

**THE PROBLEM OF THE DISINTEGRATED SELF IN THE
NOVELS OF PHILIP ROTH: A THEMATIC STUDY**

**Thesis Submitted to the
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT
For the award of the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in English**

By
N. SAJAN

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT**

March 2003

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "The Problem of the Disintegrated Self in the Novels of Philip Roth: A Thematic Study" submitted to the University of Calicut, for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is an original record of bonafide research carried out by N.Sajan at the Department of English, under my supervision and guidance, and that it has not been previously submitted for the award of any degree or diploma.

Department of English
University of Calicut

25th March 2003



Professor C.P Sivadasan
Research Supervisor

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DECLARATION

I do hereby affirm that the thesis "**The Problem of the Disintegrated Self in the Novels of Philip Roth: A Thematic Study**" has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other similar title or recognition.



N. Sajan
Lecturer
Dept of English
Sree Narayana College
Kannur

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ABBREVIATIONS

CL	-	<i>The Counterlife</i>
CLC	-	<i>Contemporary Literary Criticism</i>
GAN	-	<i>The Great American Novel</i>
MLAM	-	<i>My Life as a Man</i>
OG	-	<i>Our Gang: Starring Tricky and Others</i>
PC	-	<i>Portnoy's Complaint</i>
RMAO	-	<i>Reading Myself and Others</i>

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P R E F A C E

The narrative discourse of Philip Roth ranges from *Letting Go* (1962) to *The Dying Animal* (2001). Almost all these texts seem to negate the epistemological validity of empiricism and the canon of determinacy. The concept of the unique, autonomous self-conscious individual who forms the centre of the realm of meaning appears to be irrelevant in a close analysis of Roth's narrative texts. Each text appears to be an attempt to present an individual subject who is caught in a network of discursive tropes and semes. The subjects are positioned in such a way that they veritably demand a multi-pronged textual strategy of interpretation. The author's novels are generally looked upon as experimental fiction with prominent multivalent characteristics. As such, an exclusively empirical and conventional reading of Roth's discursivity would not be compatible with the general temper and tenor of the novels taken up for analysis in the thesis. Roth is a contemporary writer who is very much in the mainstream of American experimental writing. A corpus study of the whole range of his fictional texts may turn out to be a not too substantial work and yield only facile results. Being aware of such a consequence, the thesis attempts to make an analysis of only five novels: *Portnoy's Complaint*, *My Life as a Man*, *The Great American Novel*, *Our Gang: Starring Tricky and Others*, and *The Counterlife*. Five of these texts are studied as those that thematically represent three distinct categories in the

early life; the fiasco of his marriage; the psycho-analytic encounter and the literary career. The fourth chapter looks upon *The Great American Novel* and *Our Gang* in relation to the conflict between the self and the state. Word Smith, the octogenarian sportswriter, makes a "writerly" voyage into the synecdochic history of America by tracing the causes of the degeneration of a baseball league. Smith's construct of history is thematically examined in the light of four textual structures: the synecdochic self of American polity; the ungoverned appetites and the construct of civil society, the binary quality of the civilized and the barbarous; and lastly the reconstruction of the body politic. In *Our Gang*, the subject, Tricky Dixon's serio-comic fantasies are read as an intricate joke-work narrated in two segments: imaging the nation through rhetoric, and the perversity of political discourse.

The fifth chapter deals exclusively with *The Counterlife*, the novel that is rather seminal to the understanding of the problematic of the indeterminacy of discourse and the fragmentation of the self of the text itself. The novel is examined in the light of two narrative structures: the self-effacing Jew and the self-effacing text. In the first segment, Nathan Zuckerman is looked upon as the narrator who tries to define the Jew and Jewishness through dialectical interactions with the other subjects. The second segment looks upon the intricate relationship between the narrator - self and the text in the light of metafictional paradox.

The sixth chapter concludes with the overall findings of the research work done on these five texts. The strands of the three macro-discursive structures – self in relation to family, state and literature – are brought together for introducing a more cohesive strategy for reading Roth. The problem of the disintegrated self is discovered to be impinging upon both the subjects in the narrative and the subjectivity of the texts themselves when taken as a corpus for analytical study.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

New writing seems to coexist along with a new critical theorem that gives thrust to either “structuralist” or “deconstructive” mode of thinking. The critical theorem of contemporary times has not merely coexisted with creative writing, but it has, to a great extent, affected the latter. This symbiotic process has brought the literary scenario to a point where the avant-garde theorists write novels, and the avant-garde novelists write criticism. This indicates the existence, in the contemporary age, of a new awareness about the status of word, text, author, and reader. Malcolm Bradbury and Christopher Bigsby write that they “do not assume, then, that there is one right path to contemporary experiment, nor that a self-conscious reflexivity, a deconstructive strategy, an art of performance or a metafictional mode is the only one of current importance” (8).

Contemporary writing is characterised by styles and modes that keep constantly shifting into various directions. Besides this, many authors, unlike the older writers, are alive, continuous and incomplete with their discourses and strategies. The author’s personal intent in the modern sense of the term has practically little to do with the dependence of the text on the context. What is described as the “author” has become more of an artefact of a text that is placed within the larger matrix of discourse. The identity of the author

and the narrator is diffuse for it depends on the reader's conception of the author's role and intentions. Richard Harvey Brown reiterates that "first as discourse fictionalizes the author, it may also fictionalize the audience, in the sense that the audience, like the author, is cast into a role by the text" (146).

Roth gathers his fabula of ambiguities from the disparate content of contemporary reality which he describes in the essay, "Writing American Fiction" as:

Simply this: that the American writer in the middle of the twentieth century has his hands full in trying to understand, describe, and then make credible much of American reality. It stupefies, it sickens, it infuriates, and finally it is even a kind of embarrassment to one's one meager imagination. The actuality is continually outdoing our talents, and the culture tosses up figures almost daily that are the envy of the novelist. (*RMAO* 120)

Roth's fictional world perceivably shares the two general characteristics of the modern multivalent novel as explained by Alan Warren Friedman. Firstly, it has a "self-conscious awareness of itself as artefact," and secondly, there is a "counterpointing of conflicting ethical stances, a process in which one or more protagonists participates or serves as object" (137). The actants and the world they inhabit do not appear to be of the mimetic order, for they transcend the limits of rationality and take recourse to a

phantasmagoric reality that is similar to an “exitless funhouse” or “hall of mirrors” or a “box-within-box” (Schulz 142). They go through a variety of surrealistic experiences, the mysteries of which they themselves, as subjects, cannot resolve through either action or speech. What they encounter are the intractable materials in their world and also the enigma of always being in a state of flux. The actions are mainly centered around an illusory self that strives to make self-validating resolutions. The attempts to make such resolutions put the subjects in a labyrinth of acceptable/unacceptable values that are juxtaposed against one another. This could demand of the reader a willing suspension of belief as well as disbelief. Stanley Cooperman reinforces the idea with the following statement:

Roth reduces human beings to carnival snap-shots of themselves—sometimes comic, sometimes ugly, sometimes wistful, but always without that strength of existence, that awareness of moral truth which (even when attenuated) redeems our temporal grotesqueries into the possibility of significant human action. (438)

Roth’s early novels are set against the backdrop of the tight-knit family life of American Jews. The young subjects, Neil Klugman (*Goodbye Columbus*), Gabe Wallach (*Letting Go*), Alexander Portnoy, Peter Tarnopol (*My Life as a Man*) and Lucy Nelson (*When She was Good*) appear to be like a medium to explore the nature and causes of the fragmentation of modern

man's psyche. The coercive forces of the family, the state, and literature act upon the individual subject in creative as well as oppressive ways. The individual subjects, most of whom are Jews, struggle to assimilate themselves to a life of success and acceptance, and in the course of the struggle lose their integrity and coherence. Alfred Kazin is of the view that Roth's novels present "the Jew as individual, not the individual as Jew" (292). The communal life of the Jews in America apparently forms only a secondary concern in most of the texts. The most important of the concerns appears to be the narcissistic self that gets trapped in a serio-comic state of paranoia like situation. And so, the texts, when analysed in the dissertation, are not treated exclusively as Jewish American fiction. Aharon Appelfeld maintains that in Roth's fictional discourse "there is hardly any Jewish philosophy, Jewish tradition, mysticism, or religion, and there is no discussion of who is a Jew or what is a Jew [. . .] Roth's Jews are without Judaism." Further, he adds that eventhough the Jewish subject is prominently found in Roth's novels, he is there because of a "biographical accident rather than philosophical commitment"(14).

Goodbye Columbus (1959), the first book of a novella and five short stories that Roth published could be considered as the precursory text to the later novelistic discourse that dramatise the transformation of the self into various grotesque forms. The subjects in the stories, "The Conversion of the Jews," "Eli, the Fanatic," "The Defender of the Faith," "Epstein," and "You

Can't Tell a Man by the Songs He Sings," try to acknowledge each other's independent self. The literary devices used in the stories suggest an alternation of imprisonment with liberation. When the actants attempt to liberate each other catastrophe occurs to them. Most of them are forced to develop their self in an atmosphere of cultural refinement that imposes upon them the desire to be good. After enduring this compulsion until a certain point, they rebel out of exasperation, become two recurrent motifs in the text of the stories. These motifs get manifested through the endless ranting of the subject who is laden with guilt, anxiety and paranoia. Donald Kartiganer reiterates that Roth's fictional subjects play out the full range of their discord by magnifying the divisiveness "into a crisis of internal warfare" (82). The same problematic situations appear to have been carried over to the novels also where the subjects prominently indulge in monologic discourse that are directed towards an illusory target in the infinity that is never realized.

About the tropological visualization of contemporary reality, Roth makes a comment that carries a new sensibility and conviction regarding the art of representation in language:

And it may be that when this situation produces not only feelings of disgust, rage, and melancholy but impotence too, the writer is apt to lose heart and turn finally to other matters, to the construction of wholly imaginary worlds, and to a celebration of

the self, which may, in a variety of ways, become his subject, as well as the impetus that establishes the perimeters of his technique.

(*RMAO* 134)

This also expresses his intent of “making an imaginative assault upon” the fabula of experimental reality through the discursive space of fiction (123).

The novella, *Goodbye Columbus*, develops the theme of the uncertain actant making an uncertain choice and being forced to accept ambiguous results. Neil Klugman’s indeterminate and amoral ventures to forge his identity bring him face to face with the forces of a dehumanized modern society that is devoid of any commitment to moral values. Neil is caught between two alternatives: either to submit before the harsh social forces with a sense of resignation or to take on the power of reality with stubborn activism. Neil resorts to the latter alternative while trying to satisfy the urges prompted by his self. Similar to this is the situation Gabe Wallach and Alex Portnoy find themselves in. Gabe could be seen as a successor to Ozzie, Eli, and Neil. Developing this idea, John N. McDaniel states:

From Ozzie Freedman Gabe inherits a sincere, and at times naïve, resentment of limitation; from Eli Peck Gabe inherits a keen awareness of society’s expectations for conformity, a nervous indecisiveness, and a final courage to exert his individuality

despite the consequences; and from Neil Klugman, Gabe inherits an intellectual awareness of moral issues and a misguided yearning for wealth and social advancement. (77)

Gabe experiences the force of society particularly through the institution of family. The three significant motifs found in the novel are: “mistaken intentions,” “crossed purposes,” and “conflicting demands” (Halio 37). To seek order, direction, and self-fulfillment, he comes into a ceaseless grapple with the issues of filial obligation, flirtatious relationship, professional pursuit, adoption of child, and marital compatibility. The discourse in *When She was Good* concerns Lucy’s relationship with society and the extent to which she is victimized by false ideals and self deception. Portnoy’s monologic discourse could, on the other hand, be seen as a site of metaphors/metonymies, where the uncompromising battle between private desire and socially imposed moral conscience is staged. It is “the comedy of excess” where “obscenity is not only a kind of language” but is “very nearly the issue itself” (Halio 67; *RMAO* 18).

In *My Life as a Man*, the writer-narrator Peter Tarnopol is involved in a dialectical encounter with the compelling values of family life. The novel is more like a bildungsroman where the artist’s consciousness becomes a space to enact a conflict ridden encounter with certain constructive social norms. *The Professor of Desire* and *The Breast* introduce the grapple between David

Alan Kepesh, the Professor of Literature and the self that occupies the Kafka texts he teaches. Kafka and his actants appear in these two texts as complex metaphoric representations of the text's self.

The Zuckerman trilogy comprises *The Ghost Writer*, *Zuckerman Unbound*, and *The Anatomy Lesson*. The first novel narrates Zuckman's formative years spent in the search for a literary ideal that could provide him inspiration in his career as a writer. The reader could look upon the novel as an endless regress to which access can be gained by several entrances. *Zuckerman Unbound* is a narrative that tends to convey the point that art should not be confused with life. The narrative places Zuckerman in disturbing situations wherein he has to interact with many men and women. All of them, directly or obliquely, go on to reveal Zuckerman's odyssey towards achieving a detachment between his fictional self and real self. The narrative in *The Anatomy Lesson* is again a monologic articulation of a writer's frustration with himself and his literary sterility after his father's death: "No longer a son, no longer a writer. Everything that had galvanised him had been extinguished" (446). *The Counterlife* and *Deception* could be placed together by their thematic and technical similarities. The actions transcend all temporal boundaries of the present, past and future. Mark Shechner writes that *Deception* performs an elaborate "counterpoint between the inertia of history and the agility of the imagination [. . .]" (qtd.in Halio

215). *The Counterlife* is an imaginative rendering of Zuckerman's escapades with marriage, sex, religion and literature.

In *Operation Shylock*, the theme of transgression shifts into explicitly Jewish issues of identity and identity politics. *Sabbath's Theater* presents another aspect of literary imagination where the remorselessly real, not the imaginative is dominant. In *Patrimony*, the author dwells upon the death of his father. In *American Pastoral* (1997) and *I Married a Communist* (1998), politics, literature and the middle-class Jewish life are targeted once again as in *Zuckerman Bound*. *The Facts* becomes an experimental venture in the writing of fictive auto-biography. *The Human Stain* (2000) is set against a political intrigue in which the President of America is involved in a sex scandal. *The Dying Animal* (2001) forms a sequel to *The Breast*. The trope of body is once again brought out in a Freudian conflict between Eros and mortality.

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CHAPTER II

**THE SELF AND THE BODY : AN OVERVIEW OF THEIR
PRESENCE IN NARRATIVE FICTION**

The concept of Self has gone through various evolutionary stages on the epistemological planes of philosophy, psychology and language studies. The myriad meanings and mysteries of existence can, to a certain extent, be deciphered and resolved within the matrix of Self. Existence itself is closely bound up with Self. But there seems to be no all-inclusive episteme that could be termed as Self of man. No two persons have an identical Self. Even within one person Self could be a highly elusive thing.

Man's existence is usually riddled with predicaments, contingencies and absurdities. Whereas, as a social being, man is continually faced with choice and rigours of relationships, on a psychological level, he is caught in a maze of fears and passions. Any one of these three strands of life could influence or cast one's Self.

The older contemplations on Self is conditioned by a belief that there is a unified, cohesive line of consciousness that is not characterised by frequent breaks or discontinuities. But this type of thinking receives a jolt from modernism. The fundamental idea that forms the basis of the concept of Self is "know thyself". This epigrammatic precept is discernible right from Plato to Lacan. But, through the ages, philosophers and psychologists have been

re-casting and revamping the concept depending upon the contingencies of their discipline and times. The differences the modern reader finds in these different realisations are rather subtle but crucial. But still one aspect could be cited as a common factor in all the different mappings of the Self. All of them seem to build their ideas within the three matrices in which man is conceptualised: the existential, the psychological and the sociological.

The tenor of modernist literature is to envision Self as a diffuse inner entity that gets affected by external forces which are not always positive or predictable. Each individual forms, by some means, a defensive/offensive strategy to counter an external reality that is mostly beyond control and comprehension. The strategy becomes a substantial index to his personality. The strategy adopted could range from absolute passivity to aggressive confrontation. Existence could be chaotic and perplexing and offer only a ceaseless impasse. The responses made manifest by an individual while grappling with such a reality perceptibly differ in various contexts. The Self manifests itself fragmentarily in various roles that are never similar to one another. Tracking down such fragmentary selves embedded within the Self is an arduous task even for the person who is a participant in empirical life. So the modernist writer, in view of the Self's instability and inconsistency, is constrained to make a feasible formula to apprehend the complexity and intricacy of the matter. The formulas, in general, tend to view Self as self-contradictory, protean, and inconstant. Before proceeding with the view of

Self adopted for the analysis of Philip Roth's fiction, it would be relevant to fix the classical and modernist concepts of Self in their proper context. Classical philosophers generally look forward to a transcendence of Self. To the ancient philosophers of Greece like Plato, Self is a radiant form of consummate virtue which every individual could aspire to provided he leads a life that is in compliance with certain prescribed values. If such a supreme state of being is reached, the rest of the existence becomes devoted to attain a transcendence of Self. Pursuit of transcendental state takes one to a stature of godliness or superhuman control over existence (Russell 147-156). Plato's idea approximates to the view that the individual who perceives his Self could be considered as having reached the ultimate goal of life. Kierkegaard conceives of the Self as that which refines the consciousness of the seeker after truth and also brings together the disparate strands of the inner mind to a point of convergence. Kant looks upon Self as a manifestation of the already existent inner traits. They are projected into the world beyond personal experience and a subtle union is achieved between the two with the help of intellect and reason (Russell 675-690). Locke avers that contemplation and rationality conjoin to form the Self, and this in turn would provide man the capacity to be one with the spiritual essence (Russell 584-595). Sartre believes that Self brings in an awareness of the immediate presence of being and also its existence beyond the immediate surroundings. Hegel explains that it contains within itself the supreme form of truth and wisdom

(Russell 701-715). Despite their intrinsic distinctions a subtle strand of similarity runs through all the philosophic versions of Self simplistically enlisted here. The basic premise of all the concepts points toward the transcendental characteristic of Self. It is envisioned as something that projects out beyond the human world of physical existence. It stretches out into a world of psychological or mental prowess and gets settled into an outer world of spirituality.

Psychologists generally maintain that Self is evolved out of an inner consciousness which is ridden with diverse emotions and feelings such as love, hatred, awe, sex, alienation, and obsession. In addition, it is also said to be influenced by the social, economic, cultural and political conditions that prevail in the world at large. Freud traces the root of all human actions to the conscious / unconscious will. The mastery of the unconscious processes at work within oneself would lead to Self-knowledge. What, in the close examination of all these views, becomes evident is the fact that the psychological root of Self remains immanent among all the other factors. Self, on a psychological plane, has stood the test of time albeit all impinging influences from sociological and philosophical disciplines.

This Self is generally dependant upon the vicissitudes of the existential aspects of life. It appears to be a composite form of clarity and complexity, power and weakness, much within the subject and without too. The subject is

continually involved in a grapple with the Self within him. It is so because he desires to comprehend the world within him or without or both simultaneously. Through the process of being disintegrated, he meets failures, successes or even a great sense of accomplishment or a vicious sense of loss.

In modernist perception, Self is a state of identity never inert but swerves from context to context. It is a consciousness of vicissitudes of existence or a grave apprehension that sets in consequent upon frustrated desire, despair or ineffectuality.

The study is only about Self but the qualifier “disintegrated” is used to eschew all conventional purport of Self and to adopt only the modernist idea of fragmentation of self that stands distinct from terms like ‘self-realization’ and ‘knowledge’. The transcendental dimensions of the concept are sought to be considerably ruled out. The disintegrating process would help the reader perceive the various fragments of self manifesting themselves on various planes of existence. They emanate from the same subject. Each fragment of Self could occupy a particular site or phase of discourse in the fictional texts. The subject is found to be helpless in the face of such autonomy of the fragment which keeps on shifting from one stance to another. Self, in the modernist perspective, is innate in the subject. It is evolved out of his mind, consciousness or psyche or the reality that concerns his existence.

The thesis attempts to analyze Roth's fictional texts as narrative discourse. They are appropriated as emblems of a larger social text. The study traces the narratives as rhetorical forms and then subjects them to a thorough structural analysis based on some of the relevant tenets of the structuralist and narrative theories of critics like Roland Barthes, Gerald Prince, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Kaja Silverman, and David Lodge. The method of text analysis adopted here combines the anti-empirical methodology of classical structuralism with select ideas derived from the psychoanalytic writings of Freud, Lacan, and Laing.

From a discursive point of view, the "production, reception, and interpretation" of texts take place in particular communities of discourse that are defined by shared presuppositions, similar expectations, and common grammars of expression." (Brown 144). A text is a socially constructed system of symbols. A narrative text has political and psychological underpinnings in which a sense of lived connection between individual subject and public conduct prevails. But the presumption has lost its validity in advanced individual cultures, and so narratives have become an endangered category. A society could be considered as a "factual text" (Brown 143). Fictional texts can be seen as social symbolic acts that depict possible selves and societies. In the late twentieth century, with the dissolution of moral agency in public life, contemporary civic culture has been deprived of narrative forms. Systematically constructed plots are a rare phenomenon to

find either in society or fiction. Traditional narrative has gone out of vogue and to explain its death is to account for the disappearance of comprehensible moral political discourse in modern society.

A narrative literally means an account of an agent whose actions unfold through events in time. Plot brings integrity to the actions as a whole as well as to the subjects represented. Plot is a means by which the characteristic aspects of human existence are presented through specific events. Plot expresses a moralistic vision by codifying in actions some items of wisdom.

Language is both a social institution and political exercise. It, in earlier times formed an active synergy between consciousness and things. But since the Renaissance, Western Society has been increasingly going through a process of rapid modernisation. With growing acceptance of the Baconian dictum, "knowledge is power", and the Cartesian assertion that science would make man possessor and master of nature, an internal estrangement started to appear in the Western society. By the seventeenth century God loses his supremacy over the order of the universe. A moral and epistemological crisis sets in as the so called unified divine truth issues into a plethora of fragmented pieces of Truth/Self. By a gradual process, the limitless universe that Don Quixote sets out to explore becomes smaller in dimension. In the nineteenth century, this unbounded realm gets occupied by civil society, politics,

commerce, judiciary and other socio-political institutions. Time also becomes restricted. Milan Kundera impressionistically comments about this change:

In Balzac's world, time no longer idles happily by as it does for Cervantes and Diderot [. . .]. Later still, for Emma Bovary, the horizon shrinks to the point of seeming a barrier [. . .]. But the dream of the soul's infinity loses its magic when History (or what remains of it; the suprahuman force of an omnipotent society) takes hold of man. (8)

Contemporary signifying practices are indicative of the premise that man is non-representable and the world is decentred without any coherent meaning or centre. Self and reality become irrelevant questions, and what gets problematized is how meaning is created, and how identity and society are constructed. Time and tense lose their conventional significance and get merged into the present that is characterised by absurdity and choice. Narratives were once governed by a textual centre or "telos" that maintained causality, motivation and destiny. Socially reliable meanings die out first as a given conclusion, then as a probability, and ultimately as an important aspect of human existence. This results in a vigorous dislocation of temporal order of language and modes of representation as well. Contemporary narratives try to undermine their narrativity by giving way to a self-referential product. Barthes' "Theory of the Text" assumes that a "Text is produced in the space

of the relations between the reader and the written, and that space is the site of a productivity: 'écriture' "(31). In Barthesian terms, the text is a productive exercise where the producer and reader of the text meet. It is a labour where the tussle between the subject and the Other, and the social context converge. It does not imply an act of understanding as that which is realized by "the finity of Cartesian 'Cogito' " (36). The subject that occupies the textual site is a plural subject which could be explained away better only with the help of psychoanalysis.

The psyche comes into being out of the body. From Freud's 'dynamic' point of view the needs of the body are inseparably connected to feelings of pleasure and pain. From the 'economic' point of view, the component of the mind which Freud calls 'ego' mediates the interaction of the body with the external environment. The 'ego' controls the basic instincts to reach a point of adjustment with reality. This is viewed as a struggle between the 'reality principle' and the 'pleasure principle' in which the body is forced to defer pleasure and accept unpleasure to abide by social regulations. From the 'topographical' point of view the mind is divided into three distinct agencies: the 'id', the 'ego', and the 'super- ego'. This model is called the 'structural model'. The 'id' is comprised of the instinctual drives that originate from the body's constitutional needs. It always wishes that its desires are gratified. But the 'ego' serves as a regulator and restrains the desires by the process of

repression. The 'super- ego' gets constituted by the refining influence of parental training and societal regulations.

Repression is the focal point around which almost all the psychoanalytic concepts operate. Entry into language for achievement of selfhood could be made only after the stage of repression. To Freud, primal repression marks a prelinguistic entry into the world of symbols. But Lacan considers the second stage of symbolization - the initiation into language - as the symbolic phase. Repression acts to hide the guilt-ridden wishes from conscious stratum. But the repressed wishes may, at times, return in the form of symptoms, dreams, and parapraxes.

Freud calls the total accessible energy of the sexual instinct 'libido'. Sexuality, he believes, is to be understood not as a mere means of a reproduction. It includes the function of deriving various forms of pleasure from the zones of the body. The instinctual drives get channelled into these zones. The growth of an infant through different stages is delineated through the pleasures derived from different zones of the body. The breast, the fecal matter, and the penis are the primary zones through which the libido is channelled. Its selfhood will be determined by the assumption of a sexual identity which is psychically constructed. Until the sexual identity is achieved the infant is in a 'polymorphous' state. That is, it will be at the disposal of the 'component instincts' operating independently with disparate

aim and source. Only by a gradual process does it attain the status of an organized self that the society recognizes to be normal and fully developed. This conformity to socially ordained structure could be accomplished through the workings of the Oedipus complex and the castration complex.

Freud perceives the child's bond with its parents as crucial for the attainment of normal sexual identity. The Oedipus complex is the pivotal point of desire, repression and sexual identity. As the complex wanes, the super ego gets formed and becomes a part of the psychic topography. The task of overcoming the complex is very rarely said to reach the point of consummation. The child is forced to seek out other alternatives or to go in for a compromise with what it encounters.

Transference and counter transference could very effectively be appropriated as the 'reader theory' of psychoanalysis. Transference could be understood as a mode of attributing positive and negative qualities, according to the memories of early family life, to persons and objects directly encountered. Counter transference is a psychoanalytic phenomenon which manifests itself into a vicious 'knot' as a result of ceaseless misreadings. The phenomenon of transferring old memories on to the image of the analyst becomes operational just at the juncture where the repressed desire is in danger of exposing itself. The reader-theory that emerges out of psychoanalysis depends upon such junctures of resistance in both the text and

the reader. Freud is attracted to art partly because of his admiration of the artist for the competence to manipulate the return of the repressed. Elizabeth Wright points out that these concepts can be cleverly appropriated for a theory of reading texts:

[. . .] if the patient's text, his presentation of experience, can cause a disturbance in the analyst which allows for a new interpretation, this turns upside down the notion that the reader is the analyst and the text the patient [. . .]. Readers do not only work on texts, but texts work on readers, and this involves a complex double dialectic of two bodies inscribed in language. (16)

Freud's concepts open up new roads to the layers of unconscious in a text. They lead the critic to the ceaseless conflict and adjustment that the bodies are engaged in. He opines that the well-spring of dreams is the unconscious impulse that struggles to fulfill a desire that is not gratified in real life. The structure of the text of a dream is transformed by the remembrance of the subject. The content gets reduced into small fragments that join cohesively by a certain chain of associations. The dream work is distorted or subverted by the operation of the four devices: condensation, displacement, representability and secondary revision. These devices are of great interest to those who analyse literary texts. In condensation, the dream events get abbreviated into composite forms and images. Displacement is

seen through “the intensity of an idea becoming detached from it and passing to other ideas, which in themselves are of little value” (Wright 20). Here the objects in the manifest dream replace the objects in the hidden dream-thoughts. Representability is the means by which dream thoughts achieve form and function that are free from logic and syntax. It is like a syntagma of ideograms or pictographs which does not have any linear grammaticality. Contradictions exist together within one single image. Transmutations of coherent linkages are reinforced by regression to infantile fantasies and memories. Secondary revision is another device by which the text of the dream is distorted. The conscious mind may censor the irrational dream-sequence to form a rational order. But the process results in further distortion of the ‘distortion’ already effected by the three earlier devices:

The ‘intelligible pattern’ which the conscious mind wants to impose on the visual material can ignore or falsify what is patently there, in the manner of a reader who is so engaged in the text that he ignores the misprints. What was visible to the mind’s eye in the dream remains unchanged, but the conscious perspective produces a re-vision of it. The material is ignored in the determination to arrive at an acceptable rational narrative : the readymade formulations of the dream are abandoned, and new ones are made of the very same material. (Wright 23)

The concept of the Subject, in the traditional sense, means the self, ego, or individual cogito. Recent critical writings have resorted to shunning this concept on two grounds. Firstly, the human subject was made the point of origin for the historical, social and personal phenomena; and secondly, the fallacious belief that the individual is the possessor of “self knowledge” and is “self actuating”. Michel Foucault in the essay, “What is an Author?” writes about the dissolution of the subject in contemporary discourses as “ a matter of depriving the subject (or its substitute) of its role as originator, and of analyzing the subject as a variable and complex function of discourse” (118).

The subject, as used in the thesis, means a site, but not centre or presence, where events happen, or something to which events happen, but not that which makes events happen. The extra-individual factors use the subject to exert their influence. The subject only thinks it does use them in return. The subject in the text gets fragmented into “component systems and is deprived of its status as source and master of meaning, it comes to seem more and more like a construct” (Hawthorn 236). The ‘I’ of a discourse is not something to be taken for granted, but it exists as that which is addressed by and is related to others.

The word, “subject”, is a term popularly used by French psychoanalysts to do away with the nuances of selfhood and personhood. Lacan tries to map out, through the network of language, the split between

conscious and unconscious. Lacan's psycho-analytic concepts try to etch out linguistically the asymmetric co-presence of conscious and unconscious. The inner structure is conceptualized externally through a linguistic experience. Lacan's concepts seem to be well aligned with structuralist theories of text. He makes Freud's discoveries radical with the structuralist concepts of Saussure, Jakobson and Levi-Strauss.

For Lacan, the psyche is structured into three tiers: the "Symbolic", the "Imaginary", and the "Real". The Real does not exist on its own but it is always and already subjected to linguistic discourse: "The moment it becomes an object of discourse, it ceases to be the 'Real' because it becomes the real for someone and becomes the 'truth' ". The Imaginary is evolved out of human fascination with form. The infant's recognition of its image in mirror is the first moment of its realization of wholeness. This fictional image governs the efforts of the subject "I" toward a totality and independence which is mirage. The Symbolic is the "dimension of symbolization into which the human being's body, to the extent that he or she begins to speak, must translate itself" (Leitch, *Norton* 1281). The Symbolic assumes a linguistic dimension of speech or writing. It exists at the level of relations but not as things by themselves.

In the essay "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious", Lacan synthesizes Freudian concepts with those of structuralism. The unconscious is

not merely a mysterious source of repressed desires but rather a mode of “rhetorical energy designed both to disguise and to express those desires, which exist for psychoanalysis only in their effects” (Leitch 1281). Lacan claims that “The unconscious is structured like language” (1281). The dictum means that the unconscious will be like a foreign language, with strange syntax and syntagm, to a reader who is yet to be initiated into the language. It is not amorphous, but rhetorically dense with dreams, errors, and symptoms of the subject. In the case of psychoanalytic symptoms, it is the body itself that serves as a concrete object for the unconscious to express itself and which the analyst could “read”.

Lacan tries to comment on the texts of Freud and create another layer over them. Freud centres his studies on individual actors and minute acts. He repositions the concepts of civilized behaviour and normal personality. Lacan does not take ‘people’ as his norm. He focusses attention upon symbols, metaphors and words. The human being is believed to live in an order created by symbols and letters. His emphasis is not on a person’s falls and slips but on the adherence/resistance to the demands of the Symbolic Order of discourse. For him discourse is what determines the condition of a social bond. Discourse is opened to truth, which it can never contain because it is partly overdetermined by social values. They always frame, design and manipulate truth and knowledge. The forthcoming chapters would be judiciously using

the select and relevant concepts of Freud and Lacan and integrating them with structuralist ideas of thematic analysis of Philip Roth's fictional discourse.

Psychoanalysis is central to any structuralist study of a narrative discourse. If signification has to occur through discourse it requires a subject which, in the end, is an effect of discourse. It is in and through language that man constitutes himself as a subject. Only language could establish the concept of "ego" in its reality which is that of the being. The "subjectivity" discussed here is the competence of the speaker to posit himself as "subject". It is understood not as the feeling that everyone experiences of being himself. On the contrary, it is the psychic unity which transcends the totality of the real experiences it assembles and that which makes the permanence of consciousness.

Charles Sanders Peirce explains that reality is accessible to man because man himself is a sign. He means that "man" which is the constitutive of the human subject gets to know the world basically through language. Man is a product of language, and he is cognitively available to himself and others only in the guise of signifiers like proper names, first person nouns, images and tropes. So, understandably enough, he is synonymous with these signifiers. The subject's identity is determined by signifiers rather than by a transcendental *telos* that makes him a producer of signifiers and signified.

Barthes considers literature more as a “second - order” signifying system. Literature is conceived as a language system built on an already existing system. The Barthesian model suggests that the relationship between a connotative signifier and connotative signified could be established through reference to a larger social field that is structured in terms of class interests and values. Further, he argues that ideology is a condition of consciousness developed through discourses sponsored by a dominant class. Culture imposes itself upon the text in various ways. Ideological imperatives express themselves through a multiplicity of codes and *semes* which “invade” the text in the form of key signifiers: “Each of these signifiers represents a digression outside of the text to an established body of knowledge which it connotes ; each one functions as an abbreviated version of the entire system(code)of which it is a part” (Silverman 31).

