Chapter Six

The Victim-Victor Paradigm

I have always believed that Zionism means Jewish emancipation in every sense, including the spiritual and cultural, so that a Jew who creates cultural values may do so as a free man [. . .] but I believe that there is no Jew in the galut creating as a free man and as a free Jew.

- Golda Meir

Philip Roth’s novels describe various forms of oppositions (Lee 149). He is highly literary, referential and self-conscious. His characters are teachers of literature, writers and they are as self-conscious as their author about the influence of books on their lives. “Literature got me into this”, says Tarnopol, “and literature is gonna have to get me out” (qtd. in Lee 149). The relationship between influence in life and in literature is clearly but awkwardly embodied in When She Was Good, which is a long, miserable “American tragedy” (Lee 149) of a girl in a small Midwest town in the 1950’s.

When Roth turns David Kepesh, the professor of literature, into a breast in The Breast, he makes literary influence into an explicit part of Kepesh’s enslavement. In this extreme parable of “characterological enslavement” (Lee 150), Kepesh has progressed from literary explanations, fantasies, frustration and disbelief to an acceptance of his grotesque self. Kepesh and
Tarnopol present studies of abuses of power of literature to transform the self (Watson 123).

Taking and fictionalising through opposition is hardly new in Roth’s work. It was notably prominent in the assimilated versus alienated Jew in Goodbye, Columbus. It is also a major principle in his non-fiction Reading Myself and Others. In Reading Myself and Others, Roth analyzes himself as a writer and his work through oppositions. He describes himself in terms of Philip Rahv’s famous redskin/paleface opposition and analyses his break-through with Portnoy’s Complaint as a result of finding a fictional resolution for the nice Jewish boy conflict (Lyons 191).

According to Philip Roth, the fictional protagonists who precede Zuckerman – Gabe Wallach, Alexander Portnoy and David Kepesh – are the three stages of a single explosive projectile that is fired into a barrier that forms one boundary of the individual’s identity and experience; that barrier of personal inhibition, ethical conviction and plain, old monumental fear beyond which lies the moral and psychological unknown. (RMO 85)

Goodbye, Columbus pits the urban values of immigrant settlers against the suburban leisure values of the postwar generation (Cooper 43). Mr. Patimkin, Neil’s aunt Gladys and Uncle Max, Neil’s asthmatic parents and their son who recently returned from the army represent the former who are hardworking
and getting nothing free. Patimkin Sink is located in Newark’s black ghetto and Mr. Patimkin, for all his comfort, feels at home in hard work. But his children, and to a lesser extent, his wife, have shed the ghetto for the suburbs, and their life centres at the country club.

Ghetto values are crowded and shared but suburban values are individualistic. Aunt Gladys’ house offers Neil neither privacy nor expectation that privacy will be needed. To phone, he must retreat to a closet. But at Short Hills, everyone has a separate bedroom. There is little chance of being interrupted once behind closed doors.

Brenda is the chief representative of the new generation. Neil’s problem is what to do with his life. It is the “problem of freedom” (Cooper 44), which is the product of modern times. Unlike the modern society, in fixed societies, children’s occupations were predetermined. Roth’s major fictions explore the question of what one does with one’s life and the alternative traps of powerlessness and arid opulence.

Neil Klugman wants to be bad. Philip Roth wants to explore what it is like to want to be bad – that is, the acquisitive and the carnal. When one is essentially good and restrained by moral upbringing and cultural values, one wants to act counter to what one considers being one’s “best self”. Roth poses this as a Jewish problem in the post-war economic upsurge and, yet,
views this Jewish problem as a concentrated form of a larger American problem (Cooper 47-48).

“The Day It Snowed” and “The Conversion of the Jews” concern freedom from oppression (Cooper 31). Ozzie’s questioning of his rabbi’s dogma may touch theology, but it is less theology than it is pique. Rabbi Binder seems arbitrary to Ozzie at first partly because he makes Judaism seem to grant only its own miracles while denying those of Christianity, but even more because Binder is a bully and a hypocrite. He invites open discussion of any issue but will not allow and cannot answer questions about the virgin birth. And when Ozzie flees to the roof and forces the rabbi and the other Hebrew-school children to genuflect and admit that the Christian miracle is as possible as the Creation, he is testing freedom and not theology. And yet this child’s tug-of-war with authority, humorously portrayed, draws into it the struggle of secular Jewry against orthodox teaching and the effect of public education. In post-war America, the middle class still seemed like the model for the future, and its future lay in public education (Cooper 32).

Gabe Wallach and Paul Herz of Letting Go are teachers of literature and involved with Gentile girls. But Gabe, who is well off, is unable to commit himself and he trails a wreckage of relationships founded on bad faith while Paul struggles grimly to be a real mensch and “a man of duty” (Lee 34). Paul’s cynical, shabbily hedonistic uncle tells Paul:
Listen to Uncle Shmuck, will you? Things come and go, and you have got to be a misery for you, boy; I’d hate to see it [. . . ]. Wait and accept and learn to pull the hand away. ‘Don’t clutch!’ What is marriage, what is it but a pissy form of greed, a terrible, disgusting ambitiousness. (LG 82)

Whether the Jewish son is trying to escape the clutches of family and marriage, or is conscious that he is himself desperately clutching, he must suffer. The punishment may be like Novotny’s undiagnosable back pain or David Kepesh’s transformation into a breast.

According to Martin Tucker, “Roth inevitably sends his heroes into hell, but tries to bring them back to a new circle” (35). His most significant works have the same ending: a new beginning, even if the beginning is not shaped. The ending of Portnoy’s Complaint – “So, Now vee may perhaps to begin, Yes” (274) – is so famous that it has become a cliche.

