CHAPTER IV

MIDDLE PHSE
Estelar
Portnoy's Complaint (1969) is Philip Roth’s immensely controversial, exquisitely vulgar American novel that turned its author into a major celebrity, sparking a storm of controversy over its explicit and candid treatment of sexuality, including detailed depictions of masturbation using various props including a piece of liver. The entire novel is Portnoy’s monologue with his psychoanalyst, Dr. Spielvogel where he tries to share his childhood experiences, his upbringing, an exploration of guilt (of the middle-class, American-Jews). The book surprised and shocked the sixties decade readership of 20th century because it was an unpredicted and unexpected work dealing with the frank and candid description of sex. The book is divided into six chapters: The Most Unforgettable Character I’ve Met, Whacking Off, The Jewish Blues, Cunt Crazy, The Most prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life, and In Exile.

The first section The Most Unforgettable Character I’ve Met emphasize on Alex Portnoy’s memories of his childhood; in fact the first chapter explicitly concentrate on the description of the second main character Sophie Portnoy. Whacking Off deals with growing up in an expatriate country in predominantly Jewish neighborhood and his adventurous experiences of masturbation. The third chapter The Jewish Blues is a conflict between Judaism and secularism. This part of the novel talks about Alex and his typical stereotyped parents. The fourth section of the novel is cunt crazy in which Alex describes his compulsive adolescent masturbation frantic affairs with his gentile girlfriends and in the final chapter the relation of the assimilated Jews to Israeli Jews has been shown.
It can be an irony that the books like *Goodbye Columbus* and *Portnoy’s Complaint*, one of which won him a National Book Award and the other which is a best seller till now Roth wrote; were the books for which Roth was condemned explicitly. Portnoy, the main protagonist of the novel Portnoy’s Complaint is overwhelmed by obsession for sex (which is degraded by Judaism) and by a possessive Jewish mother. He finds his parents to be “the outstanding producers and packagers of guilt”. Roth became celebrity over night but at the same time he was slammed especially by the Jews and rabbis who called him a self-hating Jew. People who had once praised him like Irving Hove too criticized him in his essay Roth re-considered for writing a vulgar book. He convicted his works to be offensive, condescension, and morally callous. He decided that his appreciation of Roth in past needed a second thought and major surgery. Its obscene scenes, candid diction, gripes about parent’s idiocy, shallow treatment of Jewish life altogether made it a complete package for criticism.

Told as a bizarre stream of consciousness the book initiates with the psychiatrist Dr. Speivogel’s attempt of defining the Alex’ disorder clinically as:

*Portnoy’s Complaint* n. A disorder in which strongly-felt ethical and altruistic impulses are perpetually warring with extreme sexual longings, often of a perverse nature.

Spielvogel says:

'Acts of exhibitionism, voyeurism, fetishism, auto-eroticism and oral coitus are plentiful; as a consequence of the patient's "morality," however, neither fantasy
nor act issues a genuine sexual gratification, but rather in overriding feelings of shame and the dread of retribution, particularly in the form of castration.' (Spielvogel, O. "The Puzzled Penis," Internationale Zeitschrift fur Psychoanalyse, Vol XXIV p.909). It is believed by Spielvogel that many of the symptoms can be traced to the bonds obtaining in the mother-child relationship.’ (Prologue, Portnoy’s Complaint)

This well-known novel, once-controversial because of its graphic sexual and religious content, is the story of Alexander Portnoy, a guilt-laden protagonist who grows up in a middle-class Jewish neighborhood of Newark, profoundly troubled young man struggling with several disquieting obsessions. Narrated from a passionate, highly articulate and frantic stream of consciousness point of view, the book explores themes relating to the nature and purpose of sexuality, Jewishness, and freedom.

This narrative of one man's tortured explorations of his past and present is told from the first person point of view, unfolding through a complicated, cause-triggering-effect relationship between past and present, idea and feeling, insight and observation. It begins with the narrator's blunt, serio-comic description of his very Jewish, very controlling, and very frustrating parents, and continues with a graphic and uncompromising description of his obsession with sex in general, and masturbation in particular.
The novel begins with a section entitled "The Most Unforgettable Character I've Met"; the reference is to Sophie Portnoy who dominates not only the family but also the confessions of her son.

The whole chapter is the description that why does Sophie was so that little Alex was unable give her up from his memory for a second. He plunge off her description as a dominating individual in his life with-

“She was so deeply imbedded in my consciousness that for the first year of school I seem to have believed that each of my teachers was my mother in disguise.” (PC 1)

Throughout he lost before “her ubiquity” he remembered his mother as an individual who could “accomplish anything”(5, 11).

His father was perpetually constipated and henpecked husband he always use to teach Alex that

“Alex, a man has got to have an umbrella for a rainy day. You don’t leave a wife and a child out in the rain without an umbrella!”

Sophie was a mother with typical mothering styles, she used to pull a knife before her seven year old son who does not even know about his mistake….which he found very strange

“Doctor why, why, why oh why oh why does a mother pull a knife on her own son? I am six or seven year old, how do I know she really wouldn’t use it?” (16)
As Alex grew up he starts craving for masturbation. He spends most of his time doing it “before meals, during meals, after meals” after some time he realizes that he is suffering from some disease in his personal part. (19) His mother is over concerned about Alex wherever he is and whatever he is doing whether he is in bathroom she wants to see exactly what Alex is doing which some kind of frustrate Alex and he wants to escape that. She is a perfect Jewish mother stereotype who is over concerned and over protective like she asks him “Why is your throat red?” (33) He rejects their parenting style-

“These people are incredible! These people are unbelievable. Doctor Speilvogel, this is my life, my only life and I am living it in the middle of the Jewish joke.” (36)

In an attempt to make himself free from his parents and Jewishness he found sex to release all the agony and frustrations but somehow fails in doing so.

Alex always get attracted towards gentile girls which his parents strictly denied. His mother had restricted him from eating non-kosher food and for that she was ready to induce guilt into him.

“There are plenty of good things to eat in the world. Alex, without eating anything like lobster and running the risk of having paralyzed hands for the rest of your life.”

Annoyed with his upbringing and all the guilt concept of Jewish people Alex pity his present state and blames is parents for his condition
“who made us so morbid and hysterical and weak? Why, why are they screaming still, “watch out! Don’t do it! Alex –no!” and why alone on my bed in New York, why am I still hopelessly beating my meat? Doctor what do you call this sickness I have? Is this the Jewish suffering I used to hear so much about?” (37)

No one can easily make out that they should laugh or criticize or sympathize Alex. When Alex was nine year old he found that he was suffering from problem in his testicles

She was a mother who called her son her lover she has different affection which is other than a mother child affection she takes him to be her lover she asks him-

“Feel”

“What?”- eaven as she takes my hand in hers and draws it toward her body-“Mother-

“I haven’t gained five pounds,” she says, “since you were born, feel,” she says and holds my stiff fingers against the swell of her hips, which aren’t bad…”

What she exactly trying to do with a four year old boy was that for praise and attracting the little boy. Alex call himself and his mother a “maddened couple” going through Oedipus Complex. the best moments when Alex enjoyed was when his father us to take him to Turkish bath, “shvitz bath” he was happy going there because there was nothing to worry about as there was no women
and no goyim and specially his mother he was freed from the “ass licking little” boy image.

Alex was an atheist and does not believe in religion. He doesn’t believe in any kind of rituals and dogmas followed by his fellow Jews. Once when Alex mother was suffering from an ailment in her uterus and was thought to be cancer everybody in home was sad. She was hospitalized and Alex prayed for her well being and then come back home to be once again his “one and only mother.” When Alex mother Sophie tells him that Rabbi Warshaw is a respected man he condemns this thought by calling him a “fat, pompous ,impatient fraud with an absolute grotesque superiority complex”. Alex grows up and becomes Assistant Commissioner in Human Opportunity Department speaking for the rights of the people. What an irony the man who is not able to speak of his independence and rights within his family is representative of people’s rights.

But still at the age of 33 he is treated by his parents as a child. He is expected to get married to a nice Jewish girl. He flies to Europe for one month where he wanted to stay away from his parents and not even keep any kind of contact with them and indulge himself into what he always expected for, freely. Before this Alex was in relationship with monkey she was the only girl with whom Alex spent the longest period of time even though he shunned her but she remained in his memories. He goes to Europe and get involved with lots off shikses and enjoys skating with them. Even after remaining in company with various shikses he remember his past girl friends like Thereal McCoy; Alex loved to be in her company but above all he missed monkey whom he last met in a
hotel where she even tried to suicide when he rejected her when she tells him that she wants to marry him by telling her that “maybe it’s what’s called mistake” because she is a whore and marrying her will affect his public image and bring shame to his family.

Monkey was surely in love with him, she confesses “oh, it’s something! I feel, I feel so crazy… and so tender-so wildly tender with you! Oh baby. I keep thinking I’m going to cry, I’m so happy!” (190)

Monkey was uneducated which somewhere affected Portnoy’s feelings to a large extent and finally he dejects her because their standards never matched.

