4 Dwelling in What is Found

Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*

In our modern world migration recurrently raises concerns with belonging on a massive scale. Who stays and who leaves, where to go, and how those who leave their home in search for a better future are received, all of these things depend on narrative, be it in word-of-mouth accounts, storied images, or elaborate tales. The vast archive of literature speaking from these experiences gives voice and form to concerns with belonging across geographic, linguistic, and cultural fault lines, with the effect of both exposing and soothing displacement in its attempts to fathom new modes of dwelling. Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep* does so in an unusual combination of ethnographic documentation and modernist experimentation. An immigration novel that resists easy categorization, it has a history of falling through the cracks of academic reception that reenacts its thematic concern with lacking a proper place. Set at the peak time of "new" immigration (1.28 million people arrived at Ellis Island in the novel's opening year 1907 alone) and published in 1934, the low point of the Great Depression, Roth's novel takes concerns with belonging to the urban ghetto of the early twentieth century, recording with striking eloquence and sensitivity the modes of dwelling that emerged from this prototypically modern environment.[1]

Inspired by Mike Gold's groundbreaking "slum novel" *Jews Without Money* (1929), *Call It Sleep* was part of what Alfred Kazin called "age of the plebs—of writers from the working class, the lower class, the immigrant class, the non-literate class,

1 The family at the center of the novel is part of the "new" immigration of increasingly poor, unskilled, non-WASP people from Southern and Eastern Europe in the late nineteenth century that was met with nativist hostility and led to the ratification of the National Origins (or Johnson-Reed) Act of 1924, a milestone in the "repression of America's ethnic past" (Singh et al. 5). Yet while Roth's novel speaks from this particular moment in the history of immigration, mass migration is a persistent reality in the modern world: From the 1830s to World War II over 40 million people left their homes to find a new and better place to live (Bodnar xv)—a staggering number that, nevertheless, pales in comparison to the 60 million people on the move today. The global spread of "narrativized" migration experience via digital communication technology is a powerful mobilizing factor.

from Western farms and mills—those whose struggle was to survive" (*Starting Out* 12). What these writers wanted, Kazin (who was one of them) goes on to argue, "was to prove the literary value of our experience, to recognize the possibility of art in our lives, to feel that we had moved the streets, the stockyards, the hiring halls into literature" (15).[2] The demographic upheaval of the literary field occurring at this time had lasting impact on the shape and form of concerns with belonging in narrative art: first and foremost by expanding the range of lived experience to include the (promisingly "authentic") struggles and concerns of less privileged writers. Entering the field in the aftermath of modernism, however, these writers had to position themselves with regard to its daunting heritage, which for Kazin as for Roth was a matter of demonstrating "that our radical strength could carry on the experimental impulse of modern literature" (*Starting Out* 15).[3]

Call It Sleep endorses this agenda like no other novel of its time. Reading *Ulysses*, Roth said, had "opened my eyes to the fact that the material for literature was all around me. [...] That life was a junkyard […] and that you just pick up the pieces of junk. That language and art was the way you transmuted it" (Roth in Lyons 53). His novel embraces the Joycean celebration of the ordinary stuff that makes up modern urban life in a remarkable experiment of dwelling in what is felt and found. In doing so, it disappointed those who had expected a "truly proletarian novel." For them, it was an untimely infatuation with childish introspection flawed by an unfortunate lack of social realism and political will. The first review, published anonymously in the communist magazine *New Masses* in February 1935, brims with resentment: *Call it Sleep* degenerates into "impression on a rampage," is too long, contains "vile spelling of dialects," and bores its readers with "the sex phobias of this six-year-old Proust. […] It is a pity that so many writers drawn from the proletariat can make no better use of their working class experience than as material for introspective and febrile novels" (quoted in Wirth-Nesher, "Introduction" 12). Still, many of the established critics liked the novel, and even commercially it was a modest success.[4] Then its publisher went out of business, and the

2 Kazin's autobiographical *Starting Out in the Thirties* is still a most valuable read for anyone interested in the troubled decade.

3 Noted as early as in the first reviews, the Joycean influence on *Call It Sleep* has been of persistent scholarly interest. The best account of it is McHale's "Roth in Nighttown." Besides Joyce, Roth's modernism was influenced by Eliot and O'Neill. He was introduced to all of them by Eda Lou Walton Roth, with whom Roth (twenty-four at the time and twelve years younger than her) was living when writing the novel. Walton opened the literary world to him: She was a professor at NYU, a practicing poet, and an established promoter of modernism with a circle of friends who were formative of the contemporary cultural moment (among them Hart Crane, Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, and Constance Rourke). *Call It Sleep* is dedicated to her.

4 John Chamberlain of *The New York Times* wrote: "Mr. Roth has done for the East Side what James T. Farrell is doing for the Chicago Irish. […] The final chapters have been compared to the Nighttown

book plunged into oblivion, staying out of print for nearly twenty-five years with a few treasured copies passed around in select circles of rare-book lovers. Its revival has by now become legendary: Endorsed simultaneously in Walter Rideout's widely noticed *The Radical Novel* (1956) and by both Alfred Kazin and Leslie Fiedler in *The American Scholar* special issue "The Most Neglected Books of the Past 25 Years" of the same year, *Call It Sleep* was reissued, sold a million copies, and became the first paperback ever to be reviewed on the front page of *The New York Times Book Review,* where Irving Howe celebrated it as "one of the few genuinely distinguished novels written by a 20th-century American" ("Life" 60-61). (It took some serious effort to track its author down when this happened: Roth was working on a turkey farm in Maine, had dropped all ties to the literary world, and was suffering from a writer's block that lasted for almost sixty years.)

The novel's notorious resurgence went hand in hand with a critical shift in perception. Still valued as a powerful evocation of turn-of-the-century slum life in either the tradition of experimental modernism (Joyce, Eliot, Frazer) or of American naturalism (Dreiser, Farrell), now its alleged Jewishness was enthusiastically praised.[5] But as much as the novel's belated recognition benefitted from the burgeoning interest in ethnic literature at the time, its place in the annals of U.S. literature remained uncertain. When choices had to be made on which texts to

episodes of Joyce's *Ulysses*; the comparison is apt." Kenneth Burke defended it in a letter to the *New Masses* by comparing it to Frazer's *Golden Bough* and locating its "great virtue" in "the fluent and civilized way in which he found, on our city streets, the new equivalents to the ancient jungle." Alfred Hayes wrote that there "has appeared in America no novel to rival the veracity of this childhood. It is as honest as Dreiser's *Dawn*, but far more sensitive. […] It is as brilliant as Joyce's *Portrait of an Artist*, but with a wider scope, a richer emotion, a deeper realism." Edwin Seaver of the *New York Sun* accused the *New Masses'* anonymous reviewer of suffering from the "infantile disorder of leftism" and calling Roth "a brilliant disciple of James Joyce," and Fred Marsh for the *New York Herald Tribune* found it "the most compelling and moving, the most accurate and profound study of an American slum childhood that has yet appeared in this day. Henry Roth has achieved the detachment of universality of the artist." All quotes are drawn from Wirth-Nesher's "Introduction," which gives a comprehensive overview of the novel's turbulent history of reception.

5 Howe wrote that although the novel "is structured according to the narrative strategies of modernism […] [it] draws its substance, the whole unfolding of socioethnic detail, from the Jewish immigrant experience" (*World of our Fathers* 588); for Kazin it was "the most profound novel of Jewish life […] by an American" ("Introduction" ix); and Fiedler praised it as a "*specifically* Jewish book, the best single book by a Jew about Jewishness written by an American certainly through the thirties perhaps ever" (*The Jew* 38). It is no coincidence that the three critics most instrumental to its revival were children of immigrants, moved by it as a powerful transcript of the kind of "ethnic passage"—"out of immigrant confines into the larger world of letters" (Ferraro, *Ethnic Passages* 8)—which they had undergone, and could now critically and professionally affirm in their sophisticated praise for Roth's novel.

include in the new canon, the "ethnic realism" of Cahan, Gold or Yezierka would routinely trump over the "ethnic modernism" that is the artistic trademark of Roth's novel. By the mid-90s *Call It Sleep* was once again among the "most forgotten book of the past 25 years" (Ferraro, *Ethnic Passages* 90). For the study at hand, Roth's novel is intriguing precisely for the unusual combination of modernist experimentation with language and perception with an unabashed saturation in Jewish folk life that interfered with its canonization. Are the formal tensions responsible for foreclosing a proper place for this striking novel not by definition laden with contradicting assumptions about dwelling in the world? If the need to belong yields a narrative drive that both spurs and draws from narrative art, how does Roth's novel give voice and form to this need by drawing from two notoriously conflicted traditions?

Both its high modernism and its ethnic realism respond to basic troubles with belonging—alienation and displacement—but with substantial stylistic differences, and with vast implications for the practice of narrative art and its investment in matters of dwelling in the world. The high modernism of Joyce and Eliot enlisted by Roth calls for an art that, in the alleged service of a humanist ethics, aims at dissembling mimetic conventions and social entanglements to arrive at a more viable state of being. To riff on Viktor Shklovsky's famous definition, the purpose of this kind of art is to convey a perception of things that make us really see rather than merely recognize them (18). The "ethnocultural authenticity" aspired by ethnic realism also calls for an art that is true to life, but here it asks to cultivate marginal experience—and hence a hands-on truth about being in the world, residing in the concrete particularities of unprivileged life at the margin—as a bulwark against the corrosive forces of modern life, and as an imaginary repository for mainstream needs to belong. Ethnic and modernist realism are indeed closely related in this regard, separated mainly by the partisan perspective of the critics. The measure of difference is the value ascribed to the literary, a value openly negotiated in Roth's novel at a time when the pressure on literature to be politically engaged was omnipresent. *Call it Sleep* engages the conflict about literary value as its form-giving principle. In doing so, it troubles modernist yearnings for "aesthetic transcendence" as a universal remedy with practical needs for a familiar, predictable life-world while confronting yearnings for "ethnocultural authenticity" with a deromanticized depiction of life at the margin.

