Chapter Two

Roth, the Confessor

Sheer playfulness and deadly seriousness are my closest friends.

- Philip Roth

At the end of the 1950s a brilliant, youthful collection of sharply observed stories about Jews in America won the National Book Award and aroused furious hostility among conservative Jewish readers. A decade later, the author of these stories became notorious in the Orthodox Jewish circles with the outrageous “confessions” of a Jewish son with sexual problems. After ten years, at the end of the seventies, he produced two elegant fictionalized histories delineating the dilemma of a successful Jewish American writer in the sixties and seventies. Now, he is a highly respected novelist.

Philip Roth’s earlier works share qualities such as moral seriousness, responsible aspirations towards self-fulfilment in an alien or brutal Gentile world and a formal narrative constraints with Bernard Malamud’s The Assistant (1957), Saul Bellow’s The Adventures of Augie March (1953) and Lionel Trilling’s literary essays such as “Manners, Morals and the Novel” published in The Liberal Imagination (1950). There were also signs of savage playfulness which looked back to the Black surrealism of Nathaniel West in the Depression years and Lennie Bruce’s desperate joking in the sixties. The raw-materials used by
Roth and others are: psycho-analysis, alienation, erotic fixations, pornography, urban violence, strains on the family, divorce, anxiety about Eastern Europe, alarm at the implications of Zionism for twentieth century, Jewish history, dismay at the ineffectuality of liberalism, and national political guilt and disillusion.

The registering of contemporary American subject matter involved a radical reworking of fictional forms. Roth’s development has been three-fold. He moved from the “nets” of the Jewish cultural ghetto to the wider world. At the same time, he continued to write about American Jews. He grew up, with the rest of America, from the relative innocence of the fifties to the skepticism of the eighties. His fictional strategies changed from anecdotal realism to making play with surrealism, pastiche, confessional case histories and psychic fantasies, and most recently, to coolly objectified “autobiographies”.

Philip Roth is a Jewish writer, because, he writes about people called Zuckerman, Epstein, Kepesh and their mothers and about their lives’ upheavals in a manner a novelist relates things he knows ultimately. In Philip Roth’s fiction there is hardly any philosophy, Jewish tradition, mysticism, or religion, and there is no discussion of who or what a Jew is. Roth’s Jews are Jews without Judaism (Appelfeld 13-16). According to Dan Isaac, Roth is a good writer for the Jews, because a good writer has the freedom to choose his characters and make of them whatever he wants, so long as it suits his purpose (183).
In *Reading Myself and Others*, Roth defines the Jew “as sufferer, the Jew as an object of ridicule, disgust, scorn, contempt, derision, of every heinous form of persecution and brutality, including murder” (126). The Jewishness of Roth’s actual life and Jewishness that “surrounded” it were at once related and remote, unfathomably joined across the gap of a “vast discrepancy”. Harold Bloom, is of the opinion that:

Roth [. . .] is a Jewish writer in a sense that Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud are not, and do not care to be. Bellow and Malamud, in their fiction, strive to be North American Jewish only as Tolstoic was Russian, or Faulkner was American Southern. Roth is centrally Jewish in his fiction, because his absolute concern never ceases to be the pain of the relations between children and parents, and between husband and wife, and in him this pain invariably results from the commensurability between a rigorously moral normative tradition whose expectation rarely can be satisfied, and the reality of the way we live now. (2)

In examining the circumstances of ordinary life, Roth has employed a wide range of artistic techniques resulting in a fictional canon notable for its variety. Most critics acknowledge Philip Roth as a major talent, as one who has been keenly responsive to the human condition as it is revealed in contemporary American experience. They have taken stances toward his achievement, which are as diverse as the fiction itself. He has been called an anti-Semite and a
Jewish moralist, a romantic and realistic writer, a polemicist, a satirist, a mannerist, a sentimentalist, and a liar. He has been praised for having “a clear and critical social vision”, condemned for having a “distorted” view of society, and accused of entertaining an “exclusively personal” vision of life that does not include society at all (McDaniel 107-08).

The uniqueness of Roth’s fiction is intimately associated with his commitment to social realism, to a willingness to confront the community, its manners and its mores – as subject of his art (109). The confrontation between private and public realms, between “un-isolated” individuals and the shaping forces of general life, is the confrontation that is central to the realistic mode and the fiction of Philip Roth. Certainly, many critics have detected in Roth’s fiction a noticeable attention to manners, to moral issues, and to literary realism.

Roth uses Jamesian concern for motives and for what Trilling calls “moral realism” (qtd. in McDaniel 109). The crises depicted in Roth’s fiction are not so much ontological as they are moral, for, although the character may begin with the question of identity and selfhood, he is likely to conclude with the questions of Neil Klugman, Gabe Wallach and Peter Tarnopol: what they owe to their fellowmen, what kind of relationship they have with the society and the dangers of moral life. They also want to explore the extent to which they have been victimized by false ideals and self-deceptions grounded in the society of which they are the ineluctable part.
These questions remind us of Tolstoy, Conrad, Dostoevski, Gogol, the great European novelists, and Henry James, America’s most prominent novelist of manners and moral realism. Henry James plays an important role in *Letting Go*. Gabe Wallach spends a good part of his graduate school life writing a dissertation on James. When the novel opens, Gabe declares that his “one connection with the world of feeling was not the world itself but Henry James” (*LG* 3). In fact, James’ *The Portrait of a Lady* serves as a link between Gabe and the Herzes. According to Murray Kempton, a Jamesian essence broods over *Letting Go*. But one might go even further to say that the novel presents characters who are engaged in a Jamesian “ordeal of consciousness” and that Roth is clearly interested in the working out of moral and psychological problems involved in such an ordeal (McDaniel 110).

The moral concerns in Roth’s fiction have been pointed out by many critics. He gives the basis of the central moral problem that recurs in his fiction when he says that the condition of man is that they are strangers to one another, and “because that is our condition [, . , ] it is incumbent upon us not to love one another [, . , ] but to practise no violence and treachery upon one another, which is to struggle with the darkest forces within ourselves” (qtd. in McDaniel 111). The most significant aspect of Roth’s moral interests is that they extend clearly into his conception of art. In Roth’s view, “It is the job of fiction to redeem (the) stereotype and give it its proper weight and balance in the world”. Roth seems to accept James’ belief that fictional experience “is our apprehension and our
measure of what happens to us as social creatures” (111-12). Writing satire, according to him, is essentially a literary not a political act and it is moral rage transformed into comic art.

When we look at Roth’s criticisms of his contemporaries, we discover the most salient features of his artistic creed. In “Writing American Fiction”, he undertakes a casual but illuminating examination of Bellow, Malamud, Salinger, Mailer, Gold and Styron and places his own distinctive artistic concerns in bold relief. Of these six writers, Roth feels the greatest affinity with Salinger because Salinger’s fictional world, “in all its endless marvellous detail, is decidedly credible” (RMO 126). There is a spurning of life in Salinger’s fictional heroes and it is expressed by them. In the words of Roth, “Since madness is undesirable and sainthood, for most of us, out of the question, the problem of how to live in this world is by no means answered; unless the answer is that one cannot” (126).

Roth feels that the spurning of life as it is actually lived in society is evident in the fiction of Bernard Malamud. According to him, Salinger and Malamud are two America’s best authors, yet their works seem to be curiously out of touch with the actual world. The fiction of Bellow and Styron, peopled by heroes who affirm life in a foreign and unrealistic climes is further evidence that our best writers have avoided examining American public life. He quotes as examples, Bellow’s *Henderson, the Rain King* and Styron’s *Set this House on Fire*. The America we see in these novels is the America of our childhood.
Roth’s assault on the American experience – his exploration of moral fantasy, his concern for moral consciousness, his willingness to confront the grandiose social and political phenomena of our times is the most significant aspect of his art. Despite the diversity of Roth’s fiction, despite the variety of themes, values, and characters that emerge from his novels and short stories, we see an abiding faith beneath Roth’s pessimism, a faith that leads him to answer one of his critics by saying, “I find that Mr. Liptzin’s view of the universe is negative; I think of my own as positive” (McDaniel 117-18).