Quoting Emile Benveniste, Silverman explains that the “I” in a narrative refers to the reality of the discourse. The basis of subjectivity is the exercise of language. The speaking subject of a text is the agency responsible for the text’s enunciation. The subject of speech can be understood as a character or a group of characters most central to the fiction. A character is a construct put together by the reader from various *semes* dispersed throughout the text. The “semic code” according to Silverman forms a major device for thematizing persons objects or places. It operates by clustering a number of signifiers around a proper name or another signifier. Signifiers grouped like

this function like a collective signified to the proper name or its surrogate. The figure or cluster of figures who occupies a position within the narrative space is similar to that occupied by the first-person pronoun in a sentence. The spoken subject is the one who is constituted through identification with the subject of the text. The speaking subject is not to be understood as being in full control of his subjectivity. He is always constrained by rules of denotation and connotation:

Moreover, 'language' must here be understood in the broadest possible sense, as encompassing not only the operations of denotation, but those of connotation. In other words, every utterance must be conceived as having various levels of signification, and issuing from multiple voices. It is spoken not only by the palpable voice of a concrete speaker, writer, or cluster of mechanical apparatuses, but the anonymous voices of cultural codes which invade it in the form of connotation. (Silverman 50)

This is to say that a discourse gets constructed simultaneously along more than one axis. In the essay, "Language and Freudian Theory," Benveniste suggests that discourse has its origins in a divided subject. It could be presumed to issue from an unconscious and conscious speaking subject. The unconscious subject could be accessed through the conscious subject. Alongside the discussion on the Self, a brief explication of the relevance of

the body in art and literature would be contextual. Philosophy, religion and visual arts have been great attempts at defining man, his body and his spirit. The human body is the site where the conflict between fact and fiction has been staged with full vigour. This battle is as old as civilization itself and has given rise to several disciplines of study related to various aspects of the body. Man's attitude to body, his most precious wealth, is markedly ambivalent. He is either fascinated by its remarkable possibilities or awe-stricken by the taboos on its free applications. Or else he finds it too complicated to be grasped in a nutshell.

To the cynic the body is an image made out of clay, to the poet the house of the soul, and to the physician the all-too ailing structure. The psychiatrist looks upon it as a shelter for the mind and personality; the geneticist looks upon it as a perpetuator of its own kind, the biologist looks upon it as an organism and the anthropologist looks upon it as an accumulator of culture. Others see the body merely as a machine, a concept that at times attracts and other times repels.

The much debated issue for centuries, in literature, philosophy, religion and psychology and arts, right from the time of Socrates (428-347 B.C), is the mind/body dualism. The ancients extol the mind or soul's supremacy over body. The philosophers who preached before Socrates' age like Heraclitus, Protogores, Simmias, Anaxagores and Homer did not sharply differentiate

between soul and body. Matter and spirit were conceived of as parts of the physical universe. Heraclitus identifies soul with fire. Simmias avers that body represents matter's harmonious form. Anaxagoras affirms that mind is not mixed with matter and is capable of independent action. Protagoras believes that soul and sensation are two sides of the same thing.

Socrates considers the souls as a guiding force of man. It never dies out and survives all physical change. Plato compares the soul in the body to a sailor in a ship. It uses the body as a subordinate instrument. The soul is said to be autonomous and eternal. He even believes in transmigration of the soul. Aristotle strikes a balance between the beliefs of these two philosophers. He tries to establish the interdependence of body and soul. Each has its own identity but is not separable from the other. The Greeks, on the whole do not accord non-material powers to the human body.

The Christian Philosopher St. Augustine views soul as superior to body. He defines man's soul as rational and body as earthy (Russell 351-363). In *Upanishads* the body is not the true 'I' but the true One is the 'atman'. What disappears at death is the 'I', the vital principle or the ultimate self. St. Thomas Aquinas emphasizes the complementarity of body and soul. He states that man is the composite form of both these entities (Russell 444-454).

Rene Descartes appears to be the founder of modern dualism. He makes a complete division between mind and body. But he also accepts and

tries to explain the interaction and the total unity of man (Russell 542-551). With Descartes begins the glorification of the individual human being. Literature and fine-arts become man-centred and nature-centred. Artists begin to rediscover the human body and study physiology, the muscles and bones of the body in motion. The body gets resurrected fully through the texts of late twentieth century like Foucault. All this begins from Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa" and Michael Angelo's "The Creation of Adam". In both these paintings, the human and the unearthly are synthesized to form a rare union of physical and the spiritual. The zestful aspects of life are portrayed in sculpture too. Pollainolo's "Battle of Ten Naked Men" is one of the best examples of the celebration of the physical power in sculpture.

In the romantic age, emotions supercede concern for bodily forms. But two centuries later, the two World Wars brought about substantial changes in sensibility. Wilhelm Lehmbruck's "Seated Youths" is nearly faceless and connote despair. Henry Moore's "Recumbent Figure" is only a vague approximation of the human body. Twentieth century representations of body appear to lack the earlier life and vigour. Art becomes depersonalized. Artists like Pablo Picasso, Amedeo Modigliani, and George Rouault focus upon emotion and depersonalize their art. The same process takes place in literature too, especially in the texts brought out by James Joyce, Franz Kafka, Thomas Mann and Jean Paul Sartre.

Man is stripped of his identity, grandeur and supremacy. He is no more the "paragon of animals" as celebrated by Shakespeare in Hamlet. When the history of body is traced from pre-historic times to the present, it is understandable that body is the site where the politics of power is staged. In pre historic times, superhuman powers are attributed to it. But the ancient Greeks do not attach much importance to it. The Renaissance glorifies it, but in the twentieth century it is belittled again. Body is a site where intellectual, social, cultural, political and religious changes are imprinted.

In the twentieth century, body and body politics assume greater importance. Theorists like Foucault, Freud and Lacan relocate man as a "function" but not as the creator of history. Body, in their parlance, is a sign-system of power. Lately, new schools of criticism emerge like Feminism, Psychoanalysis, Post-colonial Studies, and Discourse Analysis. In all these theories, body enjoys prime importance. The new theorists try to see the body in itself and not in a dualistic relationship with soul. In contemporary theory, what becomes relevant is the body as object, the body as mirror to the self, and medium between the inner self and the outer world. It is also a social construct, symbolic unit, cultural text and space for social praxis.

Writers, by representing body with exaggerated attention to its physical aspects, deconstruct the prevailing stable world picture. Margaret Mead contends that cultures with a strong preoccupation with the shamefulness

about the gastro-intestinal system tend to silence talk about the lower regions of the alimentary canal. Such cultures obscure the recognition of the body's politic: "This tendency to obscure the recognition of the alimentary canal's open-endedness is not merely an aspect of the physiological lore of such a culture; it is fundamentally (one might say), a political aspect" (Rushdy 2). Literature, until the early twentieth century, was yet to accept its antithetical Other in the realm of carnality. All bodily functions were a part of the stigmata. The social command was so strong that exposure of natural functions of the body was an anathema. This is evidently borne out through the "discursive silences" maintained about such matters in literature (Rushdy 17). Manners and ideas of purity are not always innocent or natural. They are indicative of social restraints that deserve scrutiny. Institutions of politics are closely linked with institutions of politeness. Erik Erikson substantiates this point by stating that decorums of bodily conduct are instituted with great rigour in Western societies. The degree of social pressure depended on the spread of middle class conventions and of the ideal image of a "mechanized body". What Erikson calls "mechanized body", Foucault calls the "body subjected to training", a training that exemplifies and perpetrates the perversity of modern cultural society (Rabinow 188). He assumes that perversity is based on its manipulation of the body: "[. . .] the body had become the object of such imperious and pressing investments; in every

society, the body was in the grip of very strict powers, which imposed on it constraints, prohibitions, or obligations" (Rabinow 180).

The achievement of the five texts discussed in the thesis is their success in employing the language of American Popular culture and the idiom of pop humour to debunk the canonical representation of reality in family, politics and literature. The narrative discourse seeks to undermine American society's pious view of itself by revealing the greed, corruption, and abuse of power. Hyperbolic depictions have images of hilarious festivity. The coarseness of the discursive texture manifests itself largely in an emphasis upon material and corporeal aspects of human life. It also gets manifested through the role played by images of human body along side food, sex and emetics. By portraying men and women in the act of satisfying the most basic and primitive of human instinctual urges, the textual semes help both to create a comic atmosphere and to debunk idealistic pretensions.

The analysis of the textual semes is done in the light of thematics and narratology. The Russian formalist, Boris Tomachevski defines "theme" in his article "Thematique" published in 1925. In his perception, the theme is "the idea that summarizes and unifies the verbal material" (qtd. in Mac Kenzie 536). The text as a whole may have a theme, simultaneously each part of a book may have its own theme. After a text is reduced to its thematic elements, one comes to components that are irreducible or the smallest

particles of thematic material: “evening comes”, “Raskolnikov, kills the old woman,” “the hero dies,” “a letter is received,” and such other examples. The theme of the irreducible part of a work is called a “motif”. Every sentence has its own motif. Tomachevski finds no essential distinction between a motif that coincides with a single sentence and that which summarizes a large portion of a novel. A motif is a statement of the proposition of one or more sentences, derived by explicit rewrite instructions. The derivation is similar to that in generative grammar where the deep structure is identified with semantic structure.

All narratives embody within themselves various levels of thematic reference. Theorists suggest distinct methods of isolating themes. Barthes recommended the application of the code system for structural analysis of a narrative discourse: the proairetic code; the hermeneutic code; the referential code; and the symbolic code. The proairetic code unifies actions into a plot, whereas the hermeneutic code sorts out enigmas and possible solutions. Characters are constructed by processing semic codes; and cultural background is interpreted by way of a referential code. Symbolic code is used to arrive at symbolic meanings from textual details. The reader’s competence to recognise and summarize plots seems largely to depend upon the isolation of actions that contribute to a temporal thematic adaptation. It could be either from an initial situation to a terminal one or from one axis of a semantic opposition to the other: binary opposites or antithesis. MacKenzie states that

the generative grammar of a narrative attempts to trace out the transformational history of narrative texts. What is obtained through presupposition, intuition and analysis is the “theme”, the irreducible meaning of the text.

Norman Holland considers narratives as marks on a page and it is the reader who gives them a form out of his own desires. To him, meaning is the act of making sense of a text and it involves the simultaneous act of finding a thematic unity (qtd. in MacKenzie). Each reader will, therefore, try to frame a unifying idea that suits his specific needs for sense and logic. The reader appropriates the literary text and transposes the raw fantasy material to a *deliberate* pattern of significance. He/She encounters the text with certain *expectations*; assimilates the material according to particular *defences*; projects the wish-fulfilling *fantasies* and lastly transforms them into *themes*. These four reader- strategies are condensed as the acronym “DEFT” in Mac Kenzie.

The reader arrives at a unity by unifying together the particular details of a work under certain prominent themes until he/she arrives at a few key basic terms which constitute the central theme. MacKenzie, with acknowledgement to Michel Riffatere, calls this a “hypogram”: a set of variations or permutations of a single thematic structure. A hypogram could be formulated in various ways. It can exist in an earlier text or a cliché or an

expression in language. If a reader fails to locate the implicit hypograms in a text, his reading is likely to be unstable and incoherent. Rules could also be formulated for reversing the process of text production, operating back to a generative matrix. The entire text results from a reformulation and expansion of this matrix into a longer and more complex series of variants and metonymies. Similarly, a character (subject) could be broken up into its constituent parts: nomination, description, focalization, relation to the narrative occasion, and the citation of utterances and thoughts.

A narrative is the representation of at least two real or fictive events or situations in a temporal sequence. The first event neither presupposes nor entails the other. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, in his *Narrative Fiction; Contemporary Poetics*, identifies the three essential aspects of a narrative: "story," "text," and "narration." The events abstracted from the text when reconstituted in their chronological order with actants would make the "story". The "text" is the spoken/written discourse executed with dispersed characteristics of actants and broken chronological order. They are rather focalized through some perspective. The act of "narration" involves the process of production through a mediator called "narrator".

Story exists as a part of a larger construct called "reconstructed" or "represented" reality: "Story is one axis within the larger construct," and it exists on the axis of temporal organisation (Rimmon-Kenan 6). Within the

narrative, it remains on two levels: surface structure and deep structure. The surface structure of a story is governed syntagmatically by temporal and causal principles of organisation. On a deeper level, it is paradigmatically determined by the logical relations among the “semes” or minimal units of sense. Rimmon-Kenan assumes that the reader can abstract the story from the text and make it tangible through the process called “event-labelling”(13). In a narrative, there is no story without a discourse, and “narration” is a part of narrative discourse. Since all narratives are addressed to an audience/reader they are a part of a discourse or communicator process without which there would be no sociality or culture. Drawing on Barthes’ seminal essay, “Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives,” Rimmon-Kenan recognizes the presence of two types of events: “kernels” that advance the action; and “catalysts” that expand, amplify, delay or sustain the action.

The events combine together to create “micro-sequences” which in turn form “macro-sequences.” The study of the narrated gives the reader an insight into how narratives are organised. He can process a sequence of events into a series of states and actions pertaining to the actants in one or more settings. Reading, basically, is an activity that pre-supposes a text, a set of visually presented linguistic symbols from which meaning can be extracted. The reader, as an agent competent of extracting meaning from that set, processes the textual data. Gerald Prince identifies a marked differences between “reading a text” and “reading of a text”. The latter process involves

selection, development and re-constructing of the assumptions reached during the former. An ingenious reader is expected to find new answers to old questions and also to think of new questions. In this process he constructs new "topic-comment-structures" that would lead to the explicit- description of narratives and the comprehension of their functioning. This, the reader does by using one or many of the codes made available to him by the narrative discourse. He may use a linguistic or symbolic code and then map the meaning onto signifying systems derived from sociological, existential or psychoanalytic disciplines. The hermeneutic code would lead him from enigmas to solutions; and the code of characters could be used to organize the text around heroes, villains, helpers or donors.

All narratives raise the issue of reception and in articulating the process of this reception, the critic cannot but speculate on the narrator's intentions. The questions often raised are : Why does a narrator decide to relate a series of events? What does his narration mean to him? What physical shape does the narrative assume? and What is the interaction between a narrator and his narration? Explanation regarding these enigmas depends on the intentionality in the text. Intentionality cannot be understood as a content that is transferred from the mind to the text. It is, on the other hand, a process whereby textual meanings emanate from a point of view. But the point of view does not explicitly reside in the text as such, nor could it be taken for granted as a natural immutable sign. It is a position the reader negotiates with the narrator

by continuously adjusting to an experience of particulars and thereby exploring the relation between the semes and the overall project of the novel. This is tantamount to doing violence to the text and tearing it apart.

**THE PROBLEM OF THE DISINTEGRATED SELF IN THE
NOVELS OF PHILIP ROTH: A THEMATIC STUDY**

**Thesis Submitted to the
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
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By
N. SAJAN

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT**

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CHAPTER III

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE SELF AND THE FAMILY

Portnoy's Complaint is a monologic narrative of Alexander Portnoy's conflicts. He is the narrator-subject with "lust-ridden, mother-addicted" character (Searles 77). The text presents his "blocks of consciousness" (*RMAO* 15). By a long drawn discursive howl of outrage the subject struggles to get out of the ceaseless struggle between the two selves, one private and the other public. He is an analysand locked within the textual language of a psychic war waged between the lustful and ethical selves. The text seems to be used as an alternative homeland where he strives to resolve the conflict between his "unbridled desire" and "moral outrage" (Milbauer and Watson 100). Rather than presenting a series of events, it renders a consciousness. Dreams and the unconscious have little role. Alex declares that the "dreams, the symbols, the terrifyingly laughable situations" which others "experience with their eyes shut" he gets with eyes wide open (*PC* 290).

The operant fiction is framed with a signifying matrix of natural and contrived occurrences, fantasies and gestures.¹ These are enacted within his Jewish home on the one side and the centre-field of playfulness on the other. In both these settings, he is unable to be content. Mark Shechner describes him as "a three way loser [. . .] a bad patient, a bad Jew and a bad Boy" (118).

Taking cue from this statement, the narrative of deviant participants and practices is discussed in three "topic-comment structures": the filial encounters; the heterosexual adventures; and the onanistic fantasies (Prince 103).² These three topic-comment structures are discussed in the light of the problematic of repression and liberation that is integrated into the text with the tropes of food and body.

Alex's aberrant exploits within family are, for analytical purpose, categorised into three semic codes related to the dinner - table, the sanitary habits and the kosher/goyische binaries. Alex's morality/immorality seems to begin at the dinner table. When the superego goads him to declare, "Let the goyim sink their teeth into what ever lowly creature [. . .]," the id prevails with the desire to eat the "pussy" (*PC* 89,178). His battle for manhood is staged and won/lost within the range of such choking restrictions and eccentric violations. The term "moral" appears to be closely tied up with the word 'oral'. The most serious sin committed involves gluttony and not lechery. "Pudding" and "pussy" are two metonymic motifs of love and authority that often get mixed up in the subject's homodiegetic analepsis.³ A complementary relationship exists between them. The dining-table, the toilet and the kitchen are like three plains of one long-drawn battle. Alex and his father are the two eminent sinners on whom suspicion is always cast upon by Sophie. He recounts his father's alleged appeal for the "terrific pair of legs"

of the gentle cashier alongside his sinful eating of his "sister's chocolate pudding" (*PC* 92,97).

Sophie holds her sway over the family through a discourse that propagates morality by dietary regulations. As against this authority Alex's defensive strategy and offensive ammunition are one, that is having a "mouth on him" (*PC* 26). Food and body get focalized in the text as an integral part of its semic structure.⁴ Metonymically and metaphorically they bracket and inform all aspects of Alex's discursive experience with a fairly good degree of perceptibility.⁵ They appear to serve as the mediators in analysing the power-relations that exist within the diffused corpus of the subject's "homodiegetic" narrative.⁶ The text which is a "fractured chronology of Portnoy's shifting memories" acts as his powerful weapon (Pinsker *The Comedy* 59). It seems to make story-telling a binary process. Story exists both as textual and performative processes. The referentiality of a family story is determined and controlled by the group culture which any family proposes to keep in tact. By the implied semes in Portnoy's narrative of "mixed analepsis" it is understandable that his mother Sophie had been "ordering the task" of family story-telling.⁷ By her matriarchal authority she must have decided upon what all were to be told, audienced, retrieved and transmitted through family narrative. But Alex undermines his mother's task-ordering by accommodating contrary versions of lived reality. They circumvent a generational structure of power and control of knowledge.

Sophie is a resourceful matriarch who operates through the promotion of Alex's subjectivity. She prevails upon him not by denials and challenges but by investing him with personal objectives and ambitions. She acts through Alex's self as a "nurturer" and "devourer" by imposing fears and remedies regarding bodily matters: "For mistakes she checked my sums; for holes, my socks; for dirt, my nails, my neck, every seam and crease of my body" (*PC* 11). Eating is a manifestation of natural urge and it is a part of natural phenomenon. Sophie subjects this urge to the artifice of family taboo. Alex is powerfully afflicted with guilt from the source of the primary action of eating. Mark Shechner describes the text as "a vaudeville of the Jewish stomach" (122). The mother, designated as the Madonna and patron saint of self-sacrifice, dominates Alex's self with her "staccato cadences" of overprotective love (Halio 69). The Jewish family and its kosher taboos appear to serve more as a narrative "catalyst" than as a mere social background.⁸

Sophie and Alex take a full anthropological plunge into the ethnology of the digestive tract. The discursive battle is fought on the tropal plane of food and body. The household becomes like a "lunatic asylum" where the mother sits up at the dinner-table holding a knife and keeping the subject in constant state of torment with threats of murder and castration. If Sophie maintains a fearful sense of life her son tries to rebel against her by a free flowing involvement with life. John N. McDaniel is of the view that the text

gives "emphatic expression" to "the howl of outrage at forces surrounding the individual" (147). Eating well and eating with decorum become a part of dutifulness in the Portnovian household. But Alex tries to undermine such niceties of Jewish life. He apprehends his parents as "the outstanding producers and packagers of guilt" who extract it from him "like fat from a chicken!" (*PC* 39). Sophie dominates his conscious self with bread knife and threats of castration. The threats are couched in motifs of sickness and physical disability: "Open your mouth. Why is your throat red? Do you have a headache you are not telling me about? [. . .] Is your neck stiff? [. . .] You ate like you were nauseous, are you nauseous?" (*PC* 36). Layering of fear about bodily health is done for the understandable reason of subverting the acting subject. Guilt aroused from the primary act of eating becomes indelible so much so that he could not "even contemplate drinking a glass of milk" or eating a "salami sandwich without giving serious offence to God Almighty" (*PC* 37). Tonal manipulation and yoking of apparently unlike subjects are the means by which Sophie maintains the ambience of her authoritarian power. Food and body, as metaphors/metonymies, gain in effect from their cadence, tone and context. When Alex forms his own eating habits she intervenes forcefully: "Hamburgers", she says bitterly, just as she might say Hitler, "where they can put anything in the world in that they want-and he eats them" (*PC* 35). She dominates the discourse as an exemplar in matters of filial decorum. She violently yokes together eating, sex and filial values.

To her, reformation within the household has to be initiated from within the tropal boundaries of food and body. Family morality seems to be irresistibly tied up with these tropes: "For look at Alex himself, the subject of our every syllable-age fifteen, he sucks one night on a lobster's claw and within the hour his cock is out and aimed at a *shikse* on a Public Service bus" (PC 91).

Sophie feeds the subject on a nightly diet surfeited with "the suspense filled chapters of her perilous life" (PC 103). Paralysis, polio and cancer are three semic codes that remain dispersed in Sophie's discourse. These physical afflictions are apprehended as divinely ordained punishments for the subject who succumbs to stray temptations of transgression. While in her youth, she, after being tipsy with whiskey, was nose-led by Doyle, a charming young insurance agent, into eating lobster without her being conscious of it. Soon she realises that she has been afflicted with a paralytic stroke for this transgression: "See how I' m holding my fingers? I was throwing up so hard, they got stiff just like this, like I was paralyzed [. . .]" (PC 102).

Sophie had sermonised Alex about her cancer as if it was a purgatorial experience before deliverance in a religious text:

[. . .] first, that there was something growing in my mother's uterus, and second, whether the growth they finally located was malignant... whether what she has was... oh, that word we cannot even speak in one another's presence! The word we cannot even

spell out in all its horrible entirety! [. . .]. She tells me how Rabbi Warshaw came and sat and talked with her for a whole half hour before [. . .] she went under the knife. (PC 72-73)

Banality and grotesquery join together in the analogy drawn between the expurgated mother and the dressed chicken. To Alex cancerous growth means the same as "what she used to reach up and pull down out of the dead chicken" just to be thrown in "the garbage can" (PC 75). Revulsion arises as she has been "hollowed out" and he does not feel like drinking "ginger-ale" from her "half-empty glass" (PC 75,73). But still her image persists within his self in the form of moralistic texts with which she used to act upon him. The household library consists of Sophie's series of *You Know Me, I' ll try Anything Once* (PC 104). Further it is rich with fictional texts like *Dragon Seed*, *Argentine Diary* and *The Memoirs of Casanova* that tell of the expurgatorial processes of "hysterectomy" and "appendectomy" (PC 103-104). Her discourse is redundant with metonymic tropes of disease and torment. They form a proairetic sequence of catalysts that engenders aloneness, and fear in the subject. Safety from uncertain elemental forces becomes essential and the subject is consigned to a specifically designated disposition of docility and adherence. Alex's self is conditioned as a "subaltern whose dependency on the figure of authority forms a false escape route from the invented threat out there, in the open, the outside" (Itwaru 13). As against this formidable fortress of disciplining discourse the subject trains

his "battered battering ram to freedom" (*PC* 35). A Jewish man cannot be an independent self as long as his parents are alive. He will have to "remain a fifteen-year old boy till they die" (*PC* 124). So Alex finds a way out on the terrain of onanistic sex. He performs the blasphemous sacrament of rolling "a big purplish piece of raw liver" round his "cock in the bathroom at three-thirty" and then eats it cooked "at five-thirty, along with the other members" of his family. The episode culminates in the triumphant declaration, "I fucked my own family's dinner" (*PC* 150).

As apart from the dinner table, the physical setting of the bathroom too forms a crucial part of the narrative. Jack and Alex share the burden of familial authority manifested through Sophie. The narrator subject pursues alternatives through the use of doubles, alter-egos, mentors and opposing authorities. Choices and refusals are executed by the help of these alternatives. The father-son juxtaposition operates on the planes of parody, burlesque, slapstick, ridicule, insult, invective, lampoon and wisecrack. Jack Portnoy's constipation is posited against Alex's onanistic redressal both as means of parallelism and contrast. If the constipated father finds his "intestinal tract" governed by "Worry, Fear and Frustration", the son goes on a record setting spree "Before meals, After meals, During meals" as the "Raskolnikov of jerking off" (*PC* 27, 20,21). Bruno Bettelheim describes the farcicality of this situation from a psychological perspective: "The father cannot let go. The son cannot hold anything in, or hold onto anyone" (28).

Alex suffers from an "essential constipation" with prohibitive warnings, taboos and hysterical laws laid down by his mother. So the "diarrhea of talk" and the uncluttered space of bathroom are the two easily accessible means for attaining a similitude of liberation and selfhood (Bettelheim 25). Using the pretext of diarrhea, he enters the toilet with objects as varied as a hollowed apple, milk-bottle, candy wrapper and socks. The ethereal voice of the dream creature, Lenore Lapidus arouses him to heights of orgasmic ecstasy. Indulgence in such pleasures helps him build a self-assurance that his bodily self atleast is operative on its own. In the Freudian sense, the subject seeks a substitute means of rebelling against the filially indoctrinated values by a "masturbatory phallic fixation" (Bettelheim 25). Expulsion of his gross passion gets effected in two ways: firstly, by the diarrhea like talk; and secondly, by the onanistic pleasures.

In contrast to the narrator subject's actions, jack helplessly appeals to Sophie that he be left alone so that he could "have a little peace" and "get something accomplished" in there. But both these actor-subjects are beleaguered by threats of malignancy which, Sophie assumes, are contracted by disorderly eating habits. The binary processes of ingestion and emetics serve as analogous means for violation of sexual taboo. They also serve as a proairetic terrain upon which Sophie and Dr.Spielvogel perform the act of analysis. If Sophie tries to "get to the bottom of this diarrhea", Dr. Spielvogel attempts to analyse Alex's "frantic logorrhoea" (*PC* 24-25; Lee 16).

Sophie suspects tumour for Jack and colitis for Alex's friend, Melvin Weiner. Her advice on the dire consequences of consuming "chazerai", "doughnut", and "Pepsi" haunt him even within the safe space of his bathroom. The "discoloured dot" he finds on himself is presumed to be cancer caused by over-exertion (*PC* 19).

Alex gets little help from his father in overcoming the sense of inadequacy received by such disciplining sermons on food and body. Where a man's appetite is concerned, he thinks, he need be responsible "to no one but himself!" (*PC* 224). Jack appears to be a flat character who is developed more as bound motif augmenting to Alex's sexual evolution. The metonymic semes built around him convey a sense of emasculation. The comicality of his household identity gets established by "square steel-rimmed spectacles", "steel wool" hair, and teeth that keep smiling at "the toilet bowl" from a glass. (*PC* 308). As an insurance agent of "Boston & Northeastern life", he goes around canvassing in the "impoverished districts" where "dogs [. . .] sink their teeth into his persistent ass" (*PC* 5-6). Alex asks the analyst, with unresolvable ambivalence, whether he should rid himself of "hatred" or "love" for his father: "But what he had to offer I didn't want-and what I wanted he didn't have to offer" (*PC* 28-29). His ineffectuality is so serious that a strange "mix-up of sexes" seems to have brought about a disequilibrium in the power structure of the family. The father ought to have

been the mother and the mother the father in order to fill "the patriarchal vacuum" (*PC* 45).

The Turkish bath proves to be a kind of epiphanic initiation to Alex. This is the exceptional occasion when Jack rises to his expected role of a father. It forms a contrast to the smothering household. Everything seems to be set for a supreme moment of the realization of his masculinity. All elements are perfectly matched for a magnificent existence where "the oozing bog that was the earth, swirling white gases choked out the sunlight, and aeons passed while the planet was drained for Man". The endless search for "the key to that unfathomable mystery, his mother's approbation" ceases here (*PC* 53). The experience is drawn out in antithesis to the mother's toilet training when he is made aware of his punitive "little thing" of a masculine identity (*PC* 55). As against this, the locale of the Turkish bath abound in semes of sensory pleasure and fulfillment: "[. . .] the agonies that come of being an insurance agent, a family man, and a Jew will be steamed and beaten [. . .]. They smack them and knead them and push them around, they slowly twist their limbs as though to remove them in a piece from their sockets-I am hypnotized [. . .]" (*PC* 52-53). The elation and liberty he feels here is similar to those he "used to feel as the center fielder for the Seabees" baseball team (*PC* 79). Alex is haunted by the realization that if his public life is full of mores and restrictions, his private life is cloying with its deceptive bodily pleasures: "Enough being a nice Jewish boy, publicly pleasing my parents

while privately pulling my putz! Enough!" (PC 40). In reaction to such an impasse like situation he declares his desire "to be a centerfielder, a centerfielder-and nothing more!" (PC 80).

As apart from the dining table, the kitchen too serves as a smithy to cast Alex's character. He is initiated into the world of linguistic perception by the distinction established between the "kosher" (the blessed) and the "goyische" (the accursed) by Sophie in the kitchen. The kosher/goyische binaries get discursively condensed/displaced into the motif of blood which seems repulsive and eerie. Koshering every meal means physical as well as intellectual ablution. Sophie pervades the subject's perception of the world by this process also. The tabooed objects of woman and flesh get coalesced here. The subject gets locked within the vicious psycho-linguistic ring of "the kosher", "the kitchen", and "the onanistic dreams". The motif of blood becomes instrumental in the layering of fear and aversion within the subject. The mother ritualistically drains blood from meat "so as to make it kosher and fit for consumption" (PC 46). To the people of Israel, blood is an anathema as it is a metonymic trope of sinfulness and retribution in their moralistic parlance: " For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that maketh atonement by reason of the life". (*The Holy Bible*, Lev. 17:11)

Alex employs an undercutting banality to negate this moralistic stricture. The draining of blood from meat is juxtaposed against the menstrual drain that sends Sophie "with a most alarming moan" (*PC* 46). The Portnovian discourse tries to build up a kind of excremental vision whereby the text transmutes the "scream" into "foul language and black humour" (Buchen 401). The pleasant afternoon experience of the mother baking a "marble cake" is violently yoked with the oxymoron of "beautifully bleeding" chocolate and knife (*PC* 48). The stench of excretory blood is associated with the mother who washes him clean after a diet of "tuna fish salad" (*PC* 49).

Sophie's hegemonic influence runs through a strange hierarchy of the material and the non-material: food, body, love, language and possessiveness. She initiates him into the poetic beauty of the "real fall sky" and acquaints him not to the discrimination between "night and day, or hot and cold, but goyische and Jewish!" (*PC* 29). The resonantly pulsed reference, "Jew Jew Jew Jew Jew Jew," imposed upon the subject-in-process brings about an inescapable sense of aloneness (*PC* 84). This discrimination gets socio-linguistically operationalized in the text. In all the threatening articulations there appears to be the insidiousness of the extension of domination. The subject finds the supra personal force "barbaric" (*PC* 83). Structuration of his conduct and action is intended through radio shows and social models built into his psyche. The radio shows encourage the belief that the "blond-

haired Christians are the legitimate residents and owners" of America (*PC* 164). He is forced to frown upon the "goyim" who "knock their heads [. . .] in a ball game" (*PC* 60). The gentiles are made out to be an "empty headed" "breed of mankind" who eat "abominable creatures" and hopelessly strive "to drink, to divorce, and to fight" for building an identity (*PC* 90).

But Alex is a "cunning linguist" (Forrey 273). His unspoken complaint is fundamentally language itself. The signifiers in his counter-discourse become a source of deliverance in the Lacanian sense. Language is also the traditional repository of Jewish faith. Exalted and boundless talk is a joy of the Jewish race. The traditional Jewish joke of the son laying all blame for his misfortunes upon his mother is used with psychoanalytic underpinnings.

In Alex, linguistic inadequacy is apparently tied up with sexual inadequacy. His twenty-five word "mispronounced" Yiddish and "five-hundred- word New Jersey vocabulary" are insufficient for a creative engagement with the gentile society (*PC* 222, 233). Alongside this remains the humiliation cast by Sophie regarding his "little thing" of a sex organ (*PC* 56). Manhood, in the Lacanian sense, eludes him as long as he is incapable of graduating from the state of being the object of his mother's desire (the phallus) to the state of having the phallus.⁹ The Oedipal fixation appears to have given rise to an undifferentiated relationship with the mother. Alex is her little lover for whom she prepares jello and also the mimeographed lines

of model personalities like Isabella, Betsy Ross, and Mrs. Pasteur. But to escape being "mama's boy", he starts using language with outrageous references to the slang synonyms of the male sex organ. The libidinal drive comes to a climax with this phallic phase where the subject reorganises his self with utmost dependence upon a counter-language: " 'Do you remember Seymour Schmuck, Alex?' she asks me or Aaron Putz or Howard Schlong, or some yo-yo [. . .]" (*PC* 99). But the subject's transition from the natural register of life to the cultural register of group exchange is retarded by the oedipal crisis". The more he dallies with his language and body the stronger does his subservient attachment to his "phallic mother" grow.¹⁰ The blessing of manhood is sought in the linguistic rendezvous with Dr. Spielvogel. Through a transference process, Alex "goes to bed " with the new father Dr. Spielvogel, who appears to be more capable of making him a man. Robert Forrey, in his Lacanian analysis of the text, maintains that if "the son persists in being the object of his mother's desire, that is the phallus, then he becomes a schmuck" (*PC* 272).