Childhood as Immigration

The novel's congenial move in this regard is its choice of mediating the converging displacements of modernization and immigration almost entirely through the consciousness of a child: a young boy named David Schearl, who is almost six

years old when the main narrative sets in and eight when it ends.[6] This focalization allows Roth to interweave the commonly told immigration story of losing and regaining a familiar world with the tacit depiction of a world emerging from displacement as an experience of inherited, secondary, rather than immediate, loss of one's home. Having arrived in the New World as an infant too young to remember the place of his birth, a *stetl* in Polish Galicia (then part of Austria-Hungary), David cannot make sense of their transplanted lives on the basis of his own experience of displacement. And yet he grows up firmly knowing that he has come from a "world somewhere, somewhere else" (23), a mysterious, dreamlike place powerfully present all around him—in the children's songs that he hears in the street, in the magical glow of the stories told by the elders at home, in the linguistic boundaries drawn around their domestic space by the Yiddish spoken there, in his mother's beloved picture of a corn field, and his father's enigmatic cow horns on a plate.[7]

David's quest to belong is confronted with the challenges of the protomodern environment in which he grows up *and* with the ghost of the displaced world of his family's past. The narrative process of mapping the world emerging from this fault line is driven by the boy's maturing desire for an *own* place in the world. Focalization through his consciousness wires the narrative to an innocent and deeply immature need to belong.[8] That this narrative is existentially inclined heightens

6 Though clearly a work of fiction, David's story is closely modeled after its author's own immigration experience. Roth's family first lived in Brownsville, moved to the Lower East Side when Roth was seven, and moved again to Harlem when Roth was nine (and with that, past the protagonist's age at the novel's end). Roth also used the basic coordinates of his family's arrival in the novel's Prologue: he and his mother came through Ellis Island in 1907, and were picked up by his father who had left their home in Polish Galicia a few years earlier. Just like David, Roth was seventeen months old when he arrived.

7 Triggered by a song about a boy named Walter Wildflower (in the vernacular of the street "Waltuh Wiuhflowuh") that some girls sing along with their game, David imagines knowing this boy back in Austria with "warm, nostalgic mournfulness," and as he shuts his eyes, "[f]ragments of forgotten rivers floated under the lids, dusty roads, fathomless curve of trees, a branch in a window under flawless light. A world somewhere, somewhere else." Roth, *Call It Sleep* (New York: Picador, 1991), 23. All references to the novel are from this edition and will from now on be cited parenthetically in the text. For Sollors, this passage is a paradigmatic articulation of "the second (or the first *American*) generation's difficulty with nostalgia" for a place only known through second hand accounts ("A World" 142).

8 Due to the dominant focalization through a child protagonist and the at times quixotic quest to make sense of the world, the novel can be compared to Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, but its dependence on significant others as a main site of struggle also makes it akin to Henry James's *What Maisie Knew*. In terms of narrative modes, *Call It Sleep* takes a middle position between the two: more distanced than *Huck Finn*'s first-person narration and more immediate and introspective than *Maisie*'s auctorial narration.

the sense of urgency on which it thrives: In the world of the novel, children are not safely contained in the loving care of those who raise them but thrust into a world in which they are forced to start out as strangers. The trope of childhood as archetypal immigration is introduced early on.[9] The Prologue, set at Ellis Island five years prior to the main narrative and written last, presents us with a family that is unhappy and divided. A rift runs through its members that seems to go deeper than the tensions caused by the chaos of arrival, splitting it—in strikingly Oedipal fashion, about which I will have more to say—into the lonely figure of an angry father, and the symbiotic unity of a well-meaning mother and frightened child. Resonating with Freud's saying that "[e]very new arrival on this planet is faced by the task of the Oedipus complex; anyone who fails […] falls a victim of Neurosis" ("Three Essays" 226n, quoted in Altenbernd 682), the task of immigration fathomed in here is twofold, with a definite stress on the domestic side of the matter.

After the conflicted family triangle is established, narration plunges into the consciousness of the child and into the throbbing world of New York's tenement quarters where he grows up. Focalization through the boy turns *his* longing for a place in the world into the dominant narrative drive; in fact, it is his desire for a drink of water (one cannot survive for too long without it) that sparks narration. As he closely eyes "the bright brass faucets that gleamed so far away, each"—teasingly, it seems—"with a bead of water at its nose," we learn that he "*again* became aware that this world had been created without a thought of him." Cast against the disinterested reality of the towering sink, whose "iron hip rested on legs almost as tall as his own body," feeling out of place is presented as the boy's uncomfortable, yet most familiar state of being. There is an aching corporeality to this state: "by no stretch of arm, no leap, could he ever reach the distant tap" (17; emphasis mine). In

9 Approaching the novel this way draws from Wisse, who writes: "Every child hopes to arrive in a friendly new land, a golden land that will treat him with dignity and warmth. Happy families may be alike at least in this respect, that the fortunate pairing of the parents is retroactively confirmed by their desired, beloved children. Children of happy families are made to feel that their arrival benefits the existing settlement. But children born into less than perfect unions can never do anything to alter the condition that produced them. Because they loom for their parents as reminders of rejection and lovelessness, they must look out for harm from the very person who should be protecting them. […] Child and immigrant both are required to learn a new language and adapt to new surroundings. The burden on each is to adapt to a world already complete without him. Children may appear to be the most adaptable of immigrants because they are anyway engaged in the process of adjusting to their surroundings, and are already exercising the required skills of observation, emulation, intellection. In addition, the child has the greatest incentive to learn because he is the most disparate immigrant, lacking the advantages of maturity and mastery in other areas that sometimes help to compensate for physical or social disadvantage. Immigration is humiliating to adults because they are forced back into the position of children, and required to relearn what took so much effort the first time" (61-62).

the move from perception to intellection performed here, David's displacement is channeled into a strikingly poetic mode (or even hermeneutics) of world-making: The faucet gains a nose, the sink has hips and legs, and so on. A "child's magical thinking" (Allen 446) mobilizes the search for a place in the world in this novel.[10] But the transformative power of creative enchantment is not without hazard. As David's desire shifts from wanting a drink to taking imaginative measure of the world around him, the latter assumes a life of its own. "Where did the water come from that lurked so secretly in the curve of the brass? Where did it go, gurgling in the drain? What a strange world must be hidden behind the walls of a house!" With every question the boy's imagination expands—until the game becomes so exhilarating that he has to actively divorce himself from it. "But he needed a drink" (17).

Wired to the ravishing receptivity of an emerging consciousness, dwelling in narrative may take on a self-absorbing, potentially totalizing drive in this novel. Brown's letter-writing sleepwalker fell prey to a similar danger. But where *Edgar Huntly* gave the force of the imagination a pathological spin (sleepwalking was conceived as a form of madness at the time, and in the world of the novel it was interlinked with the imagination in ways that corroded all viable prospects of dwelling), *Call It Sleep* ties it to the inquisitive mind of an innocent child. As in *Edgar Huntly* and *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, a specific narrative space creates a specific need to tell. Yet if spatial imagination and narrative design will once again serve as the two main trajectories for my reading in this chapter, focalizing the story through the consciousness of a child conjoins them more thoroughly than in the other stories: As David gets older, the external world expands and social relations multiply. Corresponding with this dynamic, processual rendering of the external world is the child's inner growth, which climaxes in a narrativistic attempt of self- and place-making. Born from an extremely vulnerable and erring need to belong, the narrative drive of this novel is at once universalized by the fact that everyone was a child once, and amplified with the particular challenges of this immigrant child's young life.

10 About the transformative work of the imagination employed by the text Freedman writes: "The imagination does not literally create, it transforms, and what it transforms are the very materials which Roth has transfigured in *Call It Sleep*—the fears, the anguish, the ugliness of life—here a young boy's life on the Lower East Side" ("Redemptive Imagination" 114). Allen, who has credited the novel with being "the most powerful evocation of the terrors of childhood ever written" (444), stresses that David's world is not a world of "simple fantasy or make-believe but one he creates with the desperate, compulsive imagination of the poet" (446).

Space as Felt, Storied, and Scripted

The opening image of a small white steamer approaching Ellis Island unmistakably situates the novel in the world of immigrant fiction. On the threshold to this world we find the following striking inscription: "(I pray thee ask no questions/ this is that Golden Land)" (9). The deictic "this" of the novel's motto places us at the gates of a longed-for destination, the aspired end of a strenuous journey. But the "that" following suit displaces both the spatial marker and the affirmative investment, creating a suspicious perceptual dissonance between outer and inner world, reality and expectation. Hence we become attuned to a narrative operation that takes us onto unstable, problematic grounds. Bearing not even the slightest resemblance to the mythical idyll evoked in the motto, arrival comes in the shape of a hungry, people-eating machine. A harsh, naturalistic language underscores its life-conditioning force: Endless numbers of immigrants, "natives from almost every land in the world," are "delivered," like goods, "from the stench and throb of the steerage to the stench and throb of New York tenements" (9).

