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Jewish Self-Hatred in the Character of Alexander Portnoy in Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*: Analysis of the Main Character's Discourse

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Declaration

I hereby proclaim that the substance and the findings reported in this dissertation are the result of my examination, and that due reference or affirmation is made, at whatever point necessary, to the work of different specialists.

Dedication

I express my gratitude to Allah for giving me the power and the ability to finish this dissertation.

To my beloved parents, Faouzia and Abdelhamid, for pushing me forward and encouraging me to keep striving for success.

To my dear sisters and brother for always supporting me, and being there for me.

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Abstract

Modern Jewish American literature has been largely and steadily expanding towards a larger audience beyond the Jewish community since the beginning of the twentieth century. In that respect, the Jewish American literature foregrounds the Jewish American experience, and juxtaposes the struggle of living in America along with the conflict residing in expressing the Jewish identity. The prominent issue facing the Jewish community in America is the rise of anti-Semitism. However, another stigma that has been pervading discreetly inside the Jewish community is the psychological and often-verbal hostility that they have directed towards themselves, and amongst themselves. The self-hating Jew, a term that entered the lexicon in the mid-twentieth century, was a consciously underdeveloped subject among Jewish scholars, in spite of its outward manifestation among many Jews. In 1969, the publication of Philip Roth's latest work, *Portnoy's Complaint*, forced some critics to address the Jewish self-hatred stigma, and give it its due-value as a problem that is closely aligned with anti-Semitism, and even more perilous than the latter. Using an eclectic approach, which combines the Freudian psychoanalytic approach and the deconstructive approach, this research places the discourse of Alexander Portnoy, the novel's main character, under the lens of analysis and investigation, in order to uncover the indications of Jewish self-hatred, and eventually unravel the peculiar case of Jewish Americans, and the Jewish Diaspora in general.

Keywords: Anti-Semitism, Deconstruction theory, Freudian Psychoanalysis, Jewish American Experience, Jewish American Literature, Jewish Diaspora, Jewish Self-Hatred, Self-Hating Jew

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I. General Introduction

There are no divisive forces like the forces of prejudice. The exercise of intolerance has resulted in a disparity of outcomes, virtues and reputability between several ethnic, racial, sexual and religious groups. However, one of the consequences that mystified scholars and the public alike is the emergence of, as Abraham Kaplan labeled it, a “reactive prejudice” (Green 1); a prejudice that is practiced by members of the subdued group against themselves, and against their group. This identification with the aggressive forces has been termed differently through many platforms, but the prevailing term that registered with the public and rendered its comprehension more accessible is the term “self-hatred”. Many minorities recognize this phenomenon among their ranks, as it results in a form of aggression that persecutes the milieu of the self-hating member, as well as an internalized sense of shame and oppression that self-haters impose among themselves. Yet, there are distinct racial and ethnic groups that research inquiries focused on more than the others, and one community in particular that exhibits this notion at large is the Jewish community.

A. Background of the Study:

Who and what is the self-hating Jew has undergone many changes throughout the successive political turnabouts. From Karl Marx sympathizers during the nineteenth century, who adopted Marx’s belief that Jews were the invisible hand that kept capitalism afloat, and pushed the Capitalist agenda for their own interests, to the 1880’s Jewish socialist faction in Russia, which lent its support to the Russian forces during the Bolshevik Revolution, in spite of the many anti-Jewish pogroms that were conducted at that time. Later during the Cold War, assimilationist Jewish groups stood by Stalin’s regime as it massacred thousands of Jewish Old Bolsheviks and members of the

Communist party as part of the Great Purge of the 1930's. Presently, self-hating Jews are commonly regarded as those who oppose Israel's policies regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict. However, there was a distinguished category of public personalities that became labeled as such without partaking in large-scale political events.

Many Jews who arrived in America by the intermediate period of the nineteenth century preserved some of their Jewish values; however, the most of these values became swept with current of the American Christian lifestyle. The shift of Judeo beliefs escalated with each new generation of American Jews. By the time the silent generation and the baby boomers came into existence, Jewish customs were largely held for questioning and skepticism in the American environment, and it was by none other than certain American Jews themselves. Many emancipated Jews regarded their Jewishness as a disability in the large scheme of events, whether it was due to the subjugation they faced within a community in which they were pariahs, or due to their shared history of being one of the most despised ethnic groups in the world. The guilt of being associated with Jews drove many of these expatriates to voice their disdain for Jewish traditions, heritage and any typically Jewish attribute that they can be linked to. Writers, especially, took to their means to assert that disdain in the form of literary publications. Their articles, books, newspaper columns and novels harbor an anti-Jewish sentiment that rendered these Jewish American writers a subject of scrutiny from their readers.

During the postwar period, one particular literary voice emerged both as a pioneer of American Jewish literature, and also as a cynic of the Jewish ordeal. Philip Roth foregrounded the Jewish American experience in a manner that ironically angered both the Jewish and the Jewish American mainstream opinion. The general consensus

that developed by the 1960's was the Roth is a self-hating Jew, one of the dangerous ones considering the exposure and the many accolades that he received over the years since the publication of his first literary work. Yet, whatever indignation Roth raised at that time, it was not the end of it. *Portnoy's Complaint*, Roth's most commercially successful novel to date, not only ignited the criticism that became associated with Roth, but forced some critics to address the Jewish self-hatred stigma, consider its occurrence among Jewish factions, and trace its origins and the possible social outcomes that can ensue from it.

B. Statement of the Problem

The controversy that Roth's novel amassed was due to several reasons, which ranged from Roth's writing style, to the pornographic implications of the narrative. Yet, it was the main character, Alexander Portnoy, that confounded the public opinion. Portnoy, with his fervently comedic complaints, which almost register as lamentations, details the successive streak of events and people that made him into the guilt-infused, Machiavellian, libidinous, and self-hating American Jew that he is. The trick that Roth masterfully pulls in the novel is that he jeopardizes Portnoy's narrator credibility in a sarcastic, comedic, and farcical monologue that suspends the reader's belief in Portnoy's true motivations. An additional reason that requires an inquiry into the matter is that Portnoy never fully agrees with the terminology used against him at one point: the "self-hating Jew". He utters neither an agreement nor a disagreement, but chooses to let the readers, and his therapist, into a rollercoaster of intricate and vivid events and acquaintances. The sum of all of these anecdotal complaints hints at a larger, encompassing complaint that constitutes the core of Portnoy's problem, and possibly even Roth's, which is the self-hating, shameful men that they arguably became.

C. Methodology

This research relies on an eclectic methodology that combines the Freudian psychoanalytic approach and the deconstructive approach in analyzing Alexander Portnoy's narration and perceptible behavior. The psychoanalytic approach is used primarily due to the fact that the novel is written in the form of a long disclosure delivered by Portnoy to his psychiatrist. The Freudian nuances in his confessions and instances of reminiscence call for a Freudian approach in analysis. The deconstructive approach is applied with the intention of revealing the Jewish self-hatred undertones in his attitude, both of the present and the past. The primary benefit of using the deconstructive approach is the meticulous scanning that it allows the research to perform for every discernable notion, by explaining every notion by its binary counterpart, whether that was its opposite, or its parallel.

D. Research Questions

This research tackles three primary questions throughout the lengths of its chapters. The deductions of the first two questions construct the base that the third question is set to be investigated upon. These questions aim to both explore and investigate several the Jewish self-hatred notion, first as a Jewish phenomenon, then as a Jewish-American phenomenon, and finally as a subject of contention that surrounded the main character of a seminal American novel. These questions are:

1. How did the Jewish self-hatred become a canonized phenomenon and to which extent it became imbedded in the Jewish conscious and subconscious self?
2. What are the aspects of controversy in Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* and how did Philip Roth explain the themes and motives harbored in the novel?

3. Using the aforementioned eclectic approach, how are the events and the descriptions, both expressed and alluded to by Alexander Portnoy, related to his own attitude towards his Jewish heritage? How does that reveal a case of latent Jewish self-hatred?