Roth’s heroes are more aware of their foolishness. They know even their best acts are absurd. He presents his vision of a world gone separate from his talented heroes, in a tone of mocking pain and revelatory yearning (Tucker 39). His early works reveal the ache and the void when the fictions are searched for their textured signs. His heroes, in his later works, fear impotence more than the loss of love (42). For them, the passion for a loved one is succeeded by impotence, and the consequence of impotence is the plight of the partner. Roth does not have his heroes consider that a lover may stay on even if the other
partner becomes impotent. Such a sacrifice is the prelude to isolation and exile. The fear of impotence is, then, a punishment visited on Rothian men for some never stated reasons or causes.

The Rothian protagonist is doomed to perpetual wandering in a sexual wilderness (Singh 18). Nevertheless, Roth’s victim hero is ineluctably mired in a nightmare of sexual failure and loneliness though he is not a sexually ineffectual figure. Portnoy’s rampant sexuality beginning with his oceanic masturbations and culminating in bizarre sexual extravaganza with Mary Jane Reed, “The Monkey”, leaves little doubt on that score. The Rothian hero also qualifies to be “The Professor of Desire” in a novel by that name. David Kepesh, a university professor, wants to offer his erotic experiences, of which he has a ready supply, to his students as the first of the semester’s texts.

The sexual transgressions of Roth’s heroes are aimed at breaking down what Roth calls “that barrier of personal inhibition, ethical conviction and plain old monumental fear” (RMAO 166). The Rothman struggles to gain through orgasm, freedom from the restrictions of society and the pressures of living conventionally. In other words, sex seems an adequate means of salvation and perversity an appropriate metaphor of release from civilized inhibitions. But at the same time, he cannot get away from “that anguished, self-lacerating moral judgment which is in essence Judaic” (Cooperman 207).
Bellow’s Herzog, a secular Jew of *Herzog* (1964) reproaches himself in bed with his beautiful mistress, “Have all traditions, passions, renunciations, virtues, gems and masterpieces of Hebrew discipline and all the rest of it – rhetoric, a lot of it, but containing true facts – brought me to these untidy green sheets, and this rippled mistress?” (*Herzog*, 178). Roth’s hero is caught in the uneasy limbo between sex and morality. His frenzied lust is inevitably tainted by a sense of guilt. According to Pearl K. Bell, “Philip Roth has all along been more of a Jewish square than most readers suspected” (62). Roth’s sex-crazed characters seek in vain, to satisfy their escalating demands and kinky tastes without being overcome by shame. Their frantic and perverted attempts to attain the lineaments of gratified desire inevitably bring them to sterility and nervous exhaustion. Portnoy imagines himself chained to a toilet seat for his abominations and he is convinced that his impotence is a punishment for the exploitation of the female genitals. Despite his daredevilry, he remains mortifyingly aware of the codes of morality. Manacled in iron bands of repression, he cries in anguish, “LET MY PETER GO!” (*PC* 283).

David Kepesh is another of Roth’s frustrated and driven characters who, like Portnoy, struggle to break loose the bonds of repression and strive to “put the id back in Yid” (*PC* 139). On the one hand, he has no desire to set himself up in business as a saint and, on the other, he fears becoming a lump of flesh. Unable to resolve the irreconcilable demands of the ethical and erotic, he turns to the psychoanalyst to confess and complain.
Roth’s victim-hero is prevented from the possibility of manhood. Although he dreams of being a “center-fielder” and aspires to be “humanish” and “a man” (*MLAM* 36; 173), he never quite succeeds. He comes at the ragged end of the great patriarchal tradition stretching from Abraham, Isaac and Moses through a long line of monarchs and rabbis. Bellow’s Herzog feels that he is a “broken down monarch” and a “weakened father” (*Herzog* 45) instead of the patriarch he was meant to be. But the Rothman cannot even claim that. Not a single one of Roth’s protagonists ends up being a father, in stubborn defiance of the first positive commandment of the Bible, which enjoins, “Be fruitful, and multiply” (Gen. 1.28).

The *Talmud* says, “He who is without a wife dwells without blessing, life, joy, help, good and peace” (qtd. in Lovelina Singh 19). But this does not apply to Roth’s characters for whom marriage is a psychologically crippling and physically emasculating experience.

Portnoy speaks not only to his therapist but to the average American caught in the same trials and tribulations brought on by the modern world’s possibilities (Murray 78). Portnoy complains, “I’m living in the middle of a Jewish joke” (*PC* 35). Portnoy’s neurotic disorder makes its presence felt right from the beginning of the novel. Like *Moby Dick*, which begins with encyclopedic references to giant whales in order to establish their novelistic plausibility, *Portnoy’s Complaint* starts with a footnote to a learned journal to
prove the existence of Portnoy’s condition and of Portnoy himself. Like all therapeutic subjects, Portnoy is trying to persuade his therapist of his view of reality. Bringing him into the “Jewish joke”, Portnoy hopes to implicate Spielvogel in his situation, and thus, validate his condition. Just as the whale becomes not only Ahab’s difficulty but also everyone’s, so Portnoy’s “puzzled penis” becomes a shared public problem (Murray 79).

Roth fashioned Portnoy’s Complaint from four abandoned projects: “The Jew Boy”, “The Nice Jewish Boy”, “Portrait of an Artist” and “A Jewish Patient Begins His Analysis” (APRR 65-67). In this novel, Alexander Portnoy’s complaint is described as a struggle with his conscience about being identified with the Jewish community (Wadden 79). “I don’t want to escape”, he says, but he also says, “Yes, I can if I should want to” (PC 254). Roth was making fun of Portnoy, because, he couldn’t get over his mother and father and being raised as “a little rabbi” like all good little Jewish boys. But he was also deadly serious. For he failed to realize that what kept him going, what Ibsen called the “Life-illusion”, was the thought that he was not Jewish when in reality his being Jewish, which gave him incentive for denying it, was the driving force of life (73). In other words, Roth has discovered that the Jew is an archetype of the disjointed, dissociated modern man in America.