The urban environment that serves as the story's nourishing ground is thoroughly mobilized (how can the available space contain them all?) and intensified (what will become of this heterogeneous mix once they have been "delivered" to those tenements?) under the impact of this mechanical procedure. It is tempting to think of the naturalistic force inscribed into this setting as turning its inhabitants into "a force among forces" and ask "whether the idea of agency—of the self as independent actor—makes sense in a world where people come to consciousness by becoming aware of the myriad of forces impacting them" (Minter 228-29). But *Call It Sleep* is decidedly not a novel in which character is a mere effect of the environment; the alienating forces of modern life at work in it may be daunting, but they are not overpowering *per se*. Rather, the space produced from these forces calls for specific—imaginative and narrative—strategies of survival. In fact, the naturalistic air of the setting is not geared toward dramatizing the futility of these strategies; it serves as a force field to explore and refine them.[11]

11 That the main characters exposed to this setting are Jewish is crucial to this balancing act: "Jews are generally so conscious of the pressure of history that it was a notable achievement for Henry Roth […] to put character ahead of environment" (Kazin, "Introduction" xiii). As a prototypical urban dweller, the Jew is fathomed as the quintessential "modern Everyman." In fact, twentieth-century Jewish fiction was at the vanguard of creating "myths of urban alienation and terror," turning the Jew into a virtual model of what "Western man in general [was] becoming" (Fiedler, *Love and Death* 493-94). Their immigration could become a metaphor for a collective transition from agrarian/rural to an industrial/urban society and the alienation that comes with/from it, because most Jews came from rural environments and were exposed and fundamentally shocked by the foreignness of city life as well as having been torn from belonging to a safe religious community and work structure.

Perhaps the most striking thing about the space imagined by the novel is how packed it is. At the time, New York's immigrant quarters may very well have been "the most densely populated place on earth" (Wirth-Nesher, "City" 95). This is how Irving Howe remembers them:

> In 1890, within the small space bounded by the Bowery on the west, the river and its warehouses on the east, Houston on the north and Monroe on the south, there were some dozen Christian churches, a dozen synagogues (most Jewish congregations were storefronts or in tenements), about fifty factories and shops (exclusive of garment establishments, most of which were west of the Bowery or hidden away in cellars and flats), ten large public buildings, twenty public and parochial schools—and one tiny park, on Grant and East Broadway. Gangs of German boys pressed down from the north, Irish from the south. A dominant impression of the Jewish quarter, shared by immigrants and visitors alike, was of fierce congestion, a place in which the bodily pressures of other people, their motions and smells and noises seemed always assaulting one. Of spaces for privacy and solitude, there was none. (quoted in Wirth-Nesher, "City" 95)

And this is how haptic and noisy the place becomes in Roth's rendering. The passage describes the corner of the Lower East Side to which the Schearls move from the less populated slum of Brownsville: [12]

> Here in 9th Street it wasn't the sun that swamped one as one left the doorway, it was sound—an avalanche of sound. There were countless children, there were countless baby carriages, there were countless mothers. And to the screams, rebukes and bickering of these, a seemingly endless file of hucksters joined their bawling cries. On Avenue D horse-cars clattered and banged. Avenue D was thronged with beer wagons, garbage carts and coal trucks. There were many automobiles, some blunt and rangy, some with straw poops, honking. Beyond Avenue D, at the end of a stunted, ruined block that began with shacks and smithies and seltzer bottling works and ended in a junk heap, was the East River on which many boat horns sounded. On 10th Street, and 8th Street Crosstown car ground its way toward the switch. (143)

Orientation is an obvious challenge in such a high-strung environment. Quick judgments and decisions are crucial to getting around—which means, in turn, that appearance becomes a matter of utmost concern. Thanks to the "American" clothes that the father provided to the mother and the child, they blend in upon arriving at Ellis Island (a typical theme in immigrant fiction). But the child's "odd, outlandish, blue straw hat" (10), a farewell gift from a friend back home, gives them away as foreigners. Albert Schearl loathes the attention that this hat attracts: "Can't

12 Taking his cue from Allen's remark that *Call It Sleep* may be "the noisiest novel ever written", Adams dedicated an entire article to the urban soundscape of Roth's novel, arguing that the many sounds filling and often disrupting David's familiar environment are the key to evoking the effect of immediacy that is such a strong and compelling feature of the novel.

you see that those idiots are watching us already? They're mocking us!" (15), he snaps before tearing it off the child's head, terrifying the little boy, and driving his wife to silent tears.[13] Already tainted by the cloud of unhappiness under which the reunion is cast, the desired effect of blending in is now damaged beyond repair.

Fueled by the feeling of constantly being watched and judged, Albert's violent temper is a permanent threat to his environment. "They look at me crookedly, with mockery in their eyes! How much can a man endure?" (22). Losing job after job as a printer due to his unpredictable rage, he becomes a milkman, working alone when others are sleeping. (Ironically, the new line of work bears a remote resemblance to his former, rural job as a cowherd while the need to be close to the stables demands that the Schearls move to the hyperurban Lower East Side.) David's father is an insanely proud man, degraded by the conditions of survival in the New World, and profoundly alienated from everyone including his family. Once he tries to articulate what ails him: "I *think* when you come out of a house and step on bare earth among the fields you're the same man who you were when you were inside the house. But when you step out on pavements you're someone else. You can feel your face change" (31-32, emphasis in the original). Brief as it is, his account impressively captures the compound displacements of modernization and migration. The aching disjunction between place and self expressed here harks back to what Ernst Bloch (right around this time) called *Ungleichzeitigkeit* [non-contemporaneity]: "Not all people exist in the same Now. They do so only externally, through the fact that they can be seen today. But they are there by not yet living at the same time with the others. They rather carry an earlier element with them; this interferes" (quoted in Kaes 185). Bloch does not mention migration, but his concern about the dangers of this tension-ridden simultaneity of the urban and the rural find a powerful echo in Albert's unpredictable rage.

There is a strikingly physical dimension to Albert's sense of displacement—a change of the part of his body most exposed to the gaze of others, his face—which creates an irritation so profound that it destabilizes the spatial moorings of his entire family. The somatics of spatial production at work here persist throughout *Call It Sleep*; space emerges directly from the bodily experiences of its characters. David's desire for a drink that he is too small to get gives this process a distinctly phenomenal quality early on. Wherever the boy goes, he takes in the environment with all of his senses; instant by instant, his world is molded from his perceptions. "How could you hear the sound of your own feet in the dark if a carpet muffled every step you took?" he wonders when traversing the dark hallway of their tenement building. "But if you couldn't hear the sound of your own feet and couldn't see anything either, how could you be sure that you were actually there

13 The fact that he mockingly calls it a "crown" (14) has been read as pointing towards David's symbolic role as a potential savior, being brought to the New World in the arms of a Madonna-like mother figure. For further elaboration of this theme, see Altenbernd.

and not dreaming?" (20) Living in a world that is inherently troubled by displacement spurs an especially urgent need for narrative mediation, and in the world of the novel this need is geared toward affirming social ties. Albert's brief account addresses Luter, the only person in the New World whom he longs to befriend. The self-imposing "I *think*" gives voice to a desire to be heard and received by this man. Genya's many stories, told to her son or to the few adults in her small world, serve a similar function: They either affirm another's or her own place in this foreign, unstable environment. In all of these cases, narrative acts are instruments of asserting and emplacing the speaker in the unfamiliar world from which the tale evolves.

But these narrative acts of self-assertion and emplacement are acutely charged with matters of language. Different languages reign in different spaces, and the boundaries between them tend to become effective (and at times unbridgeable) as linguistic boundaries.[14] The domestic space of the Schearls unfolds from the Yiddish spoken there, transposed by Roth into "splendid, almost too splendid, King James English" (Kazin, "Introduction" xv). "Shudder when I speak to you," Albert furiously demands of his son. But as Kazin rightly points out, "The English does not convey the routine, insignificant weight of the word 'shudder' in Yiddish," veiling the fact that "The people speaking Yiddish in this book are not cultivated, careful in choosing their words" but "hard-pressed, charged up, deeply emotional" (xv). They are also less religious than their language makes it seem. Roth sets this graceful, exalted language against the crude (and possibly exaggerated) vernacular used among the children when playing in the street—here with a dissembled alarm clock: "'So what makes id?" he asked. In the street David spoke English. 'Kencha see? Id's coz id's a machine.' 'Oh!' 'It wakes op mine fodder in the mawning.' 'It wakes up mine fodder too'" (21). How different he sounds when talking to his friends! Speaking English gives him access to a world more or less closed to his mother, while her secret spaces of the "old county" gain imaginative substance when David overhears a conversation between her and her sister, in which the two accidentally switch back and forth between the—for David unintelligible— Polish that guards these spaces and their habitual Yiddish. The Hebrew David learns at his *cheder* promises to open the gates to a mystical space of salvation, gradually turning the school itself (through this very prospect and despite the abusive authority of the rabbi) into a viable shelter away from his troubled home.

In depicting space as a heterogeneous entity that is socially activated through different, often "storied," forms of language use, Roth spells out the extent to which access and orientation depend on them. "I know that I myself live on one hundred and twenty-six Boddeth Stritt" (33), Genya once set out to describe her shrunken world, but before she can go on with her story, Albert impatiently corrects her:

14 A substantial body of scholarship has been dedicated to the novel's striking use of language and its significance for negotiating matters of belonging. See in particular Wirth-Nesher, "Between Mother Tongues;" Fiedler, "Many Myths; " Diamant; Buelens; Baumgarten; Aarons.