He also remembers the time he spent with Kay Campbell, his girl friend in Antioch. He nicknamed her as the pumpkin because she was a wholesome, big-bottomed, lipstickless, barefooted shikse. Alex goes to Kay’s house as a weekend guest where he tries to prove himself as a gentleman. He used Thank You, Good Morning, excuse me, good night to people and even to inanimate objects. When the atheist Alex asked Kay that will she convert, she abandons it by saying that why will she which somehow hurt his ego and he finally told her that he doesn’t care about her any more.

One more unsuccessful affair with a gentile girl which Alex speaks about was with Sarah Abott Maulsby, the Pilgrim who was the receptionist in the office of the senator, while Alex was working as a staff with House subcommittee investigating the television quiz scandals. Even after going all the way with her Alex could not love her “it couldn’t have been clearer to me that despite all her
many qualities and charms—her devotion, her beauty, her, her deer like grace, her place in American history there could be any “love” never in me for The Pilgrim. Intolerant of her frailities. Jealous of her accomplishments. Resentful of her family. No not much room there for love.” (240)

In the last part Alex is described visiting Israel where in actual Alex has his final downfall and humiliation. The visit to his people his nation which is Israel rather than America but he is not able to accept it too when he finds himself inexplicably impotent during a visit there, could not maintain an erection in the Promised Land! It is Naomi a young woman with green eyes and tawny skin who is a lieutenant in the Jewish Army. Naomi finds him a “self hating Jew” and disapproves his way of living and decry him for taking pride in making himself the butt of his own peculiar sense of humor. Alex could not take the rejection and try to violate Naomi. And in Israel where other Jews find homeliness Portnoy is relinquished.

Finally portnoys leaps to the psychiatrist coach and whimper and plead for knowing his illness.

One can find contrast in the nature of Portnoy, sometimes he is in love with his mother and feels jealous of his father; a kind of Oedipus complex and at the same time he hates her too; throughout the novel he tries to describe his relationship with his mother which he founds weird. He blames his overbearing, smothering mother for the problems he now has with women. It leaves a kind of confusion for what in actual Alex desires. He is not married and is not
particularly interested in getting married. He's terrified at the prospect of getting bored with his mate but at the same time feels guilty of that too.

The whole book is a monologue; Alex chooses what he wants to tells and what not to tell. The book that means is totally from Alex’s point of view. There are very least chances of knowing other characters from different perspective in order to make out the true analysis. The novel portrays the emotions and escapades of Alexander Portnoy and since the book has no view point of other characters makes it doubtful to trust Alex, the pages and pages of hyperbole make him an unreliable narrator.

Existentialism is the modern technique propounded in 20th century philosophy which was later adopted by various authors of that time. In a broader sense it is centered upon the analysis of existence and of the way humans find themselves existing in the world. Since existentialism promotes free will the individual is lost in oneself and at the same time abandons God. Alvy Singer in Annie Hall and Clay Puppington in the television series and Alex Portnoy in Phillip Roth’s Portnoy’s Complaint are some of the known existentialists. Roth has used existentialism to have a bad connotation on Alex Portnoy who becomes obsessed for the search of his identity throughout and thus abandon the existence of God saying “I know better than the taboos” Existentialism centers around the individual so Portnoy showed a great deal of self-love and was every time preoccupied with himself, which develops a negative outlook on life and because of which does not believe on God and discards to be known as a Jew.
Because of Existensialism a neurotic behavior developed in Alex which led him to remain captivated with his thoughts and was unable maintain healthy relationships with anybody in his family. It can be because of his over possessive mother who had since his childhood put restrictions on him with respect to his thinking of the outer world that Alex gradually started loving and identifying his own self existence in the world and hatred for religion.

"Weep," he says, "for your own pathetic selves . . . sucking and sucking on the sour grape of a religion! Jew Jew Jew Jew Jew Jew Jew! It is coming out of my ears already, the saga of the suffering Jews! Do me a favor, my people, and stick your suffering heritage up your suffering ass - I happen also to be a human being!" (76).

Then everything that restricted him from his desires he abandoned them; then whether it was religion or family ethics and conventions. The adult Portnoy’s existence was in violating the Jewish ethics which he thought were not his free will but rather imposed on him.

“The taboo so easily and simply broken, confidence may have been given to the whole slimy, suicidal Dionysian side of my nature; the lesson may have been learned that to break the law, all you have to do is - just go ahead and break it! . . . Stop trembling and quaking and finding it unimaginable and beyond you: all you have to do, is do it! (78-79)

Soren Kierkegaard who was the father of existentialism had the view that the individual is solely responsible for giving his or her life own life meaning
which is similar to the point of view of Saul Bellow who considers that one who becomes an existentialist and does not show any kind of connection with God finally plunges into an abyss fraught with angst and turmoil and man, not God, is ultimately responsible for his actions and destiny.

There has been various influences on Roth when he wrote the novel, like he adopted the technique of stream of consciousness from Virginia Wolf, guilt and shame from Franz Kafka and existentialism from Saul Bellow’s Herzog, but the major influence on Philip Roth was of Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis. Since the origins of psychoanalysis, the field has displayed serious connections to literature. Psychoanalysis became the tool to explore the complexities of the human soul. One can easily trace all the techniques of Freud to be there in *Portnoy’s Complaint*. The patient or Alex is shown suffering from repression of desires in id due to Jewish guilt which develops under the influence of the superego, and the internalized feelings of anxiety, because of which he behaves in a manner that is illogical, self-destructive, neurotic and anti-social. And then for treatment Roth appointed a psychotherapist (Dr. Speilvogel) who tries to know his mental state by re-introducing the repressed thoughts of the patient’s mental process. Dr. speilvogel has re-appeared after six years in *Portnoy’s Complaint* after being the psychiatrist to Ella Wittig in *The Psychoanalytic Express* in 1963 where he appeared first. Other Jewish writers who used psychoanalysis as literary technique were Henry Roth *Call in Sleep* (1934), Erica Jong’s *Fear of Flying* (1973), Saul Below’s *Herzog* (1964). In order to show the influence of Freud in the story, Roth weaved the plot in a phallocentric narrative style by incorporating
castration, emasculation, repression, psychotherapy in it. In Alex, Roth has shown to have the early childhood fear of castration closely associated with the Oedipus complex which Freud and that Lacan both saw as an integral part of our psychosexual development. The castration complex is closely associated with the Oedipus complex, according to Freud: "the reaction to the threats against the child aimed at putting a stop to his early sexual activities and attributed to his father" (Introductory Lectures 15.208).

Since the narrative is phallocentric, Roth at the same time give out the idea of sexual objectification, the objectification of women and because of which the book was highly condemned by the feminist critics to be misogynistic. All the female characters of the novel Bubbles Girardi, Monkey, Naomi are mere objects of Portnoy’s sexual desires. He provide the passive role to the females of the novel and bring out the idea that try to plunge his hatred out by “fucking” women. Roth is gender biased and has shown most of the male characters dominating or humiliating females. Alex in the novel used to speak /think of women especially as only their bodies, either the whole body, or as fetishised body parts. We see Alex is shown getting physically attached with the females he had affairs with rather than emotionally. He describes his experience with her as the thrill of sadism. Even in case of the girl Monkey with whom he spent the longest period of time, shunned her due to shame that will arise cause of marrying her despite degrading her sexually in every way. The narration is extremely genderly biased, phallocentric throughout the novel Alex is in a journey of searching one or the other object for his sexual needs and gratification.
Roth has favored everything rejected by the Jewish community on the whole. One can see various such descriptions in his novels. The characters he portrays openly rejected everything which is forbidden according to strict Jewish law whether it is God, kosher food, Intermarriage, or having sex before marriage. Frank narration of sex doing all this he was known as “self-hating Jew”. This is what made Portnoy’s Complaint a shocking novel. The protagonist of the novel Alex openly blames his Jewishness for his suffering. Since childhood he is taught everything according to the Jewish conception people around him expects him to do everything Jewishly, whether it is manners, or marriage or to start a family. It is because of which if not in public but privately in a closed bathroom he found freedom from all the worldly restriction. His family forgets to treat him as a human in a continuous effort of making him a “nice Jewish boy”. Roth took an effort to tell that a man with desires cannot be called anti-religious.

Portnoy tried to escape guilt through masturbation which was his first obsession until he found his second object of fascination, shikses (that is, non-Jewish girls). He applies a nickname to each of his non-Jewish girlfriends: there's the Pumpkin, the Pilgrim, and finally Mary Jane Reed, a.k.a. The Monkey, who matches the standard of his outstanding lusts, she was a woman who was willing to fulfill his every flight of imagination. His satisfaction has no end everything keeps on growing within him. Portnoy, Assistant Commissioner of Human Opportunity for the City of New York, is not married and is not particularly interested in getting married. He's terrified at the prospect of getting bored with
his mate and considering his frank, mechanical, vulgar descriptions of sex, it isn't surprising why he's terrified of settling down. Although, he was intelligent enough to handle outer world problems but was unable to settle down his own inner conflicts. What Roth exposed is not something shameful or unknown but whatever was there in the novel is highly traditional and was an impact of late 1960s culture. It was something that was till now concealed somewhere in the id. There is an Alex Portnoy in everybody; who was till now veiled, but its jus that nobody was ready to accept that because of which the author received enraged responses. And the main cause of these responses was that the protagonist was a Jew.