The subject's quest reaches a break point with the symbolic separation of the signifier (the phallus) from the signified (the mother).¹¹ Accepting the father's law, the son gives up the mother and yearns for objects farther and farther from the original oedipal object of his desire. Freedom from schizophrenic state is also freedom from a linguistic crisis where the signifier and the signified are indistinguishable – the son being the object of the

mother's desire, the Phallus. The subject, in the section entitled, "Cunt Crazy" goes out to acquire the world of culture by an orgy of heterosexuality.

The subject is split between the world of American success and the highly restricted life of a Jew. After being an 'A' grade student who had starred as Columbus discovering America in a school-play, he now dons the mantle of the Assistant Commissioner for New York's Commission on Human Opportunity. Estelle Gershgoren Novak sums up the subject's heterosexual engagement as an attempt to "discover America through Kay, educate it through the Monkey, or take revenge on it through Sarah" (62). They are the three prominent catalytic characters who further Alex's psychological growth in the text. He approaches them for physical gratification with the intent of being rid of his homelessness in America as a repressed Jew. He needs to have his "id back in Yid" and the "oy back in Goy" (*PC* 236). He is imprisoned within familial ties and also locked in language. As such, Alex seems to be in a long drawn attempt to "eradicate the deeper truth of unhousedness, of an at-homeness in the word which are the legacy of the Prophets and of the keepers of the text" (Steiner 24).

Abuse of Jewish intellect is the method by which the narrator-participant develops an individualistic morality. In his counter-language, women are represented, in general, through the condensed trope of *shikse* (gentile goddess of love). The *shikse* is metonymically associated with

America which could be conquered, explored and responded to: "America is a *shikse* nestling under your arms whispering love love love love love!" (PC 165). Sam B. Girgus is of the view that the three gentile women "become vessels for the expression of Portnoy's deepest desires and insecurities" (130). And the grotesque desire he expresses is to have his "dick up these girls", "conquer America" and acquire a place among the ideals of the country: "Columbus, Captain Smith, Governor Winthrop, General Washington - now Portnoy" (PC 265). Alan Warren Friedman observes that his official position serves him best as a "pious means for making money, fame and females" (Jews 161).

Language plays a very significant role in his pursuit of *shikses*. The gentile woman from Iowa whom he thinks of marrying hails from a family in which language is used gently and genteelly. He thinks that all of them live in a world distinguished by "grammatical fathers" and "composed mothers." (PC 166). He seeks a mysterious "Other" to fulfill his dream of being socially engaged with these women. But there seem to be "two Edens warring" in his head (Goldman 25). The pleasure principle forces him to go in search of "little beauties redolent of the perfume of America; the alien land that must be plowed to be possessed" (PC 26-27). The reality principle restrains him within the moral codes of his family.

Máry Jane Reed, the twenty-nine year old ex-fashion model, bearing a symbolic Christian name, is reduced below the level of civilization with the nickname Monkey. She is, in thirty-two years old Alex's view, an illiterate unkoshered woman. She is wooed along with an Italian whore Lina, for the purpose transgressing all the limits imposed upon him by Sophie. The rage which he wants to direct against his mother is targeted on to her. Sexual and linguistic strands get interspersed into the narrative unit on Alex's heterosexual pursuits. If Alex considers her only as one in the lot of girls "from each of the forty-eight states", Mary desires him to be her "Jewish saviour" (*PC* 265, 172). The series of carnal escapades in New England, Rome and Athens has the actor-narrator as "an innocent desperate for experience, and experienced sinner yearning for innocence" (*Spacks* 393). Mary provides him all experiences which he considers but resents. The yearning for experience leads him to the situations of being a Jew and gentile. The two alternatives before him are those of a decadent family system with corrupted temperament and a society characterised by stark abasement.

Oral fixation and Oedipus complex put him in a serio-comic impasse where he fails to build a relationship of passionate love. A general lack of empathy keeps him under the impression that neither his parents nor the partners could do anything for him out of love. Perhaps he degrades the gentile girls out of an outrageous desire to defeat his mother. The Assistant Commissioner for Human Opportunities appeals to discuss "opportunities" as

he exclaims, "what a mouth I have fallen into!". He wonders, "Did I eat!" and whether his "life were taking place in the middle of a wet dream" (*PC* 178). He only desires oral gratification out of his hedonistic pursuits. Predilection for this appears to be a corollary of his indulgence in incessant talking.

Mary is said to be the best woman he has ever known. But still matrimony is only a game they could play on a weekend in Vermont. Mary is the materialistic realisation of the fantasy woman who had been arousing his passion since his days of adolescence. But, she is only ornamental to Alex who wants her solely for his personal advancement up the social hierarchy. With the justification that she is "ineducable and beyond reclamation", Alex abandons her in a hotel room in Athens (*PC* 232).

The split between sensuality and affection assumes a concrete form when Alex amorously woos Kay Campbell and Sarah Abbot Maulsby. They are two "lively, intelligent, self-respecting, self-assured, and well-behaved young women" (*PC* 243). But they lack the sexual abandon that Portnoy demands. He is contended with no one and clings on to the dilemma of opposed desires. Rebellion against Sophie whom he loves for being an ideal mother and hates for being over dominant plays a decisive role in deciding the nature of his relationship with women. The subject himself explains that when "such men love they have no desire and where they desire they cannot love" (*PC* 209).

Alex meets the "artless, sweet tempered" Kay in Christian mid-Western America (PC 243). Like Mary, she too is depersonalized as "The Pumpkin" "in commemoration of her pigmentation and the size of her can" (PC 244). When he graduates, from college and law-school, he also graduates from mating with a middle-class *shikse* – Sarah. The latter is nicknamed, "The Pilgrim" because of her New England origin and school propriety. Kay appears to him wonderfully American, but soon becomes a bore. Sarah has too much class for her own good, but is incapable of providing Alex oral gratification. Portnoy desires to be a profligate hedonist but he cannot escape from a tradition in which he has little faith. His sexual and emotional egotism leads him to disillusionment for himself and his partners as well. Helge Norman Nilsen reads his problem as a "conflict of Western culture between duty and pleasure, conscience and transgression. (413). Alex is allowed the human attribute of history within the narrative space of the text. He seems to speak for the dominated upon, vulnerable and self-liberating humanity. What bothers him is a wish to separate his sexuality from his moral sensibilities. He has suffered enough of the burdens of history, enough of inhibition and repression and so he feels it is time to let go. Guilt haunts him as a result of the two contradictory roles he plays: Bruno Bettelheim states that as a professional, he "tries to prevent the poor from being exploited, while all he chases in his personal life is the chance to sexually exploit others" (30). Use of his body as a weapon of defiance against

familial values keeps him obsessed with his self. This also alienates him from the sustaining aspects of family and culture.

Breaking taboo, in the end, turns out to be as demeaning as observing it. Alex is constitutionally incapable of bringing together carnality and affection in his relationship with Kay and Sarah. The obligation towards his family is to be married and to provide grandchildren. But the heterosexual pursuits are a part of a big effort to keep from his parents what they need so much from him. So he hurts the girls and thereby feels that he has a separate existence. Both Kay and Mary refuse to embrace Judaism and part ways with Alex. What Sarah fails to do is to "eat" him and submit to his pervert entreaties. Strongly enough he associates his father's inability to "rise at Boston and Northeastern" because Sarah would not succumb to "go down on" him. The refusal makes him feel "irate" and "discriminated against" (*PC* 269). The forced bodily pleasure with her does not allow "much room there for love". The smothering discomfort that she experiences is brought out in the subject's hallucinatory news-report: "JEW SMOTHERS DEB WITH COCK" (*PC* 271).

Hallucinatory fears of impotency haunt him regarding his fascination for "apertures and openings" (*PC* 116). Alex fears that the "delicious and provocative" girls may turn out to be as familiar "as a loaf of Bread" (*PC* 117). Passionate love is an enigma to him. Marital bliss is a terrifying

situation where the voluptuousness of affairs may "last as long as a year" or a few "months" (*PC* 116). Redemption from loveless affairs could be attained only if he overcomes the pervert forms of romance, fantasy and revenge. He is aware that he has to deliver himself from the settling of scores, the pursuit of dreams, and from his hopeless, senseless loyalty to the past.

Portnoy's fantasies appear as still scripts of organised scenes with dramatization of metaphoric/metonymic motifs of food and body. Forces of repression and guilt establish their hegemony over the subject right from childhood. He is continually haunted by the fear of dependence and weakness. The internal conflict rages between the hidden and the manifest psychological forces. "Understanding the laws of the unconscious", writes Juliet Mitchell, "thus amounts to a start in understanding how ideology functions, how we acquire and live the ideas and laws within which we must exist". The suffering subject's unconscious incorporates and represents instincts by ideas: "[. . .] the unconscious comprises the centre of the process of the individual's integration into and adaptation to culture" (Girgus 126-127). Within the sphere of the unconscious, ideas and motifs develop new and strange interrelationships. Portnoy does, by monologic discourse, strive to unravel the mysteries of such condensed/displaced ideas. But he succeeds in this only to a limited extent. So he apparently leaves the process of integration to Dr. Spielvogel, the implied reader or the real reader.

The epiphanic vision of the "fluttering yellow ringlets of a strange *shikse*" stirs in him the nuances of the word "longing" (*PC* 165). The ice-skating at Irvington Park fires his imagination. Mystery shrouds every gesture, even "the way they look, the way they move and laugh and speak-the lives they must lead behind those goyische curtains" (*PC* 163). They approximate to a surface representation of American culture. Portnoy wants to be adapted to it socially and psychologically. But ridden with guilt, ambivalence and fear, the process is all the more strenuous to him. Carnality and America persist in his pursuit of fantasies. He fantasizes moving among the gentile girls like Alton C. Peterson who speak with perfect accent. The fear of his "oy" getting exposed always lurks large in him. The wound he receives after the fatal fall in his maiden attempt to skate with *shikses* causes guilt over the denial of his father. Ambivalence and fear cast a shade in his attempt to make advances to Thereal Mc Coy, the creature of his pubertal fantasy. To him, she represents "Miss America" with her "plum pudding" and a "one family house". He apprehends whether she would, oblivious of his "nose" and "name", kiss him with her disposition that is "smooth and shiny and cool as custard" (170). Jane Powell, Corliss, Veronica and Debbie Reynolds are the blonde exotic women whom he fancies himself to be wooing. But consummation remains an impossibility as long as his "nose bone" acts as his "parents' agent" (*PC* 169). Mc Coy is as tempting as a toll-house cookie, but in the "jungle of love", as Mark Schechner says, "it is eat or

be eaten" (*PC* 126). The pursuit of *shikses* is similar to the pursuit of "junk" sex or "unkosher goods" (Lee 15). The fear of a nemesis always looms large over him. The family rabbi revealing his secret life in an assembly in hell keeps him embarrassed. Opening the bathroom door the Rabbi makes public the sight of Alex with "drool running down his chin" and "prick firing solves at the light bulb" (*PC* 226). He finds himself chained to a toilet in hell. Emotional cataclysms extend beyond family confines and are interwoven with fantasies. The Warshaw charges him with having an empty "refrigerator" of a heart out of which "blood flows in cubes" (*PC* 229).

In the solitary confinement of his womanless life, he sleeps with Freud on one side and his guilt on the other. Jeffrey Berman is of the view that Spielvogel, (meaning a "play bird" in German), by a transference process, becomes for Alex "an erotic plaything, a masturbatory sex object" and a handy guide as well (415-416). The narrator-participant transmutes Freudian ideas into a text of self-play. A clinical case study becomes a stuff of art. The seminal essay "The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life" is used to imitate the psychiatric case history. The subject goes in search of the author of the *Standard Edition*. The psychoanalytic landscape of the Oedipal text is like his promised land. He recreates Spielvogel into an idealized father figure—a man of kingly powers. But he wants to secure the analyst's approval and then replace him as an authority. The Doctor is paradoxically looked upon as his peer too when he declares that they are two

smart Jewish boys. By transference relationship, he attempts to usurp the Oedipal father and castrate him.¹² The Doctor is given no opportunity to assert his views anywhere in the text. The overwhelmed Doctor/Father is satiated by the subject's orality.

Portnoy who has been accusative of his mother's over protectiveness, internalizes the imago of his mother.¹³ If the mother had used food to "over nourish her son", Portnoy uses words of "love and hate" to nourish and suffocate the analyst (Berman 416). Instead of rejecting the mother's values, he unconsciously transfers them to Dr. Spielvogel. Self-analysis becomes more of an exercise in self-deception: "Is this truth I'm delivering up, or is it just plain kvetching? Or is kvetching for people like me a form of truth?" (PC 105). He imagines all the self-pitying sons of America on board "the biggest troop ship afloat" rolling in the "heavy seas of guilt" (PC 132).

Israel, the Promised Land, becomes Alex's exile where he has a brief sojourn with a voluptuous Israeli Lieutenant. After the failure in the metonymic conquest of America, Naomi, the Israeli Zionist reprimands him for his failure in establishing equality of opportunity. She finds the subject to be the most "self deprecating" and unhappy person ever known" (PC 299, 298). To Alex, she resembles Sophie by her "coloring, size, even temperament" and bends everything she is "a real fault finder, a professional critic" (PC 292). The narrative seems to end where it had begun with the

subject compelled to regress to his mother. He fails to realise his objective of raising a family. In the Lacanian sense, he possesses neither the word nor the phallus. "Without the word, without the phallus", states Robert Forrey, "the only way the son can relate to the forbidden other, the Mother and her substitutes, is by using the tongue to complain futilely about, or orally and impotently enter into her" (273). Heterosexuality ceases to promise any change from his homelessness and aloneness. Donald Kartiganer remarks that the text "twists and turns in an absolutely irreconcilable tension of id and super-ego" (100). The "Jew boy" and "the nice Jewish boy" coalesce together in a single voice that struggles in vain to silence one of its competing languages.

Naomi exemplifies a kind of racial wisdom which he cannot comprehend or accept. He is both too experienced and too innocent to deal with her. In the engagement with her, he reverses the method he used with the *shiksas*. Instead of demanding and receiving he submits to the debased state of impotence. Like an animal, he is destined to "crawl through life feasting on pussy and leave the righting of wrongs and fathering of families to the upright creatures" (Forrey 270). The major complaint regards wordlessness and all his arguments have no serious issues. The problem, as the subject assumes, is not Oedipal attachment. On the contrary, he desires to be in the stage of a suckling infant forever. In a screaming appeal he lets Naomi know, "I have To Have" (PC 305). By bringing together the warring

elements of Jewishness and sexuality, mother image and that of *shikse*, the subject could have been made whole by Naomi. But she rebuffs his advances and he discovers that he is "Im-po-tent in Is-rael" (PC 303).

The narrative discourse of *My Life as a Man* illuminates the condition of having lost a place, a house, a childhood and memory of warmth. As in *Portnoy's Complaint*, here too there is an apparent divide between characters who could, at best, be like "mad angels" and, at worst, like "sane devils" (Tucker 38). In spite of the choice before the subject, he, by external constraints, recedes towards the pain of irresolution and fascination for painful growth. In both the narratives, the actor subject is under a dominant parent whose influence he can never efface from his conscious/unconscious self. The encounter with the parent is characterised by either a love/hate dyad or a difficulties/sustenance opposition. The narratives build a situation of "unequal parts of conflicting tensions" (34). Out of such tensions emerge the subject's anguished search for a final resolution. Manhood could be accomplished only after such a hard consummation.

My Life as a Man is an autobiographic fabulation that stages the contrary forces acting within Peter Tarnopol's self. It is a self-reflexive text seemingly beset with the relationship between the written and the unwritten world. It is occupied by characters who interact with one another but simultaneously refuse to acknowledge the "freedom to be individuals"

(Grossman 460). All relationships appear to revolve around the prominent metaphors/metonymies of imprisonment and liberation. When characters seek to be liberated the consequences are devastating.

In this "self-told and thrice told story", Peter unfolds the strands of his "unsatisfactory affairs", "horrific marriage", and the long spells of treatment as an analysand (Smith 455). In a variety of tones and voices, he presents the issues regarding his libidinal drives, moral commitments, and craft of writing.

Peter seems to be a development from Portnoy. His stories lack resolution and are full of elusive and slippery forms of truth. They boil down to farce and parody while coming to grips with the violent incongruities of life and art. In the three related stories, "Salad Days", "Courting Disaster", and "My True Story", Peter attempts to impose a rational form on the irrational experiences of his adult life. Joyce Carol Oates reads the stories as "something approaching hysteria-but then rewritten, and rewritten again" (454). They are the fictional versions of Peter's life. They are contradictory and mutually diffusing in nature. But however untrue or fabricated, they seem to constitute his hold on reality. The subject tries to accomplish the closest approximations to truth by these versions. Philip Roth remarks that "Life, like the novelist, has a powerful transforming urge" (Milbauer and Watson, *Reading* 12).

The three stories apparently form three strands of one text. A "reading of" the text is attempted by locating/dislocating it into five narrative hypograms. Each of these hypograms forms an individual perspective of Peter's self presented distinctively by the discerning subject "I", and by the catalytic characters, Dr. Spielvogel, Maureen and the implied persona of Philip Roth. The subject gets transformed from Zuckerman to Peter Tarnopol as the narrative progresses through many layers. The first and the second units of the narrative, jointly entitled "Useful Fictions", have Nathan Zuckerman as the experiencing subject. In the first unit, "Salad Days", Peter is an omniscient narrator, but in the second unit, "Courting Disaster", he shifts to first person narration by retaining Nathan as the subject but the story line is altered. Both the narratives attempt to describe and define experiential reality through literature. The subject teaches and writes literature and also has a deep fascination for the relationship between fact and fiction. Peter, the writer, creates a piece of fiction about a writer's adolescence and then goes on to discuss, in his own voice, the importance of self to a novelist:

[. . .] Tarnopol as he is called, is beginning to seem as imaginary as my Zuckermans anyway, or at least as detached from the memoirist- his revelations coming to seem like still another "useful fiction", [. . .]. May be all I'm saying is that words, being words, only approximate the real thing, and so no matter how close I come, I only come close. (*MLAM* 231)

The double irony is that behind the artist Peter who creates the fictional writer, Zuckerman, is Philip Roth the real author. The text, made in layers, presents a refracted reality. It records the artist's difficulty in achieving true self-definition through art. The two accounts of his life represent Peter's attempt to understand his self in the light of his family relationships by objectifying them in words. The sufferings of a Jewish son, husband and novelist are reworked in "Useful Fictions". They are the alternative versions of Peter's "true story" framed for "conquering or exorcising the past" of a disastrous marital life (*MLAM* 231).

In the two comic narratives, Nathan is a pampered son of a businessman and pestering mother. Jay L. Halio describes him as "an alter ego for an alter ego" and "a surrogate novelist for a surrogate novelist for Philip Roth". They open up an actuality of incidents as if from "a set of Chinese boxes" or at best they could be qualified as "fiction within a fiction within a fiction" (126). Peter, Roth and the reader imagine a "reconstruction or reordering" to redefine base reality into sublime art (Halio 127).

The text, as an autobiographical narrative, assumes "to demystify the past and mitigate his admittedly uncommendable sense of defeat" (*MLAM* 101). John N. Macdaniel considers "Salad Days" as "id"; "Courting Disaster" as adventures seen through the perspective of superego; and "My True Story" as the ego's answer to superego's questions (180).

My Life as a Man as a full length novel, is dedicated to Aaron Asher and Jason Epstein. After the dedicatory page appears the "Useful Fictions", and then the reader encounters the autobiographical narrative with Maureen's epigraph expressing a sense of inconsummateness: "I could be his Muse, if only he 'd let me be" (*MLAM* 310). The reader has to penetrate through all these textual veils. This over determines the concepts of "author", "reader", and "beginning" as questionable at the outset of fiction. The fragmentary pieces are like a mosaic of the hero's ambiguous sense of personal imperatives. Peter and Nathan are Jewish writers trying to explain the strange turn of events. They aspire to seriousness in creative work. They become victims of imbedded values in culture and their psyche.

Nathan's fictionalised genesis and development is the theme of "Salad Days". The adolescent college years form its setting. David Monaghan comments that it is an account of "an existence conducted according to cliches" (75). Nathan gets led into rebellion by the influence of Hemingway's *Of Time and the River* and goes to a college where he experiences liberation. Sex life with Sharon Shatzky is based on pornographic cliches. The satirical narrative tries "to reveal the tragicomic gap between the life of moral seriousness and dignity presented by literature and the crude farce of reality" (Monaghan 76). The narrative brings out stereotypical characters with stereotypical incidents. The father's toil is rewarded with a new "'Mr Z' shoe store"; the brother, Sherman, prospers as a dentist married to a "skinny Jewish

girl from Bala Cynwyd"; Sonia, the sister, is happy with her summer house (*MLAM* 6, 11). So long as he follows cliches, Nathan progresses academically and sexually. Once he tries to live by non-conformist literary standards, life becomes an unendurable rigmarole. He cannot escape "the gaze of Mr Reality", but still works within its framework (Watson 118).

Nathan's sexual partner, Sharon Shatzky is a ravishing rebellious daughter of A "the Zipper King "Shatzky (*MLAM* 21). Their sexual adventure is highlighted like an epiphanic motif to throw into relief the disintegrated character of the subject. Sharon, as if in a well directed show of "sensual adventurousness or theatricality" exhibits her body for an onanistic orgy (*MLAM* 24). The voyeuristic scene becomes grotesquely theatrical by the positioning of Nathan at a distance pretentiously watching television and staring "down the hallway at the nude girl writhing" with the "green gourd" and the "plastic handle of her hairbrush". The "mysterious and compelling" vision is juxtaposed with Sharon's orgasmic whisper, "I want to be your whore", and the parents' talk from terrace on her newly bought "winter coat" (*MLAM* 26).

Eating as well as edible things get coalesced with body and sex. As the parents talk about their children's appetite for "syrup covered portions of ice cream" which they eat in kitchen, the "buggering" of Sharon "with his big toe" goes on alternately from under the "ping-pong table" (*MLAM* 25).

Focalization of the individual in several ways could be discerned here. The parents on terrace glance through door frame to see Nathan watching the Phillies game on television. But, he unseen by anyone, enjoys, through the frame of the toilet door, Sharon's performance. Just as an artist frames reality, Peter's "shows" order the "chaos" by "creating an alternate reality" that results in a "comic triumph of fantasy" (Watson 119). But the ironic fact about this focalizing of reality is that Nathan cannot enjoy sexual freedom wholesomely and single mindedly as Sharon does. By a voyeuristic detachment, Nathan assigns the surrogate role to the vegetable. His erotic fantasies get sublimated into parental "solicitude, complacency, baseball and its attendant male heroics" (*MLAM* 119). In the scene, Nathan, Sharon and the parents never converge at one point of social interaction. As in Portnoy, here too there seems to be a strong sense of guilt that violently separates sexual passion (the id) and the conditioned need (the superego). The subject is alienated from the object of his desire by the histrionics of a television "soap opera" (*MLAM* 195). The framing of action appears to be influenced by the electronic culture of modern times where televised and filmic images serve as "images for the superegos" (Watson 120). Nathan is allowed a "regulated subjectivity" by the show business culture of modernity where even intimate relationships become a theme for self-dramatisation (Miller 1). The power of show business focalisation acts as an "intimate phenomenon"

where by the subject is acted upon from "the interior" of the self (Miller 2). A kind of decentring of the subject appears to take place here.

Nathan's intellectual and emotional independence comes while in college in Vermont where the spell of literature entraps him. The power of literature transforms his subjectivity. He idealises the refined spirit of Woolf, Flaubert and Henry James. But the rake in him goes after Sharon. Her endless sexual exploits provide his id ample scope for free play. The coarseness of her character and language repel him from her. At the Fort Campbell army training camp, he finds himself in an ambivalent condition due to the contradictions of "the spiritual aspirations and the lewd desires, the soft-boyish needs and the manly, the magisterial ambitions" (*MLAM* 30-31).

In "Courting Disaster" too Nathan seems to desire a problematic love relationship which becomes a testing ground for his self-righteousness. He gets enamoured of Lydia Ketterer, mainly because she had "proved indestructible" in spite of her being subjected to "every brand of barbarity" (*MLAM* 70). She is one whom, he thinks, he could redeem by careful effort. As a character of professorial seriousness he works hard and keeps up parentally infused ideals. But still he happens to seduce Lydia who is a divorcee-student, five years senior to him and mother of Monica. The career as a connoisseur and teacher of literature becomes the root cause of many of the problems he encounters with regard to his body and psyche. As in the

previous narrative, the split between conscience and libido becomes a serious problem. The relationship with Lydia appears to be like a self-inflicted punishment for an overweening sense of self. She becomes responsible for the transformation of his experiences into fictional reality. The oral sex Nathan has with her is intended to overcome his repulsion towards her. But the strange sense of repulsion is never overcome. After Lydia's suicide, he goes to Italy with Monica and lives a life far removed from his professorial ideals. Like Joseph K in *The Trial*, he feels the "panic of the escaped convict who imagines the authorities have picked up his scent- only I am the authority as well as the escapee" (*MLAM* 85). He is unable either to leave Monica or return with her to America. A victim of his own literary education, he finds it hard "to believe fully in the helplessness of his predicament". But a Kafkaesque guilt that "the shame of it must outlive him" haunts his self. The next moment he also realises that he is "real" and his "humiliation is equally real" (*MLAM* 86).

The narrator-self underscores the perspective of the nineteen fifties by a digression: "For not only have literary manners changed drastically since all this happened ten years ago, back in the middle fifties, but I myself am hardly who I was or wanted to be [. . .]" (*MLAM* 81). The diversion between duty, passion, obedience to social restrictions and commitment to personal yearnings forms the main concern on the psychological domain. The pain of migraine begins with his army life. Women lead him out into goyim world in

the role of a saviour, but later, he degenerates and has to go to exile. Lydia is a frigid divorcee whose life is full of disasters. Seduced by her father and disastrously married to sadistic Eugene Ketterer, she suffers a serious nervous breakdown. A grossly aberrant disposition and a vulnerable daughter Monica are what she has to offer Nathan. Her character stands out by "the puritan austerity, the prudery, the blandness, the xenophobia" and "the criminality of the men" (*MLAM* 70). In Italy, the imbecile girl becomes his mistress.

Mc Daniel states that the text reveals the problem of a writer : " how can one explain the incredible turns of personality in a credible way? How can one turn the actually unbelievable into the fictionally believable" (187).

The quasi-autobiographical narrative seems to bring about, within itself, aesthetic detachment by spatio-temporal distancing. In this self-parody, the main problem is that of heroic self-assertion and articulating, in fiction, the moral and realistic motives behind the actor-subject: "I can't imagine that I shall have the courage to return to live in Chicago, or anywhere in America?" (*MLAM* 81).

"My True Story" seems to transmute the narrator-subject's experiential reality into literary art. Peter attempts to redefine his self by intertextual referability. The textual process appears to be a psycho-linguistic operation where the subject gets trapped irretrievably within "the linguistic prison of self-reference" (O' Donnell 151). "Manhood" and "manliness" become

"thingness" to which the narrator subject assigns various identities. The text, as a whole, weaves out "net works of reference that pertain to the positioning of 'Tarnopol' "(O' Donnell 154). The responsibilities of being a good son, good husband and good writer become the fabula upon which the sjuzet of the five narrative units of *My Life as a Man* seems to have been framed. In an internal analepsis, Peter reflects upon all these versions as "misadventures in manhood" and adds that "the manuscript was the message, and the message was Turmoil" (*MLAM* 238).

The narrative begins with a textual unit where Peter spatio-temporally places himself as a third person subject at Quahsay Colony, Vermont, involved in the writing of "an autobiographical narrative" for demystifying "the past" and mitigating his "uncommendable sense of defeat" (*MLAM* 100-101). It is nineteen sixty-seven, a year after his ex-wife Maureen's death. He tries hard to reconcile with his trying marital experience and exorcise the obsession of the misery he had already gone through: "[. . .] I was as incapable of not writing about what was killing me as I was of altering or understanding it" (*MLAM* 105). In the course of his grapple with the problem of artistic composition, Peter presents his "true story" in five units. In the middle of this attempt, he also brings out two other stories and sends them to his sister Joan for evaluation. The "recalcitrant materials of his life" prevent him from having fulfillment in "emotional, sexual, creative or intellectual" lives (*MLAM* 132).

Peter's self and manhood get represented as a series of rough drafts, false starts, skewed codes, schemes for alphabetisation and impenetrable prose. The subject is like a fragmented being in search of a father. But his quest gets nullified in his anxiety ridden sexual life where he fails to discover his manhood. He is more of a "process than a character- a process of self-inscription that leads to an awareness of the subject as multiple and as represented by its positioning in relation to those references (other characters, events, conversations, etc.) that define it as such" (Milbauer and Watson, *Reading* 157).

A deep sense of morality runs through all the interactions with Maureen Johnson. Societal conventions prescribe "manliness" as an activity of conscience whereby Peter has to accept the moral responsibilities of a husband and good son. Guiltless promiscuity had been the characteristic of his pre-marital sexual pursuits. He had been having relationship with women as varied as Karen Oakes, a student; Nancy Miles, an employee with the *New Yorker*; Dina Dornbusch, a college senior at Sarah Lawrence; and Grete, a student nurse in Frankfurt.

As a " 'writer in residence' at the university of Wisconsin" and "the golden boy of American Literature," Peter wants to experience reality in all its obduracy and intractability "at an appropriately lofty moral attitude, an elevation somewhere, say, between, *The Brothers Karamazov* and *The Wings*

of the Dove (MLAM 195). Establishing compatibility between the idea and the real is the obsession which the subject can never do away with. Leading a wedded life is one of "those moral decisions" that he had been introduced to in "college literature courses" (MLAM 193). He seeks in life the earnestness of the experiences portrayed in the classic fiction which he reads and teaches. But the process of maturing after severing filial ties paradoxically coerces him into the commission of "the brutal and bloody surgery on the emotions [. . .]" (MLAM 219).

Ambivalence and ambiguity dominate the discourse on all plains. The non-linearity of the discourse and its diffuse overlapping of analeptical strands make all the segments greatly ambiguous to the narratee/reader also. The narrator grapples with himself regarding matters of matrimony, morality and literary career: "Stuffed to the gills with great fiction – entranced not by cheap romances, like *Madame Bovary*, but by *Madame Bovary* – I now expected to find in everyday experience that same sense of the difficult and the deadly earnest that informed the novels I admired most" (MLAM 194). But the three years of married life with the twice divorced Maureen, laden with brawls and tantrums, prove to be "a soap opera" (MLAM 195).

Marriage sends Peter into unfulfilling affairs with women and psychoanalytic sessions with Dr. Otto Spielvogel. The unit, "Marriage 'a la Mode" forms the nucleus of the narrative where the narrator-subject presents

the hermeneutic codes focussing upon his fatal decision of marrying "a rough customer", Maureen: "What I liked, you see, was something taxing in my love affairs, something problematical and puzzling to keep the imagination going even while I was away from my books [. . .]" (*MLAM* 180, 179).

Peter's true story deals with his maiden fictional venture, *A Jewish Father*, marrying Maureen and then living without her. The text becomes, a discourse on the ambiguities of marital entrapment. Matrimony appears to be a trap into which he enters after being black mailed by Maureen who declares herself pregnant with the test report of the urine specimen obtained from a Negro woman on the street. To Maureen, body comes in as a weapon of both coercion and defiance. On getting acquainted to Peter at "a poet's party" she challenges him to prove his physical prowess by a "footrace from the Astor Place subway station" to his apartment. After the race, they join together in a physical orgy which germinates into a bond whereby she could gradually settle her scores with the male sex. The subject is carried away by her physical charm that approximates "one of nature's undersized indefatigables, the bee or the humming bird [. . .] sipping from a million stamens to meet their minimum daily nutritional requirements (*MLAM* 176). She, in contrast with all the previous women, is irrational, violent, and aggressive. The prefeminist era of rationalisation of the 1950's is the period when Maureen comes into the subject's life.

He seems to have been nose-led by the chivalrous belief that men "were exploiting and degrading the women" they did not marry (*MLAM* 169). Marrying a woman and fulfilling her needs is considered as the observance of a great value in society. But once fulfilled, the institution of matrimony appears to be a calamitous gesture which the subject wants to undo. The deadliness of its actuality, says Mark Shechner, has to be borne, with "the tight lipped moralism of honor, duty, and manly responsibility" (129).

The idealism attained through the graduate school religio-literary exercises in Mann, Flaubert, James and Conrad could only create a sense of impasse where he feels like one who had been detained by the authorities, stopped in transit like that great paranoid victim and avenger of injustice in some Kleist novella that he had taught. But empirical life lacks the earnestness he had presumed. Melvin Maddocks describes Maureen as the "muse of disorder, the Dionysian element every artist suspects he needs" (108). He wants to be "stuffed to the gills" with emotional and sexual experience. But the experiential reality becomes more than what he could handle. Maureen and her bodily self rise like a huge mysterious force: "Unclothed, she would sometimes make me think of an alley cat-quick, wary, at once scrawny and strong [. . .] like some woman out of the bush, a primitive whose picture you might come upon in *National Geographic*, praying to the sun-god to roll back the waters" (*MLAM* 186). Body is one of

the most powerful tropal codes that helps in mapping the discursive contours of Peter-Maureen relationship.

In contrast to the enlightenment idealism and romantic values of the Nineteenth Century what the subject is forced to encounter is the "low actuality" that gets "emblazoned across the face of the narrative, in blood" (*MLAM* 208). After having swallowed the sleeping pills, Maureen crawls, exhibiting her bodily self, and cuts her wrist. She indulges in this tantrum to avenge Peter's secret relationship with Karen. The bargain she makes is quite hard: " 'If you forgive me for the urine, I'll forgive you for your mistress [. . .] and begging her to run away with you to Rome '" (*MLAM* 209). With blood dripping from one's wrist and the other's thumb they look like "a couple of Aztecs" performing their "sacrificial rites" (*MLAM* 210). Peter helplessly runs about his room and puts on Maureen's undergarments and clothes and gives himself a "sexual break" (Oates 97).

