Fouling Out the American Pastoral: Rereading Philip Roth's *The Great American Novel*

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It would seem rather that they were transfixed, perhaps for the first time in their lives, by the strangeness of things, the wondrous strangeness of things, by all that is beyond the pale and just does not seem to belong in this otherwise cozy and familiar world of ours.—Philip Roth, *The Great American Novel*

It has been roughly thirty years since the publication of *The Great American Novel*, Philip Roth’s comically outrageous send-up of America’s favorite pastime; and in light of recent developments in Roth’s fiction, perhaps it is time for a reevaluation of the novel. At the time of its publication in 1973, reviews of the book were mixed. Many critics pointed out the novelist’s excessiveness and lack of discipline, his misuse of satire, his problematic narrator, and his overall inability to follow up on the promise of Portnoy’s Complaint. Subsequent assessments of the novel have also been diverse, with most scholars pointing out the book’s curious but nonetheless mediocre place within Roth’s oeuvre. Yet while many of these studies have proved insightful, most are at least two decades old, written well before Roth’s most recent critically acclaimed work. His American Trilogy, including the novels *American Pastoral*, *I Married a Communist*, and *The Human Stain*, has garnered him increased recognition, and it is to these novels that one can turn to reassess his literary excursion into baseball. Much like the latest trilogy, *The Great American Novel* has at its core the demythologizing of American “truths,” the most significant of these being the pastoral ideal.

As several critics have noted, baseball is one of our most prominent cultural manifestations of the pastoral. Roger Angell, for instance, emphasizes the timeless element of the game and, at its most ideal, the suspension of worldly concerns. In its refusal to be played against the clock, the game becomes “a bubble within which players move at exactly the same pace and rhythms as all their predecessors,” allowing its participants to “remain forever
young” (319–320). Similarly, Decanne Westbrook notes the Edenic quality that has been historically placed on the game, where the ball field becomes an archetypal “walled garden . . . a metaphor for human society and culture expressed as a form of unfallen nature” (77). And Murray Ross, in his contrasts between baseball and football, sees the former as suggestive of a nostalgic ideal where peace, serenity, open space, and ritualized action can be found: “Baseball evokes for us a past which may never have been ours, but which we believe was, and certainly that is enough” (718). Even Philip Roth has acknowledged the pastoral tinges of the game. In fact, sports references can be found throughout his fiction: the athletic Potemkin family and its “sports tree” in “Goodbye, Columbus”; Trick E. Dixon’s locker room “skull sessions” with his advisers in Our Gang; Jimmy “the Lufyid” Ben-Joseph and his desires to bring baseball to the Promised Land in The Counterlife; recollections of high school football games and their ethnic significance in The Facts; the all-around athlete, Seymour “Swede” Levov, in American Pastoral; and the empowering nature of boxing that Coleman Silk experiences in The Human Stain. But perhaps nowhere in his novels does he better articulate the romance of baseball than he does in Portnoy’s Complaint. “Thank God for center field!” Alexander Portnoy tells Dr. Spielvogel in an effort to describe the baseball field as an escape from his neurotic home life:

Doctor, you can’t imagine how truly glorious it is out there, so alone in all that space . . . just standing nice and calm—nothing trembling, everything serene—standing there in the sunshine . . . standing without a care in the world in the sunshine, like my king of kings, the Lord my God, The Duke Himself (Snider, Doctor, the name may come up again), standing there as loose and as easy, as happy as I will ever be, just waiting by myself under a high fly ball . . . just waiting there for the ball to fall into the glove I raise to it, and yup, there it is, plocl, the third out of the inning. (68–69)

Such moments had given the young Portnoy a feeling of connectedness and a sense of purpose he found elusive at home. “For in center field,” he waxes nostalgically, “if you can get to it, it is yours. Oh, how unlike my home it is to be in center field, where no one will appropriate unto himself anything that I say is mine!” (68). Roth articulates similar sentiments in “My Baseball Years,” an essay that originally appeared as an Op-Ed piece in the New York Times on the opening day of the 1973 baseball season. He recalls in evocative rhetoric that his “feel for the American landscape came less from what I learned in the classroom about Lewis and Clark than from following the major-league clubs on their road trips and reading about the minor leagues in the back pages of the Sporting News” (237–238). He goes on to reveal that “baseball—with its lore and legends, its cultural power, its seasonal associations, its native authenticity, its simple rules and transparent strategies, its longueurs and thrills, its spaciousness, its suspensefulness, its heroics, its nuances, its lingo, its ‘characters’ its peculiarly hypnotic tedium, its mythic transformation of the immediate—was the literature of my boyhood” (238).