The book as thought by many people is not only about masturbation as there are various scenes where young Portnoy is shown doing that and aiding young Portnoy in these surreptitious sessions of self-love are a variety of props: an empty milk bottle, a sock, a baseball mitt and, famously, a piece of liver. So numerous and colorful are depictions like these, it's tempting to conclude that this is a book about masturbation. But, in actual the book is a search of a guilt-laden man for gratification, completion, peace through masturbation.

Alexander Portnoy is a 33 year old highly successful single Jewish guy lying on his psychiatrist’s couch. A man continuously yelling and venting his suppressed aggressions in a 308 page stream-of- consciousness monologue must be badly hurt or destroyed or would be the one who had never been given a chance to speak about his feelings and desires; that never got any ear to his feelings and emotions. The expectation from a Jewish boy from his family in an alienated,
expatriate country is depicted to be too much where a child is responsible to win honor for his parents. In each and every instant he has to be a nice Jewish boy who does not commit mistake. He does not get satisfaction from anything else than his dick. And the way in which Portnoy describes his peculiar sense of alienation which he explains as "My wang was all I really had that I could call my own". (PC 190)

Roth has also penned down various stereotype of the Jewish people through this novel. The typical characteristics of their nature for which they are known worldwide are explained in detail. He brought out a Jewish mother stereotypes, a nice Jewish boy, a constipated father means an ideal Jewish family where Portnoy is shown to be in a parental trap; every moment searching to escape from it. Specifically, he bought forth the Jewish Mother Stereotype through this novel. After Portnoy’s Complaint Sophie is known as the Archetypal Jewish mother; she was the one who possess all the characteristics of an emblematic Jewish mother who beholds the powers of ubiquity, guilt-inducement, over-possessiveness, over-caring, manipulative, extreme worrier, castrator of men who shapes young Alex into her own neurotic image. She has her own ways of mothering a child. She stands with a knife before her son if he denies eating, who shuts door for him if he doesn’t do anything according to his mother. She ruins the life of her precious son with the most devastating weapon of guilt. She is so inquisitive that she makes his life asphyxiated she tells "'Alex, I don't want you to flush the toilet,' says my mother sternly. 'I want to see what you've done in there" (PC 22). Each and every time punishing him and hurting a child’s
psychology, resulting in making him fearful, scared and impotent. He finally escapes her house so that he doesn’t keep any kind of contact with his parents and indulge into his libido freely. Because of which Alex discovers that it was only through masturbation he found joy and freedom of expression in his suffocated life. She flirts with Alex shamelessly, hiking up her stockings in front of him and calls him her “lover”. ‘Well, how’s my lover?’ Her lover she calls me, while her husband is listening on the other extension! And it never occurs to her, if I’m her lover, who is he, the schmeleggy she lives with? He is her only son, one of two children, the light of her life and the bearer of all her dreams and expectations: "I am the son in the Jewish joke," he laments. "Only it ain’t no joke!". (37)

Whatever Portnoy becomes, his aggression, raging libido, sexual guilt, his never ending search, and an unsatisfied life is the result of a strict upbringing and an overbearing mother. He is terrified by his own mother and accuses all the Jewish mothers as "YOU FUCKING JEWISH MOTHERS ARE JUST TOO FUCKING MUCH TO BEAR!"(113). She is undoubtedly “the most unforgettable character” someone ever portrayed.

Portnoy’s behaviour with Naomi is a kind of “return of the repressed” attitude as described by Sigmund Freud which says that repressed elements, preserved in the unconscious, tend to reappear. His thought/feeling (id derived) and so called frustration would constantly pressing for access to the executive fictions of the mind in order to be discharged. The ego would be on constant alert to prevent the direct expression of the repressed desire but the idea had
found a disguise and surface as a symptom through masturbation and number of affairs with different girls. It hadn’t reached to that level with other girls he met in the past because nobody was alike his mother, it was in Naomi he finds to have similar characteristics prevailing. Since he finds Naomi like his mother he is terrified by the same qualities both of them possessed. He could not see her emasculating him, over powering him and guilt inducing similar to his mother who threatened him of castrating, smothering and guilt inducing. His attitude towards her implies that what has been repressed in childhood becomes conscious at that point.

Portnoy, which is shaped as a series of confessions to a shrink, is a protest against repression. "LET'S PUT THE ID BACK IN YID!" cries the embattled Alex, whose most untrammeled sexual escapades fail to resolve his mother issues.(124)

Portnoy is irritated with the so called guilt which is induced into him by his only smothering mother and Jewish restrictions he desperately wants to break down his Jewish image and let go, to live a life without mother and father, a sex life free and unfettered, without guilt, to be bad in other words ("Because to be bad, Mother," he apostrophizes, "that's the real struggle; to be bad--and enjoy it! That's what makes men of us boys, Mother. . .LET'S PUT THE ID BACK IN YID!"). (124)

Many readers have found the attitude toward women in Portnoy's Complaint repulsive; Portnoy behaves inconsiderately with women. He shows no
reverence for the women throughout. Either he is aggravated with the weak gender or he tries to humiliate them to any extent which simply reflects the wider misogynist societal attitudes. First of all, he hates his mother for being so interfering and over caring and calls her to be “the most unforgettable character I have met”. (1) He nick names his girlfriends and describes them by their personal parts most of the time, like The Pumpkin: a full-bodied but flat-chested Middle Westerner, "The first of the Antioch nymths to go barefoot to class". (216) The Pilgrim: Supergoy. . . one hundred and fourteen pounds of Republican refinement, and the pertest pair of nipples in all New England”; and the pièce de résistance, the Monkey, who fulfilled all kinds of his physical needs (in every position) for him girls were not more than mere objects that are there for their personal pleasure. Most of the time he made it look like she's at fault for, and consequently cannot carry on with her or coming on too strong and need to make her understand what he is? this is exactly what he continued doing in the novel. Towards the end of the novel in the last chapter, his misogynistic approach had reached heights when he was all set to violate Naomi because she is Jewish who looks like his mother and tells him once and for all that he’s a pathetic, self-aggrandising moron. What he replies is extremely disgusting

“Down, down with these patriotic khaki shorts, spread your chops, blood of my blood, unlock your fortressy thighs, open wide that messianic Jewish hole! Make ready, Naomi, I am about to poison your organs of reproduction! I am about to change the future of the race!” (268)
Roth has done injustice to woman by addressing them either ‘cunt’, ‘twat’, ‘tits’ which shows his hatred, and abhorrence for the fair gender. The novel has also been condemned as a blatant exercise in literary chauvinism, and many have argued that the women in Portnoy's Complaint—indeed, the women in most of Roth's work—are nothing more than objectified and demeaning caricatures.

Irving Howe and Norman Podhoretz, were not so amused but rather they condemned the novel as a base form of entertainment, the sit-down version of the abusive, in-your-face comedy found in the stand-up acts of performers such as Lenny Bruce. Howe was particularly one of Roth's early admirers, seeing in Goodbye, Columbus and Five Short Stories a promising voice in American literature. But in his essay, "Philip Roth Reconsidered," Howe blasted Roth for his adolescent condescension toward Jewish life and culture, especially the postwar suburban variety.

"The cruelest thing anyone can do with ‘Portnoy's Complaint,’” Howe wrote witheringly, “is to read it twice.” His severe criticism against him in "Philip Roth Reconsidered," he called Portnoy's Complaint "a vulgar book" (77)

Anatole Broyard put it, writing in The New Republic, “Halfway between Oy! and Wow! Another critic of the work Diannna Trilling found the book to be a “grimly deterministic view of life”. (Qtd. Roth, Reading Myself 30)

But Roth replied back by saying that it is one of the oddest misreading one has run into’,17 and after that tried to share his experiences of the response
he received after portnoy’s complaint through his surrogate Nathan Zukerman in various of his novels after the publication of Portnoy’s Complaint.

*Portnoy’s Complaint* is a lasting work of art with something important to say about American Jewish life. It is a state where one looses identity, belongingness and one’s own country. Living in diaspora was something very painful as portrayed in *Portnoy’s Complaint* through Alex. He is portrayed as a wandering Jew who is confused with his own existence. The last chapter of the book describes the feelings of a Jew who does not belong to the country he is living in and at the same time to the country to which he belong, it explores the further questions of Jewish nationhood and identity. There is a continuous search for belongingness. He is rejected by Naomi calling him a diasporic jew. He is continuously eaten up by the question what he is. He is attracted toward shikshes but cannot marry them because his mother wants him to marry a jewish girl and when he finds one,i.e. Naomi she rejects him calling him “self deprecating” and “self hating”.

Alex inability to unite his yearnings (American) with his religion (Jewishness) leads him nowhere with lots of confusion around him of Portnoy is confused with actually what he belongs to and what he actually wants, the American culture or the Jews? He seem to dwindle between Jewishness and Americanism. He is shown to get attracted towards the American culture and their ways of living. He dislike Jews which can be made out from his conversation with his father where he disdain it.
“Tell me, now that you are all finished at fourteen being a Jew, do you know a single thing about the wonderful history and heritage of the sage of your people?” (Roth 62-63). Alex retorts, “You’re the ignorant one! You!” (Roth 63). He pleads to his community to “stick your suffering heritage up your ass”(72) at the same time denounces rabbi by calling him a “fat pompous, impatient fraud with an absolutely grotesque superiority complex”(69)

Although attracted towards American culture still doubts that he cannot be the part of the American culture because he is inundated with self-doubt and guilt which again makes him a Jew.