Roth has written almost compulsively about achieving independence, authority and maturity as an artist and a man in America. His hero finds himself encaptured in a ghetto of the mind. The theme of finding one’s self unable to escape the past and overcome a perennial perspective as a writer is Roth’s definite sense of himself as an American writer. From the beginning of his career, Roth has expressed concern about the need to understand the meaning of the American experience, and, in this sense, Roth is a major contribution to the tradition of the New Covenant (Girgus 163). Along with Bellow and Mailer, Roth has written intensively about the responsibilities of the writer to explore the American idea and explain contemporary American culture. In “Writing American Fiction” Roth argues:

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

Roth carves out a special territory based not merely on his view of contemporary literature and culture but also on his understanding of the American literary tradition.

Newark seems close to the earlier ghetto of the Lower East Side (Girgus 166). Portnoy’s mental state seems to reflect this kind of environment. The presence of this ghetto mentality is obvious in Roth’s work. Roth’s fiction since Portnoy shows the growing importance of another force – literary modernism. In fact, his essays and fiction in this period sound almost like a reader of the modernist movement in literature. In style, subject matter, and sensibility, Roth’s My Life As a Man, The Professor of Desire and The Ghost Writer as well as his own critical writings, reflect the intensity of this modernist impulse.

Roth’s special style as a writer derives from his insight into the styles associated with the different cultural perspectives of literary modernism, Americanism and Judaism. The tensions, conflicts and incongruities involved in bringing these perspectives together, often, account for the devastating but humorous social and cultural criticism of his prose. The different styles
reflect different modes of thought and ways of life. As such, they operate as checks and critical perspectives on one another – Jew vs America, middle class conformist vs modernistic rebel. Brought together, they become the ironic consciousness and multi-perspective of the modern urban Jew. Nathan Zuckerman, in this sense, is the best of Roth’s effort.

The image of the Jew that emerges in Roth reflects modern literary sensibility, Jewish insecurity, and American ambivalence (Girgus 168-69). In Roth, the Jewish hero of thought becomes a kind of underground man, a symbol of perennial Jewish isolation and he advances to represent, in a manner more like Kafka than Dostoyevsky, the alienated condition of modern man. The heroes of Roth’s fiction are often these men from the underground even though they frequently function on the surface of seemingly successful and bright young Jewish men. They – David Kepesh, Nathan Zuckerman, Peter Tarnopol – dramatise the situation of being Jewish, modern, and American all at once.

As an underground man, Roth’s modern Jewish hero is engaged in a perennial search for identity and masculinity. Roth’s development of his fiction as a continuous search for a centre or a “real” author conforms with the desperate search of his characters for a sense of self. As an example of Roth’s experiment to combine this technique of fiction and his theme of the lost or uncertain self can be found in *My Life As a Man.*
In Roth’s fiction, characters often struggle to understand freedom (Cooper 11). Roth’s characters do not rest in the loss of the world. They do not even gain the emotional comfort of an overwhelming sadness, which might teach them that they can feel, and in feeling, perhaps, plumb their humanity. This seeming hardness in Roth has often been taken for personal failure or selfishness (6).

Israel has played a remarkably minor role as a theme in American Jewish fiction (Sokoloff 65). In *The Counterlife*, an affluent dentist from the suburban New Jersey arrives in Judea to embrace a life of religion, nationalism, disciplined adherence to collective ideals, and a return to Jewish consciousness. Following in a horrified pursuit, hoping to dissuade him from that path, is his brother Nathan Zuckerman. *The Counterlife* arises from the focus on characters disillusioned with America, whose flight to Israel signals an impatience with self-centred values, exaggerated individualism, assimilation, sexual indulgence, and the failures of political liberalism at home.

This novel more deliberately concerns itself with the definitions of Jewishness and considers a wider possible range of being a Jew. Like Roiphe, Roth emphasizes extremes. In doing so, he focuses on Agor, the settlement to which Henry Zuckerman repairs after surviving a dangerous coronary operation and undergoing a spiritual as well as medical change of heart. Through a series of conversations held in Israel, and through letters exchanged between the
Zuckerman brothers and an Israeli named Shuki, Roth brings out these characters’ interpretations of themselves and of one another. In other words, each explains the other according to his own frame of understanding, while choosing his own self-definition. At the heart of the novel are proliferating inventions of Jewishness (Sokoloff 66-80).

Roth’s Nathan catches not only the look of things in Israel, but also the special tenor of political imagination and sentiment projected into and out of this landscape. The “Judea” section of the novel turns into a long ideological debate between Nathan and Henry, and Nathan and the formidable Rabbi Lippman, arguing for religious annexationism and it is informed by a sense of Israel as a distinctive ambience for debate of this sort (Alter 55). Nathan confesses, “but that he had never felt so enclosed in his life by a world so contentious, where the argument is enormous and constant and everything turns out to be pro and con, positions taken, positions argued and everything italicized by indignation and rage. The image is right for Nathan and it aptly defines the peculiar quality of Israeli political discourse as anyone who has participated in a discussion about terrorists, the Diaspora will understand.

In Operation Shylock, Roth fictionalizes himself and his experiences in Israel (Halio 50-53). He has visited Israel a number of times, and like Bellow, he has stayed at the Mishkenot Sha’ananicen, the guesthouse for visiting academics and artists. But unlike Bellow, he presents his impressions of Israel through
characters such as Shuki Elchanan and Mordecai Lippman in *The Counterlife* and George Zaid in *Operation Shylock*. Though based on real persons, they are fictitious. The author’s surrogate Nathan Zuckerman is also fictitious and when apparently speaking he is “in propria persona”. In *Operation Shylock*, Philip Roth himself is a character. Nevertheless, from the characters that Zuckerman and Roth encounter and from what they say, we can gather a good deal about the author’s impressions of Israel.

Roth’s fiction mostly starts within the experience of a “human character” what he has called “the country’s private life” (*RMO* 122). He places his character in some heady experience and gives the reader, not analysis of its moral dilemma, but its smells, sights, voices, temperatures. According to Hermione Lee, Philip Roth writes:

> novels [. . .] full of tasting and eating, licking and chewing, vomiting, regurgitating, weeping and excreting, and, conversely, of forbidden foods, constipated fathers, teachers with migraines, and women who prefer not to suck cocks or drink sperm. Roth is, preeminently, the novelist of orifices and blockages, of frustrated gratification [. . .]. (14)

The major orifice in Roth’s works is the mouth, locus of indigestion but also of speech, saying, story telling, wisecracking, complaining, informing, declaring, and responding. Mouths are symbolically fed by mothers, or substitute aunts or wives, self-stuffed by compulsives usually while spewing or ranting – the labial
traffic moving in two directions – invaded by forbidden foods or sexual objects or organs protected by dentists (Cooper 20).

The relationship of America and its Jews has changed significantly in Roth’s characters. American Jewry has become more open and less defensive about its identity but at the same time more assimilated. Its chief oppositions and antagonists are no longer traditional power establishments but the under-classes touched by Jewry’s recent middle-management authority. Following the reaction to Goodbye, Columbus and Portnoy’s Complaint, Roth’s attention to the problem of Jewish conflict in America became intensified and his characters are a gallery of testifiers, many of whom are writers and whose mouths addressed and readdressed the Jewish question.

The main Jewish question raised in magazines, newspapers and surveys in response to an internal debate in Israel, was “Who a Jew is”. Sometimes “being Jewish” meant a word in a medical or army record, but mostly it meant something in the gut that said no to participation or pleasure in unfamiliar pursuits. So in addition to all the morality suggested in characters’ names and by words within titles such as “Complaint”, “Lippman”, “Professor”, “Defender”, “Writer”, “Word Smith”, “Fasting”, “Breast” and “Zuckerman” (Sweet), there is the vocabulary of independence: “Unbound”, “Letting Go”, Goodbye”, “Beyond”, “Desire”, “Orgy”, “Lonoff”, “Life” and “Counterlife” (Cooper 21).
Many of Roth’s testifiers are men like himself, born in 1933, often, in or near Newark, whose lives bear surface resemblances to Roth’s, with names suggesting nice Jewish intellectuals – Klugman (Smart), Kepesh (of the head, but ineffectual), or Zuckerman (Sugar). Five of them, Wallach, Kepesh, Tarnopol, Zuckerman and “Philip Roth”, are novelists or teachers of literature. And literature becomes the medium through which these protagonists assimilate America into their Jewish selves and themselves into America and the wider world beyond. The younger protagonists fight off the control of Jewish parents threatening their personal independence; the older protagonists of Operation Shylock strive for balance between the Diaspora that nurtured him, and the Zionism that would pull all Jews into the modern vortex of their ancient culture.