Such grandiose language and its links to literature should not be taken lightly, especially as it comes from a novelist who once saw his writing as a “religious calling” and “a kind of sacrament” (“On The Great American Novel” 77). What is even more curious is that Roth’s opening day reveries were published in the same year as The Great American Novel, a text that is anything but reverential toward the game. It is the story of the Ruppert Mundys, the hapless and homeless baseball team made up of misfits who, much like the biblical nation of Israel, wander from one field to another in search of communal definition. Along their way, Roth exposes the political hypocrisies, the social prejudices, and the ethnic- and gender-based stereotyping that unfortunately make up much of American history. And he does so through a narrative of excess, a wild series of comedic scenarios, at times outlandish and at times tasteless, in which the author doesn’t hesitate to go “too far.” In his baseball novel, Roth satirically confronts the pastoral ideal, but he does so not in order to dehumanize or deconstruct the game. On the contrary, his targets are the American ideals and institutions for which baseball has come to stand. As Roth states in an interview that he playfully conducted with himself, he acknowledges that he never set out to satirize baseball but merely wanted to use the game to “dramatize the struggle between the benighted national myth of its pretensions to a great power to perpetuate, and the relentlessly insidious, very nearly demonic reality . . . that will not give an inch in behalf of that idealized mythology” (“On GAN” 89–90). In creating an outrageous countermythology of the great American sport, Roth reconstructs the myth of the American pastoral (much as he does in his novel of the same name) and exposes its many gaps and fissures.

Reviewers of the three novels in Roth’s American Trilogy have rightly noted that his most recent work is an attempt to represent the social, political, and psychological conflicts that define America in the latter half of the twentieth-century. What few critics have acknowledged, however, is that this serious narrative impulse predated even the first Zuckerman novels. As Maria tells her husband Nathan Zuckerman in The Counterlife, “[t]he pastoral is not your genre” (317). And this is what Roth has been telling his readers even earlier. The transgressive nature of The Great American Novel is perhaps Roth’s first sustained critique of postwar America, and by reexamining the text through the narratological lens of his most recent fiction, the reader can gain a deeper appreciation of what many have considered to be a slight, and even highly problematic, novel.

It is without question that The Great American Novel, regardless of what one might think of its novelistic merits, is an antipastoral tour de force—or, as Jay L. Halio cleverly puts it, “tour de farce” (111)—but the question remains, in what manner does Roth perpetrate and sustain this critique? Certainly, the contents lend themselves to the debunking of many of America’s cherished myths. And, as I will continue to argue, these are many of the same issues that Roth foregrounds so dramatically in his American Trilogy. As in American Pastoral, with his baseball novel he explores the disastrously false assumptions of the melting pot myth, as in I Married a Communist, he explores the
economic and politically reactionary foundations upon which much of contemporary American politics rests; and as in *The Human Stain* he does not hesitate to represent the ambiguous and decented nature of American (ethnic) experience. All of these issues could have been recognized years earlier in Roth’s baseball novel. In addition to the wildly ridiculous makeup of the Ruppert Mundys, most members of which could be cast as “the Other,” the team is made homeless due to their owners’ greed. Frank Mazuma, exploitive owner of the Kakoaa Reapers, is motivated only by showmanship and revenue. Angela Whitting’s Trust’s winning Tri-City Tycoons (in many ways the most “apple pie Americans” in the Patriot League) function in nothing more than a heartless, almost robotic, manner of professional efficiency. The game’s greatest pitcher, Gil Gamesh, is not only an arrogant gamesman but eventually becomes a Soviet spy bent on the destruction of the American way of life. The president of the Patriot League, with the blessings of baseball Commissioner Judge Landis, conducts an anti-Communist witch hunt and suspends or sends to prison many league players, a pursuit that eventually leads to the demise of the Patriot League. And, in what could be read as a passage that could apply to all three protagonists in the American Trilogy—Swede Leov, Ira Ringold, and Coleman Silk—the insouciant John Baal tells his team that they are always already alienated in the world they inhabit. “You damn fools . . . you ain’t from Rupe-it! You never was and you never would be,” he screams. “[Y]ou were visitors [in Mundy Park] just like you are visitors here. You are makin’ there be a difference where there ain’t” (142).