In the sense of rootlessness, alienation, and fragmentation, the search for personal identity, constitute the dilemma of modern man and they are a major
source of the dysfunction of the modern American Jew. The more specific Jewish problems of homelessness and rejection, the conflict between tradition and assimilation, and the Jewish penchant for suffering and the search for a meaningful identity are also added to this (Freedman 90). Roth has used all these knowingly or unknowingly since he invented Neil Klugman, Ozzie and Eli in the late 1950’s.

While *Portnoy’s Complaint* can readily be appreciated and enjoyed by anyone, it has a contemporary relevance for American Jews (Tanner 68). Portnoy is obsessed with the whole WASP American world, and he is bent on full assimilation, away from ghetto identity and towards American identity with its much wider horizons of possibility. He has left the ghetto to arrive at a better place where he can have a confident new identity. But his landing is not to his expectations and this has made his way to the psychiatrist’s couch. Dan Yergin, in his review of the book, points out, although there is a general idea in the Jewish family that each son will be more successful and more liberated than the father, Portnoy’s job of mediating between poor minorities and established WASP society is basically similar to his father’s job of peddling insurance to the poor blacks on behalf of a rich WASP firm. Portnoy is not really “free”, and yet after a visit to Israel, he realizes that, in spite of the validity of the Israeli girl’s criticism of American Jews, he is nevertheless irremediably American. He is a transitional figure, like so many other Jewish figures in recent American fiction, neither quite in nor wholly out of the established society.
The question Portnoy asks towards the end of the book is, indeed, a crucial one. "How have I come to be such an enemy and flayer of myself? And so alone! Oh, so alone. Nothing but ‘self’! Locked up in me" (PC 270-71). The tremendous popularity of the book is probably related to the kind of unreachable privacy of the self it finally exposes. But the question is not answered and the listening Dr. Spielvogel opens his mouth only to close the book.

With Portnoy’s Complaint, Roth disclosed fully, for the first time, the comic possibilities of metamorphosis. The novel twists and turns in an absolutely irreconcilable tension of id and superego, fleshed into life as the lustful and ethical selves of Alexander Portnoy. The tension becomes comic in the extravagance of each force – unbridled desire coexisting with moral outrage, in the amazing rapidity with which one force can seize, then lose, the upper hand and in Portnoy’s nearly complete consciousness of the psychic war taking place within him (Kartiganer 99-100). This is a neurotic who scarcely requires an unconscious to lead him unawares to his forgotten hungers, “Dreams? [ . . . ] I don’t need dreams, Doctor [ . . . ] I have this life instead” (PC 290).

By the end of this novel, Portnoy recognizes the utter transparency of his divided personality. Having confessed the story of his impotence with an Israeli woman who resembles his mother, Portnoy cries out in Chicago, “This mother substitute! Look, can that be so? Oh please, it can’t be as simplistic as that! Not ‘me!’ Or with a case like mine, is it actually that you can’t be simplistic
enough’! [ . . . ]. This then is the culmination of Oedipal drama, Doctor” (PC 300-01). What Portnoy regards as the climax of his perversion – the three-way sex with the Monkey and Line – has led to the climax of his guilt. Portnoy is split between sensuality and affection as said by Freud in his The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation of Erotic Life. According to him, “Where such men love they have no desire and where they desire they cannot love” (207). Portnoy wants to be free from his “superego” (PC 160 - 61).

According to Shechner, “the table is a battlefield on which Alex’s bid for manhood is fought and lost” (417). Such is the war that ranges all the time within and between the body and soul of Portnoy. He can neither satiate the fires of his desire – “time marches lust peters out” (PC 116) – nor placate the guilt that interprets that very condition as a crime against maturity and normality. Every relationship with a woman eventually condemns itself by virtue of the relationship that is not. The Monkey, the momentary fulfillment of all Portnoy’s sexual fantasies, also repels him as a “coarse, tormented, self-loathing, bewildered, lost, identityless creature” (241). But all her superiors, predecessors, the Pumpkin and Sarah Abbot Maulsby, “lively, intelligent, self-respecting, self-assured, and well-behaved young women” (243), lack precisely the sexual freedom that Portnoy requires.

Portnoy is content with no one, incapable of permitting a single satisfaction to remain uncomplicated by the need that is denied by it. But he remains a “neurotic hero” (Kartiganer 102), screaming his refusal to
diminish the scope and significance of his contradictions: “at least while I lived, I lived!” (PC 309).

According to Murray, “What is important about Alex’s portrayal is not only the fundamental conflict between ethnicity and assimilation, but the ways in which Roth inscribes the traces of that determining conflict in Alex’s struggle to define and express his manhood and social identity” (100). Unable to assert his right to choose how and what he should eat, Alex Portnoy, “the would be American individualist”(95), rushes to the bathroom to claim his identity. For this he takes the weapon of masturbation to revenge his mother for snatching his childhood and adolescent freedom.

In The Professor of Desire, peripheral characters line up from childhood onwards as “secret sharers” of Kepesh’s two selves (Lee 19-151): his anxious hotelier parents versus his responsible and chivalrous department head Arthur Schornbrunn and the libidinous Baumgarten. His marriage to the sexy, sleepy Helen Baird makes the conflict unmanageable. Erotic pleasures are driven out by the professor’s need for responsible order. The result is anxiety and impotence. His mother’s death seems a judgment on his inability to sustain steady and dedicated living. Dr. Klinger tries to close the gap between libido and conscience. But the moral cure comes from Claire Ovington, who is erotic, innocent, virtuous and orderly all in one, and brings Kepesh a period of peace and satisfaction.
"When She Was Good" presents the epitome of female self-righteousness in Lucy Nelson, a product of Liberty Center, a small town in the Midwest. This novel emphasizes a noticeable contrast between leading male and female figures in the fiction of the sixties. The men are usually gentler, weaker, and more sensitive, while the women are rigid and dominating. As with Paul's attitude toward his wife Libby in Letting Go, Roy Bassart sees Lucy as "good" and an "Angel". Although, he finally denounces her, he makes this statement from a distance.