E. Structure of the Research

This research is divided into three chapters, each one tracing and developing an aspect of the larger problem that this analysis undertakes. The first chapter tackles the subject of self-hatred as a psychological construct that is currently perceived as a notable stigma among the marginalized minority groups. It examines the genesis of the phenomenon, from both psychological and religious outlooks, in order to understand the universal sentiments that constitute the core of such an outlandish conception. It narrows the scope of this investigation to include solely the Jewish community, and how the “self-hating Jew” created internal contention in the German Jewish community. The second chapter transfers the scope from the German grounds to the American context. It involves the fluctuations of the Jewish American attitudes towards the Jewish values, with the coming of multiple authors that provide adverse depictions of the Jewish individual. The head of these authors in the public discussion is Philip Roth, with a career of controversy that started from his very first publication. The chapter then heralds *Portnoy's Complaint*, and its eponymous character, Alexander Portnoy, as the focus of this research. Eventually, chapter three puts Alexander Portnoy's discourse under the lens of investigation, extracting the passages, statements, and intentions voiced and indicated by Alexander Portnoy, in order to perceive the demonstration and proof of Jewish self-hatred in the character.

F. Research Objectives

One of the primary goals of this research is to provide a definitive argument in the debate concerning Philip Roth's personal politics and his attitude towards the Jews and Jewish heritage and tradition. It is a debate that has left many Jewish and non-Jewish readers reluctant towards the idea of embracing Philip Roth as a respectable literary figure. This research also examines the conflicting mentality of Jewish Americans during the post-war era. The mental displacement and the self-alienation, of which Roth was both a participant and a witness, are common among the physically displaced societies, and most notably, the post-colonial societies. In that respect, the foreseeable findings of this research insinuate the idea that there is a middle ground between Jewish literature and post-colonial literature, and even more ambitiously aim to place Jewish literature in the hemisphere of the post-colonial one, building on common characteristics of themes and the spirit of the characters of these literary works.

Roth has never settled his debate with his opponents, whether it was due to a sheer disinterest in redeeming himself, or realizing the futility of self-redemption. Nevertheless, his works continue to attract many Jewish readers who hope to find a break from the holier-than-thou portrayal of Jews in mainstream culture, and from non-Jewish readers who seek to get an insight into the mind workings of an individual roaming in limbo between two identities. It is arguable that what many Jewish readers have resented about *Portnoy's Complaint* is the shift from them being entertained, to being affronted due to the candidness that often comes hand-in-hand with mockery. Ultimately, Alexander Portnoy resounds with the human in the Jew, as much as it does with the Jew in the human, which solidifies the novel's status as a continuous subject

for psychoanalytic inquiry, and an examination of human morality and the turmoil of individuality in the face of communal responsibility.

**II. Chapter 1: Jewish Self-Hatred: Anatomy and Origins of the Notion in the
Jewish Context**

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A. Introduction

Each year, a number of Jewish political and cultural figures find their names marked on the Jewish S.H.I.T list, otherwise known as the Self-Hating and/or Israeli-Threatening list. Jewish far-right groups such as Campus Watch and Masada 2000 have sponsored and promoted the list on their platforms with the intention of targeting the suspected self-hating Jews around the world. Currently, the list hosts more the seven thousand names, ranging across different domains from politics to the entertainment industry. With the number of names and accompanying death threats on the rise, the issue of Jewish self-hatred is still frequently debated within the educational, cultural, political, and social scenes.

Although there are documented identifications of what Jewish self-hatred is, the successive political climates across different eras of Jewish history continue to revamp the conception behind the term. The following chapter attempts to examine self-hatred as a psychological construct, and assess the manner by which this phenomenon became a notorious dilemma for the Jewish community throughout the nineteenth and the early twentieth century in Germany, and its subsequent expansion towards the rest of Europe and North America. By understanding the focal aspects of self-hatred in the Jewish community, an analysis of the concerned thematic elements in Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* can be derived and conducted thoroughly, and eventually offer an idea around the complexities of the human psyche as it is presented in the main character of the novel.

B. The Anatomy of Self-Hatred

As coherent as the concept of self-hatred can appear from a moral standpoint, it is a phenomenon that is entrenched in psycho-social and religious roots. Self-hatred is

associated with feelings of shame and guilt, but it is also argued to be much more encompassing in nature than them, because it is the product of an endemic belief system that the individual is exposed to from an early age, and it evolves to an extent by which it can modify that individual's manner of conduct, and well as their psyche. This research employs examples from both psychological and religious standpoints in order to trace the origination and the precursors to this phenomenon. Whether self-hatred is the culmination of a spectrum of reactions towards one's social milieu, or the direct/indirect outcome of religious teachings, self-hatred is an intricate psychological syndrome that excavates its way to the depths of human psyche.

1. Psychoanalytic Deconstruction

In his 1999 publication, *Ethics for the New Millennium*, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama provided an account of his encounter with the issue of "self-hatred". After being acquainted with the psychological phenomenon from Western psychologists, the Dalai Lama admitted that he initially found the notion of "self-hatred" to be "incoherent", and an opposition from the basic fact that people are always in pursuit of happiness. Later on, after further introspection, he arrived to the conclusion that self-hatred exists when the person is no longer guided by their perspective (Dalai Lama 115-116). The Dalai Lama's initial bewilderment concerning the hatred of the self is understandable, as people share an established tendency to thrive and prosper towards their own perceptions of happiness. However, the conclusion provided by the Dalai Lama has a loose connotation, as it does not delve deeper into the individual circumstances that produce such a peculiar feeling. Moreover, he also regards the "capacity of empathy" and "positive thoughts" to be the remedy for such a deeply-rooted psychological complexity (Dalai Lama 117). This kind of superficial analytical

effort invalidates the solemnity of this problem. Conversely, it is also the precursor to the many psychoanalytic endeavors made by researchers to dissect this inherent and pervading phenomenon.

One of the main points of focus for psychoanalysts and social theorists is the phenomena of psychological constructs. These multi-layered notions that exist within certain individuals and that are prompted by certain elements in their background, upbringing and national and universal identity. The bulk of these scholars' researches in this area are determined by the possibility of reducing these constructs to universal concepts. The notion of self-hatred is no different from these constructs. Several psychoanalysts have given their distinct interpretations on the origins of such a peculiar notion, with each either linking it to a collective experience, or an individual occurrence.

Psychoanalysts Jill Savage Scharff and Stanley A. Tsigounis have argued that self-hatred is nothing but a mere projection of an earlier stimulus. In their 2014 publication titled *Self-Hatred in Psychoanalysis: Detoxifying the Persecutory Object*, Scharff and Tsigounis stipulate that self-hatred is part of a broader range of emotions that falls within what they have labeled as the "persecutory object"; a "part of the self that is imbued with a sense of harassment, suppression, subjugation, tyranny, torture, vengeance and self-hatred", and that these persecutory tendencies are a result of their barer being subjected to persecution from an external object, which the barer of the persecutory notions is often dependent on (Scharff & Tsigounis 20-22). This entails the idea that the self-inflicted aggression is a result of a foreign aggression that becomes deeply imbedded within the human psyche, creating an effect that manifests itself in these negative self-perceptions. Although Scharff and Tsigounis' argument creates a

distinction between the external cause and the internal effect, they do not query the part that the self has in validating its own imposed persecution.

When Duke University law professor Jerome McCristal Culp Jr. was diagnosed with diabetes, he reluctantly received advice from one of his students who was also a fellow diabetic. The professor recounts, as it is stated in his essay titled *Seventh Aspect of Self-Hatred: Race, LatCrit, and Fighting the Status Quo*, that he was “unease with the conversation”, and that it took him a while to understand the origins of his peculiar feeling. The reason that professor McCristal Culp concluded was the fact that he was “unwilling to join the community of diabetics”, and despite knowing that he was susceptible of being diagnosed with the disease due to his mother’s earlier diagnosis, his “internalized shame” of admitting that he was another diabetic was “too much for him” and that he hated that part of him. (Culp 4-5).