In addition to noting these large-scale transgressions against America’s favorite pastime, it is revealing to examine the ways in which Roth handles the individual manifestations of the pastoral. Although he appears as an analeptic recollection, Luke “the Loner” Gofannon casts a shadow over the text in that he stands as an ideal ballplayer against whom all others are judged. Scoring close to a hundred runs for the Mundys and with a batting average of .372, Gofannon outshine all, including both Ty Cobb and Babe Ruth, in his abilities to run and steal, as well as to hit. In his prime, the fans would give him a hand just for striking out, that’s how beautiful he was, and how revered,” and “he loved the game so much, he’d have played without pay” (84–85). There is also the league president, General Douglas D. Oakhart, with his Rules and Regulations that underscore the perfection of baseball. He believes in tradition and the purity of the game, as is demonstrated by his crusade against radio broadcasts: “[A]ll radio would do would be to reduce the game to what the gamblers cared about: who scored, how much, and when” (90). In a similar fashion, Mundys manager Ulysses S. Fairsmith gives an eloquent speech against the introduction of nighttime baseball, the written text of which is “laid out on a [Sunday newspaper] page of its own to resemble the Declaration of Independence.” His argument in many ways captures the pastoral ideal of the game that many have come to hold:

Daytime baseball is nothing less than a reminder of Eden in the time of innocence and joy . . . For what is a ball park, but that place wherein Americans may gather to worship the beauty of God’s earth, the skill and strength of His children, and the holiness of His commandments to order and obedience. For such are the twin rocks upon which all sport is founded. And woe unto him, I say, who would assemble our players and our fans beneath the feeble, artificial light of goddess science! (88–89)

And finally there is Roland Agni, center fielder and batting eighth for the Mundys. He, even more than Luke Gofannon, is the ideal specimen of a player, and in almost any sport: “[T]apering like the V for Victory from his broad shoulders and well-muscled arms down to ankles as elegantly turned as Betty Grable’s,” he is the perfect batter, runner, and catcher, “the most spectacular rookie since Joltin’ Joe” (125).

It is significant to note that Roth eliminates every one of these pastoral embodiments, and he does so in a grotesque fashion. Luke the Loner dies in a car accident when he takes his hands off the steering wheel to tip his hat to his adoring fans. While campaigning for the presidency of the United States, General Oakhart, along with running mate, midget Bob Yamm, disappears without a trace in what is purported to be Communist sabotage to his plane. The religiously inspired Fairsmith dies in a dugout—“my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (330)—as a result of Nickname Damur trying unsuccessfully to turn a double into a triple when his team was thirty-one runs behind the Tri-City Tycoons. And Roland Agni is accidentally shot by former umpire Mike “the Mouth” Masterson as he is attempting to wrestle from new Mundy manager and Soviet spy Gil Gamesh a hollowed-out baseball bat containing microfilm. By killing off each of these figures, and doing so in such a farcical manner, Roth is with flourish putting the fine touches on the broad antipastoral strokes of his text.

However, Roth’s demythologizing becomes even more significant through the use of his narrative frame, the octogenarian and former sports writer Word Smith, or Smitty, as he is known. This use of the first-person narrative not only contextualizes the novel’s plot (who better to chronicle the details surrounding the Mundys’ ignoble 1943 and 1944 seasons than a sports writer with a keen eye for baseball’s history and legends?) but, perhaps more importantly, it also underscores the complex nature of Roth’s critique. As I have argued elsewhere, a careful reading of the narrative structure in Roth’s recent fiction, particularly in *American Pastoral*, reveals much about the author’s sometimes ambiguous attitudes toward his subject matter. The same can be said of *The Great American Novel*. The novel is made up of nine sections, reflecting the nine innings of a typical baseball game, with Smitty as our sole source of information. Of the nine sections, he appears in the first person only in the Prologue and the Epilogue (making only a few brief third person appearances during the course of the story), framing the narrative proper with his conspiratorial theories behind the elimination of the Patriot League. The events that unfold in the seven regular chapters make up the tale of the Ruppert Mundys, the details of which we have to assume were gathered by a sports
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Cooperstown for the Hall of Fame elections. When Commissioner Bowie Kuhn comes out to announce the results of the elections, he does not admit that "the BWAA was a cheat and a fraud and disgrace for having failed to announce [Smitty's] vote submitted for Luke Goofamor of the extinguished Patriot League." Instead, ironically enough, he states that nobody received enough votes to be elected and that this was an indication of the integrity of the institution of baseball. "The integrity of the institution," Smitty incredulously repeats. "Next they will be talking about the magnanimity of the Mafia and the blessing of the Bomb. They will use alliteration for anything these days, but most of all for lies" (24).

