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

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

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

The older contemplations on Self is conditioned by a belief that there is a unified, cohesive line of consciousness that is not characterised by frequent breaks or discontinuities. But this type of thinking receives a jolt from modernism. The fundamental idea that forms the basis of the concept of Self is “know thyself”. This epigrammatic precept is discernible right from Plato to Lacan. But, through the ages, philosophers and psychologists have been
re-casting and revamping the concept depending upon the contingencies of
their discipline and times. The differences the modern reader finds in these
different realisations are rather subtle but crucial. But still one aspect could be
cited as a common factor in all the different mappings of the Self. All of them
seem to build their ideas within the three matrices in which man is
conceptualised: the existential, the psychological and the sociological.

The tenor of modernist literature is to envision Self as a diffuse inner
entity that gets affected by external forces which are not always positive or
predictable. Each individual forms, by some means, a defensive/offensive
strategy to counter an external reality that is mostly beyond control and
comprehension. The strategy becomes a substantial index to his personality.
The strategy adopted could range from absolute passivity to aggressive
confrontation. Existence could be chaotic and perplexing and offer only a
ceaseless impasse. The responses made manifest by an individual while
grappling with such a reality perceptibly differ in various contexts. The Self
manifests itself fragmentarily in various roles that are never similar to one
another. Tracking down such fragmentary selves embedded within the Self is
an arduous task even for the person who is a participant in empirical life. So
the modernist writer, in view of the Self's instability and inconsistency, is
constrained to make a feasible formula to apprehend the complexity and
intricacy of the matter. The formulas, in general, tend to view Self as self-
contradictory, protean, and inconstant. Before proceeding with the view of
Self adopted for the analysis of Philip Roth's fiction, it would be relevant to fix the classical and modernist concepts of Self in their proper context. Classical philosophers generally look forward to a transcendence of Self. To the ancient philosophers of Greece like Plato, Self is a radiant form of consummate virtue which every individual could aspire to provided he leads a life that is in compliance with certain prescribed values. If such a supreme state of being is reached, the rest of the existence becomes devoted to attain a transcendence of Self. Pursuit of transcendental state takes one to a stature of godliness or superhuman control over existence (Russell 147-156). Plato's idea approximates to the view that the individual who perceives his Self could be considered as having reached the ultimate goal of life. Kierkegaard conceives of the Self as that which refines the consciousness of the seeker after truth and also brings together the disparate strands of the inner mind to a point of convergence. Kant looks upon Self as a manifestation of the already existent inner traits. They are projected into the world beyond personal experience and a subtle union is achieved between the two with the help of intellect and reason (Russell 675-690). Locke avers that contemplation and rationality conjoin to form the Self, and this in turn would provide man the capacity to be one with the spiritual essence (Russell 584-595). Sartre believes that Self brings in an awareness of the immediate presence of being and also its existence beyond the immediate surroundings. Hegel explains that it contains within itself the supreme form of truth and wisdom.
(Russell 701-715). Despite their intrinsic distinctions a subtle strand of similarity runs through all the philosophic versions of Self simplistically enlisted here. The basic premise of all the concepts points toward the transcendental characteristic of Self. It is envisioned as something that projects out beyond the human world of physical existence. It stretches out into a world of psychological or mental prowess and gets settled into an outer world of spirituality.

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

This Self is generally dependant upon the vicissitudes of the existential aspects of life. It appears to be a composite form of clarity and complexity, power and weakness, much within the subject and without too. The subject is
continually involved in a grapple with the Self within him. It is so because he desires to comprehend the world within him or without or both simultaneously. Through the process of being disintegrated, he meets failures, successes or even a great sense of accomplishment or a vicious sense of loss.