According to Donald Kartiganer, "When She Was Good is the most severely contained, locked in an unbroken banality that reaches into every corner of character, episode and language" (98). The subtle strength of civilization is evident in its almost unlimited capacity for forgiveness. But Lucy's driving her father from the family and Liberty Center and her anger at her father's inadequacy is the sign of her fatal confusion as to what civilization is and what it requires of its members.

Julian and Roy remain part of the social unit because while they occasionally do not transgress the forms of social behaviour, they nor the citizens of Liberty Center, except Lucy, recognize in these transgressions if there is any significant clash between the content and the forms. Lucy is aware of the values and their possible variance from actual behaviour. It is this awareness, which ultimately results in her isolation from the community. Again, in a society more
civilized, there exists a gap between form and meaning. In such a society, this gap is called “decadence” and in a society less civilized, “hypocrisy” (Kartiganer 95). But the citizens of Liberty Center genuinely adhere to the forms “as forms” having passed beyond the pragmatic or moral function of routine to an unconscious belief in its ritualised, sacred power.

The madness of Lucy and the metaphoric drama she enacts are rooted in her dual ultimately contradictory commitments to the language of Liberty Center. The duality is a threat to the town which can forgive everything except Lucy’s fierce belief that the conventions truly mean only as they are fulfilled, that they possess no ritual power in themselves. Thus, Lucy is the character in the novel most devoted to the speech of the community and the one who violates it most seriously, the most convention ridden and the least banal (Raban 153-63). Like everyone else in the town, Lucy speaks and thinks out of the context of an inviolable conformity. She quits her school band despite the rare sense it provides her of belonging somewhere, when she suddenly notices that the other girls in the group are “freaks” — “and she wasn’t!” (WSWG 88). Later she is anxious to marry Roy without his family knowing that she is pregnant. Even her statement of educational goals to Mr. Bassart betrays no indication of thought. “Develop a logical mind [. . . ] self-discipline [. . . ] increase her general fund of knowledge [. . . ] learn more about the world we live in [. . . ] learn more about herself” (119).
Lucy becomes, in Liberty Center, the figure of radical division. In other words, she is torn between convention, civilization and savagery. She becomes another of Philip Roth’s “monsters of division” such as Eli Peck, Gabe Wallach and David Kepesh. Lucy’s rage for an “authentic” conformity splits into the antithetical masks of one of Roth’s oddest and most moving transformations, as she desires to make the banal “real” (Kartiganer 97). The inherently irresolvable conflict of that desire becomes the identity she will not give up, “Liv(ing) too much in the there and now” (WSWG 289). According to Roth, When She Was Good “deals with Lucy’s struggle to free herself from the terrible disappointment engendered in a daughter by an irresponsible father. It deals with her hatred of the father he was and her yearning for the father he couldn’t be” (RMO 151-52).

In When She Was Good as in Letting Go, no one is happy, and no one seems to have the slightest notion how to change or make things any different. The system of exchange in which all participate as sexual, financial, parental, filial, and educational actors allows characters to choose their roles but not to redefine or transform them (Murray 72). Like Ozzie Freedman in “The Conversation of the Jews”, Lucy Nelson is an isolatio. Her marginality allows her to see the adult conventions of the world of When She Was Good more clearly than anyone else. Her innocence makes her take literally, what parents, teachers and friends interpret symbolically. Like many classic American heroes, she does not participate in the conventions that limit the adult world. As a result,
her unintentionally subversive questions and behaviour, like Ozzie’s questions about normative values and beliefs, threaten the social order of her elders.

What Lucy discovers is that, as a woman, she is predestined to be a victim. The two generations of women who precede her in *When She Was Good* accept their status. She does not decide to be “very good” as a way of realizing her hopes and desires. But, like the girl in the nursery rhyme, when she is bad – that is, when she uncovers the truths of her situation first as a pregnant, unwed mother-to-be and then as an abused wife who is taken for granted by everyone – she fulfills the rest of the rhyme: “When she was bad, she was horrid” (Murray 73). She ends up being horrid because she discovers that being good means turning the other check to ensure the maintenance of the status quo.

Ozzie’s daring leads to freedom, while Lucy’s experience reveals what it means for an average American woman to try to assert her rights before the rise of the contemporary women’s movement. Lower class women in this world do not enjoy the rights of citizenship either in their own family or in the larger society. There is no political world for them to function in, and thereby, define new possibilities for themselves. In such an environment, Lucy strikes everyone as obsessive. Lucy Nelson’s strength is turned inward by the prevailing social conditions, and she becomes a victim of her own response to them as well as an example of their grim limitations.
In several public statements, Roth has associated *When She Was Good* with *Portnoy's Complaint*, each exploring a familiar American family myth. In *Portnoy's Complaint*, a Jewish son feels persecuted by an overprotective mother, while in *When She Was Good*, a gentile daughter feels betrayed by an irresponsible alcoholic father. The separation of the sexes in *When She Was Good* and *Portnoy's Complaint* destroys the possibility of effective communication between them. Like that of many American classic stories, which divide the world of men and women into utterly different spheres, these novels reveal the link between the male character's victimization of female characters and their own profound feelings of male impotence (Murray 76).

Kepesh's transformation into a female breast in *The Breast*, seems in one way the ultimate simplification, a return to infancy, an abandonment of masculinity and its difficulties, an absolute pursuit of the pleasure principle, yet Kepesh's supreme unhappiness again evidences that attraction to and repulsion from the reductive levelling of experience (Watson 115). Unlike Gregor Samsa, he questions the reality of his metamorphosis and seeks explanation for its happening. He has enjoyed too much of sexual pleasures. He is comfortable and he has taught too much of Gogol and Kafka placing too much value upon the extraordinary sex. But without sight or mobility, after his transformation, his communication with the world is more radically altered than Gregor's. And he recurrently wonders if he is being televised. According to Donald G. Watson,
the transformation prompts an ambivalent but intense reconsideration to his own performance as a human being (115).