Professor Culp’s personal story is a testimony to an earlier conclusion that he stipulated in his same essay, which he made in relation to the all racial, ethnic and sexual minorities: “Self-hatred is associated with the fear of identity” (2). Professor Culp refers to this aspect of self-hatred as the “seventh aspect”. Considering that the earlier six aspects are the layers of self-hatred that result from the societal oppression and subjugation, Culp distinguished the seventh aspect as the one that involves self-marginalization and the acceptance of the “minority” label. Culp called this aspect “the sister of the fear of opposing the status quo” (3). This equivalence denotes the idea that people of minorities can be personally involved in their oppression, by adopting conventional practices and behavior patterns that are uncharacteristic of their identity. As Culp concurs, these people “are opposed to gender, racial, and sexual oriental oppression, but still have unresolved aspects of self-hatred” (3), which suggests that

these people refuse to fit the mold of their assigned stereotype by resorting to the mainstream conventions of behavior, attitudes, and identity parameters.

This form of self-imposed oppression is what American researcher Gail Pheterson labeled as “internalized oppression”. In her 1986 published essay *Alliances between Women: Overcoming Internalized Oppression and Internalized Domination*, Pheterson mentioned that this “internalized oppression” is a culmination of several notions: “self-hatred, self-concealment, fear of violence and feelings of inferiority, resignation, isolation, powerlessness, and gratefulness for being allowed to survive” (Pheterson 4). Thus, Pheterson asserts Culp’s argument that the precursor for self-hatred is internalized, whether it was a form of oppression by imposing limitations of one’s self or shame of belonging to a minority.

These scholarly endeavors uphold an alternative perspective by which the notion of self-hatred can be viewed. Their introspective dissections of what the Dalai Lama once regarded as “incoherent” prove that this subject is a familiar sentiment which falls at risk of being seen through narrow lenses. It also shows that these familiar sentiments, shame and oppression among which, operate on several layers and manifest through different mechanisms. This psychoanalytic inquiry further indicates the breadth of the spectrum of human emotions, and attests to the importance of inspecting the human sentimental phenomena.

2. Religious Deconstruction

In her 1995 essay for *Tikkun Magazine*, titled *Beyond Internalized Anti-semitism: Healing the Collective Scars of the Past*, Jewish rights activist and the magazine’s frequent contributing author Cherie Brown revisits a childhood memory of hers, which created a salient impact that would reverberate for many years to come:

As a young girl, I sat in synagogue between my parents every Yom Kippur afternoon, glued to my seat as I listened to the readings from the Martyrology service, the recitation of the pious and the saintly Jews who died at the hands of their persecutors. With every graphic reading reminding the congregants of all the suffering that had been inflicted upon Jews, including young children, throughout history, I became increasingly convinced that, as a Jewish child, I was not safe, indeed would never be safe. (Brown, par.2)

The Martyrology, a tradition practiced by Jews each Yom Kippur (or Kippur), involves the reciting of the tale of the “Ten Martyrs”; ten rabbis who have been gruesomely killed during the Jewish-Roman war. The explicit details by which this religious ritual is narrated is what registered with Brown and shaped her deterministic viewpoint of her Jewish identity: Jews are inherently unsafe from persecution.

As the Jewish religious traditions and rituals are passed from one generation to another, the internalized oppression is an issue that is not bound by any temporal frames. This is the most prominent cause that led researchers to determine religion as the main catalyst for the inherent self-hatred among religious, and certain religion-bound ethnic minority groups. In her 2004 article, *Exploring the Interaction of Trauma and Spirituality*, *Traumatology* journal contributing author Stacy Smith elaborates that religion “formalizes and structures our spiritual beliefs into a cohesive system with specific rules and doctrines” (Smith 4). A plethora of religious scriptures and traditions can formalize a system of thought that would outline and govern the behaviors and attitudes of that religion’s followers. Consequently, a religion that transmits a narrative

of social subjugation endured by its followers is bound to imbue a notion of inferiority within the successive generations of its adherents.

Basing her research studies on sexual minorities, ordained minister and author Leanne McCall Tigert draws on a personal note in order to formalize a general relation between religious faith and internalized oppression. Scholar Teeomm K. Williams reviews certain findings in Tigert's *Coming Out through Fire: Surviving the Trauma of Homophobia*. In a dissertation titled *Understanding Internalized Oppression: A Theoretical Conceptualization of Internalized Subordination*, Williams reports that Tigert introduces the notion of "intra-psychic evil", which she defines as the "the horrendous words and images that we internalize from the evil done to us" (Williams 117). This internal mechanism feeds on the negative perceptions imposed upon the individual, and turns it into part of their own self-perception.

Williams continues stating that Tigert believes this "intra-psychic evil" has been deeply connoted with church teachings, arguing that church conveys messages of acceptance and love by God; however, it often conducts harsh treatment of its own people and claims that it is their fault that this treatment is imposed on them. According to Williams, this form of hostile projection to guilt deeply contributes to the internalized oppression of those punished by the church (Williams 118). The paper also quotes that Tigert believes that such messages transmitted through religion can lead towards self-destructive acts, citing excessive drinking and self-mutilation as examples, which are manifestation of internalized oppression (119).

Based on the earlier findings concerning the psychoanalytic anatomy of self-hatred and the relation between religious tutelage and internalized oppression, the link between self-hatred and religion becomes discernable. What Gail Pheterson and Jerome

McCristal Culp Jr. have commonly shared in terms of the origins of self-hatred happens to be the consequence of those certain religious manifestations mentioned above, as well as the practices that religiously-bound ethnic groups institutionalize. The notion of Internalized oppression acts as a mediating variable between the two phenomena: self-hatred and religion. The examples provided from the sacred narratives of Judaism and the condemnation of the church variably instill the negativity transmitted through their discursive content, and diffuses it into deprecation and self-oppression among their receptors. This self-imposed oppression is practiced through a self-imposed restriction in expressing one's identity, thoughts and affiliations.

Although this exploration of self-hatred focuses on the broader spectrum of different minority groups in the large society, most of the research endeavors conducted on this matter revealed a strong inclination to relate this phenomenon to a particular minority group: The Jewish Diaspora. Jewish psychoanalysts and sociologists have fruitfully documented the probable and likely origins of their prominent stigma, thus establishing a strong basis for many succeeding investigations on Jewish identity, and identity politics in general.

C. “Jewish Self-Hatred”: Genesis of the Notion and the Term

Although many of the historical accounts base the practical emergence of Jewish self-hatred during the 18th and 19th century Jewish assimilation in Europe and – particularly- Germany, indications of a form of Jewish “othering” have been present in previous fictional, religious and realistic accounts. While the term “Jewish self-hatred” was only implemented in the wake of the internal strife between the Orthodox and the Reform Jews in Germany, the sentiment of self-hatred was previously dubbed as merely

a form of Jewish anti-Semitism, thus associating the Jew-hating Jewish man with the racially-conceited Aryan in principles and mentality.

In his review of Gilman's *Jewish Self-Hatred*, Jeffrey Mehlman recounts the fictional narrative forwarded by German-Jewish poet Heinrich Heine in his *Hebräischen Melodien*. In the poem titled *Jehuda Ben Halevi*, Heine recounts the story of Israelites' wandering through the desert towards the land of Canaan, which culminated in a consensus that they must breed with the "daughters of Canaan". When one of them attempted to stray away from their agreement and their promised destiny, they assigned one of them to strike him down. However, instead of killing the guilty transgressor, the man mistakenly killed an innocent fellow bystander whom Heine dubbed as a "schlemihl" (More commonly written as "schlemiel"). It is a Yiddish term that Max Zeldner defines as "one who has more than his share of bad luck and failure" (Zeldner 1). The schlemihl became the personification of Jewish meekness and inferiority.