"Bahday Street!" Repeating the mispronounced name with gentle self-mockery, she seamlessly weaves the disruption into her melancholic tale:

> "It is such a strange name—bath street in German. But here I am. I know there is a church on a certain street to my left, the vegetable market is to my right, behind me are the railroad tracks and the broken rocks, and before me, a few blocks away is a certain store window that has a kind of white-wash on it—and faces in the white-wash, the children draw. Within this pale is my America, and if I ventured further I should be lost. In fact," she laughed, "were they even to wash that window, I might never find my way home again." (33)[15]

But Genya shows little desire to challenge either the close boundaries of this world, or its aching absence of meaning and attachment. And hence, it is not the mother but the son who cannot find his way home one day. In his emerging world, the questions of who he is, where and how he belongs have exponential gravity, culminating once, early on in the book, in a situation in which walking away from his home presents itself as the only viable option. Enthusiastic about his adventure at first, he soon finds himself "losted," and in growing despair when realizing that the address he readily gives to the friendly strangers trying to help—"a hunnder 'n' twenty six Boddeth Stritt" (101)—does not exist on their map. It refers to a place only a few blocks away but displaced to a no-man's-land by the boy's vernacular bending of his mother's foreign pronunciation. To reiterate the nodal points of this discussion, then, *Call It Sleep* treats space as conjointly produced through perceptual and narrative investment. In doing so, it charts the incentive to make it/to make a home through a socially binding, communal use of language in ways that make tangible both its power to organize space, and its power to dissect, compartmentalize, and separate. And as David's life is sustained by a patchwork of languages, stories, and social ties *more* diverse than that of his parents, his place among them becomes increasingly troubled.

The issue of David's discomfort within his family touches upon another crucial feature of spatial production at work here. Undergirding the perceptual and linguistic malleability of place(-in-the)-making is an organization of space that is strikingly psychological—or rather psychoanalytical. In fact, the family triangle of an angry, isolated father, a loving mother, and a fearful child that is nestled into the tenement setting as the smallest spatial unit from which the narrative evolves

15 Genya's disorientation is also infused with the phenomenon of *Ungleichzeitigkeit*. In the conversation that leads to the sad account of "her America," she mentions that "nothing ever came to [her] hamlet except the snow and the rain," and that prior to her departure, the most modern experience of her life had been to listen to an even then outdated gramophone. She inhabits a "displaced corner of the Old World" (Samet 571), a description that aptly captures the peculiar distance between her and her environment. Her remoteness is further enhanced by her frequent indulgence in nostalgic stories about the "old country."

has a powerful Oedipal script.[16] But *Call It Sleep* not merely gives its spatial order a Freudian spin; it exploits this feature (which is based on a mythical tale about the human condition) as the very means to push beyond the conventionality of the immigrant's tale. In daring to suggest that David's troubled sense of belonging has a source other (or at least more complicated) than the difficulties of living in the disorienting, transitory space between different languages and cultures, it deromanticizes the nurturing ideal of the Jewish family.[17] With his father's unpredictable temper as a constant source of terror and threat, David's home is anything but a safe haven from the hostile world. The boy is haunted by recurring dreams of "his father's footsteps booming on the stairs, of the glistening doorknob turning, and of himself clutching at knifes he couldn't lift from the table" (22). In his emerging world, the fear of his father is a major structuring force, which thrives on a basic distinction: There are "black days" (the good days when his father is away at work and David has his mother and the family's domestic space all to himself), and there are "red days" (the dreadful days when his father is at home). Naming them so is the secret code that David uses to gain control over a space threatened by his father's open dislike of him. Yet intermingling with the ever-looming fear of being abused by his father are feelings of envy and adoration. When seeing him dress, David is awed by his muscular physique. "How long would it be […] before those knots appeared above his own elbow and those tough, taut braids at his forearm. He wished it were soon, wished it were today, this minute. Strong, how strong his father was, stronger than he'd ever be" (177).

In the light of such fancies, David's habit of collecting the old calendar leafs becomes tangible as the desire to create a material record of time progressing toward him finally being "big enough" (18). "You peel off the year as one might a cabbage," (19) his mother once teases him; that David's father made the calendar at one of his many jobs as a printer turns the boy's ritual into a symbolic routine of dismembering his awful power—a process in which the mother, in providing him with the daily leafs, is an accomplice. David's symbiosis with his mother (who is also rejected by the father and has no other object for her love but her son) is the bulwark raised against a menacing world. "Darkness was different without his mother near. People were different too" (37). The thought of her listening until he has traversed the threatening hallway is of existential reassurance for him. But as the story progresses, the codependence of mother and son becomes suffocating, further troubling David's already tainted comfort in the family's domestic space. The

16 A substantial body of work is dedicated to the Freudian subplot of the novel. See for example Altenbernd; Ferraro, "Oedipus in Brownsville;" Fein; Samet; Freywald.

17 Yezierka's *The Breadwinners* is an earlier portrayal of a problematic immigrant family, yet while both novels share the figure of the threatening father, *Call It Sleep* goes much further in deconstructing the ideal of the Jewish family, and adds psychological depth to the conflicts among its members.

symbiosis between mother and son eventually cracks under the weight of the boy's jealousy—his obsession with "erotic images of her naked flesh, which he compulsively fantasizes being stared at by strangers and ravished in his father's planned absence by a boarder who pretends to be his friend" (Fiedler, "Many Myths" 25).

Roth downplayed the Freudian influence on his novel that so clearly becomes tangible here. "I don't know much about Freud and never did. […] If I had known about things like Oedipus complexes I probably would have never written the book at all" (Howard 76), he stated in an interview, conceding soon thereafter: "Of course, I knew about Freud, but I only had a smattering of it. I only knew what everyone else knew of Freud, and that wasn't a great deal" (Freedman, "Conversation" 155). Deliberately exploited or not, what he knew was forceful enough to earn *Call It Sleep* the reputation of being "the most Freudian of the American great novels" (Guttman 50). Roth's intense engagement with Joyce, Eliot, and O'Neill are likely sources of an "osmotic" reception. Yet what interests me about the novel's investment in Freud's ideas are not so much possible sources or routes of transmission. Rather, I am intrigued by how readily these ideas were absorbed in contemporary efforts of giving voice and form to concerns with belonging. When Roth began writing his novel in the summer of 1930, psychoanalysis had undergone a short and steep history of success in America. Launched by the series of lectures Freud had given at Clark University in 1909 (the occasion of his only visit to the United States), psychoanalysis was rapidly institutionalized as a medical discipline, and widely received in writing (mostly through the published lectures themselves, and the translations of Freud's other major works of the time: *Introduction to Psychoanalysis, Interpretation of Dreams,* and *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*).[18] *Call it Sleep* can indeed be read as a showcase of the ways in which a popularized set of Freudian ideas began to form a more or less coherent repository of narrative frames and storylines about modern individuals and their place in the world. Three components of the emerging psychoanalytical imagination are pertinent to

18 Opening his monumental study on Freud's reception in America, noting that 1909 was the last year an American President rode to his inauguration in a carriage, Hale aligns the arrival of psychoanalysis in the U.S. with modernization. There is wide agreement among Freud scholars that the shared sense of transition pervading U.S. society during the early decades of the twentieth century was a decisive factor in propelling the favorable reception of psychoanalysis, and the quick and thorough spread of its main ideas (in Europe, they were met with suspicion until reimported from the U.S.). While it must be assumed that these feelings of instability and change were unevenly distributed and subjectively experienced throughout the social field, experiences of immigration and of the disintegrating forces of modern life had a measurable impact in turning "analytic absorption in […] individual histories" (Roazen 273) and the "search for meaning in […] dreams, wishes, fears and confusions" (Turkle 31) into welcome venues for emotional stabilization and intellectual reorientation. For further reading about Freud in America, see Illouz, *Saving*; Zaretsky; Hale; Borchers.

rendering concerns with belonging in Roth's novel: the key roles assigned to the nuclear family and to sexual desire, which are closely related through the Oedipus complex; the turn to the sphere of the ordinary and the everyday, prototypically embodied in the "Freudian mistake" that is significant precisely because of its randomness; and the secular revision of former frames of self-narration, most significantly the biblical salvation story with its clear-cut patterns of dealing with existential doubt (Illouz, *Saving* 45-68).