Zuckerman, the young artist, believes that literature can redeem life (Murray 156-57). So he decides to make a pilgrimage to the source of American art. At its altar, he hopes to find the truth and rededicate himself to the higher moral purposes of art. However, he knows that literary and biological fathers are not commensurable. Neither can replace the other. Both place demands and responsibilities upon the son. This quandary is central to all the novels in which he figures, including the *Zuckerman Bound* trilogy.

Of course, I had a loving father of my own, whom I could ask the world of any day of the week, but my father was a foot doctor and not an artist, and lately we had been having serious trouble in the family because of a new story of mine. He was so bewildered by what I had written that he had gone running to his mortal mentor, a certain judge Leopold Wapter, to get the judge to get his son to see the light. As a result, after two decades of a more or less unbroken amiable conversation, we had not been speaking for nearly five weeks now, and I was off and away seeking patriarchal validation elsewhere. (9-10)

*The Ghost Writer* is a sophisticated and richly structured response to Roth’s critics who accuse him of betrayal and he poses questions about the
nature of art and life (Nesher 26). Roth has projected his own wishes and identity in Anne/Amy. Amy is the paragon of Jew, Jewish suffering and renunciation at the holy altar of art. She is both artist and Jewish saint. If Nathan married her, he would become an accomplice in her secret scheme to preserve the memory of the Holocaust for readers like his parents, while they still consider him a traitor to the Jewish community. Both Nathan and Anne are artists sacrificing personal happiness for their art. Roth exhibits the Jewish-American writer’s problem as the central issue of the fiction.

In Zuckerman Unbound, the father who opposes the son is at first geographically removed to Florida and then he dies. The heavy hand of his father no longer weighing upon him, Nathan expects he will be able to write without having to consider how it will affect those close to him, or the larger community implicated in and avidly following his career. The introduction of Alvin Pepler calls into question the resolutions for the dilemmas, which haunt him.

Pepler amuses Nathan, when Alvin tells he too is a writer and asks Nathan if he can recommend an editor. When Pepler identifies himself as “the Jewish Marine” (ZB 197), Zuckerman recalls Alvin’s fame as a quiz show contestant. Nathan finds it impossible to shake the dogged Pepler. At last he escapes from him as Pepler enters the store to buy ice-cream (220-22). Later he comes to know from his brother Henry that his father’s last word “Bastard” (373), was a curse upon him. The writer of Carnovsky is the bastard who has brought their
father two strokes and an early grave. Henry also accuses Nathan of being a bastard – unrestrained and irresponsible, willing to do anything for his art, unwilling to acknowledge the simplest human obligations. "Everything is exposable! Jewish morality, Jewish endurance, Jewish wisdom, Jewish families – everything is a gist for your fun-machine" (397).

The novel concludes with a stunned Nathan arriving at Newark airport. Then he asks a taxi-driver to take him to his old neighbourhood. People to whom he is nobody inhabit the apartment house, where, he grew up. In this place:

You are no longer any man’s son, you are no longer some good woman’s husband, you are no longer your brother’s brother, and you don’t come from anywhere anymore, either. They skipped the grade school and the playground and the hot dog joint and headed back to New York, passing on the way out to the Parkway the synagogue where he had taken Hebrew lessons after school until he was thirteen. It was now an African Methodist Episcopal Church. (ZB 404-05)

Nathan has become unbound amid these ironic circumstances.

In *The Anatomy Lesson*, Nathan Zuckerman comes to the conclusion that he can no longer write because he has lost his subject. It goes on, "A first generation father possessed by the Jewish demons, a second-generation American son possessed by their exorcism: that was his whole story" (ZB 446). The novel ends with Nathan as a patient. According to Hana Wirth Nesher,
Zuckerman can escape neither the corpus of his own aging body, nor the corpus of his fiction (28). In “The Prague Orgy” sexual contact is mediated by language.

Ideology transforms words into political expediency (Murray 199). Words hide reality. To keep them from asserting their truth, someone bearing the power of language must be made into a scapegoat. Prague reminds Zuckerman that in the face of the terror of the twentieth century, we must all change our lives. In the later works, the question of the relationship of men and women has a more historical and social context than it did in his earlier work; the “complaint” is no longer a kvetch, or a whine, but a moving meditation on contemporary history. Prague, the city not only of Kafka but of Rilke, of Kundera, and Skvorecky as well as Theodore Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism, has become the urban embodiment of modern Western history.

According to Allen Cooper,

Nathan was not only a writer, he was the writer whose public history was closest to Roth’s. Wallach and Tarnopol might have been closer to Roth’s private history, but their readership in the sixties and seventies had not been invited to leap to biographic conclusions. However, in contriving Nathan, Roth had taken distorted public perceptions of himself and had distorted them further, to intensify the predicaments of his character and the issues those predicaments embodied. (210)
“Jewish self-transformation” (Cooper 211) is taking place everywhere. In Israel, grandchildren of men whose beards had been pulled in the streets of Europe are signing treaties and shouldering Uziz. In America, grandchildren of Jewish peddlers are senators and CEOs. Even Zuckerman would come to believe that Jews could now define themselves as men and as Jews. Roth’s books of the late eighties and nineties are assertions of a Jewish self-transformation and self-acceptance.

This Jewish self-acceptance of the later Roth hero intersects a wider historical development. For the first time in Western Jewish history, a Jew of Roth’s adult generation could choose to be a Jew. Now, in the public arena, a Senator Goldwater or Cohan, or a Defense Secretary Schlesinger could be Christian and not viewed behind his back as a turncoat Jew. It is because a Jew or a child of a Jew could choose not to be a Jew. But Jews, in general, could choose, now, to be Jews. Choice, rather than compulsion, meant freer Jews who were able to define their Jewishness. Secularists or atheists identifying themselves as Jews could criticise their people without fear of being labelled outsiders. Jewish consciousness required neither traditional observance nor open rebellion.

