When I began research, I had only a vague notion of why the Philip Roth novels I had previously read captivated me. In Marilyn Reizbaum’s class on literary realism in fall 2009 where I encountered Roth for the first time, I attempted to identify the operations of narrative style in *When She Was Good* (1967) that stirred my interest in modern literature. Though I suspected the allure lay in the text’s voice, I felt I had a limited vocabulary with which to describe it. Something in the nature of the literary voice seemed to elude articulation, particularly within the constraints of an 11-page essay. While most criticism regards voice as a medium of signification, a carrier of signifiers with little contribution to their meaning, the voice in Roth refuses to recede. It is as expressive as the words that narrate the story. I wanted to better understand the mechanisms that produce this effect and create what I saw as the author’s brilliant style. I wanted to better articulate the antidote to the reductive readings that surface when I express my admiration for Roth’s writing in phrases such as, “isn’t that the Jewish author?” or “oh, the misogynistic writer?” I sensed that the key resided in voice and style, and by immersing myself in the novels and surrounding theory and criticism, I sought to discover why. The Zuckerman novels, which follow Roth’s alter ego through a span of nine books and four decades, were good place to begin the exploration. Focusing on this single character could allow me to locate the continuations and ruptures of voice and challenge the relationships between author and character, fact and fiction, and life and art that are central to Roth’s work. After spending so much time in Zuckerman’s literary world, I hoped to further develop my lexicon for Roth’s style and theories of literary voice in general.

After reading the first four novels in the collection *Zuckerman Bound*, my increasing frustrations revealed what I had sensed from the beginning, that voice in Roth speaks in loud and relentless volumes. Spending so much time with the novels, I felt trapped within the neurotic mind of their protagonist. After writing about the frustrations in a paper that moved from complaint to reverence as I wrote it, performing a couple of close readings, and discussing with Professor Reizbaum, I started to explore outside theory to gain the necessary critical distance from a voice with which I was becoming well acquainted, for better or worse. Mladen Dolar’s *A Voice and Nothing More* (2006), which examines the ineffable qualities of voice – spoken, written, and thought – provided an invaluable foundation for my discussion by providing concrete language for the abstract voice. After reading seven Zuckerman novels, essays on Roth’s writing by critics and the author himself, essays on Jewish writing, and works of theory related to Dolar, I began to construct an analysis based around the idea of the textual voice as an embodiment of the character’s subjectivity. In novels concerned with the selfhood of their protagonist, voice acts independently from the meaning of words that comprise the story. Roth’s grammar, syntax, and structure foreground a voice that resists the calcification of writing to create a living narrative, a picture of a character that approaches the intricacies of subjectivity.

Although I need to escape the noisy consciousness of Zuckerman for a time, I plan to continue to engage the ideas of my project from a theoretical lens. In the course of the project, each piece I came across opened a new can of theoretical worms, and I feel I have more work to do in order to reach a satisfying conclusion. I will continue to read criticism and write in the coming weeks and will consider the possibility of pursuing an independent study in the spring. Overall, my project deepened my investment in my English major and piqued my interest in a topic I hope to approach from various angles in the future. I am grateful to Professor Reizbaum and the Surdna Foundation for making this summer possible.

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