The subject desires to be powerful, confident and self-controlled. But he is victimized by a woman who has fallen prey to a society that trains women to be helpless and inept. She enters the subject's life with the "hash marks" of two divorces: one from Mezik, a drunkard saloonkeeper and the other from Walker, a homosexual actor. (*MLAM* 175). Understandably, her only weapon seems to be her body that has terrific energy and spirit to defy and cover up her incompetence and despair. The actor-subject is convinced

that he can do little to free himself or his wife from the bind that societal roles and socially sanctioned patterns of victimization have forced upon them. Familial values mean so much to him but some how he could not rise up to the roles expected of him, by the society. Maureen is not a touchstone for his virility but virtuousness. He himself confesses to Dr. Spielvogel that if he had obeyed his bodily urges he would never have landed up "into this mess" and would have been carrying on with Dina Dornbusch (*MLAM* 243).

Alongside Maureen, the subject maintains a love relationship with Susan Seabury Mc Call, a well-bred "young heiress from a distinguished New Jersey family" (*MLAM* 134). They become rather a study in contrast to the subject who embraces "sexual good samaritanism" in an attempt to disprove the charges levelled against him by his "monumentally dissatisfied wife" (*MLAM* 136). He finds the two women antithetical in their sensibility regarding man-woman relationship.

Maureen yearns for something just because somebody else has what she lacks. She would have been "content" and "frigid" if Peter had been "impotent". But Susan woos him just for being dispossessed of her own "constrained and terrified self" (*MLAM* 137). She is a widow whose affluent husband was killed in an air-crash just when they were eleven months into married life. She inherits a large bounty of family wealth and a youthful body with little hope for a life. She entreats him to give her "a little bit of that" and

in return, she offers her own self as a way to recover from the boredom of his life. It is a deal where the "broken shall succor the broken" (*MLAM* 153). But bodily relationship with Susan is not as fulfilling as is expected. He finds her to be nothing "more than a piece of meat on a spit that you turned this way and that until you were finished [. . .]" (*MLAM* 123). By the third year of their relationship they come together "like workers doing overtime night after night in a defense plant: in a good cause, for good wages [. . .]" (*MLAM* 134). In Maureen, the "crescendo of passion would culminate" in faked "outcry of ecstasy" and "clamorous writhings" (*MLAM* 135). Carnal pleasure is an elusive experience to both the women. It becomes a "distressing subject" and source of rift between Peter and the two women. Maureen finds him to be too selfishly imprisoned within himself and reluctant to share his self with a woman. To Susan, he describes his misery: "I haven't been a person since I was sweet sixteen, I'm just symptoms. A collection of symptoms, instead of a human being" (*MLAM* 139).

Mutual allegations mar the relationship that never gets consummated at a point of fruition. Peter tries to attribute wrong motives to Maureen in his fictional writings like "Courting Disaster". Maureen rises from the plight of being objectified in wrong terms by writing a short story entitled, "Dressing up in Mommy's clothes". Paul Natapov becomes Peter's fictional counterpart in the story. But he accuses her that the only real thing she has is her "psychopathology" (*MLAM* 279). They go again into a tantrum and this time

Peter assumes power to hit her: "[. . .] I am about to beat your crazy, lying head in with this poker. I want to see your brains, Maureen" (*MLAM* 281). The farcical scene is enacted by them with blood smeared on their face, hands, matting and clothes. He feels elated that he "was ruining the suit in which she'd looked so attractive" (*MLAM* 280).

The subject's action approximates to the societal standard of manliness when he beats her like her father and Mezik. But he is weak, sensitive, aesthetic and demasculated. The act, rather than boosting his masculinity, really unmans him. He even thinks that it is the influence of literature and responsiveness to it that has made him acquiesce to the woman's demands. Otherwise, somebody with his devotion to seriousness and maturity would not have yielded like a defenseless little boy to this fatal woman.

Maureen's fake pregnancy and suicide attempts leave Peter unmanned and obsessed. She, as Hermione Lee remarks, "takes her place among the pantheon of obstructors, authorities or mentors" of the subject (77). She stands as a demonic influence upon the reason and wisdom of a writer. Sex with a woman could be apprehended only with guilt and dread and then felt as a consolation, something to hold on to after a bad dream.

Maureen's death does not release the subject from his misery. He learns of her death and wants to remain released. Dr. Spielvogel corrects his mistake saying that "released is the word" he has been looking for (*MLAM*

327). But the situation of being released eludes him. As Sam B. Girgus supplements, "His wife's death has released him from one imprisoning situation, but clearly he will not find any kind of freedom until he stops inventing new prisons for himself" (174). Her self haunts him in two ways. She appears as one who uses her body as an instrument of revenge; and she also intrudes into his life as a body of written impressions that would stand in contradiction to his personal version of himself. On reading Maureen's diary writings, he contemplates that man's spirit would prevail: "He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance" (*MLAM* 322). It is puzzling for him to make sense out of the real life situation: "How do I ever get to be what is described in the literature as a man?" (*MLAM* 299). It is unbearable to him to perceive the fact that he has been discursively judged and presented by Maureen. And along side this the court of law too has its own means of positioning the subject. He fails to escape being objectified by either his wife or the judge in the court: "Then why is everything in my life her affair? And judge Rosenzweig's affair!" (*MLAM* 319). He comes to realise that his best judge has not been himself but the others, especially the "woman" he "was married to for three years" (*MLAM* 318). On the contrary, she finds her experience with him "degrading" as he could merely be ranked as a Mezik or Walker who loved not her "real" self but just "some cockneyed idea" represented by her (*MLAM* 311).

The bathos comes when she records Peter's failure in categorical words: "If it weren't for me he'd still be hiding behind his Flaubert and wouldn't know what real life was like if he felt over it [. . .] knowing and believing nothing but what he read in books? [. . .] Instead he treats me like the enemy. When all I've ever really wanted is for him to be the best writer in the world. It's all too brutally ironic" (*MLAM* 310). The 'brutal irony' of nuptial life gives scope to the narrator-participant to frame another draft of his self giving prominence to his writing career. Maureen is more of a sign to him, referring to some literary experience one could think of having. As a writer-narrator, he apparently wants her to serve as a mode of experiential reality that could approximate what he reads in literature. An organic love relationship never ensues out of any of his attempts at attaining family bliss.

He repositions the subjectivity of his self from the state of a rake to that of an aesthetic writer. He reworks his own self along a new strand of discourse that substantially differs from the confessional mode to a refined focalization.

Peter appears to struggle within a limbo in which he exists as both man and artist. The only solution he has is to tell his own story over again with the hope that all the three components, artist, man and story would become comprehensible to himself and the reader. Within the hypogram of Peter's narrative on himself these themes are dealt with on a binary plane: the

professor-rake duality. The experiencing self of the writer as a rake has already been discussed in the light of man-woman relationship. Again, the reader confronts the problem of framing and interpreting the topic-comment structure of the subject's encounter with his careeristic experiences.

Peter fears the self that is not authored by himself. Maureen is not merely a fictional subject in a literary text but someone with whom he had been living with on the "Lower Eastside of Manhattan" (*MLAM* 192). He guarantees his non-fictional being a form of self-assertion. This is done by the positioning of another "real" in relation to his self. Through the whole of the text, he attempts hard to locate an "authorised version of the self" so that symbolically he could be regenerated into a new subject (O'Donnell 152).

On a social plane, the subject seems to be more of a victim of the disintegrated values of American liberalism. It is perhaps the liberalism fostered by the middle class families after the Second World War. They groom their young men in such a way that they carried their "businessmen father's values of discipline, hardwork and duty into the humanities and reform politics" (Newman 458). This results in the messing up of the aesthetic and the political strategies. The talents developed in the fifties go into disarray in the sixties. His sister Joan's response on reading two of his stories, "Salad Days" and "Courting Disaster" is that there is "no bottom" to his "guilty conscience" and it is the only "source available" for his literary art

(*MLAM* 114-115). The "guilty conscience" he develops as a result of his relationships with Maureen, Susan and other women serves as the footstool for his literary career. Morality, matrimony and fiction get problematised in his "true" version of himself which, seems to elude his grasp. "Fiction", as Joan believes, "does different things to different people, much like matrimony" (*MLAM* 116). Peter's self gets recast into a newer mould as the writer-monologist aspires to reach the loftier heights of a classic.

He owns up responsibility as the "ring leader of the plot" (*MLAM* 116). In the Lacanian sense, phallus becomes the mark of his manhood and its dissemination becomes the sign of his self. Peter appears to be obsessed with the phallus as the thing that signifies his identity. It becomes a sign around which the dialectic of identification of the subject is made. The comic and the grotesque sexual exertions appear to be a kind of means to establish his authenticity in the world around him. In the relationship between himself and the two women Maureen and Susan, phallic identity plays a very decisive part.

Peter could trust only his writings and his personal reconstitution of the world. He attempts to relate himself to history by deflating it with banal obscenity. He cannot protect those he loves nor could he annihilate his enemies. He desires to get to be what is described in the literature as a man and also wonders as to why manhood is always beyond his reach. Through a

dialectic of a narrative interface with Dr. Spielvogel, he positions another "real" in relation to his earlier self. The Doctor's version matters much to him because he is the "subject" of the psychoanalytic discourse. Every day of the revelation his personal life needs to be transcribed with "accurate accounting" (*MLAM* 252). Peter's conviction is that it is possible for a subject of a writing to be precisely represented in language.

He feels that his "ghostly real father" could never really associate his son's fictional self with his real self (O'Donnell 153). All his assumptions seem to be based on an unreal "reading" from Peter's fiction (*MLAM* 27). The author of *A Jewish Father* is to come to terms with the idea that the self as a subject of writing is multiple and unauthorised. The real father is elusive and there is no one to provide the proof regarding the origin and validity of self. Peter finds himself in a paradoxical position of feeling that he had authored his own father's words. He gets inscribed as a subject in many fictional versions by other hands over which he has little control. The 'I' s search for an author/ father. In the course of this search, he becomes a fragmented being. The subject gets transformed into an assemblage of partial selves in search of an author/father. O'Donnell maintains that the narrative is redundant with ever so many "images of mutilation" through which a "symbolic dismemberment" of the subject takes place (154). This happens when he tries to recast his past through a compilation of different versions of self. These different representations are a social construct and simultaneously

they are also an inconclusive incomprehensible text. Identity of self remains a "palimpsest of directives, defacements and intensities" that force the subject into an indeterminate process of "(self) erasure and (self) inscription" (*MLAM* 155-56). In a telling scene, Peter wanders through a bookstore and has strange experience of locating/dislocating himself in his first book *A Jewish Father* in the 'T' section. Moments later, he figures his unfinished manuscript in the form of a "corpse" which he could not "remove [. . .] from the autopsy room to the grave [. . .]" (*MLAM* 238). The remnants of the book are the dead selves, and the true subjects of autobiography are protean, always in a state of flux. Writing becomes an attempt to build a design of a still life. It comes out with a "cluster of stories, relations, and versions of the self which make up 'Tarnopol'" (O'Donnell 157). The compelling force behind Peter is not an aesthetic design. But it is the imperative to talk about himself, to confess, to draw scores by writing and to magnify the self beyond the ordinary limits of the "I". O'Donnell further adds that Peter's "graphomania" gets blown to "comic version of the will to power, dressed up in the noble drag of art [. . .]" (163).

Spielvogel locates the source of the problem not solely in his self but in factors external to himself. He heavily draws upon Freud's comments on "the ideal ego". Narcissistic psycho-analysis becomes a useful tool to explain Peter's problem. To the psychoanalyst, he is more of a literary text for literary diagnosis. The truth regarding the self could emerge partly through

the dialectic that develops and partly through the evidence the rest of the novel presents. Peter considers his struggle for manhood as a matter of cultural coercion. But Spielvogel sees it as the enactment of his ambivalence, narcissism and a libidinized aggression toward his "phallic mother" but in due course displaced onto a woman: "It soon became clear that the poet's central problem here as elsewhere was his castration anxiety vis-à-vis a phallic mother figure [. . .] in order to avoid a confrontation with his dependency needs toward his wife the poet acted out sexually, with other women almost from the beginning of the marriage" (*MLAM* 240-242).

Peter is outraged at his self being written up as case-history of regression. The analyst writes a journal article entitled, "Creativity, The Narcissism of the Artist". The narrator feels that his self is made to serve as a physiognomy to a portrait painter, a problem for his art, to be solved after close scrutiny: "It's in the nature of being a novelist to make private life public- that's a part of what a novelist is up to. But certainly it is not what I thought you were up to when I came here" (*MLAM* 250). The analyst reveals that the dominant narcissism is a defence the subject adopts for himself. It could protect himself from the "profound anxiety" aroused by his mother. He engenders within himself "a strong sense of superiority" to be least affected by the "possibilities of rejection in and separation, as well as the helplessness" that he experiences in his mother's presence (*MLAM* 217). Guilt and ambivalence also appear to be the two ruling factors of his

conscious/unconscious self. The literary career as well as the relationships with women get affected by these two feelings.

The fear that reigns supreme in him is that he might not exist except solely as a form of composite fiction framed by others. This prompts the analyst to remind him about his ambivalence regarding the analysis of his self:

'First you complain that by disguising your identity I misrepresent you and badly distort the reality [. . .] Then in the next breath you complain that I fail to disguise your identity enough-rather, that I have revealed your identity by using this particular incident. This of course is your ambivalence again about your specialness'.
(*MLAM* 249)

To Peter, the truth of the critique applied to recollection of self lies in its manipulation of evidence. Spielvogel makes narcissism the key to understanding the subject's elusive self. He is disturbed by the admonitions of the intruders into his life and also by his own critical judgements. The early similitude of perfection is projected on to a fictionalised "ego ideal". When reality, in the guise of adamant women, intrudes then narcissistic defence appears in his deeds with twofold intensity. But Maureen and Susan fulfil his narcissistic need by attempting suicide. They seem to embody an ambivalent

counter-desire for punishment and also the traits of a threatening mother image.

Peter is also aware that success and excitement would come upon him depending upon his power of "de-narcissizing" or detaching himself from his art. He denies narcissism but simultaneously he is obsessed with himself. Maureen seems to be a competitor for his attention. Jay L. Halio considers her possessiveness as the "obverse of narcissism resulting in their basic incompatibility" (140). Spielvogel lets him know that there is no escape from Susan if Maureen is dead. At the end of the text the artist "scrutinizes his self with all the wonder fear and amazement that object holds" (Halio 141).

Writing *My Life as a Man* involved "one false start after another" and it "nearly broke" Roth's "will" (*The Facts* 152). Roth is not all in favour of the Oedipal theory. He is of the view that Peter had a charmed life for he was made to believe that success would never elude him. The process of presentation/description of self is seen as the unresolvable problem: "To my mind, Tarnopol's attempt to realize himself with the right words as earlier in life he attempted realizing himself through the right deeds—fictions about his life with his autobiography". Roth sets Peter's aim to "achieve a description" as supreme among the issues in the text (Searles 80). The author-narrator could not bring himself to see his self just as Spielvogel sees it. This is partly because Peter, as the novelist who treats himself and his personal life could,

in the end, see them only as fiction. He and his self become only fiction that engender further fiction without ultimate truth or moral authority. The fiction framed cannot be called an autobiography. It is more of a kind of fictional focalization done through "the materials actuality makes available" (Searles 95).

The fictional process of creating a "real" self is sustained by an attempt to find the real author. Nathan highlights the artistic creed when he states that the artist descends within himself, and in the lonely region of stress and strife he would find the terms of his appeal. Art and psychology appear to collaborate to overcome the authority of an omniscient author. The controlling authority of narrative gets diffused in the self that emerges in multiple forms. Perhaps Roth implies that the bias towards an omniscient narrator-self reflects the wish for a realm of objective authority and security. But none seems to exist in either literature or experiential reality. For Nathan and Peter, fiction and reality become interchangeable. In "Salad Days", Nathan alludes to the Olympian point of view of the author, whereas in "Courting Disaster," he discusses the values of decorum, discipline, and sobriety. But such a self undermines itself through the imminent process of reflection and creation of a fresh level of critical consciousness. Peter's life and the lives of various literary characters create a baffling mix-up of the worlds of fiction and reality. Placing the subject's problems within the context of familial ties becomes a serious issue to the narrator-subject, the

implied author and the reader as well. Familial relationships get indistinguishably bound up with the issue of fiction making process and the narrative explicitly relates the predicament of the subjects to the implied author's narrative choices and solutions. If in Portnoy's Complaint the issue regards filial ties it is the responsibility of building a sound family and achieving societal honour that becomes the serious concern in *My Life as a Man*. Roth looks upon the frequent erasures and recasting of the fictional self as defying and submitting to "a multitude of bizarre projections". These "projections" bring about gross "simplification of self" through human relationships. So the novel is supposed to have been entitled "Don't Do with Me What You Will" (Searles 90). In his attempts to convert the transparent into opaque and the opaque transparent, Peter hurts himself. He becomes his own mistake. He gets determined mistakenly or otherwise by his own character. The final words echo a "characterological enslavement" (Searles 96). With ironic resignation he accepts his identity: "This is me who is me being me and none other!" The reader could only think that Peter may become a man and move beyond the mistakes of the past. He might be changing, growing into himself and "none other" (*MLAM* 330).

NOTES

¹Family is conceived of not as an empirical referent, but as a group culture engendered through a discourse known as family story. Langellier and Peterson discuss the idea of family story telling as a strategically produced discourse that reproduces the socio-economic institution of family, by legitimating the meanings and power relations existing within it. Family-stories are like a cornerstone-monument of family culture. The monolithic family, as a social regulator, tries to privilege certain classes or types over certain others-for example, parents over children; males over females etc. Depending upon the constraints of social and historical conditions, the family monuments mute and marginalize eventualities that affect family institutions unfavourably: divorce, homosexuality, singleness, childlessness and the likes. The discursive practices become effective as an operant fiction as they do a performative process of enhancing lived experience through exceeding referentiality. They create another possible world in performance as they problematize meanings processes and power relations involved within families. See Langellier and Peterson's essay, "Family Storytelling as a Strategy of Social Control".

²Gerald Prince explains that reading is an activity that presupposes a text-a set of visually presented linguistic symbols from which meaning can be extracted. A reader is an agent capable of extracting meaning from that set.

He differentiates between "reading a text" and "reading of a text". The latter process comprises selection, development and re-ordering of the answers reached during the former. In a "reading of" the text, the reader usually, says Prince, processes a sequence of states and actions pertaining to one or more characters in one or more settings to frame well-defined narrative units for interpretation and criticism. It is these narrative units that he describes as "topic-comment structures".

³The term "homodiegetic analepsis" was coined by the narratologist Gerard Genette and it is explained by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan in his book, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* as the device of flashback in a narrative that throws light on a character, event or story-line mentioned at some point of narration in the text.

⁴In narratology, the semic code is a major device for thematizing persons objects or places. According to Kaja Silverman, it operates by grouping many signifiers around a proper name or another prominent signifier. Signifiers so grouped function like a collective signified to a proper name or its surrogate. When identical semes traverse the same proper name several times and settle upon it, a subject is created. Sometimes clothes, gestures and patterns of speech operate as semic codes. They inscribe power-relations into literary text and may also define a subject or place in ideologically symptomatic ways.

⁵The idea of perceptibility concerns the "telling" and "showing" process in a narrative. Different narratives have different degrees of perceptibility with respect to characterization. Perceptibility, in Rimmon Kenan's view, ranges from maximum covertness to maximum overtness.

⁶Rimmon-Kenan states that a "homodiegetic" narrative is one in which the narrator participates in the narrated story (95 – 96).

⁷Mixed-analepsis is a term used by Rimmon-Kenan to refer to a flashback on a period covered before the starting point of the first narrative, but at a later stage joins it or goes beyond it.

⁸A "catalyst," within the parlance of narratology, is an event or narrative agent that expands, amplifies or maintains the action in the text. The idea of the narrative "catalyst" is found in Rimmon-Kenan.

⁹The transition from one stage, (from being a phallus to having a phallus in the Lacanian sense) to another is "correlated with the stratification of the psychical apparatus into systems of registrations" (Laplanche and Pontalis 236). The transition through different phases – oral, anal, phallic and pubertal – is similar to a process of translation in language. Portnoy is hard put to the anarchic functioning of the non-genital component instincts. Only by a positive change in his psychical apparatus could he resolve his crisis.

¹⁰In fantasies one often meets women with male sexual organ or phallic attribute. Ruth Mack Brunswick in his essay, "The Preoedipal Phase of the Libido Development" [Fleiss R., ed. *The Psycho-Analytic Reader* London: Hogarth Press, 1950. 240] states that such images appear when the child "becomes uncertain that the mother does indeed possess" a phallus. The woman with a phallus denotes the conjoining of two parents. The mother contains the father's physical attributes and the father contains those of the mother. The idea of such a 'combined parent' appearing in the child's early fantasies is elaborated upon by Melanie Klein in *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* (103-104; 333). Alex seems to look upon his mother as a "combined parent."

¹¹The whole of the emerging tropal patterns within the topic-comment segment of mother-son relationship could be psychoanalytically grounded in the Oedipal phase. Within the corpus of this narrative segment the subject has been going through oral and anal phases, which are discussed in the chapter with respect to dietary and bath-room habits. The narrative switches over to heterosexual relationships at the point where the subject reaches the phallic phase. As soon as Alex realizes the supremacy of the erotogenic zone he becomes wary of the Lacanian dialectic whose significant alternatives are to be a phallus and to have a phallus. This is the stage when the Oedipus complex reaches its culmination and is also dissolved.

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¹²The psychoanalytic phenomenon of transference concerns the patient's relationship with the psycho-analyst. Within the context of the unconscious, this concept refers to a mode of displacement. It is the unconscious wish getting manifested in disguise through the material provided by the preconscious residues (memories which are not immediately conscious but which the subject can recollect at will). The wish will be in the form of a new edition of the impulse or fantasy which was aroused and made conscious during the progress of the analysis. It has the characteristic of replacing some earlier person by the person of the analyst. The patient unconsciously makes the analyst play the role of a loved or feared parental figure. See Laplanche and Pontalis 455-462.

¹³Imago is the prototypical figure formed in the unconscious. The subject's apprehension of interpersonal relationship is conditioned by this figure. It is an imaginary set of character traits that is acquired in an amorphous form from real as well as fantasized interactions within the family atmosphere. See Laplanche and Pontalis 211.

**THE PROBLEM OF THE DISINTEGRATED SELF IN THE
NOVELS OF PHILIP ROTH: A THEMATIC STUDY**

**Thesis Submitted to the
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT
For the award of the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in English**

By

N. SAJAN

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT**

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CHAPTER IV
**THE SELF AND THE STATE:
DIMENSIONS OF THE CONFLICT**

The Great American Novel is a text where the convergence of aesthetics and history takes place. Wordsmith, the "four score and seven" year old narrator, is engaged with the problem of locating his self, the text, and the experiential reality within the corpus of a re-created "history as heinous as any ordered by a tyrant dictator abroad" (*GAN* 12, 26). In his own words it is a text about what America did to himself and the baseball fraternity called the Patriot League. The baseball expeditions of the League form the referent of the narrative discourse. Baseball apparently assumes a tropological form with "referential productivity" (De Man 69).

Within the text the verifiable incidents get discursively diffused into fiction and autobiography. Self-portraiture, referential medium, and technical demands weigh down upon Smitty who seems to be "burning with a truth that everyone else denies" (*GAN* 32). The narrative appears to be structured in the epic tradition. The "Prologue" parodies and discusses the tradition of writing a grand narrative on America with either allusions to or participant conversations of Chaucer, Hemingway, Hawthorne, Twain and Melville. Smitty, tries to counter the "craziness of reality" with the "craziness of fantasy" cast from a tropological memory (Watson 108). He finds himself

faced with a heterogeneity of conflicting discourses on the great American narrative. He desires to make it possible to effect a "rupture" with the dominant discourse and a "rapprochement" with the one that is yet to come into reality (Silverman 31).

The reality of Hester Prynne's stigma symbolized by the letter 'A' is parodied as 'R' which stands for Ruppert Mundys, a prominent team that plays for the League. Huckleburry Finn's echo could be perceived through the picaresque mode of narration and the aberrant actions and speeches of the players. A tropological parallel seems to exist between Smitty's discursive voyage and that of Ahab's fictional tryst with Moby Dick.

The 'Prologue' as a topic comment unit of the text presents the narrator – self's attempt to map a synecdochic self of American polity. The haunting image that occupies the imaginative centre of the discursive venture is Smitty's dying body that is housed in the " 'State Home for the Aged, the Infirm, the Despondent, the Neglected, the Decrepit, the Incontinent, the Senile, and the Just About Scared to Death [. . .]' " (*GAN* 31). It is this trope that seems to give coherence and meaning to the scattered and trivial concerns of the text. It illuminates the anxieties and contradictions of a perplexing socio-cultural problem in modern America: the problem of how America should imagine itself as a nation and how it should be imaged as a social entity. Smitty examines whether any adequate image of America is available.

The image of society organizes the subjectivity of individuals and makes possible the reproduction of society, or, with the advent of new images, the construction of a different society. Smitty's text appears to embody a mythical imagination. He locates the narrative within the "'demythologizing decade' of the 1960's" (Watson 113). A long drawn conflict ensues out of the text's "journalistic myth making" (Watson 114). It is the conflict between a national myth and an insidious reality. The text also concerns itself with the task of undoing what a generation of sports writers had jointly conspired and executed for the complete obliteration of the construct of a great American myth.

The narrator-subject attempts to find appropriate tropes of nationhood by which he could salvage a mythical consciousness, or, with the advent of new images, construct a different society. The text tries to live up to this ideological challenge that is a far-reaching issue in the America of the sixties. Terence N. Bowers remarks that "the emergence of new images promoted alternate ways of envisioning the nation as a social construct, and facilitated the advancement of traditionally undervalued social groups as well as the potential demotion of formerly powerful groups" (557). Smitty's project is aimed at demoting the corrupt and the malicious elements of a degenerate society.

By a tropological historiography, he envisions American society as a horizontally organized one whose builders of order and morality are subjects engaged in mundane activities tropally represented by those within the Patriot league. The fabula of a rag-tag collection of teams seems to serve as a backdrop to re-integrate the mythical imagination of a body-politic which had been "wilfully erased from the national memory" (*GAN* 26).

By comic artistry, sports becomes politics and politics becomes sports. Donald G. Watson observes about the non-structuredness of the text as "the freewheeling nature of associative logic and imaginative inventiveness" (108). This becomes a discursive device to salvage the sensibility of a nation that has been trivialised by a self-seeking grossness of capitalist economy. America was fast becoming a commercial empire, an advanced capitalist society founded on "the rhetoric of delusion" and "dishonest manipulation of language" (Jones and Nance 148). The new social types and formations generate an anxiety that underscores the need for an image of nationhood. This is to enable one to gain a control over the developments taking place. Bowers maintains that "establishing a dominant image of the nation would enable one to evaluate change properly so that it could either be impeded or accelerated according to one's model of nationhood" (578).

Smitty makes use of the logic of farce and remains responsive, as Roth states, to the "unsocialized" elements. (*RMAO* 76). A tropological plane is

created on which religion, baseball, patriotism and governmentality become interchangeable. They appear to subvert the serious values of literary culture and those of the narrator's self. The narrator subject subtly directs his "blasphemous assault" on the "Cold War years" that had "to bear the full brunt of the mass media and advertising" (*RMAO* 88). Smitty's text attempts to evolve a counter-text and counter-mythology through a discursive conflict with the daemonic reality of "disorder, upheaval, assassination, and war". The fictional discourse is characterized by a bizarre historiography that encapsulates "a continuum between the credible incredible and the incredible credible" (*RMAO* 91). The writer-subject descends into the unreality of speeches, scandals, idiocies and pieties that permeate the Patriot League. It was once a rallying point of common loyalties and enthusiasms. Along with its fascinating lores, legends, strategies and heroics, baseball had fostered a patriotism that was more humane than the sloganized one of partisan politics. The game gets transmuted into a figurative plane where many binaries are staged and comically interrogated. The text generates meanings through the media of grotesquery, distortion and incongruity. The "slang and brag" of America get foregrounded for undermining the malicious reality of contemporaneity (Pinsker, *Comedy* 85).

The dominant image of American nationhood to which Smitty subscribes is not that of the land but the body. The body trope might have appealed to the narrator because it, as Bowers states, expressed the notion

that "society was not a level, horizontally organized entity, not an open space to which all had access, but a stratified, hierarchically ordered entity that was yet unified" (578). The ancient image of society, like Smitty's own body seems to have lost vitality as a master trope. Smitty's narrative intervenes in the ideologically charged issue of imaging the nation by making use of the body metaphor as a way of assessing the severe social problems afflicting late twentieth century America. The very notion of a body politic-the industrial, paternalistic way of life it underwrites-is called into question. Smitty tries to understand and cope with the dissolution of his own body and the dissolution of the social body that had so long sustained him and to which he had given so much. He seems to get exalted to the stature of an "all-American boy or girl" and "he has become the Ahab of American sports writing" (Baumgarten and Gottfried 11,131).

Within the matrix of the narrative the world of sport gets equated to that of writing. The talk between Smitty and Hemingway on a fishing boat calls the latter's "all American skill and sexual prowess into question". Hem becomes the narrator's father-mentor for he too fishes for the great American novel that requires "the greatest courage, technical skill, and manliness to write" (*GAN* 124). In the experimental venture to fabricate a weaponry of a defensive discourse the individual self gets subtly coalesced with the social group. The history of the text is the history of a characteristic American group. The state of an individual subject-in crisis/process forms the main

concern of the discourse. It is governed by an insider/outsider dyadic phenomenon. The narrator-self's task is not to bear "witness to the true shape of his culture's values, fears, and dreams, but as that of confronting the political decisions that define its shapes and possibilities in the first place" (Baumgarten and Gottfried 123). The "logorrheic octogenerian sports writer" gets reduced to an alien in his own land where he contends with the corrupting power of rhetoric and the loss of natural innocence (Edwards 437).

The second topic-comment structure under which the relevant semes of the text are going to be analysed is the pattern of ungoverned appetites and the construct of a civil society. Smitty frames the way the reader is to picture America as a nation. He also seeks to control how one should think of his self. His body gets narrated not as a signifier of shame, but as a site of social conflict in which he becomes a casualty:

And just who is Word Smith? Fair enough. Short-winded, short-tempered, short-sighted as he may be, stiff-jointed, soft-bellied, weak bladdered, and so on down to his slippers, anemic, arthritic, diabetic, dyspeptic, sclerotic, in dire need of a laxative, as he will admit to the first doctor or nurse who passes his pillow, and in perpetual pain (that's the last you'll hear about that), he's not cracked quite yet [. . .]. (*GAN* 13)

He is a martyr-subject and hero in a larger process of societal breakdown wherein he contemplates himself as an "archaic" in his own century and a "humorous relic" in his own land and "a doornail while still drawing breath" (*GAN* 17).

The narrative frames into focus a world in which the basic organic structures appear to verge on a great collapse. The fundamental categories of the organic seem to lose their firmness. Body and orality become two tropal devices by which the narrator-explores how society nourishes and orders itself. Since the tropes partake of both nature and culture, they constitute the crucial point where the objectified participants first construct categories such as wholesome/unwholesome, decorous/indecorous, and normal/abnormal, and then begin to fashion themselves as social beings.

The breakdown of categories-both organic and social-are tropologically encoded on the player's bodies where the lower stratum continually invades the upper. All physical aberrations that Smitty chronicles are apparently bodily transgressions that reflect social transgressions. The Mundy team had a motley group of pitchers, "every last one of them flabby in the middle, arthritic in the shoulder, bald on the top" (*GAN* 143). The first unit entitled, "Home Sweet Home" records the decline of the Ruppert Munds through a series of physical abnormalities. Gil Gamesh, out of revengefulness towards the umpire throws a ferocious fast pitch that hits Masterson, on the

Adam's apple and destroys his voice forever. Gil Gamesh is banished from baseball. The fourteen year old Damur weighing just ninety two pounds was once knocked "so high and so far that the center-fielder, Roland Agni, came charging in to make a sensational diving two-handed catch of the boy" (*GAN* 116). The umpire who initially declares him out, later reverses the decision as he realizes that it is the ball that has to be caught but not the player. Again, Big John's legacy is described as notorious. His father Spit Baal delivered the ball so "juicy that by the end of an inning the catcher had to shake himself off like a dog come in from romping in the rain" (*GAN* 120). The "stringy stuff" that the pitcher used was usually saliva, phlegm, mucus or ear-wax (121). Spit's career comes to an abrupt close by an outrageous violation of the law of baseball decency. When he finds his pitches being hit hard and the crowd booing he resorts to the mischief of urinating on the ball. The next pitch of the "pissball" makes "hairpin turns and somersaults" and "it shifted gears four times, halving then doubling its velocity each fifteen feet it traveled" (*GAN* 123).

Perceptibly enough, in addition to the body, a critical area of conflict is the mouth. Bowers believes that it has an "inherently ambivalent place and function in the body"(583). As a part from the head, the mouth is an essential organ of the intellect. An oblique topological correspondence seems to have been built between the corporeal constitution of player-participants and the communal constitution. Mouth becomes an unstable and contested zone

where the upper and lower regions of the body are in conflict. The bodily abnormalities seem to produce a ripple effect in the social body. The mouth, as an orifice, exposes the body to the outside. It also represents one of the several points of entry to social units. Hothead or Hot Ptah is the most despised of the Mundy lot. With just one "leg made out of wood" he moves about with a crabby disposition (*GAN* 127). A perfect match to him is Bud Parusha with only one stump of an arm. Sometimes when he catches the fly-ball it gets stuck in his jaws. Then two fielders would have to perform the task of extracting it resulting in "an inside-the mouth grand-slam home run" (*GAN* 135).