From “The Prague Orgy” and The Counterlife through Operation Shylock Roth’s Jews enter into rather flinch from uninvolved with identifiably Jewish pursuits. The Counterlife has no single central plot or story. There is no clear beginning, middle or end. Each of its five sections describes a series of
overlapping events, which are told from different points of view. Each first
person narration is interrupted and countered by a connected yet opposed
account. The subject of the novel, as expressed in its title, becomes a central
interpretive issue (Murray 203). As Murray has again affirmed, in *The
Counterlife*

Roth dramatizes both what it means to be a modern Jew and what it
means to seek to escape from the obligations of modern Jewish
history. The novel details the power of sexuality and the escape
from the Oedipal drama. Nathan embraces the power of the
imagination to make counterlives and repudiates it in favour of the
reality of the everyday. (206-07)

The novel *The Counterlife* is divided into five sections. In the first section
“Basel”. Nathan is advised to take a surgery to cure his impotence caused by the
drug he used to take to control his hypertension. The second section “Judea”
engages the intense political questions of what it means to be a contemporary
American Jew. In it Roth suggests that perhaps the cure for private impotence in
New Jersey is a public rebirth or counterlife of renewed masculine and Jewish
strength and vigour in Israel. There “the powerless, the scattered, the impotent
Jews of the Diaspora are restored to potency by manhood” (Barnes 3). In
“Aloft”, the third section of the novel, Nathan is in an airplane, leaving Israel and
musing about his failed mission to bring back to New Jersey. Much of the fourth
section “Gloucestershire” takes place in Manhattan where Nathan lives and
works. Maria, living upstairs in the same apartment, and Nathan meet in the elevator. Maria is as charmed by Nathan's "exoticism" as he by hers. For each, the other is a counterlove, different from their former loves. In the concluding section of the novel, "Christendom", a suddenly quite alive Nathan tends to concur with the view of himself which Henry and Maria share. Here Nathan, the writer is someone exhausted by his arduously attained private culture and personal memories.

In *The Counterlife*, Mordecai Lippman defends Israel. For Lippman and his followers, the state of Israel must exist because anti-Semitism is always just around the corner. Like contemporary prophets, they foretell a time when American Jews will flee to Israel by the millions. To Henry and Lippman, the skepticism of Shuki Elchanan or Nathan Zuckerman can only be a form of Jewish self-hatred. To Lippman, the areas under controversy are Israel's by biblical right. To Shuki and Nathan the West Bank and Gaza belong to those who have made their recent homes there.

Henry wants to leave behind the "narcissistic past" and the psychologised soul-searching of Nathan's heroes for

a larger world, a world of ideology, of politics, of history – a world of things larger than the kitchen table, [ . . . ] a world defined by 'action' or by 'power, [ . . . ] a world outside the Oedipal swamp [ . . . ]. Here you fight, you struggle, here you worry about what's
going on in ‘Damascus?’ What matters isn’t [. . . ] ‘any’ of that crap you write about – ‘it’s who runs Judea!’ (TCL 140)

Nathan, however, suspects that Henry’s real motivation for embracing Zionism is his “unchallengeable means to escape his hedged – in life” to that of his obligations to his wife and family (Murray 215-16).

For Henry, Judea is heaven, a place where, for the first time in his life, he can stake out his claim to his own land and his own self. Nathan realizes this is a country where everything is written in capital letters. As Shuki puts it, “Here everything is black and white, everybody is shouting, and everybody is always right” (TCL 64). Nathan, the American-Jewish intellectual and writer, values listening as much as speaking. But Shuki, “Nathan’s Israeli alterego” (Murray 217) says Nathan has a charm and Savior faire of a Frenchman, and his secretly desired counterlife is not that of a Zionist in Judea but that of an English country squire living the life of gentility with the Gentiles in England.

Nathan chooses Jewishness over English pastoral and an active life over a passive one. This reveals the fundamental Jewishness of his vision of life:

The burden isn’t either / or consciously choosing from possibilities equally difficult and regrettable – its and / and / and / and / and as well. Life is and: the accidental and the immutable, the elusive and the graspable, the bizarre and the predictable, the actual and the potential, all the multiplying realities, entangled, overlapping,
colliding, conjoined – plus multiplying illusions! This times this times this times this [ . . . ] (TCL 306)

The novel’s hall of mirrors affirms the power of the imagination and celebrates the multiple possibilities of life rather than its singular certainties (Murray 227). Though Roth’s protagonists are “alienated both from claustrophobic Jewishness and vertiginous Americanness” and from their Zionistic and their skeptical counterparts in Israel, they, the “hellenized-hedonized-egomanized” American Jews must “reinvent” themselves (Lee 45).

Like the protagonists of The Counterlife, Roth’s protagonists must appendedly appropriate the project counter lives as best they can. Henry, the New Jersey dentist obsessed by oral sex and a reborn Zionist; Nathan, the Jewish comic performer and American writer; Lusting the gleeful base-ball player and hijacker disguised as a Hasidic rabbi; Lippman, the American exile and Jewish man of action; Shuki, the cynical intellectual and committed Jewish patriot – all are part of Nathan’s own bewildering set of possibilities. Roth, here, redefines conventional notions of failure and success in a world where each Jew contains notions of failure and success, for each Jew contains multiple personalities (Murray 228). This reminds us of Walt Whitman’s motto “I contain multitudes”.