“There are people who feel in life the ease…the simple and essential affiliation with what is going on. Why can’t I be one?” (Roth 72).

The entire book is the saga of his hatred of being a Jew and how he condemns the belief of religion but the irony is that he rejects an American girl who refuses to convert “Why would I want to do a thing like that?” (230). As an atheist, he has no use for the Jewish faith, but he appreciates the neighborhood Jewish men who play baseball on Sundays and feels a kind of belongingness with them at the same time the goyish middle class around him fascinates him with what he perceives to be the perfection of life and at last yearns for. Somewhere in his heart Judaism remains his priority which exposes his confused state of mind again. What he is blaming other people for is the outcome of his own trivial personal problems.
In one of his essay Roth narrates that it was an attempt to blend two of his dream characters the first he called the "Jewboy," who longs for the forbidden fruit and the other he described as the "nice Jewish boy," whom every mother would be proud to have as her son.

On one hand the novel is a humorous art of work there are various scenes which are extremely hilarious where Alex has an uncontrollable urge to masturbate in public places, and then hesitate doing so with the fear of being discovered so doing and then exposed in newspaper headlines ranging from the Newark papers to the NY Times--and thus shaming his family. But at the same time the book is a painful urge of a man for the discovery of balance or for a level of gratification. It is a continuous effort of the protagonist’s overwhelming desires to bring meaning to his life and to ‘find himself’ a search for freedom from all the worldly convention to attain gratification. The pain in his life can be made out from these lines the painful statement where Alex pleads to Doctor Spielvogel of his existence

"Doctor Spielvogel," Portnoy pleads early in the novel, "this is my life, my only life, and I'm living it in the middle of a Jewish joke! I am the son in the Jewish joke--only it ain't no joke! Please, who crippled us like this? . . . [W]hy, alone on my bed in New York, why am I still hopelessly beating my meat?"

(35).

Alex’s father is almost missing from the novel although he is presented as a man who makes a living by selling life insurance to Blacks in Newark’s ghetto,
and goes door to door week by week collecting pennies. He is literate, he wears a suit, he writes up policies and except for his hopes that his son can go beyond him. And finally it is only his mother who outshines other than Alex Portnoy in the novel. Alex believes that there is a “mix of sexes” (41) in his house. He explains his disappointments about his father who has been throughout intellectually inferior, busy how to give a wonderful life to his family, and incapable of expressing himself as the one

“Who should by advancing on me, retreating – and who should be retreating, advancing! Who should be scolding, collapsing in helplessness, enfeebled totally by a tender heart! And who should be collapsing, instead scolding, correcting, reproving, criticizing, faultfinding without end! Filling the patriarchal vacuum!” (42)

Maybe it is the trait of the Jewish mothers to overshadow and control all the males of the family in such a way that they forget to give meaning to their roles in the family.

The topic of sex has been the hobby horse of Roth. “LETS PUT ID BACK IN YID” (214) phrase from his book goes to his own feelings. he broke the shell of repression and followed Freud in expressing his thoughts. Roth might have quoted Freud, that “sexual (genital) love” is not only “the strongest experience of satisfaction,” but “the prototype of all happiness”i[1] (Civilization And Its Discontents, Chapter 4; Freud Reader p. 743). And he adopted it in various of his novels.
But *Portnoy's Complaint* was much ahead of this track which not only had sex to deal with but much more than it which made it obscene and censored. In it he has tried to portray the adolescent experiences of a boy in his bathroom, something more than the usual story of love and sex like from to masturbation with different props and positions, to whores, to rape, to everything that made it disgusting and shocking. Every approach is Alex’s thrust for satisfaction ending in guilt. We can analyze it from one of the scene in the book where the teenage Alex and some of his buddies, all virgins, visit a whore named Bubbles Girardi. (“In Newark, whore rhymes with poor.”) They succeed, but he is paralyzed by guilt. “Actually, I should be visiting the Girardi home to evangelize for Henry Wallace and Glenn Taylor. . . for who are the Girardis if not the people?” and then his failure in one relation is again a new quest for gratification with someone else.

The character of Mary Jane Reed (aka "the Monkey") in *Portnoy's Complaint* is very differently told by Alex as he did with his earlier girlfriends. She is a young model who in her childhood didn’t have much schooling back in Appalachia where she grew up because of which is unable to spell words properly. She is nicknamed by her boyfriend so because she was sexually agile and acrobatic or it can be because of the arcane symbolism of his girlfriend eating a banana. She had every time new ideas for enjoyment in sex adventures with Alexander Portnoy and it went to such extent that once they both festively hired a prostitute for some three-way high jinks. But finally ends up jealous and furious, even though the whole thing was her idea all along. Specifically,
Martinson is the inspiration for female characters in several of Roth's novels, including Monkey. Margaret Martinson, who eventually became his first wife and had a dysfunctional marriage, died in a car crash in 1968, left an important mark on his literary output.

There are various scenes where we can make out the endless efforts of the little boy for assimilation by presenting his good manners before the parents of Kay Cambell.

A character is somehow a depiction of oneself, if not complete than to some extent of its creator somewhere the author try to vent his feelings through it. If Alex is not like Roth completely then they both resemble each other to some degree. Roth and Portnoy are similar in some perspective or Alex sometimes look like the alter-ego of Roth for example they both share same date of birth, a hometown and an ethnic/religious background. It is also believed that the central female character of Portnoy's Complaint, Mary Jane Reed (aka "The Monkey") is a caricature of Roth's first wife, Margaret Martinson. Both of these women share the same neurotic need to submerge themselves in Portnoy's/Roth's Jewish identity so as to co-opt some of the same family love that was missing from their own lives (Claire Bloom's Leaving a Doll's House: A Memoir).

In the end we have seen Naomi blaming Alex to be a “self hating jew” (241) which he himself was blamed of when he wrote “Good Bye, Columbus” in 1959 by the Jews and rabbis.

The reply to this is very well given by Roth in his novel deception:
"I write fiction and I'm told it's autobiography, I write autobiography and I'm told it's fiction...let them decide what it is or it isn't" (190).

*Our Gang* (1971) is Philip Roth's fifth novel. A marked departure from his previous book, the popular *Portnoy's Complaint*, *Our Gang* is a political satire written in the form of a closet drama. The book is divided into six chapters:

1 - Tricky comforts a troubled citizen 2 - Tricky holds a press conference 3 - Tricky has another crisis; or, the skull session 4 - Tricky addresses the Nation 5 - The assassination of Tricky 6 - On the comeback trail; or, Tricky in Hell

Richard Nixon was symbolized by Roth in his one of the most famous political satire as Tricky E.Dixon the book takes its cue from an actual quote from Nixon:

“From personal and religious beliefs I consider abortions an unacceptable form of population control. Furthermore, unrestricted abortion policies, or abortion on-demand, I cannot square with my personal belief in the sanctity of human life — including the life of the yet unborn. For, surely, the unborn have rights also, recognized in law, recognized even in principles expounded by the United Nations.”

Richard Nixon San Clemente, April 3, 1971

*Our Gang* is centered around the character of Trick E. Dixon, a caricature of then-President Richard Nixon, and begins diplomatically with Tricky reassuring a citizen who is troubled for fear that Calley may have killed a pregnant woman,
either inadvertently to which Tricky suggests that she was simply overweight inadvertently.

The book goes on to discover various events in Tricky’s life through various incidents in his life like, in-the-streets revolt by the Nation's Boy Scouts in the mistaken belief that their President has come out in favor of sexual intercourse, an Administration maneuver to blame the popular unrest on a defected baseball player, a military invasion of Denmark, the liberation of "Hamlet's Castle," the destruction of Copenhagen then Tricky Dixon's assassination and his subsequent attempts to reestablish a constituency in Hell.

The fun begins as Trick E. Dixon, attempts to address a citizen’s concern that Lieutenant Calley may have inadvertently caused an abortion during the massacre at My Lai. Tricky squares his belief in the sanctity of life and his defending of Calley by making it perfectly clear that the Lieutenant either didn’t know that any of the slain women in the ditch were pregnant or had assumed they were just overweight if they were showing. Besides, he reasoned,

Tricky tries to settle the argument by saying that:

"This woman presented herself to Lieutenant Calley for abortion with some kind of note, say, that somebody had written for her in English, and Lieutenant Calley, let's say, in the heat and pressure of
the moment, performed the abortion, during the course of which the woman died."

Such a case would be "abortion on demand," and Tricky admits he would be prejudiced: "I will disqualify myself as a judge and pass the entire matter on to the Vice President." "I think we can all sleep better at night knowing that," says the citizen. (10)

But what gets Tricky in trouble is his proposed constitutional amendment to give the unborn the vote, a strategy he hopes will offset the democratic tilt of the 18-22 year-old vote in the 1972 election.