According to Mehlman, the image of the schlemihl is what constitutes Gilman's theory of the "erotics of assimilation" in Germany (Mehlman 2). Mehlman elucidates that the Israelites' coupling with the "daughters of Canaan" entails a fundamental divorce with the Jew that they once were; an emblematic separation of moral character, goals and attitudes to the "Jewish other" (2). According to Mehlman, the "Jewish other", a term that is arguably forwarded by Austrian-Jewish philosopher Otto Weininger, is the "Yiddish-speaking schlemihl" (2); the personification of transgression and regression of the Jewish ideological assimilation. This is why Weininger, in his controversial book *Sex and Character*, declared that the "the bitterest Antisemites are to be found amongst the Jews themselves" and that "whoever detests the Jewish

disposition detests it first of all in himself” (Weininger, par. 9). Weininger’s remark proclaims that a Jew’s self-hatred is none other than a self-projection of a preconceived notion of them being considered as “the other”; the inferior and unfortunate breeds that has been but an annexation to the Aryans. Evidently, this account of Jewish stigma is something of an incentive for Jews to examine this status and differentiate between their self-hatred and the more common anti-Semitism.

1. From “Jewish Anti-Semitism” to “Jewish Self-Hatred”

In spite of the outset of the notion being attributed to religious accounts of the Israelites’ wandering through the desert for 40 years, it did not begin to fall under a particular established label until the years of modern Germany. Early notions of the Jewish State, as well as increasing anti-Semitism and internal deceit in Germany, contributed to the gradual development of the Jewish question, from that of an internal Anti-Semitism to -more distinctly- a form of self-hatred. The mechanisms of this development are represented in the successive ideological grounds of certain Jewish thinkers that have been influenced by their own observations and deductions of the contemporaneous Jews.

Austro-Hungarian journalist and author Theodor Herzl was an illustrious figure among the Jews during the 19th century, due to the fact that his name became quickly aligned with modern political Zionism and the Jewish state in Palestine. In 1895, Herzl published *Den Judenstaat*, or *The State of the Jews*, which contained a plethora of reasons why “The Jewish State” needed to be established as an alternative to the dependence on the European host nations. The opposing attitudes around Zionism became the starting point for the internal strife between the Jews. Proponents of Zionism, such as Herzl, label the opposing Jew as being “nothing more than an Anti-

Semite of Jewish origin” (Herzl 7). Herzl’s claim targets the “assimilationist” Jews all around Europe whom he accuses of being covert agents of anti-Semitism, as they tend to establish societies for the persecuted Jews under the claim that it would protect them from the discrimination of the Christian citizens. However, Herzl asserts that these groups stealthily emphasize the anti-Semitism of these countries which would enable them to eliminate competition in the fields of production, by having the larger portion of Jews pushed even further to the margins of industry and society.

Herzl’s statements foregrounded the issue of the “Jewish Anti-Semite”, however; it was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that it became surrogated with the “Self-hating Jew”. In *On the Origins of Jewish Self-Hatred*, Professor Paul Reitter establishes that the term “Jewish Self-Hatred”, although not popularized at that time, was coined by Austrian-Jewish scholar Anton Kuh, who introduced the term for the first time during a speech he made in 1921. Kuh, who was no stranger to the hostility of the public, already laid the grounds for his views on assimilation in 1919. His speech titled *The Tragedy of the Jews* targeted his audience which consisted mainly of Jewish assimilationists. Although Herzl’s name was not explicitly stated in his speech, Kuh recited a primal damage of assimilation which, more or less, coincided with that previously asserted by Herzl: That it had helped uphold anti-Semitism. Kuh was regarded as a revolutionary of some sorts, and this image was further cemented with his succeeding publication.

In 1921, Kuh published *Juden und Deutsche*, or *Jews and Germans*, which was the beginning of a new trend in Jewish self-perception. Between 1919 and 1921, Kuh continued to voice his disdain towards both assimilation and, surprisingly enough, Zionism as well. He argued that they would both lead the Jews even further to “the

disaster of nationalism” (Reitter 36), referring to the fact that assimilationists create a conspicuous anti-Jewish agenda, that would rally the Jews for a hostile cause against the host nations, and the fact that “The Jewish State” of Zionists would submit the Jews under a system of clannishness. Although sufficing with Jewish anti-Semitism presented a far better option for Kuh, he had a struggle adopting such a term. As Reitter maintains, Kuh associated the term with a negative, polemical connotation that has been embedded as a way of mockery towards Jews. He wanted to establish a term that would describe a state of Jewish self-contempt with a connotation that was far grander than the one associated with Jewish anti-Semitism, and thus he introduced the term “Jewish self-hatred” for the first time in the beginning pages of *Jews and Germans*.

In spite of this sudden change in nomenclature, it was hard to welcome Kuh’s innovation in wording. Kuh’s use of the term is described as being confusing, as he identified it briefly and without further elaboration as being the “aesthetic self-criticism” that “mockers have named Jewish anti-Semitism” (Reitter 54). Even more confusingly, Kuh continues using the nomenclature “Jewish anti-Semitism” throughout the larger portion of the remaining of the book. However, according to Reitter, Kuh establishes a definition that is distinctive enough of self-hatred as he progresses in the book, by propounding that “self-hatred” is only a small fragment with a special “role” within the broader meaning of “Jewish anti-Semitism” (Reitter 54). What Kuh means by this, as Reitter deduces, is that the aesthetic self-hatred that was part of the Jewish mentality during the prewar era has a chance to evolve into a politicized, revolutionary ideology that will finally present an solution to the Jewish dilemma.

Kuh’s rationale behind “self-hatred” is that it is a notion that comes from developing contempt towards something which is familiar. Reitter clarifies that Kuh

chose the term “Selbsthaß”, or “Selbsthass”, which largely translates to “self-hatred”, to denote that this form of quiescent hostility stems from an anger with the Jewish assimilated families. Therefore, Kuh’s identification of Jewish self-hatred is that of a familial problem; an “intimate” emotion that, as Reitter reports, means that “a recalcitrant boy had to be born” to assimilated Jewish parents (Reitter 55). For Kuh, a self-hating Jew is a disobedient child of the Jewish genealogy, both a conscious denouncer and an unconscious adopter of the Jewish heritage. Where the anti-Semite Jew castigates, discredits, and obliterates the Jew within, the self-hating Jew censures his Jewishness which does not correspond to the ideals of the host nations. In that sense, Kuh’s “self-hating Jew” is merely a cynic individual with a flair for rebellion, far off from the widely harmful, radical Jewish Anti-Semite. Kuh’s explanation has been the premise of many accounts that people have come to associate Jewish self-hatred with, and it was further cemented with the findings of another German-Jewish scholar.

2. Theodor Lessing and the Popularization of Jewish Self-Hatred

Anton Kuh’s abstraction attracted certain other scholars to put their own spins on such a contextually revolutionizing term. In 1930, German-Jewish philosopher Theodor Lessing published *Jüdischer Selbsthass*, or *Jewish Self-Hate*, a book that tackled the raw essence of what Kuh previously forwarded. Paul Reitter notes that despite the fact that Lessing identified as a Zionist, his perception of the Jews was largely “völkisch”. Meaning that he was an opponent of the view that “Jews are associated with rapacity, trickery, capitalism and industrialization” (Reitter 68). Lessing has shown a constant abhorrence towards his Jewish heritage, linking it to every demeaning quality that the Völkisch movement, the German nationalist movement

which was notable for its embrace for anti-Semitic and discriminatory beliefs during the nineteenth century, attributed to Jews.