The character’s names often reveal an ironic twist. Many of the names are derived from Yiddish or German roots. Neil Klugman is smart enough to be cynical yet not smart enough to keep from sexual entanglement. The name is from Yiddish. Nathan Zuckerman, always present in Yiddish with an ironic twist, is too sweet and wise despite the sugar his name refers to. Dr. Spielvogel is a bird at play and Jimmy Lustig lusts and glitters. Nathan Marx and Ronald Agni, whose names echo the Lamb of God and Spiro Agnew, the disgraced vice-President of Nixon’s first term of office. Kepesh is an Yiddish word for head in “David Kepesh”. Helen Baird’s beauty is as destructive as that of Helen of Troy. Mordecai Lippman gives everyone lips. The name Portnoy has in it the Russian word for tailor and Roth gives his name to a psychological complex
while exploring it by his complaint. Roth’s characters, in trying to discover who they are, most of them talk too much. In their own ways, each of these characters is an immigrant, whose verbal display in the language of the new land is an obsessive effort to gain acceptance. The right performance will prove he or she is an American; their excess reveals the desperation of the excluded and the marginal (Murray 13-14).

Roth sets his novels at different times during the post-war decades. David Kapesh suffers his metamorphosis in *The Breast* after a life of sensation and diminishing erotic prowess. Nathan Zuckerman, though he is at first the invention of Peter Tarnopol, becomes the writer-protagonist in five consecutive works of fiction published between 1979 and 1987. In these, his surface life and parentage differ from those of his earlier manifestations. Finally, he is Roth’s pen-pal alter ego in *The Facts: A Novelist’s Autobiography*, eventually to be replaced by “Philip” and “Philip Roth” of *Deception* and *Operation Shylock* and by Mickey Sabbath of *Sabbath’s Theater* (Cooper 22).

Philip Roth has figured in the minds of certain Jewish loyalties as the exemplary self-hating Jewish intellectual ever since his first collection of stories *Goodbye, Columbus*. According to Robert Alter, he is a writer who uses his fiction to defame the world of his parents, to reject its familial and communal values (52).
He has been accused of self-hatred, egotism, anti-Semitism, Jewish parochialism, thinness of invention, flights of outlandish fancy, autobiographical and vengeful and borrowing presence from James or Kafka in lieu of a personal subject (Cooper 2). When Roth labelled *Operation Shylock*, a “Confession” from his real life, critics, who have charged him with having made the whole story up, included some, who have long declared him unable to invent anything he had not lived. So in *Sabbath’s Theater*, he has tossed back at them a puppeteer instead of a novelist, as if he had not been ventriloquizing his characters all along. In other words, Roth’s writing about Jews has seldom been perceived as an act of love (6).

But Roth defended his own writing against the charges of anti-Semitism and self-hatred. Part of his theme was that a writer must achieve a certain sympathy even for the most failed human beings, so that, the reader can derive not as moral judge but as expanded consciousness, a sense of what that act of failing is like. In the words of Philip Roth, “[...] I seemed to be interested in how – and why and when – a man acts counter to what he considers to be his ‘best self’, or what others assume it to be” (*RMO* 152).

Philip Roth uses epigraphs borrowed from his own work. The epigraph of *Zuckerman Bound* contains two sentences from *The Ghost Writer*, while the one for *The Facts: A Novelist’s Autobiography* is lifted from *The Counterlife*. In *Ode: Intimation of Immortality from Recollection of Early Childhood*, William
Wordsworth uses “Child is father of the Man” from his earlier lyric *My Heart Leaps Up* as an epigraph. Philip Roth also follows the same system.

The various texts, which Roth makes use of to frame his epigraph, concern his fictional writer Nathan Zuckerman. *The Facts* begins with a letter from Roth to Zuckerman and ends with one from Zuckerman to Roth. Zuckerman explains in his letter to Roth, “With autobiography there’s always another text, a counter text, if you will to the one presented” (*TF* 172). Fact and fiction seem to rub up against each other, blurring distinctions between the two (Friedman 224). It can be well argued that *The Facts* completes the task started by *The Counterlife* and emphatically brings Roth on the postmodern scene (226).

According to Justin Kaplan, *The Facts* is “a combined short novel, *apologia pro vita sua*, confession, exercise in nostalgia and reparation and informal reader’s guide to the works of Philip Roth” (3). *The Facts* fills in some of the real life especially the melancholy of first marriage and its toll.

Philip Roth repeatedly describes his subjects as being individuals struggling to get through and beyond the boundaries that seem to be set them for them. He compares *Portnoy* with *The Breast* by describing both as a struggle between “the measured self” and “the insatiable self”, “the accommodating self” versus “the ravenous self” (*RMO* 64). In *The Great American Novel*, he locates the core of all his work as “the problematical nature of moral authority and of social restraint and regulation [. . .] the question of who or what shall have influence and jurisdiction over one’s life” (84). The essay goes on:
The question of moral sovereignty, as it is examined in *Letting Go*, *Portnoy’s Complaint* and *The Breast* is really a question of the kind of commandment hero of each book will issue to himself; here the skepticism is directed inward, upon the hero’s ambiguous sense of personal imperatives and taboos. I can even think of these characters Gabe Wallach, Alexander Portnoy, and David Kepesh— as three stages of single explosive projectile that is fired into the 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 Gabe Wallach crashes up against the wall and collapses; Portnoy proceeds on through the fractured mortar, only to become lodged there, half in, half out. It remains for Kepesh to pass right on through the bloodied hole, and out the other end, into noman’s land. (85)

Elsewhere in *Reading Myself and Others*, Roth himself has said that in *Portnoy’s Complaint* he was clowning around, and in *Portnoy*, he wanted to write something “friewheeling and funny”, that in *Our Gang*, he wrote as the “fantasist” and “farceur” (22), that in *The Great American Novel* he wrote primarily for the sheer “comic inventiveness” (24) and “the fun of it” (76). According to Donald G. Watson, Roth becomes our Swift and Orwell (107).
In *The Great American Novel*, the ragtag collection of cripples, misfits, under-aged and over-aged players wanders through America homeless and unloved and denied even the possibility of returning home while the physically fit heroes of the nation empty the Big Leagues of all its athletic talent and fight in Europe and the South Sea. In fact, Roth uses plenty of allegories in this novel. The homeless Rupert Mundy’s suggest the American Jewish population united in an attempt to maintain its integrity and to contribute to the great American institutions at the same time, but his identification works only sporadically (Watson 113). Roth circumvents our taking this allegory too seriously by ironising it in his novel (*TGAN* 95-102). Rather, the Patriotic League is the reverse side of the heroic mythologising of the national character. Roth places this novel within the context of the “demythologizing decade” (*RMO* 87) of the 1960s, within the disorienting, shocking and alienating fiasco of Lyndon Johnson’s trying to extend the mythology of the war-time America of the Second World War to the era of Vietnam:

It was not a matter of demythologizing baseball – there was nothing in that to get fired up about – but of discovering in baseball a means to dramatise the “struggle” between the benign national myth of itself that a great power prefers to perpetuate, and the relentlessly insidious, very nearly demonic reality (like the kind we had known in the sixties) that will not give an inch in behalf of that idealized mythology. (*RMO* 89-90)
Smitty’s history of the Patriot League provides parables of a comfortable ideology and exposes the impoverishment of American culture.

Baseball is a show business writ large: myth, comedy, and commerce. Its history is American history (Watson 113). Roth appropriates baseball as a subject for riotous “demythologizing” (RMO 89) not only because “it happens to be one of the few subjects that I know much about” (86) but also because it embodies the all-American ideals of competitiveness, teamsmanship and toughness. “Winning is the name of the game” (TGAN 303). The rhetoric of games playing was one of Nixon’s favourite plays (Lee 53).