The Boy Scouts of America interpret the amendment as an endorsement for heterosexual promiscuity and converge on the White House en mass carrying banners that read, TRICK E. DIXON FAVORS SEXUAL INTERCOURSE and POWER TO THE PENIS? NEVER!

Tricky defends himself—dressed in a football uniform and helmet from his alma mater—in a secret Cabinet meeting by asking,

"What did I say? Let’s look at the record. I said nothing! Absolutely nothing! I came out for ‘the rights of the unborn.’ I mean if ever there was a line of hokum, that was it. Sheer
humbug”.(29-30)

As if Tricky’s hypocrisy has no limit (which we know it didn’t), he assures his spiritual advisor that no one in this country wishes to appear more religious than I do. But sometimes . . . people just make being religious impossible, even for someone who stands to gain as much from that posture as I do.

The environs of politics is very big where bribe and corruption are mere things and Roth has projected the actual world of politics in the novel and Roth has constructed the plot in order to undermine those very principles. In one of the scenes when Tricky faces the revolt of the boy scouts, he decides to involve Washington Senators outfielder Curt Flood, in order to corrupt the scouts because he is their sports hero. Tricky tells

“I do not know of a better way of our enemies to undermine the youth of this country than to destroy game of baseball and all it represents”(102)

When the Nation’s Boy Scouts, in the mistaken belief, revolt that their President has come out in favor of sexual intercourse, Tricky gets scared of their presentation before the television cameras. He gets worried about his wife and children’s reaction. But finally his dismay reaches extreme when he try to think about the voters; “WHAT ABOUT THE VOTERS!” (21)
Then the Gang of Tricky tries to find a way to tackle the problem. They ask Tricky to go on television and say that he had intercourse only once in the entire life. He goes to such an extent that he gets convince to announce that he is homosexual. They make a list of five people i.e. Hanoi, The Berrigans, The Black Panthers, Jane Fonda, Curt Flood, whom they will involve in their plan in order to make their plan successful. They even think of shooting the boy scouts. They thought of choosing two people who were to be blamed for killing. So one was Curt Flood who was born on January 18, 1938 in Houston Texas.

The plan Tricky and his advisors come up with to wag the dog results in the shooting of three Boy Scouts (one Eagle Scout and two Tenderfoots), the invasion of Denmark and the nuking of Copenhagen.

He justifies his attack on Denmark on television: “it was true that I have isolated Denmark from the rest of the world”. (85) And further adds by saying “whatever reports you have heard of an armed American invasion of Danish territory are categorically false and constitute a deliberate distortion of the facts”. (88)

Eventually, Tricky is assassinated in the chapter “The assassination of Tricky” he's found naked in a giant, water-filled baggy in Walter Reed Hospital where he's gone to have the sweat glands in his upper lip removed.
In a stump speech, Tricky reassures the denizens of Hell that the misinformation being spread by Satan regarding actions he may have taken as President of the United States is just a pack of lies: at last even after his death tricky is shown fighting election in hell against Satan which makes the novel humorous and also reveals the bitter truth about politics.

My fellow fallen: Let me say at the outset that of course I agree with much of what Satan has said in his opening statement. I know that satan feels as deeply as I do about what has been done to make wickedness all that it can be and should be in the creation…..and now let me say a word to those who point to my own record as President of United states and contend that it is less than I could have been as regards suffering and anguish for all of the people regardless of race, creed or color”. (185)

he also confesses that: “I was able to maintain and perpetuate all that was evil in American life when I came to power”. (191)

A ferocious political satire in the great tradition, Our Gang is Philip Roth's brilliantly indignant response to the phenomenon of Richard M. Nixon. In the character of Trick E. Dixon, Roth shows us a man who outdoes the severest cynic, a peace-loving Quaker and believer in the sanctity of human life who doesn't have a problem with killing unarmed women and children in self-defense. A master politician with an honest sneer, he finds himself battling the Boy Scouts, declaring war on Pro-Pornography Denmark, all the time trusting in the basic indifference of the voting public.
The book has been written in style that is similar to Swift's peculiarity and is all very exaggerated, one-sided, fantastic novel. Although the book is a humorous, one but it questions the political practices of the politicians. Roth's versatility is very much in evidence in Our Gang, the whole book is further divided into six parts.

This novel is mostly told through dialogue, allowing Roth to extend his satire to political jargon, to the predictability and hypocrisy of political speeches, and to the media in general. The epigraphs from Swift and Orwell suggest his theme is the abuse of words: Erect Severhead, the Rev. Billy Cupcake and the members of Trick E. Dixon's Cabinet are especially memorable abusers. Each of them is fitted into their character with absolute esthetic precision into the ingenious and sustained narrative structure.

Written before the revelations of the Watergate scandal, Our Gang continues to resonate as a broad and outraged response to the clownish hypocrisy and moral theatrics of the American political scene. After the publication of Our Gang, Richard Nixon in real life got involved into the Watergate Scandal proving the allegations of unconstitutional abuses of power and inauthentic administration put on him by Roth to be very true. He exploited the use of the dirty tricks, the enemies lists, the burglars and plumbers, the wiretaps, and the tapes altogether presented him as a liar, a criminal, and a man without morals before public. And
henceforth was known as “Tricky Dick,” a nickname that stayed with Nixon’s whole life.

The title of the novel has been taken from Hal Roach’s famous troop *Our Gang* series is notable for being one of the first times in cinema history that blacks and whites were portrayed as equals. The four African-American child actors who held main-character roles in the series were Ernie "Sunshine Sammy" Morrison, Allen "Farina" Hoskins, Matthew "Stymie" Beard and Billie "Buckwheat" Thomas.

It seems that Roth has been short of subject so he keeps on repeating it again and again in every book i.e. sex. We can easily make out it come again in *Our Gang*; something differently he used abortion as a sub-part of sex is used in this novel too is a continuation to his earlier works. There was a deep pain of abortion earlier discussed by Roth in *Letting Go* where Libby had undergo the mental agony of abortion when she deadly wanted to be a mother.

In the character of Trick E. Dixon, Roth shows us a man who outdoes the ruthless misanthropist who even in hell is not tired of his immoral practices. In order to convince others to get himself elected as a devil. Passages from Swift and Orwell appropriately serve as epigraphs for this novel.

"And let there be no mistake about it: if I am elected Devil, I intend to see Evil triumph in the end; I intend to see that our children, and our children's children, need never know the terrible scourge of Righteousness and Peace."
The use of language is perfect, it is satirical at the same time political. Deceiving language lies behind Tricky’s most devious thoughts. Tricky is projected to use language that is manipulative in order to make what he really wants to make the reality. There is amazing use of lexiconic juxtaposition in order to create a political influence in the novel.

He has used many of the Augustan satirist such as Pope and Swift and is able to justify their satiric approaches in the novel. Not only the quick satire as Pope and Swift, we can also see Roth developing gentle, mild, and light-hearted humor as Horace too. Many times his work is compared to the stand-up comedian Lenny Bruce be it Portnoy’s Complaint or Our Gang.

The protagonist representing the politicians of the time look like the real face of them with the help of various comic and satiric devices which mocks the conventional political system.

The book cannot be called solely to be on humor because there is a shift from humor to sadness, in the end of the novel. Tricky dies as he gets murdered even after his various attempts of winning the situations, also there are various angry attacks on the corruption by Roth too. Same in Portnoy’s Complaint where there are some humorous incidents in-between the monologue on the stressful life of Alex. But it can be said for Roth that he uses comedy as a tool to address
serious psychological, political and life conditions. Basically his stories contain serious events from life but, he sprinkle little humor to make it light.

The speech made by Tricky at the end where he talks about the misinformation being spread by Satan bring out the character of politicians, he says:

Although the scene is humorous, but it is the reality about the politicians who can change any statement in their favor whenever they want, it is a satire of selfishness, politics and greed. Although the speech is sounding humorous but it is a confession of past actions made by Tricky as President of the United States is just a pack of lies.

Calling Roth to be a pornographic writer, has been a usual trait of many critics most of them who condemned him and his writing. In an article entitled "Enemies, Foreigners, and Friends," Roger Sale expresses his outrage at the sexual excesses of the "enemies," Robbe-Grillet in his Project for a Revolution in New York and Roth in The Breast. He described The Breast to be "just stupefyingly bad" and dismisses Robbe-Grillet's Project for a Revolution in New York as "not an easy book to forgive." (Qtd Sale, 4) further he added:

"I can only feel, reading Robbe-Grillet's and Roth's latest efforts, that these people are my enemies, that their very facility with words, which is all that lifts these books above the level of the simplest pornography, is what makes them hateful."(5)
The Breast is one of the Roth’s masterpieces of humor, shame and guilt arising out of erotic sexual desires of its protagonist. Many critics have blamed Roth for being a pornographic writer which is not proper as he in most of his work has preferred sex as the focal subject. When we talk about sex things are extremely hush-hush and the diction has to become beyond normal. Roth has always dared to talk about sexuality openly and abundantly. Either in relationships or humor, sexuality has been a common subject for him.