This is an issue that Reitter links largely to Lessing's Jewish upbringing. An emotionally detached and abusive father, as well as a submissive mother who failed to protect her child was the source of his disdain. However, Lessing was aware of this probability, and as Reitter asserts, the superiority that he often felt, while attempting to overcome the effects of his parents, presented a larger issue for him; an issue of "incompatibility between his image of himself and the visions of community that fired his imagination" (Reitter 68). As it became discernable, Lessing was unable to free himself completely from the shackles of inferiority despite feeling superior vis-à-vis his parents. In *Einmal und nie wieder* ("Once and never Again"), he broods over his feeling of incompetence: "Kann eine Pflanze den Boden verleugnen, daraus sie wuchs? Bin ich nicht selber just die Frucht der Menschen und Umstände, die ich hasse und zerstören möchte? Bin ich nicht belastet, minderwertig, mißraten, verpfuscht?" (Lessing 509).

Lawrence Baron, a San Diego University professor and author, reverts back to the same quote in a scholarly article titled *Theodore Lessing: Between Jewish Self-Hatred and Zionism*. He translated the passage as "Can a plant disown the soil out of which it grew? Am I myself not the fruit of people and conditions which I hate and want to destroy? Am I not handicapped, inferior, ill-bred, botched?" (Baron 3). Preceding the quote in the article, Baron employs a short identification of the concept of "self-hatred" from a Freudian-psychoanalytic viewpoint. It is that Freud attributed the genesis self-hatred to a kind of hatred and –at the same time- an identification, both with intense proportions, of and to the father (3). However, Baron's account of Lessing's attitudes includes fluctuations between self-hatred and acceptance for his Jewishness.

According to Baron's article, Lessing's upbringing was not the only defining factor in his vocalized self-hatred. The article accounts for Lessing's short-term friendships with nationalist poet Ludwig Klages and nationalist pioneer Wilhelm Jordan as the main source for Lessing's nationalist tendencies, as well as his constant degradation of Eastern European Jews, portraying them as being "so obsessed with money that they even pander for their daughters" (12). Unsurprisingly, it all happened while he was still under the rift of anti-Semitic pressure from fellow Germans. This led Klages to abruptly end ties with Lessing, sending him a searing letter in 1899 that read: "You are a disgusting, pushy Jew!" (9). The realization that his Jewish bloodline would continue to denigrate him his fellow Germans, Lessing adapted a more lenient worldview, endeavoring in issues that are closely aligned with minority rights. His contribution to the women's movement led to his acquaintance with the world of the ostracized, and drove him to understand the perils of being a Jewish individual in Germany.

It was not until 1930 that Lessing's self-exploration came into ostensible fruition. His seminal publication, *Jewish Self-Hatred*, was published much to the dismay of assimilationist German Jews, primarily as it associated them with the titular term, which came into vogue after the book's publication. The book was lauded by the Zionist group. Max Brod hailed the book as a work of genius (Reitter 12), while German Zionist publications ranged in their acclaim of Lessing, with one in particular stating that Lessing has revealed "with uncommon acumen [...] the deep psychic abyss that is Jewish self-hatred" (12). What Lessing's book contained was an affirmation of a the genesis of the notion of self-hatred within the Jewish Diaspora, relating it to a deeply rooted psychological problem that, as Jacob Golomb mentions, relates to a spiritual lifestyle held commonly by the Jewish Diaspora.

According to Golomb, Lessing refers to the spiritual connection that the Diaspora Jews shared in order to explain their self-hatred. The book reportedly states that the Jewish diaspora had adapted a spiritual lifestyle in order to sustain the discrimination that they endured from the European host countries. Lessing described this as a lifestyle shared “together with their dead ones” (Golomb 12), indicating that they aimed to create a bond with their Jewish lineage as a way to cope with living with the foreign nations. Golomb reports that Lessing made a connection between the Jewish spirituality and the descent into their infamous self-hatred, as the latter expresses that the subjugation faced by the Jews in their host communities began to have an effect on the same spiritual beliefs that they established to connect with their ancestors first and foremost, shaking their belief system and rendering the Jews skeptical with their own spiritual doctrine. Eventually, the skepticism turned into a rejection of the spiritual resources, and led the marginal Jewish individual to turn these resources against himself, and anything Jew- related.

In his review, Golomb describes this process of rejection as self-liberation. He reports that *Jewish Self-Hatred* examines how that rejection of spirituality translated into a process of “insecurity, self-doubt, even self-torture” (12). All of which are part of the self-hatred spectrum. Lessing ended his book by denouncing the self-liberation that Jews had adopted as an alternative, directing his call to Jews who have been subdued into self-emancipation and denial of their identity: “Be whatever you are!” (“Sei was immer du bist!”) (12). This was eventually the reason why Lessing’s book touched a raw nerve within many of the assimilationist Jews. It precisely explored their psyche and their reluctance to accept their Jewishness, while at the same time presenting, and exposing, their case as a psychological anomaly; a dysfunction that results from their own striving to be accepted by an intolerant world.

A self-hating Jew naturally is not too keen to have their weakness exposed and their motives unveiled. During Lessing's time, members of the German-Jewish faction became outraged that someone like Lessing dissected their psychological makeup in order to extract the motives behind their disdain for their Jewish ancestry, the same motives that they were aware of but made the effort to reject and expurgate themselves from, in order to adapt to their surroundings. This put Lessing at a very critical position and rendered him their top target for capture. Publications painted him as some sort of a demagogue for the Jewish benefit, animated by the forces of the Zionist factions, while awards have been announced for anyone who managed to take hold of him. In fact, it was only 3 years after the publication of the book that Lessing was assassinated by German Bohemians, who were arguably seeking glorification behind their conquest.

Despite Lessing's inability to carry on his exploration of the Jewish dilemma, his work has been transmitted across different generations. The term *Self-Hatred* is currently an institutionalized part of the Jewish lexicon, and is continuously explored within the context of different minority groups, with a reference to the Jewish community. One of the most famous works that has been produced in the aftermath of Lessing's publication is Sander Gilman's 1986 book titled *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews*, which re-examined the issue of self-hatred from a worldly aspect. Golomb quotes Gilman's identification of Jewish self-hatred as follows: "[it is] both unique, following the fortunes of the treatment of the Jews within both Jewish and non-Jewish communities in the West, and representative, since its deep structure is universal" (6). Gilman, as well as a number of other succeeding scholars, have used the psychological interpretation that Lessing forwarded in explaining the problem with the assimilationist Jews, and deduced that it even pervades beyond the Jewish community.

Self-hatred is universal. The incentives by which it is motivated are part of the human psychological structure. The Jewish self-hatred served as a prominent case study in how reverberating self-hatred can be if it is unchecked. If Lessing's story serves as a moral portrait of anything, it is a testimony to the ubiquitous power that self-hatred in the Jewish community has. The fury that is bred with the forced internalized oppression can eradicate any traces of opposition met within the same individual, or within the community. In the Jewish context, the danger and the consequences of that self-hatred leads to an untimely dilemma within the Jewish Diaspora all over the world, and is still widely discussed within the Jewish scholarly groups and media every time a Jewish figure denounces one or more Jewish parts of themselves, be it their language, their traditions, or in the most pervading cases of the twenty-first century climate, their own people.

Throughout the current century, several political and cultural figures have been publicly adjudged as "self-hating Jews". Lists of notable persons have been gathered within several pro-Israeli groups across different platforms. The website *Masada2000.org* is known for being the foregrounding anti-Arab/anti-Palestine, which gained its fame for mainly assembling a list of nearly seven thousand names, which include Rabbi Michael Lerner, renowned linguist Noam Chomsky, and Hollywood cinematic director Woody Allen. Rabbi Lerner has received multiple death threats over his call to end the Israeli occupation of the West Bank (Lerner, par. 1). It is arguable that these current accusations are due merely to the term "self-hating Jew" being declared without any precursor, other than the target of fury being someone who is anti-Israel. This is a twisting of Kuh and Lessing's definition of what a self-hating Jew is. However, the Masada 2000 and many other pro-Israeli groups are a salient proof that the issue of Jewish self-hatred is as resounding as it was during the nineteenth and the

twentieth century, and with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict still at its peak, this stigma is still one of the focal points of debate inside and outside the Jewish community.