Philip Roth makes use of images such as “the hunger artist”, “the hungry panther”, “half a lemon” and “a sausage”. These are useful opposing images for what happens in Roth’s books. He links the subdued When She Was Good and the exhibitionist Portnoy by relating them both to the characters in the Goodbye, Columbus stories “each of whom is seen making a conscious, deliberate even wilful choice ‘beyond’ the boundary lines of his life” (RMO 25).

Roth makes use of fruit imagery skillfully in Goodbye, Columbus (Glassman 54-55). Neil, the educated, but underemployed narrator from a working class background, surreptitiously “grabbed a handful of cherries and nectarine” (GC 31) from Brenda’s family’s secret “fruit” refrigeration (30). Cherries have long been identified with virginity and the peach is often identified with the vagina. “Later that night”, Neil tells us, “Brenda and I made love for the
first time” (33). However, sometime before Neil had “flushed his fistful of
cherries [...] down the toilet” (32), hinting at the ignominious end of their affair
even as it began. This point is again underscored the next morning when “there
was some trouble about grape juice that had dripped all night from a jug” (33).
The dripping grape juice suggests on one level a ruptured hymen, but it also has
connotations of messiness and unpleasantness. In fact, it is Neil’s innocence that
is butchered, but not Brenda’s.

Throughout the novel, fruit is associated closely with their relationship.
Brenda and Neil would “fill huge soup bowls with cherries and slices of
watermelon” (GC 31), which is again a folk symbol of pregnancy. The climactic
scene in which fruit imagery occurs comes when Brenda completes her
corruption of Neil by ritualistically feeding him – as Eve in the Garden of Eden.
Eve was feeding Adam not an apple, but a grape fruit. The early name for the
grapefruit is “forbidden fruit”, and the meaning of which is retained in its
scientific name Citrus Paradise (Glassman 55).

Eating and sex are parallel activities in Portnoy’s Complaint (Charney
124-131). Mrs. Portnoy’s way of “shtupping” her seven year old son full of food
is to sit over him with a bread knife when he refuses to eat; the hours he spends,
as a teenager, locked in the bathroom, she attributes to his stuffing himself with
“French fries and ketchup”. She requests him, “Tell me, please, what other kind
of garbage you’re putting into your mouth so we can get to the bottom of their diarrhea!” (PC 25).

Kitchen and bathroom are the crucial places in the Portnoy household, “the central obsession with the body” is rooted as Roth has said, “in the utterly mundane family setting” (RMO 6). While the mother bleeds the meat and holds the knife, the son and the father compete for time on the lavatory to shed their heavy loads. Mr. Portnoy asks his son, “Can I have a little peace, please, so I can get something accomplished in here?” (PC 24).

Eating and sex dominate Goodbye, Columbus as subject matter and as a metaphor and the same concentration on consumption is found in all other books (Lee 15). One of Roth’s earliest comic scenes in Aunt Gladys’ supervision of Neil Klugman’s Newark evening meals in his first novella, Goodbye, Columbus, “You’re going to pick the peas out is all? You tell me that, I wouldn’t buy with the carrots” (4) is an example to this. Aunt Gladys’s anxious clearing out of her supplies is set against the glur of exotic fruits in the rich Patimkin’s fridge, and Neil’s unease at the Patimkin’s wasteful materialism emerges in his account of their dinner-table conversation, the sentences lost in the passing of food, the words gurgled into mouthfuls, the syntax chopped and forgotten in heapings, spellings, and gorgins (Lee 15).

In The Professor of Desire, the dying mother expresses her feelings for her son by filling up the freezer compartment of his fridge. At her funeral, the
father insists on his taking “the food she had frozen for me only the month before, the last things cooked by her on this earth” (TPD 93). Eating can be threat, promise, blackmail, prevention or protection (Lee 15-16). Zuckerman, the novelist Tarnopol’s fictional self in My Life As a Man, remembers his childhood as “Sunday sweets and success [. . .] breasts and laps” (MLAM 77). Beastly eating lets lose the id: Baumgarten, the “tasteless” erotomatic poet in The Professor of Desire, dismisses Jewish family life with the words, “All that loving; all that hating; all those meals” (TDP 110), and tears at his food like an animal – or a cannibal. Cooking and the cooked are identified with ethics, restraint and responsibility with Jewishness. The mothers who impose taboos are like cooks.

Savage unmanning women break the taboos. Maureen Tarnopol, in her final showdown with her husband in My Life as a Man, covers his room, and is covered, with blood, tears, and shit. The novel states, “I gagged and averted my head” (288). Lydia, her counterpart in one of Peter Tarnopol’s “Useful Fictions” within the novel, proves her madness by placing in front of herself for breakfast “a bowl of full kitty litter covered with wine and a sliced candle” (42).

Eating and excreting provide analogous not only for sexual taboo breaking, but also for the process of analysis and narrative (Lee 16). Mrs. Portnoy’s intention “to get to the bottom of this diarrhea” (PC 24), might as well be Dr. Spielvogel’s, when faced with Portnoy’s frantic logorrhea. In My Life As a Man, Spielvogel, again the analyst, watches Tarnopol weep for five minutes,
then, as “Are you finished?” (qtd. in Lee 16) – as a mother might ask her child, either when it is at table or on the lavatory. Tarnopol’s and Portnoy’s narrative outpourings are painful “letting goes”, the only alternative to a blocked silence.

Obscenity and sexual realism have been available to us since Joyce, Henry Miller and D.H. Lawrence. Roth, in his Reading Myself and Others, says, “In my writing [. . .] obscenity has [. . .] been governed by literary taste and tact and not by the mores of the audience” (17). Obscenity is not only a kind of language that is used in Portnoy’s Complaint; it is nearly the issue itself (18). Portnoy’s pain arise out of his refusal to be bound any longer by taboos which, rightly or wrongly, he experiences as diminishing and unmanning. The joke on Portnoy is that for him breaking the taboo turns out to be as unmanning in the end as honouring it. Roth says, “I wanted to raise obscenity to the level of a subject” (19) and this is what Portnoy’s Complaint is all about (16-19).

To quote Sanford Pinsker, “The value of Philip Roth’s work lies somewhere between the lavish praise and the lingering sense of disappointment it has generated; he is a writer of brilliant talents [. . .]” (2).

Roth’s works deal with alienation and accommodation as a major theme. Critics are of the opinion that his earlier works – Goodbye, Columbus, Letting Go, When She Was Good and Portnoy’s Complaint – deal with alienation as a major theme and his later works – The Counterlives, Operation Shylock: A Confession – deal with accommodation. “Alienation” need not be loss of
property but the term is used to apply to non-material objects such as loss of happiness, loss of subject, loss of childhood, loss of self and loss of innocence and “accommodation” means attainment of happiness through compromise, adjustment and assimilation. Both the terms are used in a broader sense. In spite of their difference of opinion about the works of Philip Roth, critics appreciate his works. They analyse the various aspects of his works such as alienation, assimilation, accommodation, Jewish American society, Jewish family, humour, satire, Judaism and characterisation. The present study is the continuation of the earlier studies.

The *Time* (1959) magazine has made a thorough study of *Goodbye, Columbus* and come to a conclusion that the stories deal with the problem of assimilation (129-32). Koch in his “Roth’s *Goodbye, Columbus*” published in *Tamarack Review*, 13 (1959) concludes that the main virtue of the stories is their accuracy. *Goodbye, Columbus* is a masterpiece of “subtly perceptive social description”. The central conflict in the stories is expressed in the ambivalence the assimilated younger generation feels “towards the reminders of their elders’ past” and the “crucial element of Jewish identity [. . .] the memory of suffering” (129-32).

According to “Jewish Fiction and the Affluent Society”, published in *Northeast Review* (1961), Ben Siegel is of the opinion that all of Roth’s novels and stories are “essentially exposures of the disparity in American life between appearance and reality, between professed idealism or goodwill and an
underlying self-seeking grossness or vulgarity. In short, Roth’s fiction derives from the hypocrisy embodied in this society’s maskings of its true behaviour and urges by its moral, high-minded pretensions” (171-90).