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

The study is only about Self but the qualifier "disintegrated" is used to eschew all conventional purport of Self and to adopt only the modernist idea of fragmentation of self that stands distinct from terms like ‘self-realization’ and ‘knowledge’. The transcendental dimensions of the concept are sought to be considerably ruled out. The disintegrating process would help the reader perceive the various fragments of self manifesting themselves on various planes of existence. They emanate from the same subject. Each fragment of Self could occupy a particular site or phase of discourse in the fictional texts. The subject is found to be helpless in the face of such autonomy of the fragment which keeps on shifting from one stance to another. Self, in the modernist perspective, is innate in the subject. It is evolved out of his mind, consciousness or psyche or the reality that concerns his existence.
The thesis attempts to analyze Roth’s fictional texts as narrative discourse. They are appropriated as emblems of a larger social text. The study traces the narratives as rhetorical forms and then subjects them to a thorough structural analysis based on some of the relevant tenets of the structuralist and narrative theories of critics like Roland Barthes, Gerald Prince, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Kaja Silverman, and David Lodge. The method of text analysis adopted here combines the anti-empirical methodology of classical structuralism with select ideas derived from the psycho analytic writings of Freud, Lacan, and Laing.

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

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

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

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

Contemporary signifying practices are indicative of the premise that man is non-representable and the world is decentred without any coherent meaning or centre. Self and reality become irrelevant questions, and what gets problematized is how meaning is created, and how identity and society are constructed. Time and tense lose their conventional significance and get merged into the present that is characterised by absurdity and choice. Narratives were once governed by a textual centre or "telos" that maintained causality, motivation and destiny. Socially reliable meanings die out first as a given conclusion, then as a probability, and ultimately as an important aspect of human existence. This results in a vigorous dislocation of temporal order of language and modes of representation as well. Contemporary narratives try to undermine their narrativity by giving way to a self-referential product. Barthes' "Theory of the Text" assumes that a "Text is produced in the space
of the relations between the reader and the written, and that space is the site of a productivity: 'écriture' "(31). In Barthesian terms, the text is a productive exercise where the producer and reader of the text meet. It is a labour where the tussle between the subject and the Other, and the social context converge. It does not imply an act of understanding as that which is realized by "the fine unity of Cartesian ‘Cogito’" (36). The subject that occupies the textual site is a plural subject which could be explained away better only with the help of psychoanalysis.

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

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

Freud calls the total accessible energy of the sexual instinct 'libido'. Sexuality, he believes, is to be understood not as a mere means of a reproduction. It includes the function of deriving various forms of pleasure from the zones of the body. The instinctual drives get channelled into these zones. The growth of an infant through different stages is delineated through the pleasures derived from different zones of the body. The breast, the fecal matter, and the penis are the primary zones through which the libido is channelled. Its selfhood will be determined by the assumption of a sexual identity which is psychically constructed. Until the sexual identity is achieved the infant is in a 'polymorphous' state. That is, it will be at the disposal of the 'component instincts' operating independently with disparate
aim and source. Only by a gradual process does it attain the status of an organized self that the society recognizes to be normal and fully developed. This conformity to socially ordained structure could be accomplished through the workings of the Oedipus complex and the castration complex.

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

Transference and counter transference could very effectively be appropriated as the ‘reader theory’ of psychoanalysis. Transference could be understood as a mode of attributing positive and negative qualities, according to the memories of early family life, to persons and objects directly encountered. Counter transference is a psychoanalytic phenomenon which manifests itself into a vicious ‘knot’ as a result of ceaseless misreadings. The phenomenon of transferring old memories on to the image of the analyst becomes operational just at the juncture where the repressed desire is in danger of exposing itself. The reader-theory that emerges out of psychoanalysis depends upon such junctures of resistance in both the text and
the reader. Freud is attracted to art partly because of his admiration of the artist for the competence to manipulate the return of the repressed. Elizabeth Wright points out that these concepts can be cleverly appropriated for a theory of reading texts:

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

Freud’s concepts open up new roads to the layers of unconscious in a text. They lead the critic to the ceaseless conflict and adjustment that the bodies are engaged in. He opines that the well-spring of dreams is the unconscious impulse that struggles to fulfill a desire that is not gratified in real life. The structure of the text of a dream is transformed by the remembrance of the subject. The content gets reduced into small fragments that join cohesively by a certain chain of associations. The dream work is distorted or subverted by the operation of the four devices: condensation, displacement, representability and secondary revision. These devices are of great interest to those who analyse literary texts. In condensation, the dream events get abbreviated into composite forms and images. Displacement is
seen through “the intensity of an idea becoming detached from it and passing to other ideas, which in themselves are of little value” (Wright 20). Here the objects in the manifest dream replace the objects in the hidden dream-thoughts. Representability is the means by which dream thoughts achieve form and function that are free from logic and syntax. It is like a syntagma of ideograms or pictographs which does not have any linear grammaticality. Contradictions exist together within one single image. Transmutations of coherent linkages are reinforced by regression to infantile fantasies and memories. Secondary revision is another device by which the text of the dream is distorted. The conscious mind may censor the irrational dream-sequence to form a rational order. But the process results in further distortion of the ‘distortion’ already effected by the three earlier devices:

The ‘intelligible pattern’ which the conscious mind wants to impose on the visual material can ignore or falsify what is patently there, in the manner of a reader who is so engaged in the text that he ignores the misprints. What was visible to the mind’s eye in the dream remains unchanged, but the conscious perspective produces a re-vision of it. The material is ignored in the determination to arrive at an acceptable rational narrative: the readymade formulations of the dream are abandoned, and new ones are made of the very same material. (Wright 23)
The concept of the Subject, in the traditional sense, means the self, ego, or individual cogito. Recent critical writings have resorted to shunning this concept on two grounds. Firstly, the human subject was made the point of origin for the historical, social and personal phenomena; and secondly, the fallacious belief that the individual is the possessor of “self knowledge” and is “self actuating”. Michel Foucault in the essay, “What is an Author?” writes about the dissolution of the subject in contemporary discourses as “a matter of depriving the subject (or its substitute) of its role as originator, and of analyzing the subject as a variable and complex function of discourse” (118).

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

The word, “subject”, is a term popularly used by French psychoanalysts to do away with the nuances of selfhood and personhood. Lacan tries to map out, through the network of language, the split between
conscious and unconscious. Lacan's psycho-analytic concepts try to etch out linguistically the asymmetric co-presence of conscious and unconscious. The inner structure is conceptualized externally through a linguistic experience. Lacan's concepts seem to be well aligned with structuralist theories of text. He makes Freud's discoveries radical with the structuralist concepts of Saussure, Jakobson and Levi-Strauss.

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

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

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

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

Charles Sanders Pierce explains that reality is accessible to man because man himself is a sign. He means that “man” which is the constitutive of the human subject gets to know the world basically through language. Man is a product of language, and he is cognitively available to himself and others only in the guise of signifiers like proper names, first person nouns, images and tropes. So, understandably enough, he is synonymous with these signifiers. The subject’s identity is determined by signifiers rather than by a transcendental telos that makes him a producer of signifiers and signified.
Barthes considers literature more as a "second-order" signifying system. Literature is conceived as a language system built on an already existing system. The Barthesian model suggests that the relationship between a connotative signifier and connotative signified could be established through reference to a larger social field that is structured in terms of class interests and values. Further, he argues that ideology is a condition of consciousness developed through discourses sponsored by a dominant class. Culture imposes itself upon the text in various ways. Ideological imperatives express themselves through a multiplicity of codes and *semes* which "invade" the text in the form of key signifiers: "Each of these signifiers represents a digression outside of the text to an established body of knowledge which it connotes; each one functions as an abbreviated version of the entire system(code) of which it is a part" (Silverman 31).