D. Conclusion

In *Einmal und nie wieder*, Theodor Lessing contemplates his ability to “survive in this Aryan world full of muscular Siegfrieds with their healthy and raw ideals of strength and blood” (Reitter 68). This a seemingly personal issue for Lessing, who dealt with the trials of his Jewish inferiority in Aryan Germany throughout his life. Yet, the question pulsates on a much higher level, as it is both the motive behind, as well as the setback of the self-hating Jews. The inferiority felt by the Jewish community in their non-Jewish nations is what drives them to repel their Jewishness. At the same time, it is this need to upscale the heritage is what turns the self-hating Jew into an enemy of his own blood, creating animosity with his fellow Jews which can lead to a state of alienation and ambivalence without any fully fledged identity.

What Lessing experienced and explored were merely the early seeds of an ever growing problem. Following the appropriation of “Jewish self-hatred” as a term, the phenomenon propelled its way to the Jewish Diaspora outside of Europe for the rest of the twentieth century. What emerged during the second half of the century is the corroboration of the idea of the self-hating Jew, which was discernable through literary works mainly. It is then that the voice of Philip Roth emerged as one who shaped the core elements of the Jewish dilemma into literary characters, thus earning him an infamous status as being one of the more pronounced self-hating Jews in the Jewish-American canon.

**III. Chapter 2: Jewish Self-Hatred in Post-World War II America: The Ideological
and Literary Scene, and the Exposure of Philip Roth**

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A. Introduction

Over the course of the years leading up to the twenty-first century, many Jewish names have been hailed at the forefront of literary innovation. Creative voices such as poets Gertrude Stein, Allen Ginsburg, novelist Isaac Asimov, and screenwriter Woody Allen are currently found among the ranks of the quintessential American writers. This popularity was achieved at the expense of very little to no controversy concerning their works, as their Jewish roots seldom influenced their creative processes, and even during the few instances where it manifested itself, it was not depicted with regards to negative behavioral features. However, this was not the case with all of the rising literary voices at that time. Arguably, no literary figure received as much wrath, intrigue, or praise for putting their Jewishness under the radar than Philip Roth.

Any discussion that involves Philip Roth also involves two primal, compulsory elements: charges of Jewish anti-Semitism and self-hatred, and *Portnoy's Complaint*. The latter of which, his 1969 disputable novel, is regarded as a subject of heated contempt among many Jewish literary critics, rabbis, and any Jew that did not find Alexander Portnoy's incessant, internal scornful thoughts towards his Jewish parents, nor his shame-riddled sexual adventures to be amusing or, at least, thought-provoking. In fact, the explicit nature of the book only played a small part in the novel's negative feedback. Alexander Portnoy was regarded as an archetypal self-hating Jew: the culmination of every fictional self-hating Jewish character that has been already scrutinized by critics. Roth's attempts to deflect these accusations were not many, and all fairly ambiguous.

This chapter chronicles the early bouts of self-hatred accusations for Jewish American authors, and the main, sometimes recurring, incentives that their works share.

Eventually, Philip Roth and his early venture into Jewish storytelling are examined in terms of the general reaction that it received, and the tumultuous consequences that, ironically, led him to write his seminal novel, *Portnoy's Complaint*, and the even more polarizing echo that it generated.

B. Self-Hatred and American Jewish Literary Figures

In spite of the fact that the term “Jewish Self-Hatred” became in vogue during the first half of the twentieth century, scholars were still struggling to achieve a consensus as to what it was in the general scheme of events. Sander Gilman’s proposition that self-hatred is a universal phenomenon suggests that the idea that Jewish self-hatred is description to a psychological complexity that is not exclusive to the German-Jewish case. The majority of research that is devoted to the issue states regards this phenomenon as an entailment of Jewish self-emancipation from Jewish roots. This is a deduction that serves the research at hand, as it justifies the expansion of the phenomenon outside the German –and European- borders, and includes the geographical polity that is associated with –arguably- the largest number of accused self-hating Jews at the present time.

In fact, the tendency to smear American Jews as “self-hating” is so pervading in the United States that it extended to target even the most self-professed activists for the Jewish statehood and people. Notable Hollywood screenwriter and author Ben Hecht was at the receiving end of these accusations once. Penning some of the most successful original and adapted screenplays in old Hollywood, such as *Gone with the Wind*, *Monkey Business*, and *Scarface*, Hecht was branded a self-hating Jew after his novel, *A Jew in Love*, which was published in 1931, gained prominence. *A Jew in Love* employs many of the unfavorable caricatures of the Jewish man that Roth’s *Portnoy's Complaint*

became infamous for. In the early pages of Hecht's novel, the Jewish protagonist is described as "a dark-skinned little Jew with a vulturous and moody face" (Gladstone, par. 2). This generalization of an unflattering physical appearance is one of several reasons that earned Hecht the ire of fellow Jews.

There are recurrent elements suggesting the fascination with the white, Christian-based lifestyle that Hecht incorporated in his work. According to published reviews of the book, the protagonist is portrayed by Hecht as a man who is in pursuit of the "shiksa" (Sometimes stylized as "shikse"); a Yiddish term that describes the non-Jewish woman. In one of the pages, this pursuit for the shiksa is labeled as "the niggerish delight of the Jew in the blonde..." (Wilson, par. 2). In addition to that, the protagonist's anti-Semitic tendencies are also reflected in his attitude towards his Zionist brother-in-law, whom he calls "a cheap, empty headed, thick skinned, little kike" (par. 3), as well as a slew of other derogatory, justifiably unflattering portrayals of his Jewish milieu.

Whether Hecht harbors the same perspective on Zionism and Jews in America is up for debate. A prominent reason for that is because throughout the years following the accusations of anti-Semitism, he became one of the most vocal supporters of Zionism and the Jewish people in the Hollywood scene. Hecht joked that he only became a Jew in 1939, when the scene for a second World War was starting to unfold. Hecht became a columnist for prominent newspapers, urging the American government to protect the interests of the European Jewry above all. A proposition that was turned down not only by the government of Franklin Roosevelt, but also by members of the Jewish establishment, fearing that prioritizing the safety of European Jews during the war would only lead to the growth of anti-Semitic tendencies everywhere else in the world

(Horowitz, par. 8). Nevertheless, Hecht's activism obliterated his previous record as a self-hating Jew. He is currently a revered figure in the Hollywood, with many Jewish-led production companies and Jewish directors citing his works as a source of inspiration, which is evident by the modern adaptations of his screenplays, and the cinematic nods to his work which they incorporate into theirs.

Hecht was not the only Jewish writer to be accused of self-hatred during the years leading to the Second World War. In 1949, Jewish journalist Isaac Rosenfeld published a lengthy article in *Commentary* magazine, which was titled *On the Horizon: Adam and Eve on Delancey Street*. The article does not outline any political position that Rosenfeld might have taken concerning the Jewish affairs. Rather, it places a linkage between the Jewish culinary items, and sexual taboos (their sexual restrictions, more precisely). Rosenfeld elaborates that the Jewish *Kosher* laws; those having a relation to the prohibition of certain food items and dishes, are a direct inspiration for the repressed awareness of sexuality in typical *Kosher* Jewish homes. For instance, Rosenfeld illustrates with the example of mixing milk and meat. According to the *Kosher* rules, meat and milk should never be mixed, due to the idea that meat is masculine, and milk is feminine. Blending them together in one meal is a representation of a "sexual act" (Rosenfeld, par. 8). The magazine was approached by many people from the Jewish community who deemed Rosenfeld's article to be a "foul piece" (Shubow, par. 2)

Rosenfeld's article is considered to be more than a first-hand commentary on Jewish traditions. In fact, several newspaper columnists and writers inserted a political spin on Rosenfeld's ideas. Nathan Abrams writes that *The Congress Weekly* labeled the article as "nauseating", "literary trash that would gladden the heart of the most rabid

anti-Semite” (Abrams 52). Notable Jewish columnist Carl Alpert emphasized on the list point by comparing Rosenfeld to pronounced anti-Semite Paul Joseph Goebbels “or any other arch-anti-Semite propagandist” (Abrams 52), in addition to calling the piece “filthy drivel” and “pornographic” among a slew of other insults. What *The Congress Weekly* and Alpert foreground by their statements is the issue of Jewish anti-Semite, who is nothing short of hateful than any other typical anti-Semite, and although the terminology of “self-hating Jew” was not directly applied to Rosenfeld, he is currently stated as one of many names who have been deemed as self-hating Jews in America.