The significance of the mouth lies in its contradictory use as a means of either sociability or aggression. The stratum of the body (and the body politic) that controls the mouth determines whether it serves as an instrument of civility or violence. Significantly, incidents of oral aggression disrupt and undermine the behavioural discipline of the League.

Incessant haggling by the players forms a prominent tropal action in the narrative. The oral excesses get manifested in various ways like spitting, swearing and crudeness of speech. The player-participants in the narrative indulge in swaggering and ostentatious comportments that are often hyperbolic. The nineteen year old Greenback pitcher Gil Gamesh rubs the ball in his "enormous paws" and announces loudly to the batter: " 'You

couldn't lick a stamp. You couldn't beat a drum. Get your belly button in there, bud, you are what I call duck soup' " (*GAN* 68). He is up in arms most of the time against the umpire, Mike, and his "booming voice had earned him the monicker ' the Mouth' " (*GAN* 71). In almost all the matches wordy duels assume the pattern of another game between Mike and Gil Gamesh:

'So's to make sure', said Gil, his voice rising to a piercing pitch,
 'so's to make sure the old geezer standin' behind you hadn't fell
 asleep at the switch! JUST TO KEEP THE OLD SON OF A
 BITCH HONEST!'

'one and two', Mike roared. 'play!'

'JUST SO AS TO MAKE CLEAR ALL THE REST WAS
 EARNED!'

'Play!'

'BECAUSE I DON'T WANT NOTHIN' FOR NOTHIN' FROM
 YOUSE! I DON'T NEED IT! I'M GIL GAMESH! I' M AN
 IMMORTAL, WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT!'

'PLAY BAWWWWWWWWWW!' [. . .]

no, he was a human being, made of piss and vinegar. . . petty,
 grudging, vengeful, gloating, selfish, narrow, and mean. (*GAN* 80)

The oral duel reaches its climax when Mike turns his back on the final pitch of the most magnificently pitched game ever recorded. Infuriated, Gil

throws a rising fastball that hits Mike "the Mouth" in the mouth and reduces him, instantly, to a mute. Gil Gamesh is thereby banished forever from organized baseball.

In the unit entitled, "Every Inch a Man", the narrative begins with Frank Mazuma, the Kakoola team owner signing the midget, Bob Yamm as a pinch hitter who "presented the pitcher with a strike zone not much larger than a matchbox"(GAN 210). The irony and humour is stretched to such an extent that the issues raised involve human rights and equality. Yamm raises the serious question at the press conference as to how "the powers that be have threatened to pass a law at the next annual winter meeting" banning anyone under "forty eight inches" from playing in the League (GAN 211). The questions further raised at the radio interview with Mrs. Bob Yamm regard midgets' housing, food, entertainment, morality and family life. The drama of midgets reaches a climactic pitch when another midget, O.K. Ockatur is introduced as a pitcher into the team resulting in a war between men with professional jealousy: "The sight of Yamm wearing a smaller number than his own made him wild with anger [. . .] why, if Yamm was number $\frac{1}{4}$ then he should be $\frac{1}{8}$, if not $\frac{1}{16}$!" (GAN 219). The newspaper reports come out with torrents of wordy stories and ask with suspicion: "Yes, a country at war hungers for distractions of a strange sort, but I ask you, my fellow Americans : *how much of this strangeness are we built for?* " (GAN 229).

Donald G. Watson perceives in all this an America, with its image as a "Land of Opportunity", bringing out the best in "the fourteen-year-old ninety-two pound second baseman, the one-legged catcher, the fifty-two-year-old third baseman, the one-armed outfielder" and the forty-inch tall Bob Yamm (114). Not only does Yamm become a success, the entire nation and all American midgets take him to their hearts. But his opponent Ockatur, angry over the fate of being confined to a dwarfish body, blinds his rival with a high inside fastball. Watson further states that "Yamm represents the benign national myth" and Ockatur "the suppressed reality which will always resist idealised mythology" (Watson 115).

An overall analysis of these semes and tropes reveal that passion dominates over reason. The accumulation of such instances of aggressive, unregulated orality constitutes an index of the deterioration of civil society itself. The League is represented as a society composed not of reasoning players taking part in mutually beneficial intercourse, but of players with ungoverned appetites engaged in hostile forms of interaction.

The intellectual and civilizing organs of the body politic are being progressively run over and rendered inoperative by the lower elements. Social intercourse becomes less polite and downright savage. The body politic unwittingly but systematically devours itself. The break-down of the elemental categories of nature finds its parallel in collapsing social categories.

The taxonomic collapse causes even a complete effacement of fundamental differences. "A society", states Bowers, "that is unable to sustain difference is one that will collapse in upon, prey upon, and ultimately feed upon itself" (586). The picture that Smitty delineates at both micro and macro levels-at both the level of the body natural and the body politic- is that of a devouring, self-consuming organism that literally eats itself alive.

The Mundys who were once honoured at every Patriot League city are now ushered on board a vehicle borrowed from the sanitation department. The welcome music played for them at every stadium on their entry was "Home on the Range", by Gene Autry, the favourite of President Roosevelt. The tragicomicality about the Ruppert Mundys is that its present is recorded in stark contradiction to its rich past. The once noble ball-club, with superstars like Luke Gofannon, Base Ball and Smoky Woden, is now "degenerated into the sad sacks of organized baseball" (Pinsker, *Comedy* 93). Patriotism gets uneasily combined with big profits when the owners lease the Mundy Park for fast cash:

'They have been chosen because glorious Mundy is dead and his heirs are scoundrels! Mammon, Mister Fairsmith, that is who is behind the move! The love of money! The worship of money! And what is more disgusting, they cloak their greed in the stars and stripes! They make a financial killing and call it a patriotic act!

And where is God in all this, Mister Fairsmith? Where is He when we need Him !'. (106-107)

The players find themselves paraded through streets in garbage trucks. They become a ragged lot with a one-legged catcher, one-armed Pitcher and a group of such other players who Smitty painfully describes as "the has-beens, might-have beens, should-have-beens, would-have-beens, never-weres and never-will-bes" (*GAN* 143). The stable categories seem to dissolve within the text. The collapse of basic categories and the inability to maintain distinctions are fraught with social implications. If distinctions dissolve on the plane of nature, they will break down on the plane of society, especially if one subscribes to an organic model of social order. To the Mundy manager, Ulysses S. Fairsmith, a ball park is "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 commandment to order and obedience" and they are "the twin rocks upon which all sport is founded" (*GAN* 101).

The totality of disorderly physical characteristics seemingly represent a body politic that has itself lost all shape, form and order. The Patriot League itself is metaphorised as a huge body going through a series of disruptive and intestinal conflicts. It becomes an "open space of choice and liberty" where unreason gets pitched against reason. Smitty and the participant-narrators, Fairsmith and General Oakhart establish their ideals on the basis of the trope

of "a fundamental choice as a condition of the exercise of reason" (Miller 112). The two participant-narrators try to locate unreason in a socio-historical context. Unreason gets situated in a milieu where the player's relation with his feelings, with time, with others are altered. Abnormality becomes possible because of everything which, in man's life and development, is a break with the immediate. Unreason seems to reside not in the player himself but in his milieu. Miller further maintains that, "The human milieu was the condition of possibility of all madness" (119). The text seems to create fragmented spaces and structures of moral discontinuity. The reader is confronted by "a variety of separate and homogeneous domains" (122). Fairsmith and Oakhart seem to represent the subject's gaze directed toward unreason as an object to be known.

At the centre of Smitty's complaint about the collapse and self-consumption of the body politic lies a profound disquiet with the development of a possessive individualism. The narrative addresses itself to the fundamental changes that involve both how the subject is defined and how a subject's relation to society is construed. These could be analysed by suturing the various tropes that focus upon the gross materialistic trends of capitalism and barbarism in the text. The units, "In the Wilderness" and "The Temptation of Roland Agni" (in two segments), seem to establish a homology of tropes that signify the disintegration of the League and its enshrined values

by the base acquisitive urges of team owners. The first unit opens with Gene Autry classic song:

Oh, give me a home where the buffalo roam,
Where the deer and the antelope play,
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word,
And the skies are not cloudy all day. (*GAN* 150-151).

As a Roosevelt favourite, the song is played to welcome the Mundys to each of the six Patriot League cities. The song is selected by Gen. Oakhart's secretary to "strengthen the idea that the fate of the Mundys and of the republic were inextricably bound together" (*GAN* 150). When the city garbage truck carrying the Mundys goes around, Hothead is outraged: "Why, it looks to me like they are carting us off to the city dump! It looks to me as if they are about to flush us down the bowl! [. . .]. It looks to me like a violation of the worst sort there is of our inalienable human rights such as are guaranteed in Declaration of Independence to all men *including Ruppert Mundys!*" (*GAN* 151).

The Mundys' many and varied experiences in the unit seem to have a semic pattern that cumulatively builds up the image of a body politic which is fragmented, and atomized. Gen-Oakhart finds himself at an interstice between residual and emergent notions of selfhood and society. He struggles to understand and re-member a body politic that seems splintered

into countless antagonistic fragments: "[. . .] they were shortly to begin to partake of the suffering that was the daily bread not just of the wretched of the earth, but of the wretched of the wretched" (*GAN* 155).

The Mundys play out their season during America's war against the menace of Hitler's fascism. They are "homeless and unloved, denied even the possibility of returning home," and they represent "the reverse side of the heroic mythologising of the national character" (Watson 113). The *sjuzet* of this unit demythologises the sanctity of an established ideology and also exposes the poverty of American culture perpetrated by expedient journalists and capitalists who care little for baseball's integrity. Against this backdrop of an emotional vacuum the reader can place the actions of the "Moms" who adopt the Mundys after their loss to the Kakoola Reapers. The Mundy Moms adopt the players and turn them into little dependent kids—bathing them, spoon-feeding them, and putting them in to bed. They are the "three elderly ladies, wrinkled little walnuts in identical hats, shoes, and spectacles" (*GAN* 165). The Mundys are ushered as guests to receive their warm hospitality. The "self appointed 'Moms' " accost them expressing concern for their well-being: "You poor boys! How you must miss your sisters and your wives! Who sews your buttons? Who darns your socks? Who turns your collars and sees after your heels and your soles?" (*GAN* 166). The players set out across Kakoola and reach the " 'Cradle of Civilization' " where they are "undressed and bathed, toweled down, powdered, diapered and encased" and kissed good

night (*GAN*_168, 171). They trade in hospitality services. The cheapest one they have is a " 'Rock-a Bye-Baby' for ninety-eight cents" (*GAN* 172). The "Moms" themselves are a part of the national culture that contributes to the patriotic spirit at a crucial juncture in history. The "Mom" asks Nickname: "Where's my loyalty to the wonderful people who come here to spit pea soup in my face? And what about the boys going off to war-how can I be so unpatriotic?" They claim themselves to serve by "cleaning the mess out of the diapers" of anyone who has "fifteen bucks" and is looking for "a good time" (*GAN* 174). Maintenance of physical well-being seems to be the object of this kind of maternal care that, gets advertised and sold in a war-torn capitalist economy. The text exploits the comic possibilities inherent in the human body. Physical discomfort and scatology are humorously centred in the narrative. The bodily functions and animal qualities in humans get figuratively transmuted into the comic order of the grotesque and macabre. The "Mum" soothes Nickname with the sensuous smear of her body: "She placed her buttocks against the bars of the crib. 'Feel how nice and firm that is. And look at my face-not a wrinkle anywhere. Not a gray hair on my head. And that isn't from the beauty parlor either. That's natural. I just do not age [. . .] 'The Eternal mom' " (*GAN* 173-174). On the tropological level, the language in such narrative segments are redundant with what Bernard F. Rodgers would describe as "homely images, animal metaphors, vernacular speech and descriptive exaggeration" (17).

Frank Mazuma, the motivated owner of the Reapers declares May 5, 1943, as 'Ladies Day' to enliven the "skimp crowd" (158). The play is interrupted by a "dolloed up lady" who leaps to the ground and starts her pranks with the ball players. The people in the crowd "converge upon the blond bomshell, piercing wolf whistles mixed with obscene threats" (*GAN* 158). Bathos comes when the cops charge after her yelling, "She ain't no lady!" Side by side with the realistic depiction of common place scenes the sjuzet gets coloured by details from the world of fantasy. The fantastic world of hilarity remains as an overall pattern of individual units and segments. The text progresses through the binary worlds of reality and fantasy. Mundane circumstances and heroic ideals are sutured together to form structures of incongruity. Smitty portrays the grotesqueries and myths of a society that has been carried away by a new set of outrageous ideals. Frank Mazuma seems to have the subjectivity of a capricious employer who delights in the gimmicks and hypes of exhibitionism. He plans to introduce commercially oriented changes in organised baseball: " [. . .] selling off all the white boys and bringing niggers in to replace them!" (*GAN* 160). His ambition is to become the "Abe Lincoln of big league ball (*GAN* 161). One of such ambitious projects he undertakes is a series with the inmates of the mental asylum in the countryside of Ohio:

[. . .] as the General simply would not hear of abandoning a practice that brought public attention to the humane and

compassionate side of a league that many still associated with violence and scandal, the tradition was maintained year after year, much to the delight of the insane, and the disgust of the ballplayers themselves. (*GAN* 187)

The game becomes a site of eccentric actions which get exhibited for fun and entertainment. The lunatic catcher squats behind the plate and offers signals to the pitcher to pitch the ball the way he fancies. When on the "sixteenth signal" the pitcher neglects him he calls the "four players up on the mound" and "in his mortification" continues "to flash from between his legs". The pitcher calls Doctor Traum to come to his rescue as he feels that he has been misunderstood and the signal flashed is for him "to meet him later in the shower" for a homosexual escapade (*GAN* 194). This act seems to be a reflection of polymorphic sexuality or perversity that gets manifested for entertainment and delight of the crowds. Baseball with the Asylum players seems to reveal the oblique tactics by which a capitalist society impinges upon "forms of pleasures, of relationships, co-existences, attachments, loves and intensities" (Foucault, *Politics* 116).

All actions in the Asylum form a catalyser to indirectly focalize the relations of power that make even perverse comicality productive and profit-oriented. With little indulgence in psychologizing, much of the narrative

employs the tropes of masculine pastimes, physical discomfort and popular myths. Rodgers's critical statement relevantly amplifies this idea:

Midgets, dwarfs, dimwits, cripples, one-armed and one-legged characters swarm through the pages of *The Great American Novel*, and typically tasteless – and hilarious – fun is made of their physical maladies. At the same time, prostitution, vaginal odors, sexual perversity, urination, flatulence, and various forms of physical pain are freely and comically treated in ways designed to offend the squeamish. (16)

Incongruity arises not by a celebration of physical prowess but by a hyperbolic treatment of "superhuman ineptitude" (16). Episodes and anecdotes are fostered in the picaresque narratives where the collective indulgence of the Ruppert Mundys becomes the principle of integration. The thumbnail portraits of players with sharp comic details and direct quotations, are quite becoming of Smitty's narrative with the tempo of a mock oral tale:

But now in the top of the second, though he continued to gobble up everything hit to the left of the diamond, as soon as he got his hands on the ball he proceeded to stuff it into his back pocket [. . .] the rest of the Lunatic infield would begin screaming at him to take the ball out of his pocket and make the throw to the first. 'What?' he responded, with an innocent smile. 'The ball!' they cried. 'Yes,

what about it?' 'Throw it!' 'But I don't have it?' 'You do!' They would scream converging upon him from all points of the infield, 'You do too!' . (*GAN* 191)

As the Lunatic shortstop pockets the ball the Mundys capitalize on his kleptomania by scoring more runs. Dr. Traum intervenes by talking to him "steadily for fifteen minutes, their faces only inches apart" and then the ball is recovered and thrown back (*GAN* 192). Such anticlimactic anecdotes colour the deformed coherence of the narrative. They, to a considerable extent, set the ground rules for Smitty's exercise of story telling by which he gets entangled with the powers of his social world.

America begins to look disturbingly similar to some of the barbarous oppressive nations. The narrative also problematizes the distinction between the civilized and the barbarous. The firmness of this distinction too does not seem to hold. This too collapses and the society appears to be headed toward civil regression, tyranny and barbarism. Such kind of a degenerate action could be discerned in Mister Fairsmith's expedition to the state of barbarous practices in Africa. He succeeds in teaching the niceties of the national pastime but is disappointed over the savages who commit blasphemy upon all the sacredly held customs of the game: "In Africa, I would have martyred myself rather than permit those savages to sully the national game. Why, why is this happening!" (*GAN* 335).

The reality that Mister Fairsmith encounters in Africa twenty years earlier has, in his view, a close bearing with what happens to the Mundys in 1943. It was the horrific culmination of his world trip undertaken, with the object of proselytizing for the national pastime in different countries. He was accompanied by Billy, his nephew, a young theology scholar. With the equipment donated by the school kids of Ruppert, Fairsmith trains the village tribals of Africa in "the fundamentals of hitting, bunting, catching, pitching, fielding, baserunning, sliding, and umpiring" (*GAN* 320). Trouble erupts over the denial of the right to "slide into first after having been awarded a base on balls", a movement that is against the game's conventional rules (*GAN* 325). The tribal leader refuses to be enslaved by the white man's "arbitrary structures designed to rob them of their inalienable cultural rights" (*GAN* 324). When Fairsmith is adamant about the rules both of them are condemned as enemies and "bound by their wrists and ankles to stakes driven into the coaching boxes, Mister Fairsmith at third, young Billy Fairsmith at first" (*GAN* 326). Then a series of odd baseball rituals are staged before them in successive phases. With the ritualistic chant " 'Omoo! Omoo! Omoo!' " the balls are boiled and thrown for the tribal children to eat (*GAN* 328). After they devour the balls, the winner is hailed "Typee! Typee! Typee! ". Then the "hitting-contest" begins with the head of a killed "enemy, or traitor" that "appeared to them to be as easy as pie" (*GAN* 329). Next in the series is the ceremony of deflowering the virgins with baseball bats. Every initiate takes

her turn in the batter's box, and the "bat was used but once and then discarded". Then to follow is the hearty feast where the villagers devour all the boiled thirty-six gloves and the "chest-protectors were boiled for dessert" (*GAN* 331). Late in the night the "crones of the village, bone-thin women" ape and re-enact the ceremony of the virgins. When all is over Mister Fairsmith gives out a faint cry, " 'The horror! The horror!' " (*GAN* 332). In the morning, the boy whom Fairsmith had Christened Wee Willie declares, " 'Mistah Baseball-he dead' " (*GAN* 333). Later the two Americans are discovered down a stream at Stanleyville, in a canoe bearing the tribe's symbol of death. They are rescued and taken to a hospital by the friendly natives.

In this kind of world, the subject is the proprietor of his own subjectivity or capacity, owing nothing to society or social convention. A subject is thus an autonomous independent self, free from others and free to enter into relations of his or her choice. The development of possessive individualism leads to social dismemberment. Such a society "encourages rapacious behaviour," as each individual subject "seeks to maximize his or her own advantage over others" even at the expense of general good (Bowers 588). A society comprised of possessive subjects is governed by competitive and invasive relations which put everyone on his own. Each subject becomes a pillager of one's fellow subjects and a tyrant too. Everyone continually competes for power against others. This is what is perceptible in the

relationship between Mister Fairsmith and Walter Johnson the tribal leader, who is named after an old time American baseball player:

'Pride he calls it? The men with spears? The women screaming like banshees? And from the looks of it, preparations underway for an outright act of cannibalism? That isn't pride in my look, and you may tell him as much!'

'But, Uncle, he says that though they will follow to the letter the rules of the white man's game, they refuse to be enslaved by arbitrary strictures designed to rob them of their inalienable cultural rights'. (*GAN* 324)

All social intercourse become a form of combat that debilitates the entire community and deprives it of the quality of human understanding. One to one communion is no more a facilitating factor that holds the social edifice in tact. Fairsmith and Johnson's actions are "a tiny manifestation of a larger pattern of cruel, predatory economic behaviour" that rips the social body apart (Bowers 589). The wretchedness of the whole scenario could possibly be perceived as a synecdochic trope of America's stagnant national prosperity and declining state of imperialistic hegemony.

Every relationship seems to get turned into a commercial relationship devoid of social content and subject to endless negotiation and dispute. The narrative unit, "The temptation of Roland Agni" stands out to exemplify this

proposition. The name echoes, as Sanford Pinsker would say, those of "Childe" and "Agonistes". Agni's body tapers "like the V for victory from his broad shoulders" and his physical prowess attracts Angela Trust, "the owner of the Tri-city team and an ex-nymphomaniac" (*Comedy* 97). She has had affairs with five superstars of baseball: Luke Gofannon, Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth, Jolly Cholly and Gil Gamesh. She considers her affairs with these men as the accomplishments she had made in her career as the wife of Spenser a "patron and patriarch" of sports and arts in America (*GAN* 281). In the course of her romantic career that is etched out alongside the history of Mundy team, she had been using her physical charms to keep the superstars enamoured of her: "Her face, her breasts, her lips, her thighs, for all that she had given them everything money could buy[. . .]" (*GAN* 275). Now when Roland Agni approaches her she is too old to woo him. But he wants her to take him into her team so he makes a bargain with his body: "My forearms and my wrists are like steel, Mrs. Trust. Want to feel them and see for yourself?" (*GAN* 270). She advises him to play for the Mundys if he loved his country. She lets out the secret about the "Communists in Russia" who are out to destroy the major leagues: " 'Baseball! And that is how they propose to destroy America [. . .] that is their evil and ingenious plan to destroy our national game!' " (*GAN* 287).

Being turned down by Angela Trust, he approaches the Jewish owners of the Greenback team. Abraham Ellis phones up the Mundy front-office and

enquires about the expected price of the centre fielder. The Mundy receptionist quotes " 'A cool qwata of a million' " dollars (*GAN* 310). Agni rebels against this bargain. He is hard put to realize the commercial value of players and the denial of one's personal right of choice and movement: " 'I' m the greatest rookie of all time! [. . .] and a Jew and a nigger bargainin' for my hide!' " (*GAN* 309). Ellis consoles him that some day a better situation would come when Agni's body and his own brains could be harnessed together to make unprecedented strides and " 'there'd be nothing like it in the history of the game' " (*GAN* 311). The right over one life too is appropriated by the media when the media, for sensation, reports about his suicide: "AGNI LEAPS FROM SCOREBOARD" (*GAN* 310).

Abraham Ellis the owner of the green backs and his son Isaac advance ideas of their own to buy Agni for their team and their ideas about ball-play are quite innovative. Isaac's theories on the method of playing the game are unconventional. With the same out of the way methods, he decides to help in the purchase of Agni. He claims to have secret patent right over a newly processed "Breakfast of Champions" or "Jewish Wheaties" which he himself had scientifically prepared in the secret laboratory under the Greenback scoreboard. Isaac claims that it could work wonders on the Mundys or any other team. He convinces Agni to spike his teammates breakfast cereal with them every morning. Then he plans to bet on the Mundys to win and thus raise the twenty, five lakh dollars needed to buy Agni. The strategy succeeds.

Rejuvenated, the Mundys go on a steady winning spree. Disaster strikes, however, on the last day of the season, when the Mundys play against the Tri-city Tycoons. The once jeered team is welcomed greatly into the stadium. Winning becomes more of an intoxicating religion for the teammates: "Winning is the tops. Winning is the name of the game. Winning is what it's all about. Winning is the be-all and the end-all [. . .]" (*GAN* 314).

Disaster strikes fatally in front of General Oakhart, Fairsmith, Mountain Landis and Eleanor Roosevelt. As Agni loses his nerve he miserably fails on the ground. With great speculation Isaac had greedily betted every thing he had been able to earn so far. With all the winning chances on his side he had planned to buy Agni and his team's franchise too. But with every cent gone he has to go back to splitting atoms in his laboratory. Agni, out of consternation and disappointment finally abuses Isaac: " 'You're a dirty greedy money- mad mocky! You're a Shylock! You're a sheeny! You killed Christ! I'd rather be a nigger than be one of you!' " (*GAN* 344).

In the unit of Agni's temptation, a persistent focalization takes place through confinement, stasis, and misdirection seems to set in. It is nefarious self-interest that governs the whole site of relationships and interactions. Every subject has some separate scheme of private interest to advance at the expense of general well-being. It is a site of permissive freedom to sell and to

act as possessive beings. When all are free no one is free. The problems encountered by Mister Fairsmith, Angela Trust, and Ellis appear to reflect a civil degradation that afflicts the body politic of a country.

Reconstructing the body politic becomes the fourth topic-comment structure under which the relevant tropes of the text are going to be analysed again. One can detect a homology between Smitty's attempts to reshape the body of his writing on the Patriot League and his effort to put order into the body politic of the baseball establishment. The War Department depopulates Cooperstown and attracts hordes of aberrant elements. The last unit, "The Return of Gil Gamesh; Or, Mission from Moscow," includes a series of "death rattles (assassinations, suicides, airplane crashes) and subsequent investigations by a witch-hunting Senate Committee into the notorious "Mundy Thirteen". Word Smith is held in contempt [. . .] and sentenced to a year in penitentiary" (Pinsker, *Comedy* 101).

Smitty narrates a Mundy establishment that is bloated into a huge misshapen mass creating physical, moral and socio-political disorder. The most potent trope of this disorder is the narrative text on the fictive reality itself which Smitty ambitiously wants to call *The Great American Novel*. The "Epilogue" of the text, as Pinsker would affirm, is "a study in illusion-reality, part of his ongoing effort to separate genuine vision from mere paranoia, truth from the official lie our society tells" (*Comedy* 101). The epilogue comprises

a series of rejection slips that meta-narratively reveal the matter that the text, as a body, could not integrate itself into an organic and acceptable structure and be consummated through its own publication.

The last unit becomes a site for complete confusion of socio-political categories and violation of moral boundaries. Gil Gamesh, after his re-entry as the Mundy Manager, tries out the methods of the communist regimentation in Russia from where he has a doctoral degree in indoctrination and espionage. Ironically enough, the "International Lenin School for Subversion, Hatred, Infiltration, and Terror in Moscow" is known by the popular acronym "SHIT. " He is back home with a contradictory ideology and conviction: "All my life I found my strength in rancorous resentment, but only after my banishment from baseball did I plunge headlong into a barbarous world of violence and vengeance, and dedicate myself wholly to destroying what had destroyed me" (*GAN* 354). America is described to be a sagging body "on its last legs" where the parodied communist dictum, " 'From each according to his stupidity, to each according to his greed' " rules the roost (*GAN* 355,359). Gamesh's construct of American competition and baseball greatly resembles his fanatical version of communism. His rhetoric gets attuned by a bizarre combination of "American competition" and "Communist propaganda" (Jones and Nance 150). His inspiring speech to the Mundys advocates an uncompromising ideology grounded in human hatred and it runs like a rhetoric of indoctrination: "You are scum because you do not hate your

oppressors you are slaves and fools and jellyfish because you do not loathe your enemies" (*GAN* 371). Roland Agni dons the Mundy uniform once again bearing the letter 'R' which instead of " 'Ridiculous' and 'Refugee' " now stands for " 'Ruthless and Revenge' " (*GAN* 381).

The memorandum prepared by Gil Gamesh, the "Chief Investigator, Patriot League Internal Security Affairs Division" indicts almost all the star players as either communist agents or fellow travellers: O.K. Ockatur, Hothead Ptah, Frenchy Astarte, Big John Baal, Chico Mecoatl, Deacon Demeter, Jolly Cholly Tuminikar, Nickname Damur and the others.

What transpires at the conversation between Gamesh, and Agni is that the ballgame is reduced to " 'Latin', threatenin', and cursin' it's wantin' to kill the other guy, wantin' him dead [. . .] ' " (*GAN* 383). But to Agni, " 'The Revolution has begun! Henceforth, the Mundys are the master race!' " (*GAN* 385). The long conversation between these two players turns out to be an exercise in mutual incrimination. During a game in Kakoola, Agni discovers Gamesh's plot to destroy the League and threatens to expose him. In return, Gamesh too raises a threat of blackmail involving the Jewish wheaties:

'You wouldn't want the world to know about those W-h-e-a-t-i-e-s, would you? [. . .] 'America?' said Gamesh, smiling. 'Roland, what's America to you? Or me, or those tens of thousands up in the stands? [. . .] America is the opiate of the people, Goldilocks – I

wouldn't worry my pretty little reflexes about it, if I was a star like you'. (*GAN* 392)

When charges are hurled upon each other two rifle shots ring out from the scoreboard. Agni falls dead and Gamesh is badly wounded. Mouth Masterson, the vengeful umpire is the assassin. But he immediately becomes the target of a volley of bullets from the Kakoola mounted police. Hilarity is taken to the extreme point when only Mike's ear is grazed by the two hundred and fifty six bullets. He actually falls dead of the heart attack caused by "the excitement of the assassination" attempt (*GAN* 393). Anticlimax and incongruity reign supreme at this juncture where the whole of Patriot league and its history are about to be obliterated from the social psyche. Roth himself claims no satiric value for the narrative as its intrinsic value is not social or cultural reform, but "to establish a kind of 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" (*RMAO* 91).

The narrative deceptively stands at a middle point between the credible and the incredible. Bernard F. Rodgers tries to explain this by perceiving a sub text of historicity within itself:

The use of specific dates and recognizable historic personages lulls us into accepting the reality of Oakhart and the Patriot League

[. . .]. The aura of historical accuracy is maintained by mentioning Coolidge, Harding, Teapot Dome, and Commissioner Landis as factors in Oakhart's decision to accept the job as a stepping-stone to the presidency of the United States. (21)

Gamesh returns to Moscow and is seen on May Day posing next to Stalin in 1949 or Khrushchev in 1953. He is executed for being a double agent in March, 1954. General Oakhart takes up the cleansing operation to deliver the League from the clutches of Communist infiltrators and the Russian espionage racket:

As General Oakhart had promised, within the week thirty-six more Communists and Communist sympathizers were suspended from the Patriot league and their names released to the press: nine Reapers, eight Greenbacks, seven Keepers, six Butchers, four Blues, and two Rustlers [. . .]. Frank Mazuma and Abraham Ellis, as well as the Soviet 'courier', Ellis's wife Sarah. (*GAN* 398)

The general who runs for president on the Patriot Party mysteriously disappears during a flight on board a private aircraft in 1956. It is suspected to be a case of "Communist sabotage" (*GAN* 406). After the expulsion of the regular players chaos reigns in the League. High school boys are enlisted and as a result by the end, "there wasn't a team in the league, not even the

untainted Tycoons, who could draw more than three hundred people into the park to watch them play baseball" (*GAN* 399).

But the integration of such an anti-social thematic into the "conventional plot of juvenile sports fiction" is not complete without a suitable consummation of the narrative venture undertaken (Rodgers 21). Smitty's text has to be published if his truths are to prevail and be recognized as a part of non-canonical history. Walter Blair and Hamlin Hill looks upon the discourse as Smitty's mission "to give the world a history that evil forces have suppressed-that of a forgotten major baseball organization, the Patriotic League [. . .]" (222). To recapture the suppressed truth, Smitty deviates from temporal sequence and sutures the disparate semes of the fabula that suit his fictional chronicle. The Judge Landis Commission that is entrusted with the task of cleansing the League and restoring its past glory only succeeds in sabotaging the whole establishment. The reformation of the body politic entails more than getting rid of a few bad apples and more than reinforcing relations of dominance, obedience and paternalist ways of life. So Smitty seems to be greatly concerned about alleviating Cooperstown of its dropsical condition. He, through his discursivity, attempts to find new structures that would be capable of dealing, on a macro scale, with the swelling hordes of masterless, rootless men. The need for such structures is paramount. As such Smitty finds it very hard "to participate in this lunatic comedy in which American baseball players who could not locate Russia on a map of the world

[. . .]denounce themselves and their team-mates as Communist spies out of fear and intimidation [. . .] out of incorrigible human perversity and curdled genes" (*GAN* 402). His defiance before the House Un-American Activities Committee earns himself a year's imprisonment at Lewisburg. There is hardly anyone to realize as to how he dramatizes contemporary reality. The narrative also brings into focus the relationship between experiential reality and art. Instead of reading as to how the phenomenon of his narrative functions, the readers tend to look upon him as a "paranoid fantasist" (Rodgers 19). Smitty is not a paranoiac but a narrator subject who attempts to re-member the body politic and thereby invent new institutional structures through his discourse. The Patriot league was once a web of obligations uniting the higher and the lower strata. But the live-in, duty-bound committed team-work has given way to a mobile, wage-earning, and increasingly urban workforce. The onset of commercialism and the greed for fast wealth and success become the major cause for shift in the pattern of operations. If the lower orders are responsible for the breakdown of the social order and traditional ways of life, the upper stratum is complicitous. Donald G. Watson observes that the text has a "literary past" that transmutes its discursive presence "as a stabilising element in the world of benign but bland ideology and rampant commercialisation and trivialisation of American mythology" (122).

Tropologically, if the body politic is being torn asunder by the self-directed conduct of its lower members, part of the reason is that there is no

head to direct them. Smitty obliquely emphasizes the head's disconnection from the body and the need for just reform but a radical reconstruction of the body politic. The implication of the head's complicity in the body's disorders cannot be underestimated. The indictment of the managerial class gets manifested through the disconnection between the club managers and the players. In the end, instead of co-operation and face to face creative engagement between the upper and the lower participants, the body politic is held together by coercion, enforced sequestration and surveillance. The reconstructed anatomy of the League makes a grotesque mockery of the body trope, and therein seems to lie the pathos and ideological significance of Smitty's narrative venture: " Truly sir, I have never seen anything in sixty years of astonishment to compare with these shameful shenanigans [. . .]. Frankly, I still don't believe them. But for sheer unabashed, unabatted, unabridged, unaccountable, unadorned, unallayed, unamusing, unanticipated, unassailable – ' " (*GAN* 402).