This emphasis on language as a masking device is central to Smitty's role as a narrator. As his name suggests, he goes to great lengths to define himself through words and possesses an almost maniacal affinity for alliteration. The significance of language is also inextricably linked to the game of baseball. Through his words, Smitty creates an alternative or counter-history of baseball that does not coincide with the one readers believe to be true. Through his narrative, Kuhn interlaces the fictitious elements of his story—the existence of the Patriot League and its ultimate demise—along with actual historical figures and events. In this way, The Great American Novel anticipates such experimental works as Operation Skylock, a novel in which its narrator, "Philip Roth" (to be distinguished from the text's author of the same name), weaves fiction into fact and creates a counter-history that challenges readers' credulity. This rhetorical move, in many ways, brings to mind the debate between Roland Agni and Isaac Ellis over the Jewish Wheaties. Having scientifically formulated a version of the cereal that ensures athletic success, Isaac quarrels with Roland over which brand of Wheaties is "real." The ballplayer argues that eating the enhanced cereal and being assured of winning would be like throwing a game, to which Isaac counters that winning is what Wheaties is all about. Roland replies,

"But that's real Wheaties! And they don't make you do it anyway!"
"Then how can they be 'real' Wheaties, if they don't do what they're supposed to do?"
"That's what makes them 'real'!" (302)

This comic inversion of the real is what defines much of Smitty's (deconstructed) history of baseball. More to the point, the slippery usage of language calls into question the narrator's ability to capture the "true" essence of the sport. Such problems recall General Oakhart's suspicions of radio broadcast ballgames: "[Y]ou could not begin to communicate through words, either printed or spoken, what this game was all about" (90).

Philip Roth not only presents this ambiguity in the body of his tale but also invests it in the narration itself. In the scholarship, questions about Smitty's reliability have usually been an either/or game: He is either believable or he is not. But such strictly binary readings do not allow for the possibility that Roth may be holding out for both. Smitty seems caught between nostalgia and madness (Blues 80), and there are elements in his narrative that suggest
both. On the one hand, he longs for the glory days of the Patriot League. His description of Luke Gofannon, his recollection of the Mundy’s previous owner, the legendary Glorious Mundy, as well as his general obsession with the league’s recognition in the Hall of Fame, all bring to mind a wistfulness for bygone days. This is rather unusual, coming from a narrator voice through which Roth demythologizes the game’s pastoral tinges.7 On the other hand, the aging sports writer is generally seen as nothing more than a curmudgeonly and delusional book. In his insistence on pursuing “the truth,” Smitty has more or less exiled himself from the baseball community and is no longer able to write its history. As such, he becomes disengaged from the “reality” of the sport and is left with no alternative except to ask Chairman Mao to publish his book.

