PREFACE

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.