People have compared his work with Kafka's "Metamorphosis," Gogol's "The Nose," and Swift's Gulliver's Travels, and by superimposing a specifically sexual connotation, Roth has attempted to surpass Kafka and has brilliantly tried to do so. He has tried to attempt to create a sexual subject with humor in association with Kafka in comparison. Kafka who had been one of the writers whom he admires and look as someone as an idol. He sees him as "the great comedian of guilt," and of "self-persecution" (11)

The Breast is the narration of a man who is not tortured by others but rather by his own desire and envy which has resulted in his conversion into a female mammary gland. People think that the breast is an answer to Portnoy’s Complaint which was taken to be a ‘a terrible mistake’ of Roth but we can see that he deliberately chose a sexual topic once again and has spoken about it in so detail that no other writer has done so ever before.

But Roth, like Kepesh, sees his lineage far more in relation to Kafka, who so preoccupied his imagination that, the year after he published The Breast, he
wrote an fiction/essay, "I Always Wanted You to Admire My Fasting' or, Looking at Kafka" (1973), in which he fantasized that Kafka survived his early death in 1924 to become Roth's own Hebrew teacher--and surrogate father figure--in 1942.

Roth approaches much the same question later in his career by way of the doppelganger in *Operation Shylock* (1993). Here, the threat to identity comes from an apparently external source, an "other Philip Roth" who attempts to usurp the identity of the narrating "Philip Roth." The double claims priority over the proper name's equivalence to an "I," and thus to the subjectivity designated by the proper name.

A child’s desire for the breast arises from his mother’s breast. The same oedipal situation can be found to be projected in *The Breast*. Although Kepesh’s mother is no more but he sees her in his girlfriend-turned-mother Claire. She is portrayed to be a girlfriend who is less interested in sex and more caring as a mother is. She visits him in the hospital and take care of the needs of Kepesh, completely portraying herself as a mother nursing her child. Claire before transformation has been completely disinterested in sex and even after transformation remained so. She sucks nipples of the breast but does not gain erotic pleasure from the task but rather she has no selfish desire rather out of love and sympathy for his needs, that reflects the nature of a mother. It would be right to say that she was less of a girlfriend and more of a mother of Kepesh.
Kepesh’s background affords us some insights into the appropriateness of his transformation, but they leave no doubt that it has indeed occurred. He tries to assert unambiguously and unmistakably that he is basically sound in mind and body. From time to time he experiences guilt about his marriage to his ex-wife, Helen (a name perhaps ironically evoking the classical paragon of feminine beauty) who has by now become a dipsomaniac. This bitter experience had led to certain emotional coldness we detect in him at the beginning. Kepesh calls himself as a "citadel of sanity" (33). This coldness is "cured" by his transformation, rather than aggravate by it, so that his condition can scarcely be viewed as a symptom or projection of alienation. He is not seen to admire love anymore rather he converted his desires into lust. He becomes a kind of a person who do not want to achieve "the calm harbor" over this "the foaming drama of the high seas" of erotic desire (8).

The story of projecting guilt and shame in the protagonist due to incapability of body is very old and Roth has done this again and again in his works it was very much visible in his character Alex Portnoy too, who craved to reach for his erotic desires but at the same time was ashamed of getting the news published in the newspaper. *The Breast* was also a much acknowledged example of such style but Roth used it for the first time in his short story “*Novotny’s Pain*” (1960), in which he portrayed a protagonist who is entangled in a grotesque conflict of mind over body and body over mind. The main plot of
the story runs around a young soldier who suffers from psychosomatic lower back pain and becomes the target of ridicule from his comrades in the Army.

“And then Roth humorously dramatizes the consequences that mental states such as guilt or shame can have on the body, and, in turn, he illuminates the effects that bodily life can have on the mind” (Qtd Gollatta 16)

The two admired novels, *The Breast* and *Portnoy’s Complaint* are the story which discusses physical maladies which are the reason of their protagonist’s plight and struggle. Kepesh’s own desire leads to his flaw, he admits he had "previously associated more with women than with men . . ." (11). Recollecting a scene on the beach with a bare-breasted Claire, he describes her breast "as though it were the globe itself—soft globe!—and I some Poseidon or Zeus!" (47). He sucks on her ample breast and speaks how he playfully envied her breast,

"I don't want to cut off your air" she says.

"'You were turning green.'

'With envy,'" he replies (37).

If we see in both of the novels the overwhelming sex drives of Portnoy as well as Kepesh directs them to their troubles. Where Portnoy’s erotic sexual drives which remains unsatisfied and causes psychosomatic impotence. It develops first of all guilt in himself and then shame to be known by everyone. Similar thing happens with Kepesh, his mental dissatisfaction from sex leads to the
physical state which is although humorous but formulate shame in the transformed Kepesh because he gets converted into a mammary gland. This dissatisfaction creates physical transformation and then this transformation leads to further psychological issues.

“The usual ingredients of current American humor—stylized insult, slapstick, horseplay, cruel practical jokes—are seldom present in Jewish humor. Rather is it disturbing and upsetting, its phrases dipped in tragedy” (Qtd. Cohen.B.Sarah 19).

But unfortunately Howe published this essay in 1951, something different was still awaiting the Jewish literature which changed his views and made him publish another essay “Philip Roth Reconsidered” because if we notice there is immense use of slapstick comedy used by Roth in his novels in order to make his audience and readers laugh.

Howe also accused him in “Philip Roth Reconsidered,” in which he said Roth of writing out of “a thin personal culture” and suggested that Roth has not maintained to the Jewish literary tradition out of which his earliest short stories, published in Goodbye, Columbus, seemed to emerge (73). Howe’s frustration is generated mainly by Roth’s widely successful fourth book Portnoy’s Complaint (1969).
Commenting on Philip Roth’s work in his essay David Gollata too said “I examine the ways in which contemporary American writers and filmmakers use body humor in their works” (Qtd. Gollata Abstract)

He also added:

“Indeed, Portnoy’s Complaint deliberately makes use of slapstick, bathroom jokes, and sexual humor, and spends countless pages detailing man’s “quickly decaying physical parts.” Roth’s books, that followed Portnoy’s Complaint, Our Gang (1971) and The Breast (1972), are equally scatological and also received Howe’s condemnation.

It clearly reflects the non-Freudian psychoanalyst Karen Horney’s concept of ‘womb envy’. The breast’s passivity, its brainlessness, the playboy image haunting American youth, hibernation can be the reasons of this envy. He describes the breast as "a big brainless bag of tissue, desirable, dumb, passive, immobile, acted upon instead of acting, hanging, there, as a breast hangs and is there" is what he finally turns into (87). He secretly desired for them but Kepesh, soon refuses to the fact that it is wish-fulfillment or any kind of tragedy that has happened to him, "No, the victim does not subscribe to the wish-fulfillment theory, and I advise you not to, neat and fashionable and delightfully punitive as it may be" (48-49). He believes that "This is not tragedy any more than it is farce. It is only life, and, like it or not, I am only human" (104)
Kepesh suggests that his mistress Claire (light and purity?), the Phi Beta Kappa Cornell graduate, is just a little too nice to be liberating, with her "well-bred, well-behaved school teacher's idea of hot sex" (106). Her last name, "Ovington," is probably derived from *uva*, "the egg," ovary, etc., and may suggest that she is prevent by deviations from the norm, which would be to run some risk of conception. This kind of naming he has done earlier also in *Letting Go* where he has named one of his character Dick Reganhart.

There also reverberation of Tiresias, the blind prophet whose breasts denote his androgyny, which in turn bestows him with the gift of prophecy. Through the breast difficulties with hearing, Roth pinpoints the relationship between a breakdown in communication and a breakdown in the sexual dialogue, T. S. Eliot's theme.

Roth has left lots of praises for the earlier writers and calls himself just non-comparable in front of those extra-ordinary writers. Kepesh calls himself feeble in front of Gogol, Swift and Kafka. He pays a tribute to the literature legends by saying:

“But,' I say, 'it might be my way of *being* a Kafka, being a Gogol, being a Swift. They could *envision* those marvelous transformations—they were artists. They had the language and those obsessive fictional brains. I didn't. So I had to live the
thing.’ . . . I had the artistic longing without the necessary detachment” (p. 104).

But Roth had presented his own views through his alter-ego David Kepesh. He wants to say that he “grabbed idea, which was the Kafkaesque, Gogolian fantasy of physical transformation” (60)

The book has illustrated two contrary views of Kepesh in starting and towards the end. Kepesh perceives the feeling of shame when he realizes that he has changed into a mammary gland and now will be observed live on television by people from "gallery" or "the bleachers". (p.50)

And towards the end of the novel the shame has turned materialistic when Kepesh thinks of getting some positive advantage from the fact of his transformation as "for him". . . but this, my friend, is the Land of Opportunity in the Age of Self-Fulfillment" (p. 108). He imagines himself becoming rich as a one-man freak show, filling Shea Stadium like the Beatles and being sought after by "groupies": "If the Rolling Stones can find them, if Charles Manson can find them, we can find them too" (p. 107). He imagines himself imitating Gulliver among the Brobdingnagians.

In the end, Roth has compared the breast to the "Archaic Torso of Apollo". The breast without body resembles the remains of the ruined statue. Both
of them undergo the same problem they don’t have a complete body. Even when
the breast is not having a body; it contains the life force and the meaning that
might have been found in the head. It leaves the reader with the message that
the life might have changed you but now “You must change your life” (113)

The book opens with “It began oddly” (1) where it refers to the thing that
has been talked about throughout the book, sometimes taken to be a dream,
sometimes imagination.