But Smitty's narrative venture does not reach its consummation. The "Epilogue" shows that the text will never be published and thereby be recognized by the society. It is a new conspiracy of "a new persecuting group" comprised of twenty seven publishers who fob him off on flimsy grounds (Blair and Hill 222). David Monaghan is of the view that Smitty is the only subject in the novel "capable of understanding the truth about American life. No one else realizes that baseball operates according to the

profit motive, that the Mundys were exiled for economic rather than patriotic reasons, and that the Red Scare is a fake". The critic further adds that the text broadly works out that the theme of "innocence corrupted by materialism" at both the extremes of "local and archetypal levels". The end of the "vividly colored but one-dimensional" sjuzet is open and inconsummate (74).

Smitty writes to Chairman Mao Tse - tung of China to translate and publish *The Great American Novel* in his country. He allusively identifies his plight with that of Alexander Solzhenitsyn in Russia who, like himself, "refuses to accept lies for truth and myth for reality" (*GAN* 410). Drawing "courage", "strength" and "wisdom" from his Nobel prize lecture, Smitty tries to survive in America: " 'In battle with the lie', said Alexander I. Solzhenitsyn, 'art has always been victorious, always wins out, visibly, incontrovertibly for all! The lie can stand against much in the world— but not against art' " (*GAN* 412).

The empty values of the Vietnam era become the focalised theme in *Our Gang*. The narrative is framed in the form of a grotesque dramatic discourse which becomes the site for a polyphony of specifically identified voices. The text is structured as a long drawn joke-work in which everyone plays "a preordained role" (Baumgarten and Gottfried 103). The President of the United States, Tricky E. Dixon orally indulges in a long commentary on the socio-politico context of his nation. His seemingly rational discourse

begins as "willful self deception" and gets concluded as "deliberate lying" (104). The proposition of deceptive language is the thematic upon which the narrative discourse is built. The two epigraphs bring out the problematic of the deceptiveness of language. The first is a statement on "Lying" and "false Representation" taken from "A Voyage to the Houhnyhms," the fourth book of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (OG 6). The second regards politics and the degeneration of language and it is a quote from George Orwell's essay, "Politics and the English Language". The text is perceptibly bracketed between these two epigraphs and a quote from the "Book of Revelation" that the devil "SHOULD DECEIVE THE NATION NO MORE [. . .]" (OG 142).

The text could well be considered as a satirical polemic on what Murray Baumgarten and Barbara Gottfried would consider as "deception and political lying" and "the disruption of American English by political corruption" (104). It is structured more like a playscript or movie scenario, redundant with dialogues and two exclusive units cast as dramatic monologues. Roth validates the narrative style by trying to place it as a joke-work in the tradition of American political satire. The text could so be read as an offshoot of the tradition well established in America by an array of comic writers like James Russell Lowell, David Ross Locke, and H.L. Mencken. The hyperbolic humour seems to be a fair extension of the broad comedy of Olsen&Johnson, Laurel & Hardy, and Abbot & Costello. Commenting on the ferocious comicality of the text, Jay L. Halio maintains that the fictional

strategy is to "dislocate" the readers and "get them to view familiar subjects in a different way" (104). The narrative rises to the level of an exercise in writerliness. This is mainly because warfare is the theme focalized in the narrative. Warfare, as a theme, could impose constraints upon structure for action, from a leader's point of view and indirection from that of a narrator's. What becomes problematic to the subject in the narrative, according to the Jerome Klinkowitz, is the act of structuring and articulating "the void itself that Vietnam had become" for the nation of America (135). The writers, by late 1966, find Vietnam experience as "one of uncertainty in the face of disrupted forms and yet unanswered questions: why was this war neither fightable nor supportable in conventional terms?" (Klinkowitz 137). On looking around, the writers could find in "October 1966 that 150,000 American military personnel were stationed in Vietnam, where President Johnson paid a secret visit to urge them on". The theme of war gets transformed into a chimera like phenomenon. The writers experience an indirection and so they start employing different literary styles and devices to "structure the void." Forms employed turn structurally disruptive with little certainty of order, coherence and authority. The tradition of linear time, physical space and God like authorial presence is completely obliterated. Communicative potential of language itself is questioned. A vacuous space arises between the world and the words used to comprehend it. Klinkowitz sums up the enigmatic phenomenon with a pertinent question: "Could it have

no centre of authority at all, meaning that everything would become not truth but just endless discussions of what truth might be – and never pretending for a minute to find it?" (Klinkowitz, *Structuring* 137). It is at such a point that the thematic of Vietnam coincides with the experiential reality in America. The text and context are constrained to take into consideration three elements. First, the events taking place abroad; second the odd occurrence at home; and the third element is the principles of fictional composition. The text and context of *Our Gang* might generate more meaning if it is read with an understanding of these topical socio-cultural realities. The text gets to be established as a re-defined space where the relations between the literary, the bodily, and the political lack order and comprehensibility. The readerly authority over the matter that concerns a nation's political history appears to be subverted. This could be one reason why the text is bracketed within the three epigraphs on the theme of the abuse of words. The relation between fiction and history comes to form one of the main topics of concern on recognising that fiction is no more less real or serious than history. But it becomes all the more complex when one attempts to define the precise relation of fiction to the world of reality. The genre of historical novel, though traditionally conceived of as imaginative literature, offers explication of the mode in which reality gets transformed into fiction. The events and figures it uses are recognisably historical: "While the genre's avowed fictionality and the notion of textuality implied by 'recognition' [. . .] might appear to place

this mode of writing in direct opposition to empirical history, its real life provenance would seem to link it directly with some version of historical discourse" (Raveendran 26). Surrealistic fantasies and topical fabula have been collated with inventive powers. *The Great American Novel* and *Our Gang* appear to embody a "fascination with conspiracy that was rampant in American culture during the early seventies" which is described as a demythologizing decade (Eiland 261). A strange voice of farcical unrealism seems to usurp all action in both the narratives. The over-ruling paradox is that these texts have to be, by historical inevitability, placed within the political context of specific reading groups. The reader is constrained to draw sense out of a reordered sequence of specific scenes or situations. Indignation and outrage over moral justification of the Vietnam War get sublimated into what Pinsker qualifies as "bromides of political rhetoric (*The Comedy* 73).

Both the texts are apparently pinned to an explosive political climate of the 1970's. In "Writing and the Powers That Be," Roth harps upon the sense of man's alienation and the rise of the impetus towards irrational rhetoric: "One even began to use the word 'America' as though it was the name, not of the place where one had been raised and to which one had a strong spiritual attachment, but of a foreign invader that had conquered the country and with whom one refused, to the best of one's strength and ability, to collaborate" (*RMAO* 12).

Tricky Dixon, the actor-subject becomes the focal point around which all catalysers of the grotesque are attached. Roth draws a parallel between Tricky Dixon and Richard Nixon. The latter who is "known as a crook" in the "kitchen" is not simply a person taken as a model of deceit from the world of empirical reality (*RMAO* 11). He becomes more of a referent of "what was imagined to be indestructible, impermeable, in the very nature of American things " (88). The discourse generates humour out of a strange "disjunction between the American myth of presidential integrity and the political reality" (Jones and Nance 134).

The subtitle, "Starring Tricky and His Friends," is suggestive of the ambience of show business and tele-posturing. Tricky is trapped in a series of comic postures into which he has to fit himself. His is the discomfort of having to put up with "credible performances before indifferent audiences" (Milbauer and Watson 110). He appears to occupy a space of fragmented reality and unstable values. Richard Nixon's 1971 speech on anti-abortion expresses his "PERSONAL BELIEF IN THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE" (*OG* 10). It becomes a text that triggers off a series interpretations and counter interpretations. What gets thrown into relief is the discord between the good, the felicitous, the perfect and the bizarre realities of American vulgarity. President Nixon's inconsistent and flexible standpoint regarding China and human rights could be predicated to this parodic situation. In 1971, he had made much about his trip to China in glorious words. Roth

points out the callous expediency of his politics through a pungently worded rhetorical question: "And if it's suddenly okay with the United States for eight hundred million people in China not to be able 'to determine their own future in free elections,' why isn't it okay for a mere thirteen million more in Vietnam?" (*RMAO* 52). Dixon tries hard to justify before Mr. CATCH-ME-IN-A-CONTRADICTION as to how scientific a project is the one that is envisaged to extend voting rights to the human fetuses who have no faculties of speech, sight, hearing or thought:

It would be a tragic irony indeed, and as telling a sign as I can imagine of national confusion and even hypocrisy, if we were willing to send our boys to fight and die in far-off lands so that defenseless peoples might have the right to choose the kinds of government they want in free elections, and then we were to turn around here at home and continue to deny that very same right to an entire segment of our population, just because they happen to live on the placenta or in the uterus, instead of New York City. (*OG* 22-23)

The ideational self-contradiction is evident. The My Lai massacre and other killings in Vietnam get justified on a false pretext of establishing "free elections" but the right to life of fetuses protected out of a grave concern for human rights. His election rhetoric is obsessed with a hyperbolic concern for

bringing justice and equality to those "without representation or voice," and they are the "infinitesimal creatures up there on the placenta" (*OG* 18). In Tricky's perception there are millions of embryos going through different stages of evolution and they accomplish physical growth "without waving signs for the camera and disrupting traffic and throwing paint and using foul language and dressing in outlandish clothes" (*OG* 18). The President champions the cause of the unborn just as Martin Luther King and "Robert F. Charisma" champion the cause of the disadvantaged masses of the country. The latter is a parodied subject who is juxtaposed with a personality from real life freedom struggle. The text is infested with such senses of contradistinction and grotesquery. The language too is well synthesized with cadences, clichés and repetitions that are essential for building up the thematic tropes of deception. Tricky builds for himself a defensive discourse characterised by "outrageous twists in logic" and "pietistic language." In such a linguistically framed matrix could the reader place the interaction between Tricky and the "Troubled Citizen". The unnamed person is perturbed about Lieutenant Calley's role in My Lai massacre and the paradoxical anti-abortion statements that President Tricky makes. He strongly suspects that one of the twenty-two Vietnamese civilians killed is a pregnant woman. In response to his odd questions regarding his suspicions the President indulges in a long-drawn "sanctimonious double-talk that typifies much of his discourse

throughout the interview and the novel (Halio 105). The conversation leads into arduous twists of logic, charged with verbal pieties:

And may I make one thing more perfectly clear, while we're on the subject of Vietnam? I am not going to interfere in the internal affairs of another country. If President Thieu has sufficient evidence and wishes to try those twenty-two My Lai villagers posthumously, according to some Vietnamese law having to do with ancestor worship, that is his business. But I assure you, I in no way intend to interfere with the workings of the Vietnamese system to justice. (*OG* 11-12)

The interface between Tricky and the Citizen moves from seme to seme in such way that Tricky could make them all conform to his "conscience" and "refusal to do the popular thing" (*OG* 11). The two popular things the people at large expect him to do are to make a declaration in favour of abortion, and then to convict the twenty two unarmed civilians as partakers in the conspiracy to murder Lieutenant Calley. He attempts to hammer out an argument that his conscience is clear as he has not done these two popular things which "cannot square" with his "personal belief in the sanctity of human life, including the life of the yet unborn" (*OG* 16). The Citizen's mind is troubled that, probably, one of the women killed by Calley was pregnant, and in that case abortion would have been performed. Tricky promptly points

out that while "there were babies in that ditch at My Lai," there were no pregnant women (*OG* 12). Even if there had been one "there could have been no possible means of verbal communication" as Calley was an American. (*OG* 13). He could have had no means of knowing that a particular woman was not just stout but actually carrying a child. As such, Tricky, the lawyer, avers that Calley cannot be charged with facilitating abortion on demand. The implied irony is that the President condemns abortion but condones large-scale murder of innocent Vietnamese peasants. The syntactic convolutedness of Tricky's rhetoric points to the absurdities rampant in American politics. George Orwell's statement about language and reality seems to be well in place in this context: "The great enemy of clear language is insincerity. When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns as it were instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish squirting out ink. [. . .]. When the general atmosphere is bad, language must suffer" (97).

The appropriate words that come out of Tricky lack involvement in or commitment to a humanitarian mission. He seems to speak out of a "reduced state of consciousness" that is "favourable to political conformity" (Orwell 96). Tricky's vision of eloquence seems to rely upon a model of speech incarnate. He appears to assume that the Citizen would be convinced by the physicality of his performance and would thereby believe in his logic. The confused Citizen, as a listener to Tricky's discourse, is thrown between the

seductiveness of listening and the actual seduction of political discourse. Nothing helps him to interpret reality and get out of his puzzled thoughts. He finds that his judgement is sunk into imbecility and confusion. Tricky's reactions seem to get piled one upon the other as an allegory of political discourse. Roth compares the ideological shifts of a whimsical ruler to those found in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four*. The official spokesmen interrupt news broadcast at every session to inform "the people that their enemies are now their friends and their friends their enemies" (*RMAO* 51).

Tricky is overwhelmed by the sheer physicality of his participation in the polemic as he hopes the listeners would be by his own. His press conference is based on his "San Dementia statement of April 3" (*OG* 17). The representatives of the media who appear as listeners are "Mr. Asslick," "Mr. Daring," "Mr. Shrewd," "Mr. Charmin," "Mr. Catch –Me-in-a Contradiction," and "Mr. Fascinated." There seems to be no determinate value of signification for his words. They are without substantial meaning and are capable, like an algebraic symbol, of receiving any meaning whose only function is to close the gap between the signifier and the signified. Jerome Klinkowitz, in his essay, "Constraint: Vietnam," draws upon Roland Barthes, to point out that the rhetoric of "American 1960's" is still an enigma because "our traditional ways of understanding have become inadequate". The reader's presumption that "reality and rationality are interchangeable terms" has to be shed in toto to come to terms with Tricky's world of non-verifiable

logic (Klinkowitz 139). His official vocabulary on Vietnam affairs is axiomatic. This is to say that it has little value as communication, but only as intimidation:

If this Vietnamese woman presented herself to Lieutenant Calley for abortion [. . .] let's assume, for the sake of argument, she was one of those girls who goes out and has a good time and then won't own up to the consequences; unfortunately, we have them here just as they have them over there – the misfits, the bums, the tramps, the few who give the many a bad name[. . .]. (OG 14)

The language constitutes only a speech/writing that is meant to thrash out a coincidence between set standards and facts. It attributes a noble morality to a malicious reality. The discourse is framed at a time when the social fabric is splintered and thousands of soldiers and civilians perish in Vietnam. In 1966, when America was fighting in Vietnam, Barthes and Saussure, in Europe, were developing new "practices of linguistics" to study "how signs function in society" (Klinkowitz, *Structuring* 138). They emphasize the double referentiality of linguistic signs: firstly, cultural signs refer the reader to something else, and secondly, they refer to themselves. Klinkowitz points out that Barthes and Derrida "had seen their respective native lands at war in Algeria" (138). Barthes' essay, "African Grammar" tries to grapple with the official vocabulary on warfare which is quite similar

to that of America on Vietnam. Barthes goes on to explicate how the language of France regarding its war Algeria functions as a code (Klinkowitz 138). His message is that it is impossible to comprehend an experience "until the discourse that experience invalidates is cleared out of the way and replaced by a style of communication, pertinent to the matter at hand" (Klinkowitz 140). In the texts of Vietnam War, the reader finds himself faced by a challenge to capture the appropriate words and forms that convey the sense either directly or obliquely.

Tricky's discourse is further accentuated by "slips in grammar and logic" (Jones and Nance 136). The mock presidential news conference ends with a typical Lutheran speech on his personal dream: "My only hope is that whatever I am able to accomplish in their behalf while I hold this office will some day contribute to a world in which everybody, regardless of race, creed or color, will be unborn. I guess if I have a dream, that is it" (*OG* 25).

"Tricky Addresses the Nation (The Famous Something Is Rotten in the State of Denmark Speech)" is a narrative unit that could make more coherence if read as an extension of the first two units: "Tricky Comforts a Troubled Citizen" and "Tricky Holds a Press Conference." Parodying of language assumes the form of "Nixon's public speaking style" with the aid of a map and pointer (Halio 108). It is an elaborately rehearsed rhetorical justification that Dixon attempts to present before the public on the despatch of "Aircraft

carriers, troop ships and destroyers" to the "Baltic and the North Seas" that geographically surround the territories of Denmark (*OG* 66). The principal enemy of America is said to be the "Pro-Pornography government in Copenhagen" (*OG* 67). The riddle as to how the government of Denmark poses an immediate threat to America is solved by a meandering discursive journey down the corridors of history. The explication is made dense by piling of diplomatic jargons and qualifiers that perceptibly echo President Nixon's "Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia policies" (Halio 108). Trivialisation of grave historical incidents is done to emphasize the expedient ways in which history is distorted by a self-motivated political leader. The syntax of the justificatory statement is crammed with phrases and modifiers: "belligerent expansionist policies," "territorial designs," "privileged sanctuaries on our eastern seaboard" and "open contempt for our territorial integrity" (*OG* 67).

Perhaps the historical allusions are specifically made to put up models, normative justifications and sanctions before the American public who form the part and parcel of an institutionalised society. Through his address, Tricky reminds that in "the eleventh century," invasions were made "upon the North American continent' by the Viking forces of Eric the Red and Leif Ericson in "direct violation of the Monroe Doctrine (*OG* 67). They had tried to establish their dominion in places of national heritage like "Boston, the birthplace of Paul Revere [. . .] and the site of the famous Boston Tea Party" (*OG* 67). Tricky seems to pose himself as the protector of a country whose

territorial integrity is very much in jeopardy. His words seem to build up an ambience of threat and mystery in the listeners so much so that they could very easily be made to acquiesce in the execution of his plans. In his perception, the invasion of Denmark is more of a liberation struggle to recapture one of the renowned cultural landmarks "that has been sacred for centuries to English speaking peoples around the world, and particularly so to Americans" (*OG* 68). Jones and Nance look upon the speech as an exemplary "parody of the American government's way of describing its involvement in Vietnam" or even any other foreign country for that matter (139).

With his typically circuitous logic he affirms that American marines have liberated Hamlet's castle at Elsinore "without firing a single shot" (*OG* 69). He appeals to the sense of national pride of the people when he breaks the news that his men have recaptured the castle immortalized by William Shakespeare and it is "occupied tonight by American soldiers, speaking the tongue of the immortal bard" (*OG* 68).

Tricky's attack on the "Pro-Pornography government" in Copenhagen stands more as a self-apparent satirical comment on America's offensive against the pro-communist government in Vietnam. Despite his reluctance to interfere in the internal matters of a foreign country, he puts up the charge that the "Pro-pornography government" has so indoctrinated the Danes that the "Danish Anti-Pornography Resistance" received no votes at all in the so-

called democratic election. Consequent upon this, America, he says, is forced to carry its "military might" to establish a government "of, by and for, not only the Danish people, but the American people and all good people everywhere" (*OG* 71). All this endless and stupefying redundancy of platitudes definitely points towards the meaninglessness of contemporary political speech. The presidential address clearly reveals to what low levels debasement of language could set into the polity which by itself is structured like a text for an expert to read and interpret.

The text could well be considered as a reflection of the polity of a period which is almost all talk and very little action. From a linguistic perspective it is understandable that individual consciousness and social structure are an outcome of discursive practices prevalent in a certain period of time. Brown, in his essay, "Social Reality as Narrative Text," states that "Language as both social institution and political practice is the active synergy between consciousness and things" (118). Human reality is experienced only with the mediation of symbols. The realities to which symbols refer are also symbolic. They are generated by human actors and realized within some shared frame of vision. Rhetoric is no longer simply a means of persuasion but the medium in which self grows. As such, reality is considered as basically symbolic, action is viewed as embodied language, and language therefore becomes the fundamental unit of empirical knowledge. One can come to know and realize reality only through an engagement in

rhetorical activity. With such a logic of the physicality of rhetoric has the reader got to comprehend the rationality of Dixon's address. Through innumerable qualifications, additions, and assertions he tries to institutionalise his expedient views on the invasion of a foreign country. This process is managed by alluding to all the traditionally reified icons of the country:

[. . .] should the state of Denmark, now or in the future, attempt to occupy Mark Twain's Missouri, or the wonderful old South of *Gone with the Wind*, in the way that they have so ruthlessly occupied 'Hamlet's Castle' all these centuries, I would no more hesitate to send in the Marines to free Hannibal and Atlanta and Richmond and Jackson and St. Louis, than I did tonight to free Elsinore . (OG 70)

The next allegation brought against Denmark is that the Danes harbour Charles Curtis Flood alias Curt Flood, the ex-baseball player of St. Louis Cardinals of the National League. The existing charge in the name of the ballplayer is that he "is out to undermine the youth" of the country by "destroying baseball" (OG 75). He, according to Dixon, has done injury to the nation's pride by a clever legal action against the sport "made famous by Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Ty Cobb, Tris Speaker, Rogers Hornsby, Honus Wagner, Walter Johnson, Christy Mathewson and Ted Williams" (OG 74). To argue out the case against National League, Curtis Flood had enlisted two

lawyers from the Supreme Court, Mr. Abe Fortas and Mr. Arthur Goldberg. Besides all this, in the long description of his crimes, appears his role in inciting "the Boy Scouts of America [. . .] numbering nearly ten thousand" to riot in Washington D.C. (*OG* 79).

The digressive matters presented in the speech look very much like a parodied version of President Nixon's "Checkers Speech" (Halo 108). Dixon presents a narrative on his early struggles as a budding lawyer in Prissier, California and then moves on to discuss the sluggish state of American justice. He justifies his scheme of "Justice in the Streets Program" as a means to alleviate courtroom crowding (*OG* 77). The narrative becomes more of an exercise in language than a novel per se. The parodic texture of the rhetoric, whether read comically, seriously, or on some ironic level in between, submerges the banal, but significant elements like story and plot. The whole speech palpably inspires a kind of distrust in reality which also seems to be the basic premise of *Our Gang*. The text's appeal seems to lie more in the humour made out of the state of affairs of the occasion. Rhetoric gets fine-tuned by the machinery of official lying and platitudinising. Roth himself looks upon the text as "an exaggerated impersonation, a parody, of Nixon's style of discourse and thought" (*RMAO* 45). The President's style stands out by its strange "discrepancy between official pieties and the unpleasant truth" (*RMAO* 53). This is borne out by the way in which the death toll in the anti-Boy Scout operation is quantified and advertised. Out of the ten thousand

strong group of Boy Scouts in the two-day protest the police had shot dead only a meagre number of three protesters: "That breaks down to one and one-half scouts per diem, while nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-eight and a half Scouts continued to live full and active lives the first day, and nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-seven the second" (*OG* 80).

Tricky's expedient rationality accords him the status of the text's most mature speaker. But it is simultaneously undercut by an irony that even after his deliberate and methodical attempt to make sense he could construct only deceptive truths from the reader/listener's point of view. Crucially enough it is not his actions but his narration that does the damage by its stylistic approximation to virtual truth. He finds himself at pains to affirm before the public that he is not susceptible to sensation but only braced up to tell the truth: "My fellow Americans, I am confident that you recognize as well as I do, that any man who says he wants to make things perfectly clear as often as I do, both awake and in his sleep, obviously does not have anything to hide" (*OG* 72).

It could well be such an irresistible motive to dramatically encode his accomplishments that prompts him, in the course of his speech, to indulge in two elaborate narrations: one on the weapons of torture and the other on the dramatic capture of Curt Flood through "Operation Courage" on the "Danish island of Zealand" (*OG* 91). Through a kind of readerly absorption he

reproduces a simulation of experiential reality. His narration appears to mimic the effect storytelling has on himself. He tries to play the rational reader by focussing on the virtuality the stories convey. Albeit the unstated motives, there seems to be an experiential identification with the narrated incidents:

And unless we cut these sources of contagion from our society as swiftly and as thoroughly as we would excise a cancer from a living body [. . .]. And so long as I am President, I am not going to stand idly by while the children of this country come down with cancer, leukemia, or, incidentally, in that connection, muscular dystrophy. (OG 89)

Tricky's consciousness seems to be obsessed with the carnal body. This is discernible in the topic-comment structure which brings together his attempts to justify his ventures in Vietnam and Denmark. He is captivated by the carnal body, much as he hopes the readers/listeners would be by his discursivity. In the earlier segment of the text, the foetal trope becomes the referent for body which Tricky conflates with the notion of violence. In his irrational fancy, it serves more as a metonymic trope that condenses together ideas of violence and basic human rights.

In the later segment of the text, the spectre of Denmark, like Vietnam in the earlier unit, haunts him as a disordered/disordering body. Curt Flood,

as a tropical image, appears to embody an un-American American's threat to the body politic: "Even now, with the American Army massed on their borders, the American Navy blockading their coast and the American Marines firmly in control of 'Hamlet's Castle' [. . .]" (OG 90).

To comprehend the influence of the Vietnam War on American culture and its texts, it would be worthwhile to examine the structural challenges posed before the episteme of war. Klinkowitz identifies three factors that have been structurally challenged: "the military strategists' planning and their tacticians' conduct, the fiction writers' remarkably similar struggles with form, and the cultural theorists explanations for what was happening [. . .]" (140).

Tricky, as a narrator of "Operation Courage" in Denmark is faced with a similar challenge. He struggles hard to capture the war's experience which has to reach its climax of action. The best way he finds is to condense it into the action of just one day as if in a child's tale of adventure:

[. . .] only two hours before coming on television to address you, I gave the order, as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces meeting his responsibilities, for a fleet of helicopters to make a surprise landing [. . .] only twenty nautical miles from the capital of Copenhagen [. . .]. Would he resort to poison gas? Would he dare to employ tactical nuclear weapons? There was no way in

which our aerial photography could penetrate this man's skull, to see just how far he would go in violating the written and unwritten rules of warfare. (*OG* 91)

In this passage, all three factors seem to converge directly or indirectly: military strategy, fictional form, and even deconstructionist thought. He wishes his "brave Green Berets and Rangers" to be precise in their dodging movements (*OG* 91). But the grammar of this new war will not allow it. The syntactic tenor itself is intransitive, not transitive, with no real structure as apart from an endless series of improbable possibilities. Tricky punctuates the trackless grammar with a series of "woulds". How to organize the war defies all previous military, political and even fictional schema. The politics and military tactics of Vietnam War become a test of imagination. As such Tricky can find no substantial vocabulary for the war beyond some hackneyed images. His vision cannot supercede the video adventures or he seems to jerk through signs drawn from gangster or cowboy movies to find the right manner of description:

First off, the dangerous flight from Elsinore to the landing site was made in twenty-two minutes and fourteen seconds [. . .] the hazardous search of the farmhouse, the outbuildings and the tilled acreage was accomplished in thirty-four minutes and eighteen seconds, in other words, with two full seconds to spare [. . .].

Moreover, our forces returned to safety without sustaining a single casualty. As at Elsinore, the enemy was so completely taken by surprise that they did not fire a single shot. (*OG* 92)

The experience of the war makes little sense. The narration seems to have no sense of purpose or achievement. It cannot free itself from the clichés of popular war stories and movies. Tricky wends his way from pretexts (his study of the map of Denmark and *Hamlet*) to subtexts, that is the actual literary structures of the war: "My fellow Americans [. . .] 'Something', he said, 'is rotten in the state of Denmark' [. . .] we shall [. . .] with God's help, purge Denmark of corruption, now and for all time" (*OG* 94). Incongruities become the common characteristic of the scenes of the narration of war. It could be suggestive that Vietnam and the war are a reality entirely different from what America had previously known. This seems to be "a non-linear war, with no objective to seize, no identifiable good to achieve, and no overall end-date in sight" (Klinkowitz 148).

The three units of the text entitled, "Tricky Has Another Crisis, or, The Skull Session," "The Assassination of Tricky," and "On the Comeback Trail; or, Tricky in Hell" are conflated together as a topic-comment structure that concerns the issue of Tricky's ungoverned appetites. The whole text of *Our Gang* apparently presents a series of loosely linked comic strips rather than a plot with evolutionary development. As a parodic-satire the rhetoric attempts

to deconstruct "the absurdist string tied to Nixon's actual words" (Pinsker, *The Comedy* 74).

In "The Skull Session," Tricky is faced with the contingent situation of having to overcome the Boy Scout protest against his idea of favouring sexual intercourse by protecting the rights of the unborn fetuses. Tricky dresses himself up in football uniform and holds the "Skull Session" in his blast-proof underground bunker. The uniform appears to restore the sense of his own power. He discusses his crisis with his aides who too are dressed up in football uniforms: "Indeed, even in the midst of the most incredible international blunders and domestic catastrophes, he has till now, with the aid of his football uniform, and a good war movie, been able to live up to his own description of the true leader in Six Hundred Crises as 'cool, confident and decisive' " (*OG* 26). Baumgarten and Gottfried discern this as the President's "macho of the childish values" or "the adolescent qualities legitimated by the American culture of sports" (107).

Tricky's discussion with his "Political," "Spiritual," "Highbrow," and "Legal" Coaches brings about several expedients. Everyone's paramount objective is to exonerate the President from the charge that he had given "POWER TO THE PENIS?" (*OG* 31). He and his staff contemplate a massive public relations exercise by announcing on national television that neither himself nor anyone in his family has ever been "infected by desire or

lust, or for that matter, an appetite for anything at all, outside of political power" (*OG* 30).

Besides this, he wants to escape from his own carnal self to impress upon the people that he is devoid of all sexual urges. His discomfort is that he has a body that perspires and tarnishes his image. So he decides to remove "the sweat glands "from his upper lip and dissociate himself from "anything remotely resembling a human body" (*OG* 30). The mob of Boy Scouts has to be silenced alongside the task of restoring the dignity of the Presidential office. To perform these two tasks he discusses the efficacy of himself coming out with an open confession to homosexuality. But the Spiritual Coach advises him against such a confession as even homosexuals engage in intercourse. What becomes evident here through the "textual action" is an attempt towards normalisation of political conduct against a revolutionary "transformation of the grammars" of the polity undertaken by the Boy Scouts (Brown 128). The practices within a polity is regulated and executed through its "reigning grammar" (Brown 128). So also, the public action within a political unit is facilitated by the grammars laid down through constitutions, common laws, or traditions, which are manifest bodies of political thought and conduct. "The Skull Session" brings into relief, though in parodied form, the American polity as a text. It has to be understood as a process of communication in which ideas are mooted in terms of the reciprocal reactions they engender on the part of the political addressee. Political strategies are

transformed into events to which meanings could be attributed. These meanings give rise to the artificiality of experience and also integrate them into the textual grammar of polity. It is a grammar that generates its own rules and meanings. Again, it is this textual grammar that appears to unite the so called Coaches (voices) in a system of political communication and also constitutes them as a polity.

The confluence of serio-comic views expressed at the session constitute a witty negotiation of internalized but unassailable contradictions in the social order. Jones and Nance observe that the "The Skull Session" becomes a hyperbolic "parody of the way in which policy decisions are made and the political opportunism and irrationality that motivate them (138). The Military Coach is prevented by Tricky from opting for the solution of shooting orders. So the advisors make a list of five renegades and zero in on making Curt Flood, an ex-black baseball player, their scapegoat:

Tricky: [. . .] Since I am a decisive man, as you can see from my book *Six Hundred Crises*, I am now going to decide how many of these five enemies of America each of you will be allowed to choose to charge with the crime[. . .]the Professor will read his list, and each person present will select as many as he wants, up to three...No, two...No, three...Uh-oh, my lip's sweating-uh-oh, I think I'm having another crisis! *Two! Two! Say two!* [. . .].

Highbrow Coach: To the list then, gentlemen. 1:Hanoi. 2: The Berrigans. 3: The Black Panthers. 4: Jane Fonda. 5: Curt Flood.

All: *Curt Flood?* (OG 46–47)

The joke opens up a multiplicity of subject positions to the reader/listener. There seems to be a conflation of the code of action with the code of inaction, and that of the spy novel with the domestic drama. The scene also brings the world of high politics to the level of the common world of family life. In 1968, the real Curt Flood had challenged the decision of his ball club St. Louis Cardinals to trade him off to Philadelphia Phillies. It is this reality that is collated into Dixon's discourse with a different twist. Out of a strange sense of expediency, he fixes the responsibility of the Boy Scout uprising on Curt Flood and declares him the arch enemy of "the most American of American sports" (OG 50). In the long examination of the credentials of each of the five culprits they unanimously find Flood to be the most appropriate choice as his public image in the country is at its all time low.

Highbrow Coach: I cast my vote for Curt Flood and Curt Flood alone. Not only is his a fresh name to a country that is growing pretty weary of the Berrigans and Panthers-and, with all due respect, is sick to death of Jacqueline Charisma-but on top of that he is, as I said earlier, someone we can slander and vilify without any danger of turning him into a hero or martyr. (OG 61)

In real history, President Nixon had widened the jurisdiction of the FBI and the CIA in connection with the apprehension of the suspected enemies of the White House. Taking cue from this, humour is aroused by the bizarre topicality of allusions to ball players, actresses, and President Kennedy's wife as if in an allegoric adventure story. As the session concludes, Tricky becomes conscious of his true bodily self which he desires to hide from public gaze: "No, I will remain in uniform, helmet and all, and with the aid of the ballots you have cast here in this free election[. . .]" (*OG* 63).