Professor Susan A. Glenn states that renowned Jewish scholar Sol Liptzin compiled a roster of names that have been associated with the issue of Jewish self-hatred in America. In *The Vogue of Jewish Self-Hatred*, an article which Liptzin published in *Congress Weekly* on March 18th, 1957, Liptzin reportedly mentions Rosenfeld, Hecht, and Philip Roth among a list of names which include screenwriter Budd Schulberg, and novelist Michael Gold. Liptzin is quoted mentioning that the “literary misdeed” of these writers has “furnished an abundance of scandalous material to the American followers of Hitler and Streicher” (Glenn 96). Schulberg’s 1941 novel, *What Makes Sammy Run?*, is a rag-to-riches story, which features a Jewish protagonist, Sammy Glickstein, who ascends to the higher ranks of Hollywood screenwriters by changing his name into a more Americanized version, plagiarizing other works, and practicing duplicity in the production scale of Hollywood films.

According to Robert Nason, *What Makes Sammy Run?* was quick to spark backlash from critics. He states that certain critics found Sammy Glick to be a stereotypical, “anti-Semitic portrait” of the Jewish individual (Nason, par. 12). Bernard Cohen was equally unenthusiastic about Schulberg’s main character. In his book

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Literature, Cohen mentions Sammy as one of many fictional Jews who are portrayed as “aggressors facing a hostile world” in the literary canon (Cohen 103), as demonstrated by Sammy’s conniving practices from behind the scenes of Hollywood’s glamorous films, indicating that nothing hinders him from attempting to achieve material wealth and social power. The world that Sammy operates within is not stated to be either Jewish-friendly, nor anti-Semitic, as Schulberg felt that it was “a whole Jewish world that Sammy is exploiting. The people he displaces are Jewish” (Melton, par. 19). This raises an issue that Bernard Cohen places at the center of his exploration of Jewish self-hatred in American literature.

Cohen uses Sammy, as well as other fictional Jewish American characters, to exemplify the relation between aggression and the psychological formation of Jewish self-hatred. According to Kurt Lewin, the frustration that comes with facing subjugation and inequity in the host societies, is the primary incentive of an aggression that should be placed against the subjugating power; however, due to the disparity between the minority’s status and the that of the majority, this aggression ultimately is placed against the individual’s own group or own self (Cohen 103). This explanation is not related directly to the portrayal of Jewish characters in fictional works; however, it explains why most of the Jewish characterization in American literature has been deemed to be classic, anti-Semitic, and negative portrayal of the Jewish individual and community.

Relying on the notion of the Jewish aggressor, Cohen sites other examples of Jewish self-hatred within many fictional characters in American literature. Harry Bogen, the main character in Jerome Weidman’s 1937 novel *I Can Get it for You*

Wholesome, is a young, Jewish businessman in the 1930's New York, who crooks his business partners out of their money, leads a scandalized love life by leaving his dutiful wife for a lavish dancer, and yet he holds on to his lamenting mother, coming back to her for food and comfort, as she implores him to look back on his past mistakes and revert back to his old, more innocent character. Cohen comments that critics view Bogen's character as "an insecure Jew who becomes self-hating", and that there is an existence of a "misbegotten creation, a lack of ease and assurance, a pathological reaction to the fury of Hitler" within the character (103).

In both Sol Liptzin and Bernard Cohen's studies around Jewish self-hatred in American literature, one name in particular is foregrounded. Philip Roth is discussed across many literary and magazine articles as the one writer who has become synonymous with the self-hating Jew archetype. In the wake of his death on May 22nd, 2018, media platforms have been divided in how to write about Roth and his prolific literary career, from articles reminding their readers about Roth's once-status as "enemy of the Jews" and how that image has slowly faded away from his portfolio (Kaplan, par. 22), to a look at how his literature helps its audience in the process of coping with being a Jew in America. Nevertheless, being an American Jew is the one defining quality about Roth from the public perspective, and is ultimately the primal factor which sets him apart from other great American novelists.

1. Philip Roth: A Landmark of Jewish Contention

"The epithet American-Jewish writer has no meaning for me. If I'm not an American, I'm nothing". In an interview with Cynthia Haven, Philip Roth said that this statement, which he previously told an interviewer at a certain point during his career, was not an attack on his Jewish heritage, but merely a way to say that the Jewish part

does not play any role in his production of literary language, and that the statement was merely a sentimental description of his character as a person, not as a writer. Even so, it is helpful to reiterate this quote in order to understand the reason why Roth was, and still is, the target of the public Jewish ire. Many of his works may have been perceived as products of hatred for one's own lineage at initial encounter, but for Roth, they were merely an approach towards authenticity in expression.

In fact, Roth's first encounter with public opposition started with his very first publication. In 1959, *The Paris Review* published the first of a collection of short stories written by Roth, who was then a graduate student at the University of Chicago, and a stationed soldier. *Goodbye, Columbus* was the lengthiest out of the stories comprising the collection, and upon analyzing it, it is found to be the one with the most impact upon the collection's readers. The novella centers around Neil Klugman, a Jewish young man from an lower-class family in Newark, New Jersey, who falls in love with Brenda Patimkin, a young Jewish woman from an upper-middle class family residing in Short Hills after moving out of Newark. The novella follows their summer romance during the year 1957. As the tensions in their relationships due the differences in attitude pave the way for a breakup, which eventually occurs over Labor Day, Neil is continuously reminded of his inferior position in society, thus allowing his to find freedom within the constant belittling and shaming of Brenda.

The conflict that Neil and Brenda face in their relationship occurs when she undergoes a significant physical transformation. Brenda undergoes a plastic surgery to alter her nose's appearance, from a "bumpy", characteristically Jewish nose, to a "bobbed" one (Roth 21). Neil becomes vexed at Brenda's confession, justifiably so. During the 1950's, the nose seemed to be the unquestionable Jewish trademark; a token

of social and cultural affiliation that became the first spot of criticism and mockery for non-Jewish people against Jews. Brenda's nose surgery is one of many attempts conducted by her parents to groom her into the "American-Jewish princess"; the wealthy and beautiful Jewish girl who overcomes the stereotypical Jewish treatment. This process of transformation culminates in them forcing her to separate from Neil, as he becomes the only remaining tangible connection to her Newark roots.

It is noticeable for readers of *Goodbye, Columbus* that there is one psychological feature that Roth repeatedly attributes to Neil: his identification with the African Americans. It is arguably hinted at in a more satirical manner during Neil's phone conversation with Brenda. As she questions him about what does he look like, he answers that he is dark, and her instant reaction is: "Are you a Negro?" (Roth 17). This does not seemingly harbor any relation to Neil's association with black people; however, it highlights the fact that he bases his entire physical appearance on the darkness of his skin, due to this quality's ability to place him within a specific social category, one that is, more or less, equal to that of the Negroes. When Neil visits the Patimkin household for the first time, he feels more out of place than their "Navaho-faced Negro" (26). Even more so, Neil develops an intellectual connection with a "small colored boy" who frequents the library that Neil works at. As the boy develops a keen fascination with books that encompass beautiful images of Tahiti and its residents, Neil equates the euphoric feeling of envisioning Tahiti with his own experience visiting the Patimkin household in Short Hills.