The protagonist of the novel, David Kepesh is a professor in English
Department and is hypochondriac, who notifies even a mere change in the body,
one day faces an uncanny situation when his whole body transforms into a 155
pound female breast.

The professor notices a mild tingling in his groin but after search finds
nothing and imagines it to be a nervous disease.

“I simultaneously realized that it was undoubtedly, as always, nothing.”

But it was something really happening to him, the mild tingling turned
into “discoloration” to “pinkening” of the skin to becoming “soft reddish”. (5)
David calls his physician, Dr. Gordon to consult his problem. Knowing his
symptoms, doctor shows his concern and tells him, he is reaching immediately.
David misses Claire, his girlfriend’s presence that night. After hanging up he
realized that he had informed the doctor about the tingling and pinkening but
wasn’t able to make out his coldness towards his and Claire’ relationship since a
year. The doctor comes running and seeing his condition decides to admit him to the hospital.

On February 18, 1971 between midnight and four a.m. David Kepesh transforms into a Breast due to a “hermaphroditic explosion of chromosomes”.(12)

Remaining unconscious for ten days Kepesh regains consciousness after having strange feeling upon washing his face and screams:

“I’ve been burned! I was in a fire”(15)

According to doctors it was Kepesh will to live that made him survive the “explosion” or catastrophe, otherwise it was not possible. He regularly kept on asking “what happened to me” after turning into a breast.(16)

David started rejoicing the act of ablutions performed to him every morning, it almost arouse his sexual desire.

“Oh! that does feel so good”(18)

Dr. Gordon and Dr. Klinger, David’s psychoanalyst for five years, breaks the suspense for him and tells him about his transformation. But what upsets him now is the public display of all his activities it hurts his personal pride and asks:

“Is this being televised, Claire?” (31) but Dr. Gordon assures him of his privacy which he doesn’t believe

“so, though I pretend otherwise, I know they are studying me, watching me”. (23)
So annoyed with his transformation and his condition that he tells Dr. Klinger- “I have not been able to free myself completely from feeling of shame”. (28)

He was very upset and was unable to confront the mental pain of his transformation.

“And why? In the history of the human race, why David Alan Kepesh?” (23)

The visitors to Kepesh consisted of a very short list inclusive of the scientist, doctors, hospital staff, Claire, his father and one of his friend, Arthur Schonbrunn.

He was surprised to see his father’s courage who regularly visit him. The strength shown by him is tremendous but he used to get irritated by the stories he kept on telling and thinks:

“Wonders never cease” may be David feels this after seeing his own condition.

David had suffered a failed marriage which he even symbolizes as “boredom”. His girlfriend Claire he feels was an “antidote” to his former wife, he calls her cool, inexpensive, and notably undemonstrative young woman.(9, 27)

During Claire’s first visit she began to sob and laid her head on his midsection that aroused his sexual feeling which had, till now, become dormant.

But to speak frankly, the instant I felt the weight of her head upon me heard her sobbing for me in my misery, all the possibilities opened up in my
mind and it was only a matter of time before I came to want from her the ultimate act of sexual grotesque.

Kepesh lying on bed retrospect the time spent by him with Claire where he got so much attracted towards “Claire’s breast” that eventually he even wished to be a breast.(34) Kepesh the breast has started having fervent feelings for physical pleasure. Apart from Claire Ms. Clark who was an old lady he wanted her also to fulfill his desire.

“I get so excited I want to fuck you! I want you to sit on my nipple-with your cunt.” (35)

The only thing that stopped him from doing so was the fear of closed circuit television and being watched by others.

He became so obsessed that he wanted Claire to nurse him and told Dr. Klinger about his wish “Someone young- and beautiful!” but it was all waste of breath.(36) After several months again he thought of offering lark rejects he would ask some other woman whose profession might permit her to satisfy this desire for a price.

Finally the doctors decides to put a mild anesthetizing solution and areola on his nipples which not ends but reduces sensation felt, but even then his desires could not meet an end.

Kepesh faces another “crises” when his friend Arthur Schonbrunn, Dean of the college of Arts and Science visits him one day and Arthur could not stop
himself from laughing. (43) He was “overwhelmed by hilarity simply at the sight of me!” (47)

His friend visited just for two minutes but could not speak a word but kept on howling. “Arthur Schonbrunn unable to speak coherently” (47)

Schonbrunn’s visit left a deep mark and Kepesh was so broken that thereafter he refused to believe that he had turned into a breast, it was not at all possible, for him it was all hypothetical and could take place only in imagination.

“That’s an illusion! I’m dreaming! It’s just a matter of waking up!” (50)

Kepesh kept on struggling with himself and others to make believe that it was all his imagination and he was dreaming. Afterwards he quit his thought of dreaming and thought that he had gone insane.

“And of course the first big step towards recovering my sanity was this realization that my sense of myself as a breast, my life as a breast, was the delusion of a lunatic.” (51)

Kepesh starts recounting the reasons due to which he had become insane and co-relates his insanity to teaching of Gogol and Kafka. In return Dr. Klinger questions “of course many professors teach “The Nose” and “Metamorphosis”” he replies “not with so much conviction as I do”.

Dr. Klinger did not agree and put forwards his view and tells him that

“You didn’t make up Arthur Schonbrunn’s visit, Mr. Kepesh, you didn’t make up what had happened to him here.” (57)
Kepesh rejects Klinger’s view and keep on imagining that he is no longer a breast but a mental patient and forces his father to say so. Seeing his son’s emotional breakdown he agrees:

“Yes, son, yes. You are a mental patient” to which Dr. Klinger says,

“He should never have told you that.” (62,63)

With Dr. Klinger, Kepesh now started figuring why actually he had imagined himself to be a breast. He confesses to Dr. Klinger that since he always desired for more that’s why the sex life between him and Claire began to cool down. Fifteen months passed, Claire used to visit him everyday, give him sensual pleasure as well as read out Shakespeare for him. Kepesh re-counts his days when he too was in love with “Oliver” and had memorized his speeches.

Kepesh again questions Dr. Klinger- “did fiction do this to me?”

To which he tells him- I have out-kafkaed-kafka “He could only imagine a man turning into a cockroach. But look what I have done.”

In the concluding chapters tired of predicting the reasons of his metamorphosis accepts his state and starts thinking how to utilize this metamorphosis to his advantages and earn money. He thinks whether, he will teach or go to the Shea Stadium, where he will have girls, women, who will fulfill to his sexual desires.

“I am David Allan Kepesh, The Breast, and I live by my own light”(72)
He further decides to tell people about his transformation (about which he was earlier scared) in order to get fame. The book ends with a strong message-

“You must change your life.”(78)

The major portion of the book consists of Kepesh monologue other than that the book proceeds further with the dialogues of Dr. Klinger and Kepesh. One or two instances of Kepesh and his father’s conversations are also there. Claire is shown throughout the novel conversing. She is a hidden character recognizable only through Kepesh’s description.

Roth used the modern technique of stream of consciousness. To provide more emphasis to the protagonist’s thoughts and ideas lengthy sentences are used. Many times these sentences are as long as a paragraph in order to depict the psychology and mental conflict that he was running into.

The Jewishness portrayed earlier and in this book are quite contrary, projecting two different points of views. Lucy Nelson, Alex Portnoy or Gabe Wallach does not share good relation with at least one of their parents. But Kepesh father has been shown to be very caring and understanding. He broke the image of the contemporary Jewish image that was portrayed in earlier novels of Roth. Rather his father breakdowns emotionally after seeing his son’s condition and begins to cry.

The novel also throws light on the relation of Kepesh and his wife Helen. In The Breast Roth has shown through Kepesh and his wife’s failure in marriage. Many critics link it to Roth’s real life where Roth and Margaret were facing a
collapse in their relationship which is depicted through Kepesh and his wife’s relation.

Alike the character of his first novel Letting Go Gabe Wallach and Paul Herz, David Kepesh is also a professor in English Department. Projecting Kepesh as an Art student Roth has made various references from literature. He has talked about Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, Gogol’s *The Nose*, Kafka’s *Verwandlung* in addition to these there is complete description of Shakespeare’s work. In fact Kepesh is a fan of *Othello*. To end the novel Rilke’s quotation has been used. The amalgamation of earlier works with his style Roth created something hilarious as well. *The Breast* may be called a union of Science and Literature where Dr. Klinger represented science and Kepesh represents literature. The major conflict arises when Kepesh condemns his transformation and calls his transformation to be an outcome of teaching too much of literature.

The New York Times book review called it “terrific…inventive and sane and very funny” it was the review of Roth’s Kafkesque attempt of *The Breast*.

It is the work that makes people laugh and at the same time sympathize with the situation of the protagonist Professor David Kepsh, who one morning turns into a gland, a woman’s breast. What happens then is a lot of fun, thrill and mental quest for identity.

Always dealing with real subjects Roth managed to stand in the queue of imaginary writers, after the publication of his one of the weird subject of a human metamorphosis into a breast. The book has depicted various hilarious
scenes, but utmost it depicts the agony and loneliness of a man even after being surrounded by a crowd.