In The Ghost Writer, Zuckerman tells Lonoff that the Jewish writer is an intellectual with “blood in his penis” (ZB 49). The Counterlife takes this
statement as its implicit starting point and transforms it from a private statement into a question of public definition. A meditation on the relationship of impotence and vision, *The Counterlife* is about the possibility of re-vision – the writer revising his work, the character revising his self, a people recreating their national life. As Maria notes of Zuckerman in her imagined interview, “He said to me ‘A time comes when you have to forget what frightens you most’. But I don’t think it was dying that most frightened him – it was facing the impotence for the rest of his life” (*TCL* 246). There is a craving for the fullness of life as revealed in the final paragraph of the novel.

The motto of modern Zionism, according to Herzl, the founder is: *Imtirzu eyn zo agada* – if you wish it, it is not a dream – leading to the recreation of modern Jewish life and the founding of the modern Israel. Nathan is a Jew by reason of imagination to remake the self, family and nation and open it to the range of possibility. The novel dramatises the urge to experience contradiction and accept it by rendering an outstanding gallery of characters (Murray 229-30).

Art is life, life art. Sexual impotence is “like an artist’s artistic life drying up for good” (*TCL* 35). Later it is said, “A life of writing books is a trying adventure in which you cannot find out where you are unless you lose your way” (131). According to Pinsker, in *My Life As a Man*, art turns into the Frankenstein monster, stalking Tarnopol with the banal albeit painful realities he so disastrously courted. *My Life As a Man* also completes the informal trilogy
that gives Roth’s canon the illusion of a seamless whole. Seen through Joycean prisms, it could be described this way: *Goodbye, Columbus* is *Dubliners* writ small, *Portnoy’s Complaint* a pale shadow of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *My Life As a Man*, a failed Ulysses (101-05).

*Operation Shylock* externalises and dramatises the self-dividedness of the Jew. During Smilesburger’s lecture to Philip toward the end of the novel, he argues:

> the dividedness is not just between Jew and Jew – it is within the individual Jew [. . . ] inside every Jew there is a ‘mob’ of Jews.

The good Jew, the bad Jew. The new Jew, the old Jew. The lover of Jews, the hater of Jews. The friend of the goy, the enemy of the goy. The arrogant Jew, the wounded Jew. The pious Jew, the racial Jew. The coarse Jew, the gentle Jew. The defiant Jew, the appeasing Jew. The Jewish Jew, the de-Jewed Jew. (*OS* 334)

The internal plurality of the Jew that Smilesburger names, speaks to different ways Jews may identify themselves or be identified by others. But at root is the difficulty of defining precisely what “Jewishness” is.

The sense of being situated in history is pervasive in *Operation Shylock* as, perhaps, in no other novel by Roth except the political satire *Our Gang*. In Israel, Philip attends the Demjanjuk trial, where the central event of recent Jewish history, the Holocaust, is being replayed, and with it, the narrative of
Jewish victimization. The problem of the determinacy of identity takes on dire historical consequences as the audience in the courtroom tries to ascertain whether the “cheerful palooka of sixty eight” (OS 61) is Ivan the Terrible of Treblinka and therefore deserving punishment. “So there he was”, thinks the narrator, “– or wasn’t” (65). Philip must also confront the historicity of contemporary Jewish experience represented all around him in Israel, ranging from the Jewish aspirations whose fulfillment is symbolized by the courtroom itself – “One day we will determine justice!” (140) – to the moral problem posed to the Israel by the presence of the Palestinian population.

The Palestinians are represented by Philip’s embittered friend George Zaid. “Zee”, as he is called, stands for an inverted “story of Z” – that is of Zionism (Shostak 741). A self-described “stone throwing Arab consumed by hate” (OS 121), Zee presents the subtext of the narrative of Jewish success that is modern Israeli history. He sees the “victorious Jews” of Israel as “terrible people” (124), intolerant, arrogant about their authenticity as Jews, contemptuous of Diaspora Jews, and exploitative of their history of victimization in order to buy themselves moral immunity. According to George, Israel is “a state founded on force and maintained by force” it has “forfeited” its moral identity [...]. By relentlessly institutionalising the Holocaust it has been forfeited its claim to the Holocaust” (135).
Roth opposes Zee’s compelling case to the perspective of Smilesburger, the unapologetic Israel intelligence agent. Calling himself “a ruthless man working in a ruthless job for a ruthless country”, Smilesburger openly admits that “To make a Jewish state we have betrayed our history – we have done unto the Palestinians what the Christians have done unto us: systematically transformed them into the despised and subjugated other” (OS 350). The implicit dialogue Roth sets up between Zee and his antithesis, Smilesburger, requires Philip to confront how he might define himself as a Jew. The conventional representation of the Diaspora Jew is “self-questioning, self-hating, alienated, frightened neurotic” (125).

Israel poses an identity crisis for the Diaspora Jew largely because of its symbolic power as the Jewish “home”. For two millennia, Jews have considered themselves in “golah” from the homeland, and from the perspective. Jewish identity is inextricable from the Jew’s nostalgic conception of the self in relation to the lost home. Every Passover Seder expresses the hope “Next year in Jerusalem”, and many Jews have immigrated to Israel under the “Law of Return”, which “guarantees the rights of residency and citizenship to all Jews returning to the homeland” (Shusterman 294). Richard Shusterman asserts that “the myth of return [. . .] is quintessential to Jewish identity” (295). The tension between “aliyah” and “golah” is central to Operation Shylock.
Roth concretises the identity politics suggested in the dialogues between Philip and both Pipik and George Zaid. The opposition of Diasporism is Zionism, of historical Diaspora to voluntary redispersion, of Israeli to Arab, explores not just how one might claim the power to delineate the self, but also how one identifies oneself as an American, or eastern European, or Israeli citizen who does not conceive of him or herself in a marginal cultural position. The self-dividedness that Smilesburger assesses as the Jewish condition emerges not just as a consequence of the postmodern view of identity but also as a problem of historical and moral embeddedness (Shostak 743).