Robert M. Adams, in his Review published in Hudson Review 15 (1962) is of the opinion that the novel Letting Go is full of flat characters, flat details, repressed and unrepressed hysteria, and “a few moments of power”. According to him, though the theme of disentangling oneself “from the web of personal demand” is interesting, Roth belabours it “unmercifully” (420-428). In his article entitled “Magic Realism in Prose”, published in National Review (1962), Guy Davenport discusses Roth, Updike, Baldwin and Herbert Gold and says that they are the petitioners of a “magic realism” whose masters were Mann, James, Gide, Dostoevsky and Genet. They pursue “something like the Victorian ideal of gathering an entire world into a novel” and understatement behind. Their works deal “with a confusion of fragments”. Taking a theme from James, “Roth has created a tragedy of brave decisions” and projected two entire worlds: the perimeter of the American university and the world of the middle class (153-54).


If Roth is indignant at the values of the prosperous world, he is also saddened by the sheer pathetic emptiness, the comfortable
meaninglessness, the petty superficiality of the lives he sees. Under the ferocity of his satire is a terrible sadness that is ultimately the more important quality of his vision, a sadness that life has become merely a comfort station for easing tensions [...]. What has, like a Procrustes bed, truncated the rage of life, excluding on the one hand the embrace of aspiration [...] and on the other the acceptance of suffering. (259-268)

Frederick J. Hoffman, in his The Modern Novel in America (1963), is of the opinion that Goodbye, Columbus is “surely one of the most distinguished first books of our time”. Letting Go is the first genuine attempt to write a Jewish novel of manners. “The intricacies of Jewish family, custom and sentimentality are combined with a species of person that needs much more careful and astute study: the academic lower class [...]. The book’s value comes from its weaving in and out of a Jewish situation comblee, its adapting Jewish manners to a comic and pathetic plot” (243-44).

According to “Jewish Radicals, Jewish Writers” published in American Scholar (1963), Allen Guttman says that Roth’s Goodbye, Columbus and Letting Go describe a society in which the radical tradition is dying out. “Roth has begun to chronicle the far from-radical world of the assimilated Jew, the world we must understand if we appreciate the failure of radical politics and the success of the newest modes of ‘Jewish’ dissent” (563-75).
The article “A World Without Realists” written by Alan Cheuse and published in *Studies on the Left* (1964), exhibits the point that the main virtue of *Letting Go* is its attempt to present American society in a realistic manner. But though Roth seems far ahead of his peers in vividly portraying the society which surrounds his characters, he has failed to convey “a sustained sensual image” of American society, or even of the “small province” – the “psychotic or near-psychotic, the netherland neurasthenia” of his middle class characters – he treats. Instead, he is guilty of the very retreat into the self he protects against: Wallach’s stasis is “the other face of Kafka, the man who cannot operate in society and so takes flight into the recesses of his imagination [. . .] ”. (68-82)

Leslie A. Fiedler in his article “The Jews as Mythic American” published in *Ramparts* (1964) is of the opinion that the Jewish American writer’s acceptance of his alienation as a satisfactory symbol for the human condition threatens to turn it into affection, a fashionable cliche. Roth is a “belated forties’ writer” who did not seem aware that “anti-conformity” has become conformity (89-103).

Charles M. Israel made a study on the fractured hero of Roth’s *Goodbye, Columbus*, published in *Chicago Review* (1964). According to him, critics are concerned with Jewishness in the novel. But the major theme of the novel is neither ethnic nor social but it is what Neil fails to learn as a fractured hero. Neil’s defensiveness, his insensitivity, and his passivity illustrate a prideful
define father-son relationship, “bereavement, hostility and alienation, partnership, and sacrifice”. “Epstein” is an example of bereavement and; *Letting Go* presents “every nuance of parent-child relationship” (18-20).

In his article “Child and Man in Philip Roth” published in *Midstream* (1967), Hochman arrives at a conclusion that the essential factor in *Goodbye, Columbus, Letting Go* and *When She Was Good* is Roth’s “close participation in the lives of people – most of them young – who are bursting with tamped fury and child-like frustration, but who haven’t the faintest notion of what their troubles are about [. . .]” (68-76).

“The Perils of Portnoy” published in the *Time Magazine* (1968) discusses *Portnoy’s Complaint*. According to the article, “many immigrants and first generation Americans saw their sons as Colombuses who would lead the family to security and status in the New World. The burden of these aspirations has left many of those Colombuses with painful kinks”. Few writers can match Roth’s “ability to perceive and record manners and minutiae, or equal him in relating life’s inner tumult to its outward appearances of order” (102-06).

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egotism of human clay to be modelled by persons and forces outside him. He is a creature of contradictions, and his contradictions are expressed in his behaviour throughout the novel. In the end, he comes “near the realization that his dilemma may be partly his fault” – but he ends as he began, searching for a “coordinated soul” (5-11).

“The Hero in Stasis” (1965) written by Stanley Trachtenberg, concerns with novels of compromise. In his own words, “meditating between the compulsive affirmation of Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, Herbert Gold and the surrealistic agony of Joseph Heller, John Hawkes and Thomas Pynchon, a novel of compromise has developed in which the heroic mode is static, lacking either motion or confirmation of inactivity, surrendering the options of experience by default”. Neil Klugman is typical of such heroes, because, “separated from and faintly contemptuous of his own background, resentful of Brenda’s, Neil never confronts either of his opposing drives. Instead, he implies that somehow things have worked out for the best, and in so doing substitutes of pretended understanding of Brenda’s social aspirations for an insight into his own complicity in their failure of love” (5-17).

Lawrence F. York undertook a study on “The Image of the Jew in Modern American Fiction” (1966) in the University of Connecticut. The study is concerned with the image of the Jew in American Fiction during the last fifty years. Since the Second World War, the problems of Jews have become almost
identical with the problems of non-Jews. As the Jew began to make his way in American society, the cause of alienation of the hero in Jewish fiction was no longer literally religious or cultural; they reflected the relation of all men in modern society. Roth and his contemporaries are concerned with the Jew as an alienated man in our society.

William Fredman’s study on American Jewish Fiction was published in *Chicago Review* (1966). According to him, in his eagerness to fulfil all the predetermined requirements of Jewish fiction as a stereotyped form, to include all the standard themes of suffering, alienation and compassion, Roth has spent a little time developing a fable which legitimately embodies these themes and as a result in such stories as “Eli, the Fanatic” and “The Conversion of the Jews”, a saleable Jewishness of his material seems superimposed rather than made integral or organic. The conversions in both instances are inadequately accounted for by either of the characters, the setting, or the style – and consequently we are likely to find ourselves unconvinced of the resultant attitudes and emotions. In Roth, this relieves the author of the need to supply adequate motivation for the actions of his characters and this lack of “conviction” is “what keeps him from being a genuinely first-rate author” (90-107).

George Bowering, in his article entitled “A Dream Dies in Grass-Roots Rot”, published in *Toronto Globe Magazine* (1967), affirms that the novel *When She Was Good* is part of “the line of American fiction that deals with the failure
or betrayal of the American Dream”, and is laced with a tragic understanding that makes it a “superior addition” to that line (14). Irving Malin, in his “Mad Crusader”, published in Progressive (July 1967), makes a thematic study of When She Was Good. According to him, Roth’s typical theme is “the conflict between moral superiority and human imperfection” and his typical character, “the mad crusader” trying to reform the society. Lucy is secretly obsessed with “the will to power”, which she calls moral superiority, and finally equates “her petty desires with divine will”. Roth is adept at conveying discrepancies between the real and the ideal, and ironies reverberate throughout the book. In his exposure of Lucy’s search for goodness, “he is at his best” (34-35).