Of course, Roth is having it both ways here. When Smitty writes to the Communist Chinese leader, he bemoans the fact that American publishers refuse to handle his mad text, curiously enough entitled The Great American Novel (GAN 400). But a book by the same name is what sits in the reader’s hands, and seen in this way the novel both is and isn’t there.8 Such mischievousness helps to explain the many references to those Smitty calls “my precursors, my kinsmen” (37). Throughout the Prologue and Epilogue, the narrator summons the literary spirits of Mark Twain, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and especially Herman Melville. Such allusions make sense, given the fact that all three writers, at one time or another, are believed to have authored “the great American novel.” But their invocation in Roth’s text has a further significance. Both Hawthorne and Melville, and even Twain in many ways, have been read as practitioners of romantic irony. Through their narrators, these nineteenth-century writers were able to maintain apparently disparate ideas, wanting to be taken seriously while at the same time fully conscious of the comic implications of their own seriousness. This attitude is further demonstrated by a self-conscious recognition of the composition, or the constructedness, of the text.9 Through Smitty, Roth playfully foregrounds the constructed nature of his own novel, and he does so by borrowing from a variety of rhetorical conventions: realistic reportage, brief chapter summaries reminiscent of the nineteenth-century Victorian novel, collections of letters, newspaper editorials, official committee transcripts, government reports, and timelines that speed the reader through the action (indeed, almost all of chapter 7 is nothing more than a pastiche of styles). What Roth is suggesting here is that, just like the history created by his precocious narrator, the pastoral myths of baseball are nothing more than constructed fictions. And, by association, so are the ideals of America.

In the mischievous interview he conducts with himself—another example of an ambiguous two-sidedness—Philip Roth comments on his narrator and his self-ironizing critique of America:

By attributing the book to Smitty, I intended, among other things, to call into question the novel’s “truthfulness”—to mock any claim the book might appear to make to be delivering up the answer—though in no way is this meant to discredit the book itself. The idea is simply to move off the question “What is America really like?” and on to

the kind of fantasy (or rewriting of history) that a question so troublesome and difficult has tended of late to inspire. (“On GAN” 91)

The emphasis here is not on discovering the essence of America (or baseball, for that matter), but on the “fantasy” of the ideal, an alternative reimagining that underscores the manner in which narratives, or histones, are created. Roth goes on to reveal in his self-conducted interview that his novel was an attempt “to establish a passageway from the imaginary that comes to seem real to the real that comes to seem imaginary, a continuum between the credible incredible and the incredible credible” (91). This novelistic impulse anticipates almost exactly the narrative structure of American Pastoral. In that book, the narrator Nathan Zuckerman reimagines the tragic life of the all-around athlete Swede Levov and in the process reveals the fictions, however unlikely, upon which American identity is based. In his baseball novel, Roth never claims to know what America is “really like.” Instead, he invests his narrative energies into “not knowing,” a phrase that in its negative signification suggests a complete opening up of fictional possibility and becomes the basis for much of his writing. “Not knowing, or no longer knowing for sure, is just what perplexes many,” he asserts during his self-conducted interview. “That, if I may say so, is why I invented that paranoid fantasist Word Smith . . . to be (purportedly) the author of The Great American Novel. What he describes is what America is really like to one like him” (“On GAN” 90).

Here is another way in which The Great American Novel can be read in light of his more recent fiction. Most of The Human Stain revolves around the fallacious claim that “everybody knows” about the secrets of Colman Silk. However, as Roth makes abundantly clear, such an assumption is not only precarious but downright iminical to the creation of narrative. The idea itself is nothing but a fiction masquerading as a certainty: “‘Everyone knows’ is the invocation of the cliché and the beginning of the banalization of experience. . . . What we know is that, in an unclitched way, nobody knows anything. You can’t know anything. The things you know you don’t know. . . . All that we don’t know is astonishing. Even more astonishing is what passes for knowing” (209). Playing upon what is not known about Silk, the narrator Zuckerman creates a fiction that opens up his subject matter in ways that “really knowing” would not allow. This in many ways recalls Keats’s famous notion of “negative capability.” As he writes in an 1817 letter to his brothers George and Thomas, the phrase refers to the moment “when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason.” For Keats, such an uncertainty leads not to pessimism and skepticism but to the belief that “with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration” (1: 193). The “not knowing” about what America (or baseball, for that matter) is really about allows the novelist to freely articulate alternative narratives that can tell us volumes about the ways we delineate our national experiences.
Herein lies the power of Roth's ambiguity as inscribed through Smitty. This unlikely narrator, with his insider status, as well as his conspiratorially assertions, creates a counternarrative that exposes the fiction of the pastoral ideal. In the process, his efforts underscore a joie de vivre that refuses to be frozen by any metanarrative. By reimagining the history of baseball, Word Smith suggests that the meaning of sport—indeed, the meaning of America itself—is an always ongoing process, constantly in flux and never static. The play of writing, then, becomes the play of baseball with its free-flowing actions, its emphasis on the importance of minute gestures, and its opening or freeing up of both space and time. This may be what Philip Roth was getting at, a return to the kind of joy Portnoy experienced out in center field or the feelings the novelist reveals in "My Baseball Years." In exposing the fiction of the pastoral, Roth was not completely dismissive of the sport, especially as a stand-in for America itself. Baseball, for him, still held out a defining quality worth holding on to. As he writes in his reflective essay, published immediately after the subversive baseball novel, "Baseball made me understand what patriotism was about, at its best [emphasis mine]" ("Baseball Years" 236). In The Great American Novel, Roth attempts to demythologize the game of baseball not only to expose constructively its (and America's) many inconsistencies and hypocrisies but perhaps more importantly to draw attention to the sheer gratification of creative play and its meaning for national identity, mischievous or otherwise.