The unit entitled "The Assassination of Tricky" metaphorically reveals how the tangle of signifiers which Tricky has woven out so industriously to undermine, becomes a net in which he himself gets incarcerated. Newsman, political observers and lawyers who wrote on President Nixon's Watergate scandal had profusely commented on "the sinister distortion of language" by the administrators during the war years (Lee 54). Lyndon B. Johnson appears to have "sanitized" the language of war and this, opines Hermione Lee, was carried on by Nixon too. The device of "doublespeak" was applied to the war in Vietnam and the oppressive measures resorted to against the revolutionaries at home. In the early 1970's the spy networks were "dressed up in terms such as 'electronic surveillance', 'mail coverage' and 'development of campus sources' " (Lee 54). Language was rarefied to such an extent that a lie could not be distinguished when one found it: " 'True' words became unusable once Nixon had described the withdrawal of the American presence

in South Vietnam as 'peace with honour' " (Lee 54). When interviewed, his arguments were characterized by "banal, lengthy evasions" and "random inconsistencies" (Lee 55). Tricky, after being assassinated, gets dispersed into a mazy syntax of alliteration, repetition and overcrowded sentences. This happens in the last two units of the text, "The Assassination of Tricky" and "On the Comeback Trail, or Tricky in Hell". In these segments, which are together examined as one single unit where ungoverned appetites form the main thematic, Tricky gets metamorphosed first into an embryo and then into an incarnate form of the evil Other.

The range of bodily excesses that seem to plague and pleasure him throughout the narrative comes to its consummation in the last part. The trope of the Vietnamese foetus appears to be the originary source of pollution and depravity that spreads across the narrative. Tricky's obsession with carnality begins with the discussion on the My Lai massacre with the "Troubled Citizen". It is no accident that the metamorphosis occurs on the site of the narrative. Indeed, all he has is his skill of rhetoric and physical metamorphosis: "[. . .] I will hammer out, in the lonely vigil of the night, the conspiracy that seems to me most beneficial to my career" (*OG* 63). What he produces with these skills provides sufficient distractions from his troubles. It converts his lack of a secure position into a prolonged engagement with foetal bodies.

It is precisely Dixon's attraction to the physical aspects of oral discourse – his attachment to his expressions – rather than the truth of the text that enables meanings to be transmitted. The "President's Bilge Secretary" announces: "It was his belief that if he could stop sweating so much along his upper lip when he addressed the nation, the great majority of the American people would come to believe he was an honest man, speaking the truth, and may be even like him a little better" (*OG* 103). Identities in the novel are contiguous with surface physical appearance. Baumgarten and Gottfried look upon the text as a "dramatic enactment of the political uses and abuses of language" and as one that "unmasks the process by which these Americans seek scapegoats for their failures, and condemns the corrupt and corrupting tactics of those holding even the country's most sacrosanct offices" (111).

What seems to be operational in the discourse is the classic strategy of satire, where subjects convict themselves with their own words. This strategy comes to its efficacious stage when, after the "assassination", he is represented by a polyphony of voices that appears to figure him out in an ironic tropes. The language used is that of tele-reportage where the reporter guides the narrative by bringing in voices and sketchy texts on the leader's personality from various quarters of the country: "A second White House announcement has now called attention to the President's schedule for the day, pointing out that no mention is made there of dying" (*OG* 95). Such reports

are alternately juxtaposed with direct declarations. The Vice President, "What's-his-name" goes into a paroxysm of alliterative speech when asked as to why Tricky was secretly admitted to Walter Reed Hospital: "This lachrymose lie is a lamentable lollapalooza launched by the lunatic left" (*OG* 96).

As reports flow in about the mounting speculation regarding the President's death following a surgery for the removal of sweat glands from his hip many press interviews are also conducted with responsible persons. The "Chairman of the National Committee" is questioned as to how the "President's death would give a great boost to his waning popularity" (*OG* 97).

Reports and sidelights on the President flow in with the characteristic "unnaturalness, or falseness" (*OG* 105). The reports are orally filed in by "Morton Momentous" in Chicago, "Peter Pious" in Los Angeles, and "Ike Ironic" in New York city (*OG* 109-111). Anticlimax comes when the hospital authorities make the crucial declaration: "The President of the United States was assassinated sometime in the early hours of the morning. The cause of the death was drowning. He was found at seven A.M., unclothed and bent into the fetal position, inside a large transparent baggie filled with a clear fluid presumed to be water, and tied shut at the top". (*OG* 107).

The body, as a trope, provides a point of metonymic contact, a point of origin to which the disordering ripples of perversity that spread through the text are insistently traced. Dixon's problems can be summed up as the misfortune of having a body and no quality. Rhetoric also becomes the body's alibi in the text. The unreasonable presence of the carnal could be accounted for by its role as a catalytic trope that makes Tricky's presence more concrete within the site of the narrative discourse. It adds an extra psychological dimension to the text.

The body seems to have an inescapable connection to the *sjuzet* of the text. Tricky's discourses are sensational oral performances. They are more like stand-ins for the speaker's body. If he mismanages his body, it is the discourse that makes him do it. Rather than functioning as emblems of depersonalized virtue, as repositories of self-evident and politically productive truths, the rhetoric becomes sites of private and deeply troubled identifications. The text's logic appears to become more palpable when rhetorical speeches are treated as privately fetishized objects rather than discursive pieces for rational discussion.¹ The subject seems to be attached to shapes and surfaces of the narrative – to the material embodiment of their storyness.² This allows it to function like a body, as a vehicle for cathexis and absorption. The redundancy of nonsensical alliterative codes appears to be hermeneutically significant in this context:

'So the blah blah blah blah of state has been passed [. . .]. Heavy are our blah blah blah blah [. . .] our civilization with it. We can ill afford that [. . .]. Blah blah 1776 blah blah? [. . .]1812 blah blah? [. . .] 1904-1907? [. . .]. Blah blah blah one hundred years ago [. . .].Blah blah blah blah nation's capital'." (*OG* 125)

Tricky's rhetoric is physically contagious in the narrative setting. Subjects rub against one another discursively and transferences seem to take place. Such transferences that operate through rhetoric threaten the prospects for the actors' return to rational existence. Tricky's cathartic metamorphosis into devilish being could probably be read in psychoanalytic terms: "And one thing I have noted as I have traveled from one end of Hell to the other is the wonderful belief our people have in Wickedness [. . .]. And I humbly submit to you, the denizens of the greatest infernal region in all creation, that if elected, I would be that kind of Devil" (*OG* 132).

Images run one upon the other and sensations succeed in so rapid a sequence. The text seems to have been built insensibly, almost as though the narrative itself were a sleepwalking. James F. English, in his analysis of the political language of literature, considers such texts as a "farical generic slippage" between a spy thriller and a fantasy story (622). The text tosses up a world in which "something so fundamental has been disturbed that all the crucial institutions of society – schools, homes, churches, courts, senate

houses – go mad" (Kernan 453). The reader is disallowed from adopting even the pretense of the rational as there is so much of emphasis on sensationalism. Perhaps, the text shows vigorous resistance to closure in the absorbing effects of its structure, its narrative, and its rhetoric. So Tricky who appears to be fictively dead resurfaces alive in hell:

I am no longer a man burdened by all the limitations and weaknesses of that condition, such as conscience, caution and consideration for one's reputation. And I am no longer the President of the United States, with all the barriers and obstructions that stand between the holder of that powerful office and his own capacity for evil. I am at long last a citizen of Hell, and let me tell you, that is a great challenge and a great opportunity. (OG 137)

The discourse produces something that is wholly out of line with the ideal of reason. Perhaps, it serves to produce a body politic where desires exceed the possibility of control. As Tricky cannot contain his desires within his self, he goes on to haunt an irrational self by which he could have flourishes of narrative rhetoric. The spectre of his carnal body cannot be explained away rationally. It can only be rationally warned against. Peter Prince's comment on *The Great American Novel* is relevant here too: "The whole mode of the book is designed to illustrate the fashionable opinion that

the condition of contemporary America is so grotesque that the only way of interpreting or enduring it is by means of farce and fantasy and manic-depressive fun" (439-440).

The excess of his physical self and its pleasures haunt Tricky. He farcically pursues the cause of human body (foetus) but he falls a victim to the condition of bodily excess. His story becomes the story of his own imperilled body and its accompanying perils. *Our Gang*, on the whole, is itself a captivity narrative, though of a farcical sort: "[. . .] you are going to see a New Dixon, a Dixon such as I could only dream of being while still an American human being, a Dixon who humbly submits that he has what it takes in experience and energy to be the kind of Devil all you lost souls deserve" (*OG* 137).

NOTES

¹Fetishism means an abnormal attachment of erotic feeling to an object or part of the body. The term is most applicable when a subject becomes focussed on some object (or part of the body) to the exclusion of every thing else. In the text, Tricky appears to be fetishistically attached to his own language and/or sometimes to certain parts of his own body. Frank N. Magill et al., eds. *International Encyclopedia of Psychology*, 2 vols. (London: Fitzroy, 1996) 1547-1548.

²Cathexis is a term recurrently found in Freud. Its connotation and significance vary greatly as according to the demands of the context in which it is used. The term appears first in 1895, in the *Studies on Hysteria*. The term is relevant here as one that connotes a psychological energy that gets attached to an object (the object of narration itself in *Our Gang*). Tricky, as a subject, evokes an important but unpleasant event in his own political career with indifference and then tries to associate it with a kind of harmless narration. This is a kind of displacement or false association. See Laplanche and Pontalis 62-65.

**THE PROBLEM OF THE DISINTEGRATED SELF IN THE
NOVELS OF PHILIP ROTH: A THEMATIC STUDY**

**Thesis Submitted to the
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT
For the award of the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in English**

By

N. SAJAN

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT**

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CHAPTER V

**THE LITERARY IMAGINATION: DIMENSIONS OF A
PROGRESSIVE EVOLUTION**

The Counterlife is a narrative in which there is an apparently relentless attempt to eviscerate both the text and the narrator- subject's self by substructuring the main preoccupations of being a jew and creative writer simultaneously. What the reader confronts is the discursively sculpted "idea of a counterlife, counterlives" and "counterliving". Roth himself highlights that the basic edifice of the novel lies in the device of introducing a new story or version of reality against what precedes it:

"We are all writing fictitious versions of our lives all the time, contradictory but mutually entangling stories [. . .]" (Milbauer and Watson, *An Interview* 253). Each of the five segments represents a fresh start and the reader is hard put to resume his perusal from an entirely different sjuzet. But, at the same time one cannot and should not shun from the mind what has gone before.

The text changes voice and tone to put the reader into Nathan Zuckerman's frame of perception and also into those of the other subjects in the novel. The reader also, in the course of reading, re-creates himself through encounters with many probable selves. Like a detective stumbling on to rash conclusions, the reader is forced to shift from one perspective to another by

acquiring indeterminate insights into the problematic of being a modern Jew and a creative writer. The central concern is the puzzle of Nathan's physical survival as a family man within a Jewish space. Alongside this puzzle he is also faced with the imperative of defining the contours of his authenticity as a writer who keeps his self engaged with the hermeneutics of history, fiction and reality.

Nathan and his brother, Henry attempt, at various levels, to interpret their selves and their Jewishness. Nathan's predicament is more excruciating as it involves not mere religiosity but a productive dialectic between his individualistic Jewishness and his vocation as a writer.

Alan Cooper, in his distinctively titled essay, "Zuckerroth" describes him as a "maturing, musing Nathan" who is discerned as "plumbing his own character" and "inducing readers to discover theirs" (214).

Nathan appears to wend his way to truth through five segments that are dense with impersonation and dialectical conflicts. He tells his younger brother Henry that "the treacherous imagination is everybody's maker - we are all the invention of each other, everybody a conjuration, conjuring up everyone else" (*CL* 145). In the novel, the self gets elevated to the position of a theatrical space where "the question of authority over one's life is explored in a more philosophical and self-conscious manner" (Lyons 190). The drama of the self gets evolved through the sections, "Basel," "Judea," "Aloft,"

“Gloucestershire,” and “Christendom.” Perceptibly enough, in all these sections, the older pastoral ideal of the unified, linear and conflictless world is repudiated as unhistorical and unbecoming of the Jewish diasporic dilemma. The pastoral ideal of a cohesive world is only echoed through ventriloquial voice through which Nathan realizes that what he has been describing is “people divided in themselves” (CL 320). This, he knows, is the “absolute opposite” of the “idea of emotional integration.” He goes on to explain to his imagined wife, Maria, that as according to the “Western idea of mental health” what is covetable is the harmony between “self consciousness” and “natural being” (CL 320). The repudiation of the pastoral ideal seems to have been effected because of its inherent inability to embody conflictual situations. It rather would embody the dream of a return to the primordial past or a complete escape from history.

Nathan perceives an unseen but umbilical relationship between the Jews and the anti-pastoral which he wants to bring out as a textual construct. As such, he strives to preclude all the elements that constitute the pastoral in the older Western sense of the term. To him, the Judean pastoral appears to perpetrate an escapist tendency: “Fleeing now, and back to day zero and the first untainted settlement – breaking history’s mold and casting off the dirty, disfiguring reality of the piled – up years: this is what Judea means to, of all people, that belligerent, unillusioned little band of Jews [. . .] (CL 322).

He, in sharp contrast to such a pastoral romantic nostalgia builds up an anti-pastoral discourse which, like a Jewish joke, “pictures a wholly deconsecrated world: demystified, deromanticized, utterly dedeluded” (Roth, *Reading 7*).

The contradictions and conflicts that the text stages could be seen as responses to the discursive propositions about the Jew and his tradition. The metafictional strategy of the novel appears to be well in tune with the depiction of the multivalent historicity of the Jewish race spread across America and Israel in the present and the nineteen sixties. Metafiction comes to be a method of discourse that could bring about a better link between the metaphysical aspects of reality and the commonplace constraints of life.

Joseph Cohen calls *The Counterlife* a “post-Einsteinian” text:

Through the literary adaptations of Einstein’s relativity theory, linearity is theoretically reduced to absurdity, the distinctions between past, present and future are cast aside, simultaneity is legitimated, the principle of causality is negated, the certainty of accurate observation and analysis is deposed (the Heisenberg principle) and reality is interpreted in a totally subjective way.
(201-202)

It is this dreamlike subjectivity that understructures *The Counterlife*. Time and space become relative and cause effect relations get diffused. Henry

and Nathan Zuckerman carry on with their lives even after each of them dies during open-heart surgery. Time and characterization become rigorously discontinuous and are presented in the form of a mosaic like structure. Perhaps the unilinear progression of history is not found to be suitable to the narrative that has the Jewish Diaspora as one of its major focalized themes.

In the twentieth century, the dialectic between individual and the society appears to have been replaced by, on the one side, an apparent urge for “egalitarian community” (a pan-Judaic community within the context of the novel), and on the other side, “a growing sense of alienation from such community”, a “sense of exile” brought about by social or spiritual dilemma (Docherty 256). Dilemma faced by Diasporic characters, Nathan, Henry, Shuki, and Lippman, to a considerable extent, seems to be reflected in their characterization and structuration in the text of *The Counterlife*. In his essay, “Characters, Religion, and Politics,” Docherty perceptively attempts to explain how the fundamental tropes of Judaism “provide useful models for fictive characterization” (257). He points out that Judaism lacks a supreme author like idol that is similar to Christ in Catholicism. Moses and Prophets form the central part of the Jew’s religion. The text of *The Decalogue* is more of a bricoleur to be interrupted side by side with the other prophetic writings. The modern trend in the religion has been the follower’s active involvement in the recreation of the Law. Adin Steinsaltz in *The Essential Talmud*,

considers the Jewish holy book as indeterminate and compares it to “a living organism”:

Although the organism has taken on this final form, it still produces new shoots that draw sustenance from the roots and continue to grow [. . .]. The principle that the Talmud is unfinished hold out a constant challenge to continue the work of creation. It is incumbent on every scholar to add to the *Talmud* and to contribute to the work, although it can never be finally completed. (Qtd. in Docherty 258)

This kind of interpretation of the Talmudic discourse could safely lead the reader of a text to a state of subjectivity where he could not find an individual authorial self in a literary text too. Dialogue becomes the organizing principle of literature. There could be no one authentic reader too. Readers are conceived of as a community that has a certain degree of potential for escape from exile of the wilderness of words to the radiance of meaning and comprehension. The formation of the state of Israel in every “interpretative/ creative act” of reading the text allows scope for the Jew “to return home” (Docherty 258). But what ultimately happens is a loss of the individual self in the larger cause of the community (like Judaism here). Perhaps the thematic of the Jewish diaspora, in terms of fiction, provides a steadfast model to the novel that problematizes “Jewish mores, Jewish

intensity and emotionalism, Jewish-Christian relationships, the role of the Jew as writer in contemporary America” and “the conflicting myriad viewpoints of the Israelis” (Cohen 202).

Against such a quasi-religious backdrop the text will be analyzed under the topic-comment structure of the self-effacing Jew in the first half of this study. History and literature are two modes of representation of reality and also two spaces for inhabitation. The Hebrew culture still continues to be a force in Jewish American literature because it has its “dwelling in words”. The Hebrew culture is said to be fundamentally “anti-autochthonous” and reluctant to “locate Yahweh in shrines, hilltops, or altars” (Fredericksen 37). It, on the contrary, is said to be heavily reliant upon the *Book* and the written word which keep the followers together. The Hebrews are presumed to have shared a common spirit of life through the ceaseless flux of written narratives. Literature provides them scope for imaginative life; laws give order and right vision; and history allows interpretation of time and reality. Written words seem to be used as a powerful means to counter the harsh realities of life. For the Hebrews, the *Book* endures as it embodies written words that are “added to, rewritten, and commented upon in a process” which spans “hundreds of years” (Fredericksen 37).

As the *Book* got to be written and rewritten several times the culture appears to be underpinned with what Silverman calls “writerliness.”¹ *The*

Counterlife could safely be placed within the category of writerly texts. It seems to be constrained to adopt a wide range of fictional strategies for it addresses itself to the problematic of defining Jewishness. The text also harnesses a wide range of models of being a Jew. The point of departure is the polemic “between champions of the secular, even hedonistic pleasures of Diaspora life and super nationalist ideals in Israel” (Sokoloff 74). Nathan becomes the focal point of all arguments and counter-arguments. In Israel, the Zionist Leader Mordecai Lippman makes the charge that the Diaspora Jews lead an aberrant life of psychic disintegration because of men like Nathan. He appears to be ridden with contradictions on materialistic, spiritual, familial, and professional planes:

I was the American-Born grandson of simple Galician tradesmen who, at the end of the last century, had on their own reached the same prophetic conclusion as Theodor Herzl – that there was no future for them in Christian Europe, that they couldn’t go on being themselves there without inciting to violence ominous forces against which they hadn’t the slightest means of defense. But instead of struggling to save the Jewish people from destruction by founding a homeland in the remote corner of the Ottoman Empire that had once been biblical Palestine, they simply set out to save their own Jewish skins. (*CL* 53)

Through a series of such musings and conversations held in Israel and America, and through letters exchanged between the Zuckerman brothers and an Israeli named Shuki, the text brings out the subjects' interpretations of themselves and of one another. Each constructs the other according to his subjective frame of understanding, while also effecting his own self-definition. The consequence of all this is a proliferation of invented Jewishness. The novel is filled with clashing constructs of the Jewish self in which hardly any viewpoint is permitted to score out the others. The two sections that bring into relief the textual phenomenon of the self-effacing Jew are "Judea" and "Aloft". They could be said to serve as the two nuclei that develop the narrative hypogram of Jewishness through a series of opposing fictional subjects, the most significant being the two Israelis. The first is Shuki Elchanan, a liberal urbane journalist who feels himself to be "politically impotent, morally torn apart, and weary to death of being angry with every one," yet he feels "an inescapable identification with Israel's struggle" (*CL* 161,158). This doubt-ridden Jew is countered by Lippman, a Jewish ultra-nationalist who has a conviction that all non-Jews shun Jews, that Arabs understand only force, and that the homeland he fights for is Judea.

The segment "Judea" is woven into the family story of Nathan who happens to be in Israel as a mature subject with the intent of bringing his brother Henry back from messianic Zionism to a happy settled life with wife and children in New Jersey. He meets his old friend Shuki who asks a crucial

question: "Why do you pretend to be so detached from your Jewish feelings? In the books all you seem to be worrying about is what on earth a Jew is, while in life you pretend that you're content to be the last link in the Jewish chain of being". Nathan quips that it is a part of "Diaspora abnormality" (CL 73). But Shuki, in the last eighteen years, seems to have matured in his views about Israel. He argues that abnormality is nowhere as intense as it is in Israel which, now has turned into "the Jewish obsessional prison par excellence!". The homeland too appears to have veered away from fulfilling the goal of making everyone a "normal Jew" (CL 77).

Lippman considers all gentiles as people who uphold causes inimical to his, and so, quite simply, rivals. Nathan does not want Henry to be influenced by such fanatical thinking. He perceives the experience of diaspora in a secular way that stands in sharp opposition to Lippman's conception of it. He thinks that he could be in diaspora even in Israel. Whenever he feels least at home, he is most in diaspora. In a radically articulated statement he points out that "Oriental Jews are brought to Israel to be exploited as an industrial proletariat. Imperialist colonization, capitalist exploitation – all carried on from behind the facade of Israeli democracy and the fiction of Jewish national unity". In his conversation with Shuki, before meeting Lippman, he adds that he is married to Maria, a non-Jewish divorcee, and now settled in England: "Life is fine there. If it wasn't for Israel, everything in London would be wonderful" (CL 65).

He hopes that he could confidently carry Zion with him and could be himself regardless of any geographic space. The novel does not seem to provide answers to questions as to where the Jews belong to geographically. But it challenges all general beliefs and values that have been celebrated for ages and also the Jew's tendency to feel at home in Israel: "If anything is territorialism, if anything is colonialism, it's Tel Aviv, it's Haifa" (CL 109).

The ironic situation that emerges out of the polemic is that, in Israel, the Jew needs to think more as to how to defend his life; whereas in America, he need think little about defending his Jewishness. Shiuki compares the situations in Israel and America in words that point towards this paradox:

Whenever I meet you American-Jewish intellectuals with your non-Jewish wives and your good Jewish brains, well bred, smooth, soft-spoken men, educated men [. . .] I think exactly that: we are the excitable, ghettoized, jittery little Jews of the Diaspora, and you are the Jews with all the confidence and cultivation that comes of feeling at home where you are. (CL 74).

Before visiting Lippman, Nathan travels to Agor to see Henry at the school where he gets trained himself to be a zionistic Jew. Henry is renamed Hanoch there for the new place is his refuge "from his history" and "from everything else purged from his life" (CL 99).

Henry, after a bypass surgery, had gone on a vacation to Eilat and also had happened to visit Mea She' arim, the orthodox neighbourhood of Jerusalem. He came to realize his lack of Jewish identity there and so resolved to "undergo a spiritual bypass to match the physical" (Cooper 223). Having lost the earlier opportunity to shun the New Jersey Jewish life and go to Basel with his *shikse*, he had decided to settle in Judea as a Zionist. When Nathan meets him he is very much into another life, away from his wife Carol and children.

Aliyah gives him a new identity as Hamoch, a gun-toting devotee of the fanatic Lippman. He is constrained to seek his self in something larger than himself, characterized by religious discipline. Alan Cooper interestingly comments that "the novel's various shiftings of fictive grounds are explorations of bypass like cures for impotence [. . .]" (223). The shifts in position are also attempts to modify life through disentanglements from pressing dilemmas.

Judea, notwithstanding the representation, is not just a place in the Middle East. It also serves as an item of Jewish choice on the list of various possibilities available to a Jew. The present of the articulation of consciousness is not actually a present. It appears to be a process of reinscription of the patches of the past within the space of Judea which in turn may provide the material for another open and divided present. The

section, “Judea” is a narrative corpus where the reader could find penetration by both diachrony and synchrony. David Carroll opines that fiction, when penetrated by both these frames, would present moments of experience that are incoherent because “it is not simply spatial, not simply present, but already within itself historical, carrying along with it traces of the past-the present moment of writing also” (147).

Judea is the primeval tribal state of the Jews. Nathan also, like his brother, seeks his Judea. But for him the thing larger than himself does not turn out to be his new country but his renewed dedication to the reality of fiction – including his own potential to sculpt in words a personal Jewishness. He articulates his ideology of a subjective Jewishness through the arguments with Henry on the subject of the search for the Jewish self:

‘Tell me something, is it at all possible, at least outside of those books, for you to have a frame of reference slightly larger than the kitchen table in Newark.? The kitchen table in Newark happens to be the source of your Jewish memories, Henry – this is the stuff we were raised on. It is Dad – though this time round without the doubts, without the hidden deference to the goy and the fear of the goyish mockery. It’s Dad, but the dream- Dad, supersized, raised to the hundredth power [. . .]’. (CL 138)

Nathan intends to undermine his brother's position by interpreting the loyalty to the leader, Lippman, as subjugation to an imposing father figure. Lippman, in his view, magnifies Henry/Hanoch's guilt just as their own father had done earlier by alluding to the anachronistic tropes of pogroms and Jewish vulnerability. These are issues which Nathan finds to be rather irrelevant for an understanding of the predicament of contemporary American social and political climate. But Henry estimates that his brother, as a writer, is prone to the reductivist tendency of looking at historical reality through the ahistorical prism of private neurosis. Nathan could comprehend his brother's zionistic sense of rebellion as nothing more than repressed desires manifesting in a new form against some paternal imago:

Wasn't what he described as a revolt against the grotesque contortions of the spirit suffered by the galut, or exiled Jew, more likely an extremely belated rebellion against the idea of manhood imposed upon a dutiful and acquiescent child by a dogmatic, super conventional father ? (*CL 112*)

Each charges the other with lack of authenticity, cultivating false values and going away from the real objectives. Shocked by the erosion of sanctity in the secular world, Henry assumes that his brother's life is not genuinely Jewish. In response to this, Nathan thinks that Henry's zionistic fervour is sheer counterfeit posturing: “ ‘Look, I'm all for authenticity, but it

can't begin to hold a candle to the human gift for playacting. That may be the only authentic thing that we *ever* do' ” (CL 138). Going radically down the roots of middle class Jewish American morals, he further lashes out at the simulated enthusiasm shown by Henry .

Neither the burning lush, nor the golden calf appears to haunt the collective memory of their family. On the contrary he believes that it goes back to “double features at the Roosevelt on Saturday afternoons and Sunday double headers at Ruppert Stadium watching the Newark Bears” (CL 133).

Just as Jews construct themselves and one another, so, too, others fantasize Jews. Nathan avers that Hitler's contemptuous construct of the Jew is similar to Lippman's attitude towards the Diaspora Jews. Both of them find in the Jew a repulsive aberrance and both condemn the pacifist inclinations and humanistic principles found in a Jew. What Lippman encourages and foments in an ideology grounded in violence and assertiveness: “The Jew who drives the school bus past the Arabs throwing stones at his windscreen, he does not *dream* of violence- he *faces* violence, he *fights* violence. We do not dream about force- we *are* force” (CL 127).

The polemic between Nathan and Lippman raises the issue of Jewishness to a dialectical proportion. A friendly dinner becomes an occasion for Lippman to launch a strong defense of Israeli nationalism. He opposes Shuki's values as those of “niceys and goodies” of Tel Aviv who simply want

to be “humane,” who are “embarrassed by the necessities of survival in a jungle” (CL 166). The Jewish weakness disguised as Jewish morality is anathema to him. Backed up by his wife Ronit, and friends, Buki and Daphna, he advocates stiff resistance to those he considers “Hellenized Jews” and to Arabs who want to see Israel obliterated (CL 117).

They do not want to crush the Arabs but would not let them crush the Jews. Lippman is in favour of coexistence but strongly opposes Arab statehood within the Israeli borders: “You can put the State of Israel seven times into the state of Illinois, but it is the only place on the entire planet where a Jew can have the experience of statehood, and that is why we do not give ground !” (CL 129).

Against such vehement pronouncements Nathan upholds his concept of subjective creation of history. The section is full of contradictory posturings and they seem to delight the reader with kaleidoscopic ideas on Jewishness. Perhaps the arguments make better sense among themselves than in reference to an outer reality. Verbal games transcend the realm of referentiality and redirect the reader’s interest toward the making of Jewish tropes of exile and Diaspora on the page. Klinkowitz states that in such mode of writing the attention is directed “less toward the conceptualisation of either the thing itself or to what it’s compared, and more to the distance between them, the arena of the writer’s art” (*The Self* 33). Realistic tropes that are

appropriated unrealistically in the section "Aloft" frustrate a referential reading, and the reader is hard put to develop strategies against the effacement of words and images within themselves. Klinkowitz is aware of such an impasse the reader confronts in a text, and he goes on to explain the phenomenon in very clear terms: "By blocking what the reader wants to do with words and making this disruption a more and satisfying process to follow, the self-apparent fictionist has taken the genre's weakest point and made it a tactical strength" (*The Self* 33).

The section "Aloft" creates a world where temporal and spatial dimensions confuse the reader with alternation of fact and fantasy. Conventional expectations are violated and the text obstructs the referential role of narrative by substituting a simulated world of story. Conceptualisation gets focussed on the story's own structure rather than its message about the Jews and their world.

The segment appears to be more of an interlude, a fantasy of Nathan's return from Tel Aviv aboard El Al flight 315. The debate on a Jew's transformation now takes place on an epistolary plane. Writing of his concern for Henry's newly constructed identity, he states that it was formed by "an imagination richer with reality" than his own. It is Lippman's powerful imagination that seems to have re-constituted his self in its new form as a zealous Zionist. "We are all each other's authors" (*CL* 145).

The letters drafted “aloft/E1 A1” form an elaborate hermeneutic code to the understanding of the intricacies of the text and its thematic concerns. The very spatial setting that is physically distanced from the mainland seems to be highly suggestive of the Jew’s inviolable consciousness of exile and wilderness. It is again in the tropal space of the desert “the cult is forged, the laws (written laws) are given, the covenant is renewed, and where the people act out in microcosm their history of being chosen, backsliding, being chastised, and renewing commitment (Fredericksen 37-38). The formative experience, as far as a Jew is concerned, is that of leaving his city or civilization and wandering in a land of wilderness. Taking cue from this tropical paradigm of Jewish Diasporic experience, it could be argued that, in the text, the spatial setting of “Aloft/ E1 A1” is similar to a wilderness from where Nathan tries to reinforce and explicate in clearer terms his ideas about the Jew and Jewishness. In traditional thinking, the desert forms the “home of absence, a vast space where nothing is contained” (Fredericksen 38). The Jew is supposed to go to desert to lose his civilization and himself. By doing so he finds a renewed self in a state of absence or nothingness. Similarly, the epistolary trope too appears to be suggestive of the empty space of the text that provides Nathan an opportunity to remould his ideas in a better way. A desert is occupied by shifting sands and endless possibility. Likewise, the text provides Nathan ample scope for ceaseless frames and perspectives of narration.

From the Jewish point of view, “both desert and Book are figural spaces which can represent Yahweh [. . .]” (Fredericksen 38). To write is an exile and writing also serves as a home for the self/ being. What a Jew needs is the exile from the voice of the spoken word. Basically, exile is not intended here as a means of tormentation. Nathan appropriates the condition of exile as a unique experience that could facilitate living in the indeterminacy of interpretation. He thinks that the Jew could be located in the literary words of the text: “The construction of a counter life that is one’s own antimyth was at its very core. It was a species of fabulous utopianism, a manifesto for human transformation as extreme – and, at the outset, as implausible – as any ever conceived. A Jew could be a new person if he wanted to” (CL 147).

The imagined exchange of letters among Nathan, Henry and Shuki builds scope for multivalent perspectives on the Jew and Judaism. This is a unit where Nathan, has domination as the narrator. As he composes and re-reads letters he makes definitive views about everything that happens around. Long distance correspondence makes way for single sided communication in the imagination. Letters are only simulated but neither sent nor answered, and so the polimic remains unresolved. The dramatic action, on the whole, enacts the principle he elucidates- authoring of other’s selves.

Shuki’s letter points out the problem that Nathan faces. Nathan is imaged as a “writer with a strong proclivity for exploring serious, even grave,

subjects through their comic possibilities” (*CL* 157-158). Even the Jews’ vulnerability is treated by him as hilarious and ironic. Shuki intends Nathan to become aware of the overwhelming danger of the potential for comic hyperbole which could lead anyone to gross cynicism. Comicality, he believes, is not always suitable to comprehend reality: “At the symposium here in 1960 you were condemned from the audience by a vociferous American-born Israeli citizen for being unforgivably blind in your fiction to the horror of Hitler’s slaughter [. . .]” (*CL* 162).

Henry’s counterlife of robust manhood in Israel and the Diaspora Jew’s probable counterlife of robust Jewishness in America are compared and contrasted in the letter that Nathan conceives of writing. Israel is described as an utopian state where the Jews are most likely to divest themselves of all their Jewishness and live as ordinary men and women. Moreover, this becomes a self justificatory argument that legitimates his personal choice of diaspora Counterlife. Alongside a self-justification, he advocates a sense of history that does not demand a straitjacket submissiveness to any essentialist ideology: “History doesn’t have to be made the way a mechanic makes a car – one can play a role in history without its having to be obvious, even to oneself (*CL* 146).

The stasis of this polemic which does not reach a point of consummation in the text is suddenly disrupted by the comic fantasy of a

hijack attempt by Jimmy Lustig, a Jew from New Jersey, whom Nathan had met at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Jimmy seeks Nathan's help for the hijack and his endeavour to force the Israeli government to close down Yad Vashem, the Museum of the Holocaust in Jerusalem. He insists that Jews should achieve deliverance from their super-ego by the advocacy of "Forget Remembering":

ISRAEL NEEDS NO HITLERS FOR THE RIGHT TO BE

ISRAEL!

JEWIS NEED NO NAZIS TO BE THE REMARKABLE

JEWISH PEOPLE!

ZIONISM WITHOUT AUSCHWITZ !

JUDAISM WITHOUT VICTIMS!