Quoting Emile Benveniste, Silverman explains that the "I" in a narrative refers to the reality of the discourse. The basis of subjectivity is the exercise of language. The speaking subject of a text is the agency responsible for the text's enunciation. The subject of speech can be understood as a character or a group of characters most central to the fiction. A character is a construct put together by the reader from various *semes* dispersed throughout the text. The "semic code" according to Silverman forms a major device for thematizing persons objects or places. It operates by clustering a number of signifiers around a proper name or another signifier. Signifiers grouped like
this function like a collective signified to the proper name or its surrogate. The figure or cluster of figures who occupies a position within the narrative space is similar to that occupied by the first-person pronoun in a sentence. The spoken subject is the one who is constituted through identification with the subject of the text. The speaking subject is not to be understood as being in full control of his subjectivity. He is always constrained by rules of denotation and connotation:

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

This is to say that a discourse gets constructed simultaneously along more than one axis. In the essay, "Language and Freudian Theory," Benveniste suggests that discourse has its origins in a divided subject. It could be presumed to issue from an unconscious and conscious speaking subject. The unconscious subject could be accessed through the conscious subject. Alongside the discussion on the Self, a brief explication of the relevance of
the body in art and literature would be contextual. Philosophy, religion and visual arts have been great attempts at defining man, his body and his spirit. The human body is the site where the conflict between fact and fiction has been staged with full vigour. This battle is as old as civilization itself and has given rise to several disciplines of study related to various aspects of the body. Man's attitude to body, his most precious wealth, is markedly ambivalent. He is either fascinated by its remarkable possibilities or awe-stricken by the taboos on its free applications. Or else he finds it too complicated to be grasped in a nutshell.

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

The much debated issue for centuries, in literature, philosophy, religion and psychology and arts, right from the time of Socrates (428-347 B.C), is the mind/body dualism. The ancients extol the mind or soul's supremacy over body. The philosophers who preached before Socrates' age like Heraclitus, Protogores, Simmias, Anaxagores and Homer did not sharply differentiate
between soul and body. Matter and spirit were conceived of as parts of the physical universe. Heraclitus identifies soul with fire. Simmias avers that body represents matter's harmonious form. Anaxagoras affirms that mind is not mixed with matter and is capable of independent action. Protagoras believes that soul and sensation are two sides of the same thing.

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

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

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

In the romantic age, emotions supercede concern for bodily forms. But two centuries later, the two World Wars brought about substantial changes in sensibility. Wilhelm Lehmbucks’ “Seated Youths” is nearly faceless and connote despair. Henry Moore’s “Recumbent Figure” is only a vague approximation of the human body. Twentieth century representations of body appear to lack the earlier life and vigour. Art becomes depersonalized. Artists like Pablo Picasso, Amedeo Modigliani, and George Rouault focus upon emotion and depersonalize their art. The same process takes place in literature too, especially in the texts brought out by James Joyce, Franz Kafka, Thomas Mann and Jean Paul Sartre.
Man is stripped of his identity, grandeur and supremacy. He is no more the "paragon of animals" as celebrated by Shakespeare in Hamlet. When the history of body is traced from pre-historic times to the present, it is understandable that body is the site where the politics of power is staged. In pre historic times, superhuman powers are attributed to it. But the ancient Greeks do not attach much importance to it. The Renaissance glorifies it, but in the twentieth century it is belittled again. Body is a site where intellectual, social, cultural, political and religious changes are imprinted.

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

Writers, by representing body with exaggerated attention to its physical aspects, deconstruct the prevailing stable world picture. Margaret Mead contends that cultures with a strong preoccupation with the shamefulness
about the gastro-intestinal system tend to silence talk about the lower regions of the alimentary canal. Such cultures obscure the recognition of the body’s politic: “This tendency to obscure the recognition of the alimentary canal’s open-endedness is not merely an aspect of the physiological lore of such a culture; it is fundamentally (one might say), a political aspect” (Rushdy 2). Literature, until the early twentieth century, was yet to accept its antithetical Other in the realm of carnality. All bodily functions were a part of the stigmata. The social command was so strong that exposure of natural functions of the body was an anathema. This is evidently borne out through the “discursive silences” maintained about such matters in literature (Rushdy 17). Manners and ideas of purity are not always innocent or natural. They are indicative of social restraints that deserve scrutiny. Institutions of politics are closely linked with institutions of politeness. Erik Erikson substantiates this point by stating that decorums of bodily conduct are instituted with great rigour in Western societies. The degree of social pressure depended on the spread of middle class conventions and of the ideal image of a “mechanized body”. What Erikson calls “mechanized body”, Foucault calls the “body subjected to training”, a training that exemplifies and perpetrates the perversity of modern cultural society (Rabinow 188). He assumes that perversity is based on its manipulation of the body: “[. . .] the body had become the object of such imperious and pressing investments; in every
society, the body was in the grip of very strict powers, which imposed on it constraints, prohibitions, or obligations" (Rabinow 180).