NOTES

1. For a brief listing of reviews at the time of the novel's publication, see Ben Siegel (1975).
2. Such earlier critics include Ben Siegel (1975), David Monaghan (1975), Thomas Blues (1981), Walter L. Harrison (1981), Richard C. Crepeau (1983), Frank R. Ardisa (1985), Janis P. Stout (1986), Jay L. Hall (1992), Jerry Klinkowitz (1993), and Kerry Ahearn (1994). Roth's career has taken a marked shift since the early 1990s, with both the quantity and the quality of his output growing almost exponentially. During the 1990s his books won every major American literary award, including the National Book Critics Circle Award, the National Book Award, the PEN/Faulkner Award, and the Pulitzer Prize. Interestingly enough, scholarly attention to The Great American Novel became as well as extant at about this time.
3. These are just a few of the many references to the pastoral that can be found in sports literary criticism. See also Peter Heinegg (1985), Michael Novak (1985), and Donald Halt (1981).
4. In addition to Hall, other critics who highlight the antipastoral thrust of the novel include Siegel, Blues, and Ahearn. See also Roth's own comments on "On the Great American Novel."
5. See, for instance, my essay, "Fictional Realms of Possibility."
6. Stout goes as far as to accuse Roth of voicing blatant "prejudicial clichés" and engaging in nothing less than "the senselessness of misogyny" (74). Such an egregiously myopic reading simplifies the novelist's creative intentions, not to mention leaving no room for ambiguous narrative play.

REFERENCES

"And Drive Them from the Temple": Baseball and the Prophet in Eric Rolfe Greenberg’s *The Celebrant*

Roxanne Harde

In the acclaimed novel *The Celebrant*, Eric Rolfe Greenberg chronicles the career of the first national baseball hero, Christy Mathewson, and the early decades of major league baseball, intertwining this history with the fictional story of a Jewish immigrant family of jewelers, the Kapp brothers: salesman Eli, designer Jackie, and manager Arthur. The final chapter of the novel closes with the fiery suicide of Eli, a chronic gambler about to lose everything in the Black Sox scandal, as he drives off Coogan’s Bluff crashing explosively against the Polo Grounds, home of the New York Giants.

In the epilogue, Jackie, who is both Eli’s betrayer and the narrator and title character, discusses the 1925 death of Mathewson. Jackie then describes Major League baseball between the 1919 Black Sox scandal—which Mathewson helped bring to light—and the first All-Star game in 1933. Jackie reminisces on early legends of baseball and the perfection they achieved on the field, particularly on Mathewson. He pauses over the first time he saw Mathewson pitch, the no-hitter of 1901, and his own joy in celebrating Mathewson’s artistry with his own, in the form of a tune inspired by the pitcher’s perfection, the first of several rings he crafted to honor the pitcher and his works. After this straightforward accounting of personal and baseball history, Jackie offers an ambiguous summary of his relationship with Mathewson for the novel’s final words: “[I]n his age and suffering he would accept that vision of my youth, entwine it with his own hard faith, and end in madness. Eli! Eli!” (269). Jackie’s closing lament for Eli calls into question his decision to follow Mathewson’s command that he not offset Eli’s wagers by betting on Cincinnati, a command that meant sacrificing his brother for the greater good of baseball. However, Eli’s name also begins both the twenty-second Psalm and Christ’s last words: “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” (My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?) (Psalm 22.1, Matt. 27.46, Mark 15.33). “Eli, Eli!” might lament a brother, albeit one representative of the corruption that nearly