In his “The Secular Mode of Jewishness” published in Works (1967), Maurice Kramer is of the opinion that the traditional rituals of Judaism have been replaced in the fiction of Roth, Malamud, Salinger, Bellow, West and Gold, by secular ones. Often the works of these writers concern a ritual of suffering for good, a ritual of ethical purpose, embodied in the figure of shlimozel. The irony, in at least three of Philip Roth’s stories, stems from a sense that traditional Judaism is already dead; Roth presents characters that use, abuse and confuse a religion that they hear about but cannot know because it doesn’t really exist. Roth tries to repudiate the shlimozel in Letting Go in an obvious, but rather confused, way (99-116).

According to “Father and Sons in Jewish Fiction”, published in Congress Bi-Weekly (1967), four themes have been repeatedly used by Jewish writers to
define father-son relationship, “bereavement, hostility and alienation, partnership, and sacrifice”. “Epstein” is an example of bereavement and; Letting Go presents “every nuance of parent-child relationship” (18-20).

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precipitates which are the sources of morality. He has all praise for his frank treatment of masturbation, a “most illicit and yet central experience of adolescence” (57-70).

Peter Collier studied Portnoy’s Complaint in his “Portnoy’s Compliance”, published in Ramparts (1969) and arrives at a conclusion thus. According to him, Portnoy is a prodigal son of the Jewish tradition. Guilt, suffering, moral confusion and all these elements are present in his monologue. But they have no clarification of things as an end. He has the stance of earlier Jewish American characters, but he does not have their swing. His Jewishness turns inward, feeding on itself instead of going outward. He has come down to a collection of neuroses gathered into a comic psyche syndrome. Inert and trivialized, Jewishness has become a joke. When all was said and done, that was the only identity America could allow it (29-31).

According to Glicksberg (1969), the central theme of Jewish American literature is the search for identity. “Philip Roth produces work that conveys on the whole an unflattering version of the Jew. His main object, Roth declares, is to write fiction, not to be a Jew [. . .]”. (196-205)

In his book From Shtetl to Suburbia: The Family in Jewish Literary Imagination (1971), Gittelman examines, “Eli, the Fanatic”, “Epstein”, Goodbye, Columbus, Portnoy’s Complaint and When She Was Good. He also discusses generation gap and the impact of suburbia on Jewish life. According to him,
Roth's “vision of the society he writes about is more in the tradition of Yiddish social criticism than perhaps any other writer we identify as being in the Jewish American tradition. Roth is crying out against the disintegration of kinship values, which have been the essence of Jewish survival through the centuries. He portrays this world as decadent because through satire, he hopes, will come realization” (166-71).

Allen Guttmann, in his “Philip Roth and the Rabbis” in *The Jewish Writer in America: Assimilation and Crisis Identity* (1971), makes a survey of Roth’s novels through *Portnoy’s Complaint*, which focuses on the conflict between Jewish tradition and assimilation. “The Conversion of the Jews” and “Defender of the Faith” seem to be wholly negative about Jewishness, but *Goodbye, Columbus* and “Eli, the Fanatic” portray the dilemma of characters caught in the middle. *Letting Go*, his best novel, is concerned with involvement without commitment. *When She Was Good* “rivals and perhaps surpasses” *Main Street* and *Winesberg, Ohio*. *Portnoy’s Complaint* is a “joke about Jewish jokes” and a “kind of terminus” to the satire of assimilation (64-76).

Eileen Z. Cohen (1971) undertook a study on a comparison and contrast of theme and motifs of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Portnoy’s Complaint* and arrived at a conclusion that both are “dream-vision” literature. It is a sub-genre in which the characters must “wander through their nightmare visions to discover who they are”. In both, “motifs of identity and its aspects of castration,
annihilation, death and blood are associated with food and standards of
behaviour”; both contain trial scenes which reveal the “psychology of the central
characters” (161-68).

Harold Fisch published an article in the *Midstream* (1972) entitled
“Fathers, Mothers, Sons and Lovers: Jewish and Gentile Patterns in Literature”. According to him, the replacement of the Jewish father as central figure in the
home by the Jewish mother is “the most important event in twentieth century
Jewish life and letters”. Earlier Jewish writers ejected the father from the
household, confident that, since the Jewish mother would remain, though there
would be commandments, “there would be a Jewish home, warm, permanent,
and intact”. The character of the Jewish mother, which has since emerged, and is
epitomized in Sophie Portnoy, “is a product of western emancipated Jewry, in
particular a product of American-Jewish society”. Her prototype is not found in
the Bible, but in Mrs. Morel in *Sons and Lovers*. In the same way, the search
for sexual partners among alien groups is typically western, not Jewish (37-45).

Scott Donaldson in his article “Family Crises in the Popular Novel of
Nixon’s Administration” published in the *Journal of Popular Culture* (1972),
makes a thorough examination of *The Godfather, The Love Machine, Love Story*
and *Portnoy’s Complaint* as popular novels and arrives at two conclusions:
people seemed to be obsessed with sex and “particularly attracted by semi-
pornographic writing which enables them to feel superior to those whose sex
lives, though more adventurous than their own, are basically barren and
compulsive affairs”; and “the American family is in trouble especially in terms of tensions between the generations” (374 - 482).

In “The Jew’s Complaint in Recent American Fiction: Beyond Exodus and Still in the Wilderness”, published in Southern Review (1972), Alan Warren Friedman makes a detailed study of the characters in Jewish fiction with special reference to Portnoy’s Complaint. Accordingly, the Jew who comes to America feels doubly estranged – a continual anomaly, an outsider in the wilderness which is the Gentiles’ Promised Land. But paradoxically, the Jew is also right at home in America, for, alienation is implanted deeply in the American theme. Portnoy’s Complaint shares the characteristics of much of Jewish fiction: the heroes are intelligent, obsessives, self-confessors, neurotics who end in stasis. “Perhaps the central theme in Portnoy’s Complaint concerns the use and abuse of the intellect and, more specifically, the ambiguous role of the intellect in Jewish culture” (41-59).

Stanley F. Chyet’s “Three Generations: An Account of American Jewish Fiction” (1972), analyses the three generations of the Jewish American writers. According to him, the three generations are: the Jewish writers of the first two decades of the twentieth century, who “give expression to their immigrant experience” and to the question of what it means to become an American; the Jewish writers from between the wars, who know they are Americans but grapple with their identity as Jews, and who are attracted to various forms of secular
messianism (Freud, Marx); and the Jewish writers of the post-war period, who are beyond ideology and whose works focus on the self. They accept themselves as Americans and Jews; what they each seek is a way to be a “free human being”. Often their heroes are not so much victims of society as victims of themselves, of their “own fears, uncertainties and illusions”. This is apparent in Letting Go, “Eli, the Fanatic” and Portnoy’s Complaint. Roth is also characteristic of this generation in his humour (31-41).

Jesse Bier’s essay on the defence of Philip Roth published in Etudes Anglaises (1973) reveals that the key of Portnoy’s Complaint is the idea that even the Jewish family has been corrupted by the distorted values of the dominant culture (49-53).

According to “Philip Roth: ‘Old Jacob’s Eye’ with the Squint”, published in Twentieth Century Literature (1973), Stanley Cooperman is of the opinion that Letting Go is a work directed at the particular moral choices, risks and failures of individual human beings. These individuals struggle not merely against “repressions” but toward some sort of moral reality, or identity, their struggles occur within but transcend the particular social or psychological context in which Roth places them. The “Old Jacob’s Eye” of moral judgment and personal commitment is, finally, the vision which Paul Herz achieves – and Gabe Wallach denies; without such vision the realist is blind even in the particular environment he claims to have mastered”. Thus, Letting Go is superior to all of Roth’s other
works because of its insistence on moral value (203-16). Alfred Kazin, in his “The Earthly City of the Jews” (1974), analyses Roth’s subject-matter in his novels and says that Roth’s natural subject is the self-conscious Jew (144-49).

In 1974, Mark Shechner made a psychological inquiry into Roth’s work, which identifies the image of himself as a perennial Jewish son as the core of identity. This connects him to Kafka but the sons we discover in Roth’s fiction differ from Kafka’s in this crucial respect. It is not the father’s power that condemns them to impotence and bachelorhood; it is his weakness. With fatherhood in doubt, all other relationships, in this world, are painful experiments whose failures may be preferable to their shame-ridden successes. The family, according to Roth, doesn’t pass on culture; it transmits symptoms. In such a world, to be a child is excruciating and to be a parent is unimaginable. Until My Life As a Man, which appears to return to his earlier mode, Roth’s artistic progress seemed to bear an identifiable form. The early books, pre-Portnoy, were documents of repression and his latter writings witness to the return of the repressed.