While the latter two aspects feature prominently in the novel's narrative design to be discussed in the following section, the Oedipal nexus of nuclear family and sexual desire has a decisive impact on the novel's spatial organization—with two important effects. First, it amplifies a use of symbolism in which related pairs of opposites (light and dark, good and evil, inside and outside, cellar and roof) gain meaning in close relation to space. The Oedipal script of the family thus interlinks with a thoroughly spatialized symbolism, connecting darkness (the dominant symbol of fear) to the space of the cellar *and* to the father, just as light (the symbol of salvation) is associated with the roof and the rail *and* with the desired escape from male authorities (the father, the rabbi). That the symbolic couplets thrive on an inside-outside opposition, which is firmly grounded in the novel's imaginary geography, amplifies their signifying power (the problematic interior spaces of the Schearls' home, the cellar, the *cheder* versus the promising openness of the urban wasteland by the river and the rails).[19] Such a highly charged environment is riddled with boundaries that are both geographic and symbolic, which makes movements across especially effective in spurring narrative action. Second and closely related, the psychological dimension brought into play by the Oedipal rendering of the family has the effect of mobilizing the space imagined by the novel from within the storytelling process. Contrary to Freud's "geographical" model of the psyche, with its fixed realms of the ego, the superego, and the id, the Oedipal family follows a progressive and predictable script. Out of sheer psychic need, the relation between its members *has* to change, with the effect of altering

19 This pattern can be further extended in the sense that the cellar resembles the unconscious and the roof resembles the super ego. On the symbolism of light vs. dark, good vs. evil, see Lyons, *Henry Roth* 40-42; Freedman "Mystic Initiation" 27. For the psychoanalytical enhancement of this symbolism, see Fein. For psychoanalytical cellar and roof symbolism, see Freywald 445-48. Furthermore, all the headings for the individual books into which the novel is divided—"The Cellar," "The Picture," "The Cheder," "The Rail"—have not only significant symbolic meanings but also these symbols are attached to and substantially gain their meanings in relation to the novel's imaginary geography. See Lyons, "Symbolic Structure." With regard to Books I, III, and IV, these references have already been mentioned. Book II, entitled "The Picture," is associated with the cornfield in which David's mother lived out her affair with the Christian organist of her village.

the space they share among themselves and with others.[20] Such an implicit mobilization of space resonates with Freud's conception of the family as a biographical event. In stark difference to the genealogical mechanism of emplacing an individual within a fixed and given social order that we saw at work as a socio-economical determinant in *Edgar Huntly*, construing the family as a biographical event goes hand in hand with a mode of symbolic production that molds and expresses one's individuality in a unique and subjective way. *Call it Sleep*'s spatial imagination is indeed deeply invested in this kind of eventfulness. The Schearl kitchen as its epicenter mirrors Freud's insistence (in opposing Marx) that the domestic rather than the work sphere is most formative for a person's life, with the family constituting the very entity from which individuals have to separate themselves to become a mature being.[21] The eventfulness inscribed into the Schearl family through the Oedipal script climaxes when David throws a dipper onto the streetcar's electric rail in a desperate attempt of self-creation, and act of near self-electrocution. He seizes the tool—symbolizing the (sexual organ of the) father (the cowherd, the milkman, the one allowed to touch his mother's breasts)—from a milk can in the street when escaping from home after the final showdown with his father, and takes it to the open space by the river on his erring flight. Yet all too soon, he finds himself back in the family kitchen, injured and in need of his parents' care. It is not in the vision of an urban, democratic community taking shape in the public space out there by the river, but in the Schearls' domestic space—in the flicker of the softening fatherly hatred upon David's return—that a new form of belonging becomes tangible in this novel.

I will resume this train of thought in the following section. For now, we need to stay tuned with the space evolving from the family as a biographical event, more precisely, with the ways in which the Oedipal constellation between its members *prescribes* its mobilization. In providing a progressive script with predictable phases such as "arousal of sexual desire for the mother" or "increasing conflict with the father," it encodes the space imagined by the novel with a specific semantics of action (from powerlessness to self-assertion). The Oedipal subplot of the family hence plants narrative "seeds" that generate events and direct the course

20 The rise of Freud's ideas coincided with a transformation of the notion of the family. A decreasing birthrate led to conceiving it as a close, triangular relation between father, mother and child, while the increasing emphasis of the generational divide had the effect of juxtaposing the functional unit of the parents against their child. Within this basic structure, the growing specialization of gender roles resulted in an intensification of emotional bonds between mother and child, structurally prefiguring a conflict between father and son that became the touchstone of the Oedipus complex. See Illouz *Saving* 69-72.

21 Ironically, this revaluation happened when the traditional foundations of the family began to falter, making it return as a "story" in which the self was placed rather than having an institution regulating it. See Illouz, *Salvation* 67.

of the action while the narrative space of the novel unfolds. Yoking spatial organization and narrative action in this way directly affects the novel's investment in matters of dwelling. It choreographs a search for meaning-as-form that takes us on a journey in which "return" is never an option (neither can David go back to an earlier, more innocent state of his evolving world nor can he return to a more comfortable place called home in the Old World). The journey on which the narrative takes us along with its maturing child protagonist is geared toward self-assertion and empowerment, and this turns travelling down the plotted path into a narrative ritual in more than one way. Plot—in its capacity of laying out the grounds to be traversed in order to make the boy's world more suitable for dwelling in it—reigns over the prospect of mastering the rite of passage thus imposed on and through the boy, and the journey undertaken with this aim leads across the compound grounds of plotting as place-making and plotting as storytelling. Intertwining these two operations in the Oedipal script of the family (the smallest spatial unit from which the narrative is structurally destined to evolve) gives the journey a psychoanalytical spin. And with psychoanalysis being "a primarily narrative art" (Brooks, *Reading* xiv), redeeming the child's lack of belonging is bound to take narrative form. The desire for this narrative—to craft and to tell it—is the primary form-giving drive in Roth's novel.

Yet while *Call It Sleep* is deeply invested in the productive nexus of belonging and narrative, it was written at a time of rising suspicion against plot. *Ulysses*, for instance, the novel that had such a profound impact on Roth, has more than 500 pages but hardly any plot. Its meandering narrative is not unconcerned with belonging; in fact, one of the most compelling features of Joyce's novel is the degree to which its main protagonist Leopold Bloom is not an alienated modern individual but one that (despite the unfaithfulness of his wife that drives him from his home and makes him roam the streets of Dublin for an entire day) firmly and joyously belongs. For a displaced and fearful immigrant boy, however, aimless drifting through inner and outer worlds is not a source of comfort. His conjoint states of immaturity and displacement create a different need to tell—one that is plot-driven in strikingly modernist, erratic ways.

Found Stuff as Narrative Foundation

David has a habit that perfectly captures the novel's erratic mode of emplotment. He gathers (in what can be read as a *mise en abyme* of the novel's plotting operation) random objects from his environment and stores them in an old shoebox, to which he turns for comfort. There are two orders of things in his "treasure chest" (19): calendar leafs and "striking odds and ends he found in the street" (35). He treasures the calendar leafs for their capacity to map the contours of his emerging world by keeping a material record of time progressing toward outgrowing (the fear

of) his father. The "things […] old and worn" or "gems" (35), as his mother lovingly calls them, provide the imaginary stuff to fill this map. The link of a broken chain, the thread on a bolt of a castor wheel, the overstretched spring of a window shade are precious to him because they bear "obscurely aching" (36) marks of the places where they used to belong, and thus inspire him to assign them with new ones.

> If one had one of these [springs] on one's feet instead of shoes, one might bounce instead of walk. High as a roof; far away at once. Like Puss in Boots. But if the mouse changed into an ogre inside the puss—right before it died—I am a mouse—an ogre!—Then poor Puss would have swelled and swelled and— (36)

Following this basic pattern, stuff randomly picked up from David's environment—objects like those mentioned above but also people, mental images, pieces of conversations, anecdotes—are employed to fill his emerging world with elaborate, self-empowering stories. Using what is found as the organizing principle of emplotment—and thus as the narrative foundation of dwelling in the world—is closely aligned with the emerging psychoanalytical imagination, especially with Freud's endorsement of the random and the everyday. As spheres of the ordinary and the uneventful they become primary sites of creating and destroying the self, turning the insignificant, the trivial, and the common aspects of life into primary resources of sense-production, identity formation, and belonging (Cavell, "The Ordinary"). *Call It Sleep* embraces this logic both in being relatively uneventful (we follow a fearful Jewish boy through his daily routines and timid transgressions), and in the sense that random or minor mistakes and events essentially drive the plot. After dropping a spoon into a bowl of soup his father erupts, curtailing a series of dramatic events: the boy earns a severe beating for kicking a friend in the nose, knocks one of his playmates to the ground (is he dead?), flees the scene of his "crime," and gets lost. The rosary, a gift from a Christian friend, exposes him as a traitor, propelling the story toward its end.

This kind of stuff assumes an avalanching force over the course of the narrative. And if David's "gem" collection mimics the plotting operation of assembling random, ordinary occurrences and things, one can think of it as *found* in at least two different ways. Echoing Roth's conviction that art can be made "out of junk" (Lyons, "Interview" 53), it draws on an artistic procedure employed by Kurt Schwitters, Marcel Duchamp, Pablo Picasso (in his sculptures), and a bit later by Robert Rauschenberg, in which everyday objects (often pieces of junk) are creatively recontextualized, and hence turned into art. Roth's novel embraces this procedure to the degree that it becomes an overall practice of form-giving, applied to the protagonist's self- and place-making efforts, and to the narrative project of the novel as a whole. But one can also think of David's stuff as found in the sense of "gifts from the world." These gifts capture the boy's imagination because their displacement makes them ache with a mysterious promise of belonging, fitting,

being useful somewhere again. What David "learns" from the sex games imposed on him by the neighbor's physically challenged daughter, or from being cowed to throw a metal sword onto the streetcar's electric rail by a gang of Christian boys on Passover Day, quivers with meaning in similar ways. Seemingly useless, disposable occurrences—the "junk" of his everyday life—become valuable through creative recontextualization. "Playing bad" with Annie, devastating as it may have been when it happened, provides him with the key to decode the sexual tension between Luter and his mother, just as producing "lightning" from the rail inspires his redemptive attempt at self-creation.