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

The analysis of the textual semes is done in the light of thematics and narratology. The Russian formalist, Boris Tomachevski defines "theme" in his article "Thematique" published in 1925. In his perception, the theme is "the idea that summarizes and unifies the verbal material" (qtd. in Mac Kenzie 536). The text as a whole may have a theme, simultaneously each part of a book may have its own theme. After a text is reduced to its thematic elements, one comes to components that are irreducible or the smallest
particles of thematic material: "evening comes", "Raskolnikov, kills the old woman," "the hero dies," "a letter is received," and such other examples. The theme of the irreducible part of a work is called a "motif". Every sentence has its own motif. Tomachevski finds no essential distinction between a motif that coincides with a single sentence and that which summarizes a large portion of a novel. A motif is a statement of the proposition of one or more sentences, derived by explicit rewrite instructions. The derivation is similar to that in generative grammar where the deep structure is identified with semantic structure.

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

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

The reader arrives at a unity by unifying together the particular details of a work under certain prominent themes until he/she arrives at a few key basic terms which constitute the central theme. MacKenzie, with acknowledgement to Michel Riffatere, calls this a “hypogram”: a set of variations or permutations of a single thematic structure. A hypogram could be formulated in various ways. It can exist in an earlier text or a cliché or an
expression in language. If a reader fails to locate the implicit hypograms in a
text, his reading is likely to be unstable and incoherent. Rules could also be
formulated for reversing the process of text production, operating back to a
generative matrix. The entire text results from a reformulation and expansion
of this matrix into a longer and more complex series of variants and
metonymies. Similarly, a character (subject) could be broken up into its
constituent parts: nomination, description, focalization, relation to the
narrative occasion, and the citation of utterances and thoughts.

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

Story exists as a past of a larger construct called “reconstructed” or
“represented” reality: “Story is one axis within the larger construct,” and it
exists on the axis of temporal organisation (Rimmon-Kenan 6). Within the
narrative, it remains on two levels: surface structure and deep structure. The surface structure of a story is governed syntagmatically by temporal and causal principles of organisation. On a deeper level, it is paradigmatically determined by the logical relations among the "semes" or minimal units of sense. Rimmon-Kenan assumes that the reader can abstract the story from the text and make it tangible through the process called "event-labelling" (13). In a narrative, there is no story without a discourse, and "narration" is a part of narrative discourse. Since all narratives are addressed to an audience/reader they are a part of a discourse or communicator process without which there would be no sociality or culture. Drawing on Barthes' seminal essay, "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives," Rimmon-Kenan recognizes the presence of two types of events: "kernels" that advance the action; and "catalysts" that expand, amplify, delay or sustain the action.

The events combine together to create "micro-sequences" which in turn form "macro-sequences." The study of the narrated gives the reader an insight into how narratives are organised. He can process a sequence of events into a series of states and actions pertaining to the actants in one or more settings. Reading, basically, is an activity that pre-supposes a text, a set of visually presented linguistic symbols from which meaning can be extracted. The reader, as an agent competent of extracting meaning from that set, processes the textual data. Gerald Prince identifies a marked differences between "reading a text" and "reading of a text." The latter process involves
selection, development and re-constructing of the assumptions reached during the former. An ingenious reader is expected to find new answers to old questions and also to think of new questions. In this process he constructs new “topic-comment-structures” that would lead to the explicit description of narratives and the comprehension of their functioning. This, the reader does by using one or many of the codes made available to him by the narrative discourse. He may use a linguistic or symbolic code and then map the meaning onto signifying systems derived from sociological, existential or psychoanalytic disciplines. The hermeneutic code would lead him from enigmas to solutions; and the code of characters could be used to organize the text around heroes, villains, helpers or donors.

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