Where Roth used to give us stoical characters who bore their misfortunes with a sullen nobility of the civilized until they are overtaken by sudden, irrational outbursts, he has turned to showing us literary surfaces that look like the primary process of thought. Where there was repression, now we have rage and in lieu of symptoms, we now get style. Roth’s characters, early and late, seem to be struck with this obligation, to satisfy deep-seated but contrary needs
at once: to grow up and to regress; to let go and to hold on; to be autonomous and dependent. Totalists that they are, they are unable to find and occupy a human middle ground on which self-reliance need not be isolation or love entrapment. The essay goes on to discuss Portnoy’s Complaint, The Breast and My Life As a Man. The latter is Roth’s most sustained piece of writing since Portnoy’s Complaint and, perhaps, in all, his best book. When She Was Good is “a book that seems so ancient now that it might as well be a Sumerian Tablet covered with cuneiform scrawl. What My Life As a Man suggests is that both books are attempts to manage and articulate the same situation, and that the first book’s failure to contain this life in its fictions led Roth to reformulate his obsession in another, more direct, form. My Life As A Man may or may not represent “psychic gains” for Roth himself; its literary gains are clearly substantial, for the book engages his talent fully, at its most frantic, its most ironic, and its most subtle (410 - 427).

Josephine Zadovsky Knopp, in his The Trial of Judaism in Contemporary Jewish Writing (1975), examines “Eli, the Fanatic” and arrives at a conclusion: “What Roth rejects is not Judaism but Jewish life in America”, and in it he “has shown that Judaism offers a significant alternative” to the corruption of the “American ethos” (103-09).

David Monaghan, in his “The Great Anmerican Novel and My Life As a Man: An Assessment of Philip Roth’s Achievement” (1975), finds that the consistent vision underlying his work is his exploration of the theme of “failure
to commitment”. This theme is central to *The Great American Novel* and *My Life As a Man* (113-20).

R.L. Schwartz in his “Reading Roth”, published in *Minnesota Daily* (1977), makes an especially lucid survey of Roth’s career through *The Professor of Desire*. According to him the most persistent problem in Roth’s novels is “the protagonist’s aspiration to the idealistic condition of ‘manhood’”. This manhood “has two components: one public and the other private. To put it simply, Roth’s protagonists seek reputable professional positions and satisfying sex lives. The complication in each instance involves the denial of one or the other; most often, the latter. Thus, Roth has become “the patron poet of disastrous marriages and mangled love affairs”. Roth’s protagonists cannot sustain a successful “man-woman relationship for a very good reason. He has [. . .] failed to become the ‘man’ part of the equation. Perched on the verge of manhood, he looks around himself and finds no model of manhood. But [. . .] in Roth’s fiction, fathers are at best ambiguous figures.”

His protagonists clearly love their fathers. But do not want to “become” the father, for, in the son’s mind the father somehow does not register as that lofty character known as “man”. The Roth protagonist, therefore, “casts himself in the image of a literary hero. He, thus, comes to confuse the facts of literature with the facts of life. Handsomely prepared to be disillusioned, he next lays siege to the creature that can only be called the Roth woman who must ruin the protagonist’s life, even though she ruins her own in the process.
Seeking “literary epiphany” the Roth hero finds only mundane reality, psychoanalysts, divorce proceedings, bland mistresses. To paraphrase Tarnopol, he is fooled by appearances, largely his own. In The Professor of Desire, all of this familiar ground is covered, and Roth’s step has never been “surer or more felicitous”. For the first time since Goodbye, Columbus, he attempts to elicit a pang from the heart rather than a laugh from the belly. The Professor of Desire is, above all, a novel dealing with compromise, a description of being as opposed to wanting to be an adult – a description told in the classically elegant, Jamesian prose Roth has developed over his last three novels (13).

Joel Grossman, in his “Happy as Kings: Philip Roth’s Men and Women” published in Judaism (1977), describes Roth as the “inventor of the Jewish novel of manners” (7-17).

Bandler analyses the subject of The Ghost Writer in American Way (1979). According to him, the novel’s subject is the relationship between life and art; its impulse is Roth’s desire to respond to his critics; its greatest achievement is the creation of a “rich, memorable” group of characters. Zuckerman and Lonoff will be remembered long after the Kepeshes and Patimkins are forgotten. “For the first time in quite a while, Roth is writing out of the wellspring of love. He has fashioned a beautiful vignette [. . .] with artistic fidelity” (112).
Bertrens in his “The Measured Self vs. the Insatiable Self: Some Notes on Philip Roth” published in From Cooper to Philip Roth: Essays on American Literature (1980) is of the opinion that the deepest tension in Portnoy, Tarnopol and Kepesh is the tension between an attachment to what belongs to ordinary, conventional experience, and a deep desire for adventure, intensity and freedom. They are emotionally attached to the middle ground, both in the direction of the obscene and in the direction of the ideal. The essay goes on to say that The Professor of Desire most successfully embodies this tension; and that, in keeping the two different aspects of the author’s personality firmly under control, the novel achieves “an impressive balance” which demonstrates Roth’s “artistic maturity” (93-107).

Joseph J. Da Crema, in his “Roth’s ‘Defender of the Faith’”, published in Explicator (1980), feels that Roth’s assimilation is expressed through his use of “high standard” English (19-20).

The American Studies (1981) brought out an article entitled “Is There a Life After Baseball? Philip Roth’s The Great American Novel” written by Thomas Blues. In The Great American Novel, Roth has transformed what in his previous fictions had been an essentially personal theme into the revelation of a cultural crisis. The crisis is the perverse disconnectedness of American life. More precisely, the perilous inability to make adequate connection and distinction between past and present, Roth uses baseball to convey the crisis. As
the book urges our release of the myths of the game, it compels us to recognize that we refuse to surrender its meanings. To maintain our belief in an eternal, ordered, unvarying universe, we will surrender knowledge and money and will continue to see and believe in what no longer exists. Roth tries to make this difficult for us by using an insane narrator and violating plausibility, challenging us to recognize the myths we want to believe are reality. Thus, *The Great American Novel* poses on a social level what his other novels pose on a personal level (71-80).

According to the review published by Marcella Thiebaux in *Best Sellers* (1981), mythologising in *Zuckerman Unbound* removes the novel from the realm of the purely autobiographical, “giving a symbolic dimension to the Jew as a type of modern artist alienated, rebellious, tortured by his moral sense, unable to be reconciled with his god, guiltily self-mocking. Occasionally the novel’s mainly satirical voice breaks sentimentally, but the novel remains sardonically and painfully funny” (9-10).

John Aldridge, in his “The Voice in the Void” (1983), analyses the monologues in Jewish American fiction. According to him, Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, Walker Percy and Joseph Heller, among others, have all written fervidly monologistic novels. But the case of Roth is of particular interest, because, in a sense, his whole career has represented a sustained effort to deal creatively with some of the circumstances of contemporary life and they have helped to produce the current obsessiveness with the monologistic form (25-35).
Beverly Edwards undertook a study entitled “Zuckerman Bound: The Artist in the Labrinth” (1987) in Leigh University. He has analysed Zuckerman Bound, Portnoy’s Complaint and The Counterlife and arrived at a conclusion that these novels solidly establish Roth as one of the major American authors of the late twentieth century. In these works, Roth’s portrait of Zuckerman stands as a realistic account of the vicissitudes of an artist’s life. He also suggests that The Counterlife serves as an appropriate culmination to the Zuckerman series.