Moreover, and crucially, both incidents have a profound impact on the further course of the narrative. In the first case, David loses interest in the game he is playing with his friends when he sees Luter approach his house, suspecting him of wanting to "play bad" with his mother—which makes him embark on his adventure of running away after knocking down his playmate (with Luter at his home he cannot go there). In the second case, he breaks into the *cheder* and is caught by the rabbi, who ridicules him for believing to have found "God's light" (257) in the urban wasteland by the car-tracks, thus making him receptive to the Christian faith about which he learns from his new friend Leo. The latter event makes him stumble across yet another gift from the world with vast implications for the further course of the story: his friend's rosary. But this gift comes with a price. To receive it, David must help his friend "play bad" with his cousin. And when the rosary falls out of his pocket during the final showdown with his father (the most "Freudian" of his many mistakes, fueling his father's suspicions that David is the illegitimate child of a *goy*), it pushes the conflict between father and son to a point of no return. Even the rosary's previous owner, David's friend Leo, can be viewed a found object with vast impact on the plotting operation. David makes his acquaintance when, feeling betrayed and lonely, he retreats to the roof of his house, where the older, gorgeous boy is flying a kite (a powerful symbol of freedom, recalling Benjamin Franklin and his famous kite-flying experiment). Leo is lean and blond, and besides his kite, he owns a pair of skates that grant him a mobility that David envies. Leo goes where he pleases, eats what he likes, and in all of this, he is intriguingly "other" to David (Polish, Christian, American). That Leo just happens to be passing through the neighborhood when David finds him on the roof underscores the random nature of an encounter that profoundly alters David's desire to belong, with the effect of stimulating imagination and narration right away. Before even talking to the other, David fantasizes about a "bond of kinship growing up between them, […] both inhabitants of the same realm" (300). He, who has never wanted to be anyone's friend, spends one of the "most blissful" hours of his life in the company of the other boy. "The longer he heard him speak, the longer he watched him, the more he became convinced that Leo belonged to a rarer, bolder, carefree world" (305)—a world of which he yearned to be a part.

There are numerous echoes in this yearning: his father's wish to befriend the treacherous Mr. Luter; his mother's premarital affair with the *goy* organist of her village; her husband's doubt that David is his son. Acutely charged with this family history, becoming Leo's friend is the ultimate act of digression. Indeed, once the imaginary kinship with the other boy takes shape as the shaky outpost for a new way of belonging, challenging his feeble position within the family is only a matter of time.[22] Exploiting what is found as the organizing principle of emplotment thrives on a promise of (narrative) agency and self-empowerment to be gained from creative recontexutalization. The novel's plotting operation follows a pattern in which things happen to David with unsettling force, to which he responds by emplotting them. The frequent interior monologues explicate his relentless attempts to make random things fit with the effect of dramatizing his prospect of emplacement as hinging on a ceaseless narrativizing process. Once he returns home frightened and breathless, telling his mother that he "saw a man who was in a box" (63). After a lengthy interrogation about darkness, death and dying, she tells him about her grandmother's death, ending with this highly poetic image:

> She died the winter of that same year, before the snow fell. […] She looked so frail in death, in her shroud—how shall I tell you my son? Like early winter snow: And I thought to myself even then, let me look deeply in her face for surely she will melt before my eyes. (68)

Comfortably immersed in the story, David drifts into a dreamy state in which the grandmother's melting face blurs with his mother's features dissolving in the grainy light of dawn in ways that remind him of the swirling confetti he once saw at a wedding. Plunging deeper into his reverie, it occurs to him that the happy couple at the center of his randomly found mental image left in a carriage just like the one in the funeral. "It was solved now. He saw it clearly. Everything belonged to the same dark. Confetti and coffins" (70).

The boy's frantic search for meaning quietens when, in creatively connecting his found mental images with the concluding image of his mother's story, narrativizing the disturbing event of the funeral reaches a tacit moment of closure. And hence, the young protagonist learns not only to *read* (or decode) but also to *write* (or encode) his environment. The narrative-structuring process thus performed (and modeled quite consciously after Joyce) "occurs simultaneously in the character and in the reader; as motifs accumulate, we together with David gradually invest them with symbolic and emotional attributes" (Adams 45). The fusion of the reader's experience with that of the maturing child is grounded in a narrative situation in which a (more sophisticated) "narrating self" orders the impressions of a (less developed)

22 The implicit "Americanization" of this itinerary of belonging has led Cappell to read *Call It Sleep* as an anti-Jewish novel.

"experiencing self."[23] The result is a kind of storytelling that stages the endless process of negotiation between experience and narration across the cognitive gap inherent to all narrative activity. Similarly to *Edgar Huntly* (and quite differently form *Pointed Firs*, in which the "experiencing self" is voiceless in comparison), *Call It Sleep* aligns its form-giving drive with the internal negotiation between these two narrating agents. In fact, it enhances the form-giving process with an air of urgency by routinely assessing it from the disorderly, immature side of *experience* with the effect of structurally implementing an explicit *demand* for narrative mediation. And this means that the subsequent passage through the plotted middle ground is inherently challenged by a narrative operation that simultaneously propels and disperses the creation of order. In fact, in a narrative world founded in the perpetual operation of finding and recontextualizing the very stuff that feeds the story, the narrative drive of making the world known and familiar, which preconditions any possibility to belong, is simultaneously embraced and deterred.

In terms of narrative agency (conceived in this study as the capacity to make choices about the telling of one's story and impose them on the world) encoding the external world with meaning thus becomes especially crucial. However, encoding is not merely a complementary process to the semiotic activity of decoding, the latter being grounded in *actuality* in the sense of departing from something that exists in the protagonist's external world. Rather, encoding is an activity through which David's "imagination reorganizes reality into its own […] pattern of symbol and meaning," and in doing so, it exerts "its own pull on reality" (Diamant 346-47). Encoding is indeed absolutely indispensable to the protagonist's task of fathoming—narrating—a world with a place for him, for it can mold a given reality according to its practitioner's particular needs. But encoding becomes precarious if the imaginary reorganization of the world performed by it loses touch with the actuality of the world; if the invented patterns and narratives are hermetic, employed to ward off reality rather than engage with it. David's final response to the funeral epitomizes this drift toward hermetic closure. "Confetti" is associated with marriage, "coffins" with death, both are linked by the carriage, and the threatening darkness is effectively blocked out. In fact, his entire operation of encoding the world has this tendency. If one reads the novel as a "semiotic *Bildungsroman*" in which cognitive activity progresses toward a more refined state, the rite of passage takes shape as a movement "from flight via hermetic [storytelling] toward a more balanced […] poetic activity, which will enable the protagonist to establish a positive reciprocity with his environment" (Diamant 355). And this also means: to assert a place for himself the boy must become a different storyteller.

The funeral passage is illuminating for yet another reason: It makes tangible how the "odds and ends" of other stories, absorbed into the narrative operations

23 Again, the terms are drawn from Stanzel 59-91. For a superb discussion of this cognitive operation in *Call It Sleep*, see Diamant 338-40.

of a maturing consciousness, assume a key role in advancing the rite of passage engrained into the narrative design of this novel.[24] Two of David's most powerful findings in this regard are fragments of salvation stories: the story of Isaiah who sees God surrounded by the brightest light, and is cleansed of his sin when the angels touch his lips with a holy piece of coal, an aborted version of which he hears at his *cheder;* and Leo's cryptic account of "Christ, our Savior" (304) who died on a cross and possesses a holy light "way bigger […] den Jew light" (322). Both stories capture David's imagination with their redemptive plots, and they do so with particular force since they are mystical and incomplete. Yet even more importantly, they connect themselves to David's desire for an own story. In offering models of emplotment that enhance his sense and widen his scope of agency, they can be effectively recycled to sooth or redeem his aching lack of belonging. It is thus no coincidence that David's final act of self-assertion builds on these religious narratives to envision—in an idiosyncratic mix of borrowing from Judaic and Christian faith—a viable place in the world. From the first story David adopts the idea that he, like Isaiah, can be cleansed of his sins if he finds the equivalent to God's "angel-coal" (231), a storyline most welcome to a boy tormented by the treacherous dangers of sinning. In fact, it lends itself extremely well to creative recontextualization; with almost no effort, David exploits it to indulge in the fantasy that the terrifying light produced from the rail has the same cleansing power as God's magic coal. Another random finding supports this crude story. Right before the older boys force him to throw a sword onto the rail, he sits on the docks where he sees in the sun's bright reflections on the surface of the river "God's holy light" burning the water. Connected through the Isaiah story, these two events turn the urban wasteland by the river into a space of possible healing and transcendence.

If the practical use of the Judaic salvation myth is to help the boy imagine himself cleansed of what he believes to be his sins, thus promising to create a degree (and ground) zero for a new way of belonging, his creative recycling of the Christian salvation myth is more diffuse. It is indeed as cryptic as the bits and pieces gathered from Leo's account of it. This is hardly a problem, however, for the practical use of this story is inseparable from David's fascination with its teller. His friendship assures him that he can fully and fearlessly inhabit the grounds purged from sin to become part of a new and freer world; it also cannot be separated from his desire to possess the rosary that is the token of this possible future.[25] Yoked together by

24 The narrative drive of the boy's consciousness anticipates a major theme in Richard Powers's *The Echo Maker* discussed in the following chapter. Inspired by recent neuro-scientific research on the human brain, consciousness is once referred to—and throughout the novel explored as—a "storytelling machine" whose entire end is "self-continuation."

25 Using religious salvation stories for therapeutic purposes is another manifestation of the psychoanalytical imagination consolidating at this time. Drawing on Kirschner's *The Religious and Romantic Origins of Psychoanalysis*, Illouz argues that the basic structure of salvation narratives

the boy's longing to escape the terrible reign of his father, these findings fuel the plotting operation like gasoline poured on fire. With a total of a hundred and twenty-two pages, the fateful day following the visit at his new friend's home covers more than a quarter of the book. Up to this point, the narrative loosely strings together events that are stretched out over more than two years. But now it shifts to closely following its protagonist through a day in which one odd and random coincidence chases another with ever-rising levels of anxiety, thrill, and exhaustion.