According to Parrish Operation Shylock completes the long journey that Philip Roth began in 1959 with the publication of “The Conversion of the Jews” in New Yorker. Critics suggest that Operation Shylock is one of “non-fictional trilogy”, and the two others being The Facts and Patrimony. In this trilogy, Roth “explores” and “illuminates” “the value of self making” that has also engaged much of recent post-modernist theory. Herold Bloom includes The Counterlife along with the three books and forms a “tetrology” implying Roth’s autobiographical truth. In fact, as we know, all of Roth’s novels have at their centre a crisis of identity. But what connects these four books is that they carry Roth’s concern with Jewish identity to a new level of fictional and autobiographical intensity (Parrish 575-76).
Kauvar is right to suggest that Roth ultimately “insists on the reality of the self and the truth of subjectivity”. But one must also stress that not only is Roth interested in the performances of his performing self characters undertake, but also the roles that they adopt (414). Debra Shostak notes that Roth reveals his interest “how Israel poses an identity crisis for the Diaspora Jew largely because of its symbolic power as the Jewish home” (742). One should remember that Operation Shylock takes shape as Roth’s response to his own American predicament. It is also significant that it incorporates virtually all of twentieth century Jewish history from the Jewish Diaspora into America to the Holocaust of the creation and consolidation of the State of Israel (Parrish 577-80).

Pipik’s appearance in Israel articulating Diasporism initiates Roth into a critical-fictional drama since the beginning of the novel (Parrish 582). But once Diasporism becomes a public property by being reported in newspapers and broadcast over the radio, the real Philip Roth decides “the ideas expoused” are “mine now and would likely endure as mine even in the recollection of those who’d read the retraction tomorrow” (OS 35).

According to the imposter Roth, Diasporism is the recognition that as a response to European Jewish history that culminated in the Holocaust. Israel has been a terrible mistake. Diasporism recognizes that the true meaning of Jewish identity resides in its European history. Roth, impersonating Pipik, says Diasporism envisions “a Jew for whom ‘authenticity’ as a Jew means living in
the Diaspora” – a position that Roth himself has frequently presented in his own
(OS 170). In the words of Pipik, “The destruction of Israel in a nuclear exchange
is a possibility much less far-fetched today than was the Holocaust itself fifty
years ago” (43). Thus, Pipik advocates returning to Ashkenazi Jews to Europe in
order to save them from the destruction that will be brought down on them as a
result of their own fanatical militarism. Not only will returning to Europe save
the Jews from themselves, but the Europeans will welcome them back as their
long lost family members, “You know what will happen [. . . ] when the first
train load of Jews returns? There will be crowds to welcome them. People will
be jubilant. People will be in tears. They will be shouting, “Our Jews are back!
Our Jews are back!!” (OS 45)

Roth and Appelfeld are not Jewish opposites, but the contemporary halves
of a whole Jewish self (Parrish 587). Appelfeld is a Holocaust survivor whose
fiction is rooted in the experience of the Holocaust. In fact, he is an Israeli
citizen. But Roth is a Jew of the American Diaspora, free to move in and out of
the questions of Jewish identity. Appelfeld’s existence does not challenge Roth’s
identity because he does not impinge on Roth’s sense of himself as an American
Jew. The Israeli writer is perhaps unique in Roth’s fiction since he is a double
figure who may be described as comfortably “other”. On the other hand, Pipik
represents a form of Jewish identity that is identical with Roth’s, the “Diaspora
assimilation” (587).
The irony of Pipik’s position is that saving Israel is his Jewish identity. Applying Roth’s definition of a Jew as one who embraces his historical position, Pipik wants to murder the Jew in himself. In this respect, Pipik is the ultimate assimilationist. Like Henry Zuckerman in *The Counterlife*, Pipik wants to solve his identity crisis by removing himself from his historical moment. Pipik’s Diasporism becomes Roth’s depiction of the awful schizophrenia that ensues both when one’s authentic identity puts one at odds with one’s country and when one’s country cannot accommodate multiple identities within its mythology.

“Operation Shylock” names not only the novel but also the mission that Roth performs as an agent of the Mossad. The code word for the mission is “Three thousand ducats”, a reference to Shylock’s entry in *The Merchant of Venice*. Earlier in the novel, while travelling in a taxi back to Jerusalem after visiting George Zaid in Ramallah, Roth is asked six times by his driver. “Are you a Zionist?” (O5 166). Roth’s refusal to answer the question makes the driver abandon him. Then the Mossad picks him up. Smilesburger puts a different version of the question as we advance the novel further. According to Smilesburger, when the Arabs finally capture Israel, they will ask one question for their captives to determine if they should live or die: “did you approve of Israel and the existence of Israel?” (351). In this scenario, this will be the last question that Roth hears before the Arabs kill him. Answering the question requires that Roth confess what his position is on Jewish identity, which only sets up an irreconcilable contradiction. Roth’s refusal to reveal whether he is a
Zionist signifies his refusal to identity himself with a notion of an essential Jewishness (Parrish 591).

The conclusion of the novel takes place not in Israel but in a Jewish food store on Amsterdam Avenue in New York. By removing Smilesburger from Israel to New York in order to give Roth his final lesson about identity, Roth seems to reinforce the point that his Israel novel takes its fullest meaning only in an American context.

Rothian protagonists are victims in a sense. They are victimised by society, complexes, failures, impotence, homelessness and they are comically neurotic. But they try to overcome these huddles by trying to conquer the defect in their characters. Indeed, they overcome their flaws and they become victorious. Portnoy is prepared to accept the prescriptions given by Dr. Spielvogel, Neil accommodates himself with his work. David Kepesh goes to the level of infancy and Nathan Zuckerman becomes victorious in The Counterlives. Moreover, there is an implication that Philip Roth’s Israel novel like Operation Shylock gets fulfilled in America. In other words, the Rothman accommodates himself to the American situation.