In his interview “A Conversation in Prague” published in The New York Review of Books (1990), Philip Roth brings forward the contributions of Jews to various cultures. According to him:

We must recognize that there has never been a long period here without some sort of anti-Semitic explosion. To most people, the Jews represented a foreign element, which they tried at the very least to isolate. There is no doubt that Jewish culture enriched Czech culture by the very fact that, like German culture, which also had an important presence in Bohemia – and Jewish literature in Bohemia was largely written in German – it became for the developing of Czech culture, whose evolution had been shifted for two hundred years, a bridge to Western Europe. (14-22)

Shirley Primach Azen submitted to the University of California her dissertation entitled “Laughter and Trembling: Humour, Irony and Schlemiel in
Greek and Jewish Writing” (1991) in which she was trying to explore the dynamics of classical Greek and modern Jewish humour in a cross-cultural perspective. She discovered that, notwithstanding the circumstances that the Greek and the Jewish texts are so diverse in content and genre, some similarities appear in the ways they use humour to political and social institutions. From the marginalized people of the two cultures, laughter had the internal power to defuse the external exercise of power.

Lawrence L. Langer, in his “Zion’s Response to the Holocaust” which was published in The New York Times Book Review (1993), is of the opinion that the Holocaust remains part of the Israeli heritage. He concludes the article quoting Mr. Segev according to whom the power of the Holocaust’s legacy “lies within it, and it has become part of the existential experience of all Israelis” (3, 37).

Mrs. Archana Kapoor in her “A Synoptic View of Jewish Family in Philip Roth’s Novels” published in Contemporary American-Jewish Novel (1994), provides a synoptic view of the Jewish family in Philip Roth’s novels and the pressures of modernism that have eroded its traditional structure. According to her, the “traditional Jewish home used to be the main bulwark of Jewish morality”. Jewish family was a strong unified force and it symbolized great warmth between parents and children. As they desire large families, they disregard bachelors and spinsters in their community. In addition to this,
chastity and matrimonial fidelity are emphasized in their society in accordance with the Ten Commandments. Philip Roth’s sense of family is very strong. He depicts the degeneration of the Jewish family in a convincing manner in all his novels (320-29).

In “The double, Comic irony, and Postmodernism in Philip Roth’s Operation Shylock” published in MELUS (1996), Elain B. Safer opines that Philip Roth, like other postmodern novelists, uses comic irony to mock rational methods of solving contemporary problems, particularly problems with regard to traditional Jewish issues that people hold dear (157-72).

In his article “Transgression in the Fiction of Philip Roth” published in Twentieth Century Literature (1997), Robert M. Greenberg examines the omnipresent theme of transgression in Philip Roth’s fiction, from Portnoy’s Complaint to the Zuckerman Bound trilogy. It also includes a section on transgression in his recent work Sabbath’s Theater. The psychological dimensions of his narratives are of particular interest to the critic. Moreover, Greenberg examines the ambivalence about succeeding in the American mainstream, confluence of personal and artistic themes about being a Jewish American and the importance of cultural position in his precious article (487-506).

Debra Shostak apprises the book The Breast in his “Return to The Breast: The Body, The Masculine Subject, and Philip Roth” published in the Twentieth
According to him, *The Breast* deserves a second look because it challenges some of the most deeply held oppositions – human versus non-human, masculine versus feminine, subject versus object and inside versus outside. By forcing a confrontation with the manifold meanings of the gendered body and by representing the very fleshliness of gendering, Roth makes a valuable contribution to thinking about the conventions of subjectivity (317-36).

In “The Metamorphosed Parodical Body in Philip Roth’s *The Breast*” published in the *Critique* (1999), Kai Mikkonen evaluates the literary work *The Breast* and affirms that Roth no longer wants just to transform the past into writing but consciously to transform himself within the writing and make himself more “factual” (13-45).

Victoria Aarons’s “Is It ‘Good-for-the Jews or No-Good-for-the Jews’?: Philip Roth’s Registry of Jewish Consciousness” (2000), affirms that Roth’s protagonists attempt to transform themselves in and out of their Jewishness. In the short story “Eli, the Fanatic”, one of Philip Roth’s early pieces, we find the prototype for many of Roth’s later characters. The Jew is deeply ambivalent about his history and identity that he is not even sure whether he has an identity or a history outside the limited confines of his own unconscious desire to manufacture both. And so Roth creates his protagonists’ double, an ironically insistent reminder of the failure of self-invention. Since *Portnoy’s Complaint*, Roth’s protagonists have enacted a conscious dialectic of reconstructing
themselves as Jews. For Roth, a deeply suspicious and evasive assessment of Jewish identity is what it means to be a Jew in the latter half of the twentieth century and the ensuing new millennium (1-7).

Jeffrey Rebin Dorsky undertook a study on American Jewish identity and published his findings in the form of an article entitled “Philip Roth and American Jewish Identity: The Question of Authenticity” in *American Literary History* (2001). According to him, against the prophets of doom who have predicted the demise of a recognizable American Jewish community, America has finally become a legitimate homeland for Jews. Philip Roth’s recent work exudes a contemporary spirit of Jewish self-examination and cultural inquiry and exemplifies a new dynamic in American Jewish life. According to the authors the term “homeland” means a country where Jews are living meaningfully and where their actions and deeds in the world reflect their Jewish identities, and the word “legitimate” means in America the Jews can be deeply committed to the values, aspirations and meanings embodied in Jewish history and at the same time remaining loyal to American institutions that guarantee such aspects (1-79).

The *Time Magazine* (2001) made a profile on America’s Best Artists and Entertainers. According to the study, Philip Roth has delighted and infuriated readers for four decades. And as his recent novels show, he is still in command. What he did was to gun his engine and rev out in rapid succession three of the strongest, most vibrant novels of his long career. The three novels are *American*
Pastoral, I Married a Communist and The Human Stain. His Operation Shylock, Sabbath’s Theater and The Dying Animal would win much support as America’s best working novelist. According to the survey, Roth is a serious writer who has never been sombre in print; his narrative voice is unique, and so is the way he consistently wrings slapstick comedy out of the ties and obsessions of his characters. No one else writing today has been more amusing and more enlightening.

In his interview with Philip Roth entitled “A Conversation with Philip Roth” published in The Observer (2001), Robert McCrum brings out the novelists whom Philip Roth admires. According to Philip Roth, the greatest American writers of the last century were William Faulkner and Saul Bellow. Together they form the backbone of twentieth century American literature. Philip reads their novels again and again. As I Lay Dying and The Adventures of Augie March are the two better novels written in America in any century. Again Philip Roth gives reason why he has shifted from Zuckerman to David Kepesh in The Dying Animal.

Philip Roth gave an interview to Houghton Mifflin Books on I Married A Communist (2002). According to Philip Roth, American Pastoral deals with a very important, powerful decade in American life in the Vietnam War era. Similarly I Married A Communist deals with the McCarthy era of 1940-1950. In this era the Korean War began and the Russians exploded an atomic
bomb in 1950. Elsewhere Philip Roth says that he set this novel during the witch hunts of the late 1940s and early 1950s and the novel traces that era’s devastating effects on a naïve radio actor Murray Ringold who had been Zuckerman’s English teacher.

In his interdisciplinary study, *Diaspora and Zionism in Jewish American Literature: Lazarus, Syrkin, Roznikoff and Roth* (2003), Omer-Sherman explores the evolving representations of Diaspora and Zionism in Jewish American writing from 1880 to the late twentieth century. Beginning with the often-neglected proto-Zionist verse of Emma Lazarus, through the urban and Holocaust-inflicted lyrics of Marie Syrkin and Charles Reznikoff, to the post-assimilationist novels of Philip Roth in the 1990s, Omer Sherman analyzes literary responses to the competing claims on this dual allegiance has made on the self. He explores the Jewish writer’s relation to the loss of diasporic affliction as an ongoing principle for Jewish life in the novels of Roth. Omer Sherman also shows how this literature developed in direct relation to crucial phases in Jewish acculturation in the context of nativism, xenophobia, the holocaust, and a beckoning distant homeland.

A good deal of the critical writing on Roth’s works sharply focuses on the theme of alienation and accommodation as portrayed in the novels of Philip Roth. It is, thus, essential to define the terms “alienation” and “accommodation” in the larger context of diasporic writing in the west as well as in the specific
context of Roth’s working in the Jewish American milieu. Alienation is “lostness” and accommodation is “union”. Moreover, these two terms are complementary to each other.