Toying with his new friend's faith brings him closer to becoming a member of that other, freer tribe, but to realize this fancy, his existing kinship bonds must first be resolved. His mother's story of her affair with the organist of her home village provides the "odds and ends" that David needs for this purpose. Again, it is a highly fragmented story, secretly overheard by the boy when his mother tells it to her sister Bertha, a character who, "like the sweat that pours from her body," brings all the silenced trouble "to the surface" (Wisse 66), and whose function in the evolution of the narrative is precisely that. In abiding by a now-familiar pattern, the story exchanged between the two sisters is odd and inconclusive to the eavesdropping child. Genya tells much of it in Polish, the old country's tongue that David never learned, and only accidently slips into her habitual Yiddish, giving away just enough to piece together the main thrust of the story while leaving precious gaps for her son's creative adaptation.

> What had happened? She liked somebody. Who? Lud—Ludwig, she said. A goy. An organeest. Father didn't like him, her father. And his, too, maybe. Didn't want him to know! Gee! He knew more than his father. So she married a Jew. What did she say before? What did she say before? Benkart, yes, benkart in belly, her father said. What did it mean? He almost knew. (205)

And then he knows: His mother could have been pregnant from this other man—which means that he could be *this* man's son, not his father's. Transposed (at least in his hungry imagination) from possibility to actuality, this fractured storyline becomes the trajectory of the disaster tale that he tells the rabbi during the long final day. Born from the horrifying consequences of getting caught, David's panic-driven act of narrative self-assertion not only gives him a Christian father, it also denies his parents altogether. His mother is dead, he wails tearfully, the woman raising him is really his aunt. The basic plot of this tale bears striking similarity to Freud's "family romance," according to which part of gaining a mature psyche is to create, often around David's age, an account of oneself with parents other than

recurs in the story of the developmental-psychological self: Both are linear, closure-driven, eschatological, geared towards the future (away from a present that is incomplete and full of faults); Freud's ideas could only become so influential because their ways of self-narration were highly compatible with the salvation myth deeply engrained in Western cultures through protestant conceptions of the self and romantic adoptions of biblical narratives (*Saving* 71-80).

one's actual ones.[26] Again, this incidence can be read as a token of the "psychoanalytical imagination" taking hold at the time of the novel's production, fusing the expectation of permanent self-analysis with self-help culture that became the most powerful resource of the popular reception of psychoanalysis in America (Illouz, *Saving* 79-84, 253-65). David's self-invention is inflected with the fantasy at the very core of the American self-help myth: You can proactively turn—narrate—yourself into the person you long to be, the person better equipped to belong. [27]

David's frantic act of self-narration stands out in force and consequence because it is one of the rare moments in which his narrativizing efforts are not confined to his psyche but acted out and imposed on the world—when narrative activity (a basic mode of engagement with the world) becomes narrative agency (the capacity of making choices about the telling of one's story and impose them on the world). In terms of content, however, this narrative act is yet another incident of hermetic storytelling, performed by a terrified boy to hold the world at bay. It is indeed consequential because once uttered, there is no easy way of integrating his speech act into the world from which it was meant to create a safe distance. But the catastrophic failure of David's madly fabricated story has a productive side as well. It challenges the hermeticism of the boy's habitual mode of storytelling by exposing it to the world; in doing so, it creates a practical need for the boy to narrativize his life in ways that engage with his surroundings rather than withdrawing from them into the sheltered sphere of his imagination. If and to what extent the new need that is triggered by David's frantic confession is redeemable depends on the outcome of the densely plotted final day, and the stakes are rising in a avalanching chain of events: The rabbi calls on David's parents, and when he gives away Genya's secret recounting David's story, Albert voices his darkest suspicions: that his wife married him and then sent him ahead on a ticket purchased by her impoverished family to cover up her illegitimate pregnancy; and that she did so knowing about the parricide that left him with no other choice but to leave his home. While the parents still fight over this long-suppressed matter, Bertha and her husband arrive. They immediately realize the hazard into which the occasion of their visit—breaking the news about David plotting sex games involving their daughter—would put the boy, but get caught under the spell of Albert's terrible will. Soon enough the

26 See Freud, "Family Romance." For discussions of its exploitation in *Call It Sleep*, see Altenbernd 679: Sollors, "A World" 152-54.

27 Freud himself paved the way for this development. Departing from his earlier conviction that therapeutic work can ease but not heal a patient's psychic troubles, he ended his fifth and final Clark Lecture on a decidedly more optimistic, "Americanized" note: "Der energische und erfolgreiche Mensch ist der, der durch Arbeit seine Wunschphantasien in Realität umzusetzen vermag" (quoted in Illouz 84). Henceforth, the psychoanalytical search for the lost or buried self became reconcilable with the strife for self-realization that is quintessential to modern yearnings to belong—and, as Roth's novel shows, applicable with staggering universality.

tension becomes unbearable and David speaks up for himself, is attacked by his father, and flees the apartment.

Coinciding with this fateful chain reaction is a structural, or rather contractual dimension of the impact that David's transgressive narrative act has on the storytelling operation. In the immediate aftermath of the showdown in the Schearls' kitchen, focalization through his consciousness (the exclusive mediator of the novel's main narrative until now) is suspended for several short intervals—one focalized through the rabbi, another with the zero focalization of an auctorial narrator, and yet another with shifting focalizers and a pluralized narrative voice—with the effect of changing the terms of narrative transfer. The first two of these passages are strictly excursive; rather than furthering the narrative they neutralize focalization and arrest a narrative agency gone wild. After pages of interior discourse turning in circles, focalization through the boy winds down as his narrative capacity reaches degree zero:

> The small sputter of words in his brain seemed no longer his own, no longer cramped by skull, but detached from him, the core of his surroundings. And he heard them again as though all space had compelled and were shattered in the framing, and they boomed in his ears, vast, delayed and alien. (409)

In this state of exhaustion, language exceeds him, but it also plants a thought in him: "*Now I gotta make it come out*" (409)—"*it*" being the redemptive light he wants to draw from the rail. The italic type in which the thought is set anticipates the typographical form in which David's exhausted consciousness continues to articulate itself while another part of the narrative ventures into the urban space surrounding him. Hence, as his hollow mind becomes occupied with a singular call to action, the dominant mode of telling the story is interrupted for a third and final time: In an unmistakable homage to the "Nighttown" chapters of *Ulysses*, it is broken up and pluralized. Pushing beyond the boy's consciousness that keeps driving the plot through the typographically separated sections, narration dissociates itself from the plotting operation, and meanders into the environment. In this expansive move, it gathers the random activities and vernacular-bent conversations of the multiethnic mix of urban dwellers peopling it: a rheumatic old watchman who talks to himself, a loud group of sailors, dock workers, promiscuous women in a nearby beer salon, the Irish motorman of the approaching streetcar ringing his bell, a leisurely Armenian peddler, a fainting woman, a policeman, a doctor. Here is a taste of how this works (411-12):

> Over momentary, purple blossoms, down the soft incline, the far train slid like a trickle of gold. Behind and before, sparse auto headlights, belated or heralding dew on the bough of the night. "And George a'gappin' and me a'hollerin' and a'teching the ground with the toe of my boot and no wheels under me. Ha! Ha! Hmm! Wut cain't a man dream in his sleep . . . A wheel . . . A bike . . ." He turned away

seeking the clock. "And I ain't been on one . . . not sence . . . more'n thirty-five . . . forty years. Not since I uz a little shaver"

Clammy fingers traced the sharp edge of
the dipper's scoop. Before his eyes
the glitter on the car tracks whisked . . .
reversed . . . whisked . . .

"Say, listen O'Toole dere's a couple o' cozier in de back." The bar-keep pointed with the beer knife. "Jist yer speed!"

"Balls" Terse O'Toole retorted. "Wudjah think I jist took de Bull-durham sack off me pecker fer—nuttin'? I twisted all de pipes I wanna w'en I'm pissin!"

"No splinters in dese boxes, dough. Honst, O'Toole! Real clean—"

"Let 'im finish, will ye!" the hunchback interrupted sourly. "O'Toole don' have to buy his gash."

"Well, he says, yea. An' all de time dere wuz Steve an' Kekky unner de goiders belly-achin'—Hey trow us a rivert. An' I sez—"

—Nobody's commin'!

Klang! Klang! Klang! Klang! Klang!

The fat bunion foot of Dan McIntyre the motorman pounded the bell.

This is more "found stuff" for the plotting operation for sure, but no *real* sense of community emerges from the polyvocal narration employed here. The "odds and ends" assembled in this experiment remain too disjointed for that; in fact, they converge only in the boy's yearning for a new way of belonging that drives narration toward and beyond the point of him losing consciousness when struck by the power drawn from the rail. The erratic passages articulating his hallucinating mind throughout this chapter (they are set in cursive, justified only on the left margin, and at times bracketed) are inserted into the text as a "boxed-in space or series of spaces" (McHale 98). Reminiscent of cinematic montage, these "textual enclosures" connect by way of separation, and just as in experimental cinema, this has the effect of foregrounding *procedural* matters. In loops of verbal and syntactical repetitions, language itself becomes tangible in both its referential and material dimension. But modernist experimentation with language and narrative is not boundless in this passage. Rather, the montage-like procedure advanced here allows Roth to exploit a transgressive aesthetics while keeping it safely confined to the boy's troubled mind. In doing so, Roth (like his fellow modernists Dos Passos and Lowry) "contains the Joycean poetics of reality pluralism by subjectivizing it" (McHale 98).[28] By the same token, however, the expansive narrative agency probed

28 I am following McHale's insightful reading here. He further elaborates this well-taken point as follows: "'Containment' here is not even a metaphor, but applies literally to the special typographical conventions of this episode, whereby David's hallucinations appear in italic type, inset from the rest of the text, justified to the left margin but not on the right, and even (for part of the episode, IV.xii.424-431) enclosed between parenthesis. The effect is to produce a kind

here in its capacity to generate a new way of belonging is not pluralized in actuality; the plurality of voices is the fantasy of a hallucinating mind, not the blueprint of a polyvocal mode of dwelling in and through language and narrative.