THE PAST IS PAST !WE LIVE! (CL 165)

Two Israeli security agents drag Jimmy and Nathan and torture them until they are exhausted. The officers make them realise how seriously ineffaceable the Jewish id of the holocaust is:

You think it's the Jewish superego they hate? They hate the Jewish id! What right do these Jews have to have an id? The Holocaust should have taught them never to have an id again. That's what got them into trouble in the first place! You think because of the Holocaust they think we're better? (CL 178)

As apart from dealing with the problematic of defining the Jew and Judaism, the text can also be read as one that involves itself in a dialectical conflict with the process of creating a plot /structure. It is a fiction about the invented worlds of fiction and the life of their inventor. By thematizing the structure in the novel, the narrative shatters all conventions and also dispels the notion of the unitary self by multiplying stories about/of self. Fiction is opened out to ponder over its own making.

Nathan's decentred/indeterminate self challenges the reader to shed all anxiety of the interpretive act as it foregrounds the duplicity of reality as well as language. The novel, as a whole, could be looked upon a metafictional exercise with an anachronistic commitment to the reformulation of the self-effacing real.² The Freudian notions of cause and effect seem to trouble the relationship between reality and fiction within the textual realm. Debra Shostak comments on the metafictional paradox in the novel: "The 'reality' of the novel is nothing but its fictiveness, its multiplication of possible realities, while at the same time its fictions are presented as participating in concrete, gritty and comic examples of felt life, much in the style of mainstream American realism"(199).

Nathan, as an actor-self in the narrative explores the diffuse boundaries of textuality and also the question of subjectivity itself. Right in the first segment "Basel" itself the novel emplots the premise of textual desire

through the explicit trope of Henry's sexual desire. The actions of "Basel" take place in New Jersey; only thing Swiss about the narrative segment is Wendy, a former mistress of Henry. She is Henry's lost opportunity to escape from middle class Jewish family life. She is based on an early affair Henry had confided to Nathan. The manuscript account of Henry's affair reveals the fact that he suffers cardiac arrest and beta-blocker induced impotence. He figures in Nathan's imagination as a symbol of quixotic desire. The childhood memory about Henry is associated with his sleepwalking "out of his room, down the stairs, out the door, and into the street [. . .]" (CL 15). On another occasion, "he was in his coffin, the sleepwalking boy" (CL 16).

The text alludes to erotic desire when it opens with Nathan constructing his brother's decision to undergo bypass surgery. In a unit typographically set off from the section "Basel," Henry is projected as desperately impotent for he cannot enjoy his dental assistant Wendy's wild passion. Henry's secret desire is revealed in the language of narrative construction: "He reminded himself of the terrible unruliness spawned by unconstrainable desire – the plotting, the longing, the crazily impetuous act, the dreaming relentlessly of the other, and when one of these bewitching others at last becomes the clandestine mistress, the intrigue and anxiety and deception" (CL6).

Henry wants to revitalize his own life by a heart surgery but dies during the operation. In Freudian terms, this initiatory event of Henry's death is the point of departure of Nathan's narrative. The reader who looks upon the incident from the Freudian point of view, would find that Henry is Nathan's double, the figure in Nathan's dream-novel who represents himself: "In a way brothers probably know each other better than they every know anyone else.' 'How they know each other, in my experience, is a kind of deformation of themselves'" (*CL* 80).

Nathan contemplates the purport of erotic desires as well as that of the death of the self. Perhaps the death of the self is fictionalised both as being deceased and as the disintegration of the unitary self. The paradox of bringing in the tropes of both regeneration and degeneration could be understood better if it is read with the help of Thomas Docherty's idea regarding the existence of a binary desire in fiction:

In general terms the desiring engenders a quest for something positive, procreative and generative, or it is manifest in a hope for the end of questing, for something negative, destructive, and retrogressive [. . .] the satisfaction of desire seems to be closely connected to death, the death of desiring subject. The subject seems to be real only in so far as it is deffered or projected towards a future. (224 – 225)

What is discernible in the segment “Basel” is a play of “the erotic” and “the thanatic.”³ Textual desire gets fictively transformed into sexual desire. Henry’s imagined death is a fantasy by means of which Nathan tries to overcome the anxiety over his own death. But this fantasy gets reversed in the fourth segment “Gloucestershire” where he himself dies after an unsuccessful surgery. The quest for counterlives ends with the textual thanatos that Nathan reaches in the fourth unit. By the end of the fifth segment “Christendom”, he attains a sort of immortality provided by textuality. The narrator-subject’s fears and desires get displaced: “Fantasy is speculation that is characteristically you, the you with your dream of self-overpowering, the you perennially bonded to your prize wish, your pet fear that he’d annihilated from his mental processes” (*CL* 235). The construct of counterlives helps Nathan to analyse his erotic desires, his death, and the disintegration of his self or rather the multitude of selves.

In the enactment of the segmented counterstories the self is not reported but prolonged. Silverman argues that “the writerly text replaces the concepts of ‘product’ and ‘structure’ with those of ‘process’ and ‘segmentation’ ” (247). These replacements transform the experience of textuality. Segmentation attracts the reader to the junctures which suture the pieces together. It lays stress on the autonomy of each of the textual units. Segmentation not only demystifies the classic text, but nourishes it greatly. Signification gets denser with ceaseless digressions and interpolations.

The text weaves out its circuitous sjuzet with an abundant use of repetition and inversion. Debra Shostak draws ideas from Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to explain that "repetition compulsion refers to the compulsive acting out of repressed traumatic experiences in an effort to master the trauma: repetition makes the experience familiar, bringing it from the unconscious, through memory, into consciousness" (202). "Gloucestershire" offers a counterlife in which Nathan suffers in place of Henry and also dies. Carol is substituted by Maria, the wife of his upstairs neighbour. Nathan falls in love with her and wants to marry her and rear children. He is forced to be satisfied with a one-sided affair. Maria's main accusation against her secret lover is:

You have a defiant intelligence: you like turning resistance to your own advantage. Opposition determines your direction. You would probably never have written those books about Jews if Jews hadn't insisted on telling you not to. You only want a child now because you can't. (CL 188)

The narrative unit is again full of the repetition of oppositions, contrasts, and counterlives as in "Basel," "Judea", and "Aloft."

The impotent Nathan wonders as to why Maria stays in relationship with him. She gives a paradoxical reply: " 'I mean that without the physical commitment somehow a woman like me feels stronger' (CL 197). Their age

difference too is a source of mutual attraction as it is a young twenty seven year old woman in love with a forty five year old gentleman. She too is a writer, a “hackette” who pens “fluent cliches and fluffy ephemera for silly magazines” (CL 189). She apprehends that he has already started transforming herself by inventing a woman who doesn’t exist” (CL 191). He has/has not started this as the subsequent turn of events show.

Restoration of health and potency for the consummation of his relationship with Maria becomes the strongest motive that leads him to bypass surgery: “If I can have this wonderfully bruised, supercivilized woman, I can be recovered from my affliction fully” (CL 203). He is beset with a “purely mythic endeavour, a defiant, dreamlike quest for the self-emancipating act, possessed by an intractable idea of how [his] existence is to be fulfilled [. . .] (CL 205). But the surgery turns out to be a failure. Henry too gets his turn to find himself unable to read the eulogy on his brother. The young editor delivers the eulogy praising Nathan’s earlier novel *Carnovsky*. Henry later learns that Nathan himself had, before death, composed his eulogy extolling his novel. He also discovers Nathan’s notebooks and chapters of the book *The Counterlife*. Henry finds himself represented in bad light in the drafts of “Basel” and “Judea.”

On reading them he is prompted to make a categorical declaration: “Of all the classics of irresponsible exaggeration, this was the filthiest, most

recklessly irresponsible of all” (*CL* 226). Henry leaves with more than two hundred and fifty pages of the manuscript, and keeps undisturbed certain portions of “Aloft” and the whole of the section “Christendom”.

Henry’s discovery reveals certain contradictory facts that are demeaning to Nathan’s writer- self. The segment provides Henry or rather Nathan provides himself an opportunity to comprehend how his readers perceive the positions he takes in his novelistic discourse. Henry affirms that his brother was using him “to conceal himself while simultaneously disguising himself as himself [Nathan], as responsible, as sane, disguising himself as a reasonable man while [Henry is] revealed as the absolute dope” (*CL* 226-227).

The novel remarks about itself both “retrospectively and prospectively” and effects alteration, falsification, exaggeration, and fictionalization of everything and everyone (Halio 192). To a great extent, it could also be read as a commentary on the ontological status of fictional discourse and the role of the writer who remains highly elusive. Patricia Waugh, while trying to answer the question, “Are novelists liars?” makes the following statement about the “creation/description paradox” in metafiction:

Metafiction not only exposes the inauthenticity of the realist assumption of simple extension of the fictive into the real world; it also fails deliberately to provide its readers with sufficient or

sufficiently consistent components for him or her to be able to construct a satisfactory alternative world. Frames are set up only to be continually broken. Contexts are ostentatiously constructed, only to be subsequently deconstructed. (101)

The metafictional writers ususally eschew positions of falsity. As Nathan/Roth would insist, they construct through language an imaginative world with full referential status as an alternative to the world of reality. Fictional discourse exists and has its “truth” within the corpus of the alternative world. Statements of the real world have their “truth” in the setting of a world which they help to create.

Fictional text is merely a different matrix of “frames,” a different matrix of conventions and constructions. In this perspective, a novelistic subject is ‘unreal’ in one sense, but subjects who are not persons are still “real” and they exist within their particular worlds.

Metafictional texts “reveal the ontological status of all literary fiction: its quasi-referentiality, its indeterminacy, its existence as words and world” (Waugh 101). By frequent shifts in and revelations of context, they emphasize the paradox of creation and description. The more a text lays emphasis on linguistic constraints, the more is it removed from the common milieu of everyday life presented by realistic fiction. It reveals the fact that literary fiction can never imitate or represent the world in its real form but always

imitates or represents the discourses which facilitate the construction of that world. However this does not mean that there is absolute autonomy from reality for the alternative world of fiction. Notwithstanding the fact they are linguistic constructs far removed from everyday reality, they still always implicitly evoke the happenings and settings of common reality.

About the overall structure of *TheCounterlife*, Halio remarks that “the novel doubles back upon itself, once, twice, three times, providing counterlives to counterlives, countereulogies to countereulogies [. . .]” (192). This kind of an overall structure is controlled mainly by speculative repetitions. The overall pattern becomes all the more evident when the reader reaches the last segment, “Christendom.” Each of the five segments effects a change on the prominent trope of flight or escape. The tropal figure of physical death is seen to be centre upon which all repetitions are grounded. Nathan, from the beginning till the end, fears mortality. In other words, his fear could be seen as that of losing his self the Other who might wear a multitude of faces – the lover, the gentile, or the political state. The text lacks linearity in progression, and each segment either replaces or supplements the one that has gone before as a probable construction of inverted, or extended narrative semes.

In “Basel,” Henry desires to escape by means of the *shikse*, Wendy who is a forbidden erotic object. He desires to achieve his sense of being by

objectifying the other, and building the power of his own subjectivity. In “Judea,” Henry’s escape is “from the folly of sex, from the intolerable disorder of virile pursuits and the indignities of secrecy and betrayal” to assert a “transpersonal, historical self” (*CL* 132; Shostak 205). The trope of the crazy flight in “Aloft” tries to categorise and define the “normal” and “abnormal” selves of the Jew. “Gloucestershire” again deals with the erotic, but here the desire is displaced into language and textuality. The escape is toward the mode of existence offered by textuality which is beyond the rules of time or mortality. The final unit, “Christendom” introduces an assimilationist fantasy of an escape into domesticity. It presents Nathan’s imagined life with pregnant Maria. She represents the genteel and serene domestic culture of a refined English family. His life with Maria in England is an escape from his cultural alienation from Judaism, home and family.

Narrative repetitions in the text become relevant when they are seen as intrinsically metonymic substitutions that bring about counter-progressions at the level of characterization and structural constitution. Repetitions take place between Henry’s initiatory death in “Basel” and Nathan’s textual demise at the end of “Christendom”. Between these two points in the narrative, the preoccupations that recur regard the themes of impotence and erotic relationship, death and health, Jewishness and Christendom, and normality and abnormality of the self. The devices of repetition and inversion are significant from a Freudian perspective on narrativity. The compulsion

towards repetitiveness could refer to “the compulsive acting out of repressed traumatic experience in an effort to master the trauma: repetition makes the experience familiar, bringing it from the unconscious” (Shostak 202). It is basically through metonymic representation that the text binds together its diverse themes and energies. Peter Brooks, in his essay “Freud’s Masterplot”, argues that metonymy is the pivotal figure of narrative: “The description of narrative needs metonymy as the figure of movement, of linkage in the signifying chain, of the slippage of the signified under the signifier” (281). The beginning anticipates the end, and it is in this pattern that one could read through the five chapters of *The Counterlife*. The reader reads the incidents of narration as signs of promise and annunciation enchained metonymically toward a construction of significance. The sense of beginning (“Basel”) gets determined by the sense of an ending (“Christendom”). Brooks adds that “all narration is obituary in that life acquires definable meaning only at, and through, death” (Brooks 284). Between the two poles of life and death the repetitive phenomenon occurs as a chain of metonymic representations: “Narrative always makes the implicit claim to be in a state of repetition, as a going over again of a ground already covered : a sjuzet repeating the fabula [. . .] (Brooks 285).

The novel opens with Nathan’s imagined but undelivered three thousand word eulogy. The first authorized version is the one that is accepted by Carol and also apparently approved of by the text as it is placed in the first

chapter after Nathan's italicized musings that give a different version about Henry. But, later in the chapter, Nathan imagines that he hears from Carol too about Henry's sexual escapades. The second composition of eulogy is for Nathan himself who dies in the fourth unit. This eulogy is not a justification of erotic desire but of fiction's appropriation of fabula from real life.

Henry's liaison with Maria is recorded in Nathan's journal. He uses Maria as a material. She becomes more of a prototypical object of his erotic desire. She gets transformed into an English lady in the last two segments of the text. She appears to be a fiction, and Nathan the narrating subjectivity. He keeps himself in her company to tell her tale and also to invent it in so many ways he like. As she once observes, he wishes to "rise in exuberant rebellion against [his] author and remake [his] life" (CL 313). In "Christendom," Nathan reconstructs Maria's mother as an ordinary woman, and Sarah, her sister, as an anti-Semite. English anti-Semitism becomes a thematic concern in their conversation at a restaurant where they eat and celebrate Maria's twenty eighth birthday. A quarrel arises between the husband and the wife over this matter. She threatens to divorce him and also charges him with the act of reinventing the issue of anti-Semitism on the provocation by an experience with one of his previous wives. In her long anguished monologue, she compares him to Mordecai Lippman, the fanatic Zionist. Jewishness never allows him to go scotfree as it becomes the focus and centre of his existence as well as of his marriage. He wonders if he is a "paranoid Jew attaching

false significance to a manageable problem requiring no more than commonsense to defuse – if [he] wasn't making them all stand for far too much and over imagining everything [. . .]" (*CL* 307).

Maria leaves him after writing a letter. She is apprehensive of what he might do to her daughter Phoebe. If he could kill Henry, kill himself and construct the hijack episode he could even make Phoebe the object of an interesting text. She is at pains to realise that Nathan is incorrigibly preoccupied with an "irresolvable conflict" (*CL* 313). It appears "boring and regressive and crazy" for Nathan to be madly associated with a community into which he "simply happened to have been born, and a very long time ago at that" (*CL* 314).

In the imagined reply to the imagined letter, Nathan discredits the idea of an essential self. He argues that a subject is constrained to take up several roles and "impersonates best the self that best gets one through" (*CL* 320). He agrees to the charge that pastoral ideals are no more his favourite. He associates circumcision to pastoralism in a strangely convincing manner. Circumcision is believed to be the ultimate means of the Jew to prove that the child is born into the world and out of the womb, or the primordial pastoral environment. Nathan considers that circumcision is the quintessential Jewish mark of reality that "makes it clear as can be that you are out and not in -also that you're mine and not theirs. There is no way around it: you enter history

through my history and me” (CL 323). Nathan’s secular mask seems to fall off his self and his Jewish pride is out. But still the reader cannot get much hermeneutic clue about Nathan. He appears to sum up the web of the codes of reality and writerliness as well .

All through the text it has been the reversal, displacement and repetition of here/there, out/in, and mine/theirs. The “no way around it” seems to identify circumcision with circumcision. It is a process of initiation into a world of confrontational plurality as against that of the pastoral’s “strifeless unity” (CL 323). Only in England does Nathan recognise the distinction of being a Jew. Michael Greenstein, with a psychoanalytic perspective, makes striking comment about the trope of the body that erupts in the text towards the end: “Cut off one of Hydra’s heads and regeneration ensures; circumcize the Jew and counterlife begins. In English the signifier “pen” is related to penis (phallogocentrism); in Hebrew, *meelah* equates word and circumcision as homonyms” (62).

Through their absent foreskins “they are supposed to pursue their forefathers (Greenstein 63) . Nathan resorts to die again and embrace oblivion, perhaps in the textual maze of the *meelah*.

NOTES

¹ The writerly text is characterised by a ceaseless play of signification where there is little possibility for the existence of a transcendental signified. Such a text will have no syntagmatic coherence and can be entered at any juncture. See Silverman 246-250.

² The term “metafiction” seems to have been initiated into critical operation by the American critic and novelist William H. Gass in an essay published in 1970. Metafiction deals with the problem of how man reflects constructs and mediates his experience of the world. It draws on the classical metaphor of the world as a book and recasts the idea of fiction in terms of philosophical, linguistic, or literary theory. See Patricia Waugh 1-19.

³ Freud employs the Greek word “eros” in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), to connote all the life instincts as opposed to the death instincts. He wants his readers to substitute this term for sexual instincts to overcome all the derogatory sense allied to it. “Eros” could readily be used as synonym for ‘life instinct’. Even though Freud does not prominently use the opposite word ‘thanatos’ in any of his writings, it understandably, could designate the death instinct or the instinct of destructiveness found in his idea of instinctual dualism. See Richard Wollheim 107-126.

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N. SAJAN

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
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CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Roth's fictional discourse appear to question all the conventional contract between the author the reader, the subject and the text. They very rarely conform to the literary norms of an Aristotelian narrative as they have "many beginnings, middles, and endings" (Milbauer and Watson 11). What Roth says, in his interview with these two critics, about *The Counterlife* undoubtedly applies to almost all the five texts analysed in detail in the previous chapters. The five novels appear to be rather fairly representative of the whole corpus of Roth's fiction . They appear to be representative because almost all the major themes and preoccupations found generally in Roth's fictional discourse are well focussed upon. The author's major concerns have been brought under three heads: the family, the state and the literary imagination. From the study of the texts under the three macro-structural units, it is possible, to a considerable extent, to reach certain conclusions regarding the texts, their contexts and their status as the institution of narrative prose fiction. Again, for interpretative convenience and analytical coherence in the conclusion, Roth's fiction would be considered in terms of the authority or the author; the textual structure; and the constitution of the subject which have come to stay as three formidable entities in contemporary writing.

With the death of the mimetic order of fiction in the last quarter of the twentieth Century, the novel, at present, is faced not with the problem of representing experience through language but with that of experiencing language through a disintegration of the represented reality. Andre Brink expresses the view that the contemporary novels are “amazingly dense intertexts, subsuming within them something of the history of the novel as a genre- reaching back across the centuries [. . .]” (3). Roth has to be placed as an author in such a context where the issues of authority and power are of utmost concern to American writers. Since the eighteenth century, power has been either concentrated or centralized, in social institutions, and political state. In a milieu saturated with power in multifarious forms, almost all citizens are made to share the sense of power and examine its limits and lapses; and also discover its hidden dangers. The author has to perform the role of mediator to preserve or transform the place where he lives. His efforts toward redemption of his environment cannot be separated from an exercise of power that is carried over to the medium of language which is his mighty instrument. In the present circumstances, where language has lost its poetic force, the writer has the responsibility to revitalise words to encompass truth.

But contrary to this, what seems to be coming up as a trend among the modern writers is a structuralist frame of view that goes counter to the modernist traditions of the past one hundred and twenty five years. Charles Russell is of the opinion that “the basis of contemporary stylistic

experimentation or innovation is no longer a belief in an historical directionality grounded in the nineteenth century faith in political and scientific progress” (359). The contemporary novelists tend to adopt the structure of a discourse that is the structure of their desires, illusions, and needs. But it appears to be quiet doubtful as to whether such structures permit scope for the significant expansion of meaning and the propagation of social values. Contemporary literature seeks to move in two main directions. One tries to apprehend how experiential reality is filtered through consciousness or the self. The other course taken by literature is to focus closely upon the prescriptive structures of literary language. Roth appears to have taken the first direction, “to a celebration of the self, which may, in a variety of ways, become his subject, as well as the impetus that establishes the perimeters of his technique” (*RMAO* 135).

Roth’s fiction mainly makes use of the fabula appropriated from the post Korean America’s painful concerns. Psychoanalysis, alienation, erotic-fixations, pornography, urban violence, familial crises, Jewish history and ineffectuality of liberal political ideology all become thematically realised in the novels. Hermione Lee analyses the novelist’s literary evolution in three stages (9-11). Firstly, he is said to have transcended the Jewish cultural ghetto to wider but alien spaces of the world. Secondly he seems to have grown up with the rest of America, from the relative plainness of the fifties to the radical scepticism of the present. Thirdly, but more importantly, his fictional

strategies show a marked change from anecdotal realism to surrealism, pastiche, confessionals, psychic fantasies and to objectified autobiographies. As an author who operates with his discursivity on such a volatile plane of reality the reader cannot expect him to exercise authorial authority the way the realist writers of the nineteenth century did.

Actually, the word “author,” as according to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, means a person who creates or gives existence to something, a begetter, father or one who sets forth written statements. Edward W. Said finds an interesting link between the word “author” and the past participle of the Latin verb “augere” which means “an increaser and a founder” (49). Again, “auctoritas” means production, invention or right of possession. It could also mean continuance or causing to continue. All these meanings together point towards the notions of the individual power to initiate, power to supplement, and the authority for continuance of a course. All these could be understood as what an author performs in narrative fiction. A novel “asserts itself psychologically and aesthetically through the technical efforts of the novelist” (Said 49).

In the contemporary age, the best word that Said finds to designate the author’s exercise of writerly authority is “molestation” (49). The apprehension of novel writing as a discursive exercise would reveal the fact that the writer sets his fictional discourse as a parallel to the world of common

discourse. In this parallel process, authority and “molestation” get to be the root of all fictional production. There is begetting, continuity, augmentation, and molestation of reality. But the locus of the author – reader relationship seems to have been seriously undermined in almost all the novels of Roth, just as in most of the fictional texts of his age. In the centre of his novel is the focal character whose voice acts as an opaque mediator between experience and fictional truth. Fiction paradoxically tries to construct truth through falsity and a process of elimination and augmentation.

Generally, the author’s name prompts the reader to attribute to him certain discursive practices and determine their category within a society or culture. Foucault, in his essay, “What is an Author?” questions the traditional practices of the reading public to fix the responsibility for the writing on a single person called author (108-109). Foucault’s premise is that the author is “only a projection, in more or less psychologizing terms, of the operations that we force texts to undergo, the connections that we make, the traits that we establish as pertinent, the continuities that we recognize, or the exclusions that we practice” (110). The author’s biographical details, more often than not, provide the foundation upon which the readers build their propositions about literary texts. But, in Roth’s case this kind of a strategy of reading would undoubtedly prove to be self-defeating and detrimental to the pattern in which five of his novels have been examined. All the five texts contain a number of signs like the personal pronouns, and adverbs of time and place

that seemingly refer to the author. Foucault states that these signs are highly misleading and it would be “wrong to equate the author with the real writer as to equate him with the fictitious speaker; the author function is carried out and operates in the scission itself, in this division [disintegration] and this distance” (112). The first person pronoun and the present indicative do not categorically refer either to the writer or to the time in which he writes, but rather to an alter ego whose spatio-temporal distance from the author varies from time to time and text to text. Roth’s novels appear, to a certain extent, to be endowed with the “author function.” But they possess a plurality of self which the reader has to dislocate and locate in the process of a “deft” reading explained in the second chapter of the thesis. Roth’s self that speaks in an interview, a preface and in *Reading Myself and Others* and in the texts are all apparently different from one another. In an interview or a preface, the “I” refers to an individual who has completed a certain job. In the text, the “I” indicates an individual caught within a web of symbols, signs and axioms. Again within the text itself the “I” could, as a third self, perform the hermeneutic role of explaining the meaning of signs or actions. In these strands of discourse, Roth gets dispersed/disintegrated as many “simultaneous selves” (Foucault 113). As apart from the “author function,” what requires further consideration is the way the traditional character has been replaced by what could conveniently be called the subject in the post-Freudian sense of the term. The basic change the reader could find is the shift from the dark

zones of psychology toward the surface. This shift is clearly discernible in the discursive evolution from *Portnoys Complaint* to *The Counterlife*. It is not the mere shift toward surface. In *The Great American Novel*, and *The Counterlife* the traditional concepts of character and form become a means of parodying the conventions themselves. In *Our Gang* and the baseball novel the names chosen seem to have meanings which they do not have or do not develop or about which one cannot judge. They undermine the importance of the names and ultimately of "character" in fiction. The practice appears to bring out the fissure between the meaning the reader assigns and the meaning which may or may not be there. Character becomes fiction in Roth and his novels abound with characters whose names are simultaneously appropriate and incongruous.

The treatment by the author of himself as his own main character has emerged as an unconventional technique in modern experimental novels. This is found to exist very prominently in *The Counterlife* where Nathan Zuckerman is considered as "Zuckerroth" by Alan Cooper (213). The reader is intrigued and delighted by Roth's treatment of his fictional self. At the same time it could be considered outrageous if judged from a different viewpoint. It is in fact like the real Roth manipulating the reader's attitude towards the fictional Roth. This kind of manipulation is most likely to obscure and confuse the significant implications with regard to the bond between

imagination and fact. This is a point where the contemporary writers like Roth face the charge of lying.

In the attempt to define the ontological dimension of literary fiction, philosophers have gathered themselves into two groups. The first group subscribes to the view that fiction is nothing but refined lies. The second group argues that it is irrelevant to talk about the status of "truth" in literary fiction. But from the polemic between these two groups a third opinion also has arisen that fiction presents "alternative worlds." Patricia Waugh believes that there is a clear conflict between description and creation in fiction:

Description of objects in fiction are simultaneously creations of that object (Descriptions of objects in the context of the material world are determined by the existence of the object outside the description). Thus the ontological status of fictional objects is determined by the fact that they exist by virtue of, whilst also forming, the fictional context which is finally the words on the page. (88)

From this view it is clear that a fictional character exists as well as does not exist. He/She is a non-entity but at the same time is somebody. Portnoy, at the end of the novel just lets out a long anguished cry. The character is only a voice, having awareness of its existence only when it articulates. What the conventional reader longs for is the real that supposedly

exists outside language, beyond an author. But the actuality is only of the author's voice which is let out through language. Ultimately, language forms the totality of existence and the text is the only reality one could look forward to.

In Roth proper names are displayed in their apparent arbitrariness or absurdity. They are placed in a directly metaphoric/metonymic or adjectival relationship with the thing they name. This is quite pertinent to all the five texts. Bernice W. Kliman has written an article itself on the peculiarity of names in *Portnoy's Complaint*. He thinks that the novel operates as a discourse mainly because of its peculiar proper names. With familiar historical and casual names the text achieves verisimilitude.

Again, interchangeability of characters also poses a problem to the reader. In *My Life as a Man*, *The Great American Novel* and *The Counterlife* interchangeability is either implied or covert. The thoughts and impressions assigned to the major and minor characters are more of tropisms as they seem to have a high level of similarity and a low level of individuation among themselves. Robert S. Ryf maintains that "the narrator, both participant and observer, merges with his characters on occasion, and the characters themselves assume, from time to time, each other's identities, at least in part" (321). Characters are given reduced importance as characters for their own sake in order to harness their potential for point of view. They have the

potential to provide various masks for the author. This is significantly exemplified through *My Life as a Man* and *The Counterlife*. Ryf further reinforces the point by drawing out a pertinent analogy between “author-character relationship to” the epistemological function of the imagination” (332).

Of noteworthy significance is the narrator taking up the role of an informant about his own text. Along with this is the shifting perception of the nature of the bond between narrator and characters. In Roth’s novels, the narrator who calls the characters “you” appears to perform the composite role of an observer and participant as well. Characters in Roth’s fiction usually disintegrate, but what keeps them as beings with simulated integrity is their proper names. The names not only identify in the sense of naming the character but they also unify, integrate and individualize the disparate attributes of the character. Docherty suggests that naming strategy in fiction would make possible the existence of the character as a “pre-text” as well as the character’s existence in the ‘context’ of the novel” (223). In realistic fiction, the reader gets referred back in time to an existence cinterior to the text which reveals the significance of the character in the text. But Roth’s *avant garde* novels do not refer the reader to the character’s existence as a “pre text,” on the other hand, they refer him to a “post-text” (Docherty 223). That is to a future construction of relevant subjective experience or history, and not to a conceptually realised past experience.

Be it within the realm of the familial ties or a conflict with the polity, the motivational forces effect disintegration of the whole self in character. In a certain way, the illusory ontological existence of the character is undermined by such a strategy in writing. Characters could be found transcending the boundaries of the fiction or sometimes they even go beyond the integrating notion of the self. In this case the novel gets into history, the history and experience of the reader-subject.

Roth's characters look for a place of safety and security, a home rather, from where they could meaningfully interpret their world. Over and above this, they need a stasis and rest in the accomplishment of selfhood. Their home could be the static centred self from which frame of view they would be able to make meaning of their universe. The motivation of the character towards a fixed self, a static place or "home" is a difficult thing to consummate. Roth's narrative discourse does not appear to refer to one named self as such. The language of the texts becomes connotative of a kinetic series of subjects. Character loses its place and static self and becomes, as Docherty would say, "absent to its own speaking presence in the text" (235). Portnoy cries out to Spielvogel to deliver him from a state of emptiness. To Smitty, the sense of aloneness has been "the masoned, walled town of a novelist's exclusiveness, which admits but small entrance to any sympathy from the green country without" (*GAN* 42). Again, Nathan states about his search for his true self as "the search for [his] anti-self carrying [his] old identity papers

and disguised as N.Z.” (CL 149). It is through a productive interaction that the reader and the character attain their ontological status within the discourse as desiring kinetic subjects. Smitty and Tarnopol desire a comprehensible epistemological structuration of events that would let them find their place among them in fiction. This appears to be the motivation for them to write narratives. They have to locate themselves in the space between the experiencing character and the narrating character. They all fail to reach a point of consummation and end up merely as a subject but not as a static self. America becomes an important text, for it stages the evolution from the self to the subject. All characters find themselves exiled from their self (home) and arriving in the brave new world of choice that is America which symbolizes “a punishment for a transgression at home” (Docherty 240). Every novel starts at a point where innocence is lost and the character (and reader) is at the entry point of the experience of America. The new typology of characterisation, based on agapeic motivation liberates characters from their status as static selves. It also helps the reader move into the possibility of a subjective experience beyond the self. History could then be constructed through subjective characterisation.

Roth’s texts appear to disavow epiphany and pretend to believe in the worthlessness of external values which imply the peril of reducing the writer’s scope for expression of subjectivity. Well in keeping with the spirit of his age, the reader is able to find a shift of the “mimetic referent from external

‘reality’ to their own mock literary activity” (Greenman 308). His fiction rejects the concepts of spirituality and aesthetics, and what is substituted for them is an engagement with the banal. In the novels, one finds the attempt to situate the reader in their language constructs. Description seems to be shunned to make way for the discursive construct. In Roth, language itself becomes an essential property out of which he makes his construct: “Beginning with *Goodbye Columbus*, I’ve been attracted to prose that has the turns, vibrations, intonations, and cadences, the spontaneity and ease, of spoken language, at the same time that it is solidly grounded on the page, weighted with the irony, precision, and ambiguity associated with a more traditional literary rhetoric” (*RMAO* 15). By his unconventional use of language, he brings into effect an epistemological shift that calls into question the mimetic property of language as a window to the world of reality. The texts become a site not merely for an intercourse between fiction and reality, but also for a dialectical confrontation between language/syntax and reality. The syntax of reality is made apparent by asyntax of language. Barthes, in “Theory of the Text” defines the text by giving supreme status to its linguistic component:

“The text is a fragment of language, itself placed in a perspective of language. To communicate some knowledge or some theoretical reflection about the text pre-supposes, then that one is oneself in some way or other engaging in textual practice” (35).

There appears to be a total absence of easily decipherable values and of any philosophic or aesthetic depth in the texts. They are more involved in bringing about the recognition of that literature fundamentally is a subjective act. The aesthetic object seems to be a non-entity or peripheral to the text's functioning as a discursive operation. If at all there is a mimetic strand in Roth's texts it would be mimesis of subjective, internalised reality.

Contemporary thinking posits that a text is framed by its own commentary. The interpretation of a literary text depends upon the same level as its object. This is say that the interpretative potential of the text is embodied within itself. There can be no pure literary object that would not contain a code of interpretation. The classic conflict between the text and its external interpretative operation is replaced by what Slavoj Zizek defines as "a continuity of an infinite literary text which is always already its own reading; that is which sets up distance from itself" (153). This point about the possibility of metalanguage in fiction is very relevant in the case of *The Counterlife*. Perhaps, this is why the contemporary critical procedure emphasizes a search in purely literary texts for statements denoting a theory about their functioning.

Generally speaking, every text is caught in a fundamental ambiguity and flooded with the dissemination of the intertextual process. The appeal of the text is not to the being of man but ultimately to the structures of language

and the unconsciousness. Literature and humanistic discourses have been trying to “dissolve” man. They have been creating epistemes to provide themselves with a space to individuate man as an object to be known according to a number of different paradigms. Roth too could be said to succeed in creating a matrix of space within which he, through novelistic discursivity, tries to establish the basis on which man is able to present himself to a possible knowledge.

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