The characterization by Roth is very similar in most of his works like Gabe Wallach Paul Herz, David Kepesh too is a English Professor. The characters are not happy in one of the relation or suffer from dissatisfied marriage. But the way Roth plots the same content again and again gives his characters enough hope and the work becomes scintillating outcome.

The novel starts with David’s transforming into a breast. But he is not able to believe it and sometime takes it to be a dream or his imagination or the influence of literature on him but is not able to trust that he has become what he had once admired the most. He tries to defense his thoughts and remains in the mental conflict throughout the novel about his identity. He questions his existence many times to himself and to others.

The Breast is the story of transformation and its related humor and pain. The plot of the novel inspired by Kafka. There is in fact one instance in the novel where one morning, Kepesh in conversation with Dr. Klinger relates himself to Kafka he might have reached the heights of insanity by saying:

“Have you realized, Doctor, that all our names begins with K, yours mine and Kafka’s?” which clearly indicates that Roth has deliberately given Kepesh a name starting with the alphabet “K”. Whether it is coincidence or deliberately done then Gogol’s Kovalyov is also from “K”.
The Nose, Metamorphosis and Gulliver’s Travel were the stories all of which are related to the change of image of a person that makes them to struggle with the changed image. The changed image causes them pain and puts them in a wacky situation. “The Breast” too has the same plot but the only difference of this novel and the precursor novels is that the protagonists of the earlier noels get back to their original image but in The Breast the protagonist remains in the changed image thereafter.

Gogol’s The Nose and Roth’s The Breast are somehow similar these are both the stories of transformation. The protagonist of both the novels keep on searching the reasons for their transformation. Waking up one morning and unable to find nose puts Kovalyov in a very strange situation. Kovalyov, the central character of Gogol’s the nose stands aghast when he finds that his nose is missing from his face. He sets off in quest of explanation for the reason behind it. The reason he associates to this queer situation is his dreaming or hallucination or drunken vision. Unable to get satisfied by the reasoning he had given finally allocates it to black magic done to him by Mr. Podototsina, one of the officer’s wife.

Likewise Kepesh too looks for the reason of his transformation which he is unable to find. Alike Kovalyov, Kepesh also imagines that he is dreaming and it is just the matter of waking up. Rejecting the idea he thinks that he has gone insane and is in some mental institution.
Both Kovalyov and Kepesh are scared of shame and humiliation and of losing their self respect. Both the characters are unable to believe in their transformation. When Kovalyov thinks that he will not be able to go out and gain attention from women. At the same time Kepesh is scared of the closed circuit camera that will be recording his act of masturbation. Finally when we talk about *Gulliver's Travel* we can make out that the author had mentioned consist of the reference of *Gulliver's Travel* we can make out that the author had mentioned consist of the reference of Gulliver’s trip to Brobdingnags where he was mistakenly taken to be a nipple. Roth has deliberately chosen to notify this instance in his work in order to show similarity between Gulliver’s and Kepesh’s state of mind.

As John Gardener stated in one of his reviews of the book he acclaimed Roth for writing a novel with completely different subject and his idea of weaving a humorous subject. He said :

“technically at least, *The Breast* seems to me Roth's best book so far. The humor and pathos (it has fair amounts of both) come from his solid grasp of how life is, his firm knowledge of the importance of strength of character and the will to live. Or, as Kepesh calls them in his meetings with his psychiatrist, "S. of C., and the W. to L." He explains: "These banal phrases are the therapeutic equivalent of my
lame jokes. In these, my preposterous times, we must keep to what is ordinary and familiar." (Qtd. Gardener)

The book is brilliant and has created a new kind of protagonist, a huge detached breast with human consciousness and feeling. The trick is so good, so obvious and easy and yet so rich with meaning, it's a little hard to translate from what it is, a piece of art.

He also added that:

“He talks much too much—like a hung-up schoolboy or like the trendy popular novelist he is, for all his virtues—about taking down his trousers, studying his penis, moving his bowels, maintaining his sexual potency, and so on....”

Feminity and masculinity altogether is what The Breast is. Roth chose the protagonist’s transformation into a breast seems humorous but on the other hand it becomes very compassionate also. A male hero losing his masculinity and turning into a female, partly might be a fulfillment of desire but leaves Kepesh in much agony, angst and lots of frustration and questions his identity. Alike The Nose by Gogol where the hero loose his nose in The Breast too the main protagonist transformation leaves him in a dilemma. Am I still human if I lost my nose? Am I still a member of humanity if I’m only a breast?
It has been predicted by number of critics that *The Breast* by Philip Roth (1972) is, in part, a parody of Kafka’s “Metamorphosis”. As it can be considered to be an imitative work created either to comment on, or trivialize the original work “Metamorphosis”, its subject, author, style, or some other target, by means of humorous and ironic imitation. Roth himself confessed that he has “out-Kafkaed Kafka”. The other point of view is the gothic style of writing the book is somewhat exactly like that in this novel the protagonist who is a literature teacher, one day transforms into a gland and imagines that too much Gogol and Kafka might have led him to that conversion.

Kepesh was a man of dependable sexual potency. But his coldness in sex amounted him to want more in order to satisfy his rampaging lust. His twisting and turning or clawing the bed to climbing on Claire like an animal were all the result of his own desire which had become dormant since a year and suddenly erupted like a volcano. Kepesh was now caught in a whirling vortex of desire that led him to his transformation into a breast. And why only into a breast was his own wish or envy towards them and made a wish of being “breasted or Claire’s breast”.(34)

Kepesh has contrary views when earlier after his transformation he is scared of his activities being televised to the general public but at the end of the novel he wants to go out comments on the contemporary society and calls it the “the age of self fulfillment” and his transformation to be the “land of opportunity” which will help him rake-in lots money and becoming rich. At the end Kepesh gets acclimatize with his transformation. For most of the critics
consisting Irving Howe, all found Roth’s work to be reprehensible and it looks as if he has deliberately chosen Kepesh metamorphose into a breast. Since critics have condemned Roth by saying that he writes “pornography”. The Breast was Roth’s attempt to rebut the strong criticism he received to be called as a “self-hater” “anti-semite” after the publication of Good Bye, Colombus and above all Portnoy’s Complaint which was not even a best seller but at the same time raised eyebrows on him. Making a gland a hero could only be expected by Roth, to which Israel Horovitz said:

“Roth has succeeded in creating a literal breast a hero, a breast with a voice of his own, a sweet and gentle breast” but The Breast, for Roger Sale was “stupefyingly bad” novel. (Qtd. Sale,4)

The nipple has been shown to satisfy Kepesh’s desires before and after transformation. On the beach he seeks for Claire’s and hopes that if she could “lower a breast all the way into my mouth”. The nipple which was formed from the penis provides all kind of external sensations now. Even now the nipple is the source of physical pleasures for David Kepesh, The Breast. He carry out all the “sexual frenzy”(20) through it and receive the pleasure of erotic stimulation.

If the novel is humorous at one hand then on the other it also explores the pain of losing one’s identity of a professor of literature, a lover, a son, a friend, a neighbor, a customer, a client and a citizen.

The experience that he had prior to his “alteration” had been “boring and pleasure less” he had a depressing married life and now it has become much
miserable he feels: “wherever they have put me, whoever may be looking down upon me, I am really quite as alone as anyone could ever wish to be.”

Overcoming the truth of transformation the second crisis for him was the visit of Arthur Schonbrunn, who breaks the image of having tremendous confidence with men, “power over an audience of two or two thousand” at the moment he pays a visit to David Kepesh at the Lenox Hospital. His “gigling”, his “howling” simply at the sight” of Kepesh “weathered” and led to the crisis of faith in friendship, humanity and his confidence that there is one person in the world who simply would not lose control in such a situation, its Arthur.”

What Arthur, represent is the behavior of “frivolity”(73) and Kepesh represents the “mysterious misfortune” (55)

The supreme irony in the breast is the description of Claire. She is like a hidden character highlighted only in Kepesh’s words who calls her “saintly” one who had been living a holy life which is completely contradictory to what he describes her earlier Claire is neither “vixen nor the virgin in spirit”(29) for Kepesh, she is just a pleasure- giving Claire whose pale skin bore the marks off his teeth.

When the book was written Roth was experiencing bad time with his marriage and we can see that the alter ego of Roth is utilized to present the writer’s thoughts. What David tells about his marriage seems as if Roth is sharing his personal experiences that:
Marriage involves a “grinding boredom or the wild unfocused yearning, or the round the clock strategies of deception, placation and dominance”. For him it is an “unfortunate encounter”. (8) He is so withered that he says that “I would never touch the stuff again”. (9) Here Roth has tried to vent his thoughts, experience through his alter ego David Kepesh.

The novel ends passing a very strong and optimistic message to his reader that “You must change your life”. (78) It tells the reader that it is you who make your life what it is? Either take what life has for you or change your life.

The feeble character David Kepesh acclimatize himself with the transformation then why can’t you the “fellow mammalians” belonging to the “Age of Reason” as there is no place that does not see you” He urges the man to step ahead and try. (63)
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