There is a political or even an ethical side to not endorsing fully a transgressive modernist aesthetics as the way to a better, truer state of belonging—a reluctance to retreat from the boy's developing sense of self, from his individual and particular need for change.[29] These narrative agents are decidedly not to be given up. Transformation is on its way, but it is not invoked by language spilling beyond the confines of the boy's emerging subjectivity with materializing effects. Rather, it takes shape in his exhausted consciousness while it becomes the locus of blending the urban environment projected into it with recurring images of light and dark, physical and metaphysical power, hammer, coal, the cellar, the Statue of Liberty, etc. And as narration expands, the boy's hermetic storytelling gives way to a narrative agency that engages with his environment in new and unprecedented ways. The novel's ending, reached ten pages later testifies to this transformation. Repeated like a mantra, the title-giving sentence opening the final paragraph—"He might as well call it sleep." (441)—is the emblem of David's newly found(ed) narrative capacities.

In the meantime, focalization through the boy has been resumed; he has been taken home, where the dreadful family constellation shows tacit cracks as the father shrinks under the actual possibility of his son's death, which David registers with silent but jubilant satisfaction. His first attempt at telling his life anew takes place in the family home, and this puts it to the hardest test right away. Responding to his mother's caring question "Sleepy, beloved?" (441), he refrains from imposing premature meaning on his exhausted state. "It was only toward sleep that every

of textual enclosure, a boxed-in space or series of spaces within which […] the Circe principle is allowed free reign. But the walls of this textual enclosure are never breached. Nor, for that matter, are the ontological boundaries between the level of discursive figures and the level of the world, between the real world and the world of mystic archetypes. Nothing equivalent to the materialization, in 'Circe,' of the nymph Calypso […] occurs in *Call It Sleep*, and the messenger angels on Roth's messianic subtext remain *discursive* angels only […] Finally, there is here none of the 'ripple effect' of Joyce's 'Circe.' No trace of the Circe principle, even in Roth's attenuated and subjectivized version of it, is allowed to spread beyond the confines of Chapter IV (xxi) to any other chapter of the book" (97-98).

29 Ever since the novel's publication there have been heated debates about its political stakes, ranging from disappointed complaints about retreating into the sex phobias of the boy protagonist to insisting that the novel is focalized through the consciousness of a maturing political activist. For early reviews, see fn4 of this chapter. For two recent discussions of the novel as a political failure, see Lesser, "Revolutionary Energy," and Kerman, "Limits of Typicality." For an opposite discussion of this matter, including the transformative, community-building power of David's near self-electrocution, see Todorova.

wink of his eyelids could strike a spark into the cloudy tinder of the dark, kindle out of shadowy corners of the bathroom such myriad and such vivid jets of images" (441), he contemplates, pausing to let these images—all gathered during the novel's final day—take shape in his memory:

> the glint on tilted beads, of the uneven shine of roller skates, of the dry light on green stone stoops, of the tapering glitter of rails, of the oils sheen on the night-smooth rivers, of the glow on thin blond hair, red faces, of the glow on outstretched, open palms of legions upon legions of hands hurtling towards him. (441)

Then the accident catches up with him, entering his psychosomatic narration in a stream of acoustic and visual sense data from the external world:

> He might as well call it sleep. It was only towards sleep that ears had the power to cull again and reassemble the shrill cry, the hoarse voice, the scream of fear, the bells, the thick-breathing, the roar of crowds and all sounds that lay fermenting in the vats of silence and the past. It was only toward sleep one knew himself still lying on the cobbles, felt the cobble under him and over him and scudding ever toward him like a black foam, the perpetual blur of shod and running feet, the broken shoes, new shoes, stubby, pointed caked, polished, buniony, pavement-beveled, lumpish, under skirts, under trousers, shoes, over one and through one and feel them all and feel, not pain, not terror, but strangest triumph, strangest acquiescence. One might as well call it sleep. He shut his eyes. (441)

Only after an extensive process of feeling out his experience he tacitly distances himself from it. His final assurance of having prevailed, of having defied both fear and pain, may indicate a revised mode of self-narrative, a dawning possibility to change his place in the family and in the world revolving around it. But what does it mean that he feels "*strangest* triumph, *strangest* acquiescence"? That it is uncertain how these feelings will affect his world once he opens his eyes again? Toying with a new mode of giving voice and form to his need to belong may suggest that the young protagonist has, if not mastered, at least subsided in the rite of passage imposed on him; that there is hope to improve his displaced state in the life ahead of him. He may even be (as some have argued) on his way to becoming the poet who will eventually turn his experience into art. But could the strangeness of his feelings not also mean that drifting into this sleep-like state is a drift toward death? And if yes, what would this death "mean" within the narrative design of this tale? The futility of a herculean effort? The redemptive self-sacrifice of a New World messiah? That language persists where the need for a place in the world comes to an end? Where, in other words, does this suggestive, provisional ending leave us in terms of the boy's prospect of dwelling in the world?

Yearnings for Autonomy and the Aching Limits of Belonging

If the novel's ending leaves us with an impenetrable uncertainty about the boy's future (and this is something that generations of scholars have failed to acknowledge when projecting their preferred "meaning" on David's journey), the search for meaning-as-form staged and engaged by the novel takes us back to the erratically plotted middle ground. And here it is difficult not to be struck, time and again, by the vast effort imposed on the boy by his need to belong. He may mature in ways that refine his remarkable talent for creative emplotment and equip him with the tools and techniques that it takes to narrate himself into a more comfortable state of belonging. But the Freudian subtext of the rite of passage plotted here turns matters of alleviating the boy's displaced state into a thoroughly individual(ized) responsibility. It is in this pivotal sense that *Call It Sleep* fathoms the immigrant's struggle—in a sad mix of exaltation and unease—as a strictly private affair.

In fact, the Oedipal script undergirding the novel's spatial order and rite of passage turns individual autonomy into the *sine qua non* of belonging. In doing so, *Call It Sleep* toys with a notion of belonging that is aligned with psychoanalytic redefinitions of autonomy as the freedom to decide for oneself what to do with one's life.[30] Prior to this shift, having a comfortable place in the world hinged on an autonomy of a different kind: the liberal investment in property—one's belongings—that we saw at work and contested in *Edgar Huntly* and *Pointed Firs*. Psychoanalysis maintains these conditional ties between belonging and autonomy, but in reframing the latter as an internal relation to the self, belonging now comes to rest on a highly mobilized, immaterial property in demand of constant readjustment. Exploring the stakes of this altered conjunction between belonging and autonomy is key to *Call It Sleep*'s narrative politics. The strategic weakness and vulnerability of the boy protagonist—and the immigrant population for which he synecdochically stands—maximizes the weight of his task to reach an autonomous state that may, in turn, redeem his painful lack of belonging. In telling us about the boy's struggle in terms of a world emerging from displacement, we are asked to closely participate in his erratic, fearful, and exhausting attempts of dwelling in the world. And if ambiguity is yet another technique of reconciliation—of artfully rendering uncertain what remains unsayable—underneath the ambiguous state

30 See Zaretsky 22-24, 235-38. Inherent to the philosophical and religious traditions of all civilizations, the project of individual autonomy was first secularized and universalized in Enlightenment thought. The Second Industrial Revolution, which provides the historical context for this novel, extended its meaning to ("extra-moral") realms such as creativity, love, and fortune; to explain why this new autonomy was so hard to attain, psychoanalysts invented concepts such as ambivalence, resistance, and sublimation. Previous notions of autonomy were "moral" in endorsing nineteenth-century understandings of property along with the liberal consensus that human beings could postpone individual interest for the sake of the common good.

of quiescence reached at the end, autonomous selfhood aches as a contemporary limit of belonging.

Yet again, things are not quite as simple. Throughout the novel autonomy as an endlessly malleable self-relation imposed with the freedom to dwell as one pleases is confronted with two other modes of autonomy: autonomy as the communal product of folk authenticity, which comes in tow with a promise of dwelling in the nourishing grounds of a shared ethnic culture; and autonomy as the property of an avant-garde aesthetics, which comes in tow with a promise of dwelling in grounds revitalized by modernist art. None of the three modes of autonomy is endorsed as a remedy for the deeply and multiply troubled state of belonging explored in this novel. The boy's effort is too staggering, ethnic culture is not a safe haven, aesthetic transcendence is warded in; in fact, none of the three modes is allowed to reign over the others at any given point. Rather, they create a force field of idle prospects and misguided hopes, wild dreams and sobering truths. Maybe we can say, then, that in the—modern, immigrant's—world of this novel, maturing in matters of belonging means shunning ideological alignment of any kind to dwell provisionally amidst conflicts, restraints, and imperfections.