Neil's characterization and Roth's novel in general, received as much praise from critics as it received criticism. Upon receiving the National Book Award in 1960 for his collection, Roth was congratulated by critic Leslie Fiedler on receiving "the

young Jewish writer's initial accolade: the accusation of anti-Semitism..." (Landis 3). Shortly afterwards, when Roth began working as a contributing author to *Commentary* magazine, critics sent numerous messages to the magazine's address complaining about Roth, and citing primarily his characterization of Jews in *Goodbye, Columbus*. Most of the letters labeled Roth as a "dangerous, dishonest, and irresponsible" and as an outward anti-Semite (Walden 4). One reviewer in particular wrote a scathing condemnation that summarizes the general opinion against the author:

Roth never writes about Jews. ... He writes about more exciting and lucrative themes- adultery, licentiousness, infidelity, lechery. . . . Obviously, he is driven by a hatred for the Jewish people, and above all, for himself. That his books are more popular than the sermons of rabbis is to be expected. When has filth not been popular and profitable? (Walden 3)

The consensus that Roth was a self-hating Jew was not purely based on only one novella. Another story, *Defender of the Faith*, which was published as part of the *Goodbye, Columbus* collection, was heavily criticized by the American Jewish community, mainly for its depiction of a Jewish American military sergeant who resorts to conniving methods in order to receive special treatment in the military, by exploiting his Jewish heritage. This story in particular was the focus point for many students of Yeshiva University in New York during a literary symposium held in 1962. Philip Roth was invited as a guest of honor along with Ralph Ellison, and Pietro Di Donato. Several student hollered at Roth and began shouting insults at him; accusing him of anti-Semitism and invoking harm of grand proportions to the Jewish community.

Roth would later recall this incident in *The Facts*, his 1988 autobiography. One incident particularly made an impact on Roth, which occurred as he was leaving the stage that day:

I listened to the final verdict against me, as harsh a judgment as I ever hope to hear in this or any other world. I only began to shout, 'Clear away, step back - I'm getting out of here', after somebody, shaking a fist in my face began to holler, 'You were brought up on anti-Semitic literature!' 'Yes,' I hollered back, 'and what is that?' - curiously wanting to know what he meant. 'English literature!' he cried. 'English Literature is anti-Semitic literature'. (Butler, par. 12)

That day, Roth recalls that he made a promise to himself that would never depict Jews in any upcoming publication. His two succeeding novels, *Letting Go* and *When She Was Good*, were devoid of any Jewish depiction or anything that is Jew-affiliated. According to Alan Cooper, Philip Roth became convinced that any attempt at giving his characters a moral criterion would immediately render him susceptible of harboring that same quality, and that there is a risk in attributing certain thoughts and feelings to his characters (Cooper 2). Under the scrutinizing lens of the Jewish public, Philip Roth is just as self-pitying as Neil Klugman, and as exploiting of Jewishness as Grossbart, the main character in *Defender of the Faith*. For the most skeptic Jews about Roth's true affiliation, he was simply an anti-Semite, arguably the most dangerous kind; the kind that would easily have access to the Jewish resorts, acquire the confidence of Jewish intellectuals, and yet still smear the core of the Jewish existence in America, and strike at the heart of their collective consciousness.

The forced abstinence from telling Jewish stories did not remain for too long. In spite of his notoriety and the number of disaffected readers, Roth's artistic inclination ceaselessly pulled him back to the Jewish setting. Adam Kirsch reveals in an article for *The New Republic* that Roth's inspiration, which came from his own Jewishness, was his "real guilt", as it became clear that his reversion back to Jewish storytelling proved that his art was real (Kirsch, par. 24). In the sense, Roth's chief artistic motive was his Jewish upbringing, and the people that defined that. It is primarily the reason why Roth decided to venture into the same cultural domain that came to define *Goodbye, Columbus*, while still managing to explore other confrontational and contentious themes. The result is arguably Roth's most well-known novel to date, and "one of the dirtiest books ever published" according to the *New Yorker* (Cox, par. 1). The work is titled *Portnoy's Complaint*.

2. *Portnoy's Complaint* and the Art of Provocation

In *Reading Myself and Others*, Philip Roth considers the reason why *Portnoy's Complaint* was deemed to be his most scandalous work by the American literary society. He summarizes its allure and outrageousness in one sentence: "a novel in the guise of a confession was received and judged by any number of readers as a confession in the guise of a novel" (Roth 146). His fourth novel (The second one depicting Jewish characters), received the same treatment as *Goodbye, Columbus*, in the sense that readers associated Roth with his narrator and main character, in terms of the moral values, the ideology, and –mostly- the attitude towards his Jewish environment. It was no surprise that the hate campaign against Roth has increased to even more public proportions. Roth remembers the media frenzy that occurred following the publication of the book, which pitted even the most notable public figures against him.

Portnoy's Complaint brought many outstanding cultural and literary names to the forefront of discussions concerning Roth. During an appearance in the late night American program, *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson*, American best-selling author Jacqueline Susann exclaimed that although she admires Roth as a writer, she “wouldn’t want to shake his hand” (Swenson, par. 27). Susann did not offer any professional criticism regarding Roth’s novel, but her disdain towards Roth was justifiable for the American public as she was Jewish, and her position was not different from that of the majority of American Jews. Even Roth’s may-or-may-not relationship with actress Barbra Streisand was discussed, with the media publicly denouncing Streisand for her “fiery romance” with the author. Roth cites one name in particular, Leonard Lyons, who inserts Streisand’s name into his “ten-word tidbit” about Roth: “Barbra Streisand has no complaints about her dates with Philip Roth”. What would have been a condemnation for the Jewish Streisand was, as Roth insinuates, a futile attempt at constructing a defaming narrative, as Roth still insists that the two of them have never even met (Roth 145).

Literary critic Gershom Scholem is arguably the fiercest foe for Roth, and the most outspoken critic of *Portnoy's Complaint*. He famously labeled the novel as being “more harmful to Jews than *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*” (Feldman, par. 1). *The Protocols* was a book published in Russia in 1903, which became the quintessential anti-Semitic publication, due to its insinuation that Jews were plotting to take control over the entire world, through different means of exerting influence over time. The idea that engulfs *The Protocols* was that Jews are the personification of evil on the planet, and that they share an inclination to deceit, connive, and destroy any opposing power. It is arguably difficult to surpass such a description in terms of which publication smears the image of Jews more; therefore, when Scholem released his statement, it was an

echoing for what numerous other scholars and prominent Jewish figures have felt about the Roth's book upon its release.

Whether the scathingly negative reviews were based on solid grounds of criticism is debatable. However, *Portnoy's Complaint* is a rare example where a novel's premise gives the first incentive for a definitive reaction. Set primarily during a psychotherapy session, the novel is a first-person narration from the part of Alexander Portnoy, a thirty three years old Jewish-American man hailing from Newark, New Jersey, and living to New York as an adult. Portnoy recounts the most intricate details of his distinctively Jewish upbringing and his tumultuous relationship with the American values as he grows older. The novel is divided into six chapters, each representing –in a non-linear fashion- Portnoy's own reflections on different phases throughout his life.

The first chapter, titled *The Most Unforgettable Character I've Ever Met*, is Portnoy's reflection on his childhood years. A smart, overachieving boy with some latent, perverse sexual tendencies, he was raised in the hands of an overbearing mother, Sophie, and a hardworking, yet luck-ridden father with a constant struggle with bowel movement, Jack. His older sister, Hannah, was a well-behaved and docile girl during their childhood; however, their mother regarded her as a "no genius" compared to Alexander, but a hard worker nevertheless (Roth 1). Portnoy's monologue then shifts to a more explicit account of his sexual practices in the second chapter, *Whacking Off*. Portnoy's early years into adolescence are riddled with different, and unconventional ways of self-pleasure, including one that involves his own sister's undergarments, and another that involves a piece of edible liver. The third chapter, *The Jewish Blues*, finds Portnoy considering his own Jewish affiliation, and highlighting his skepticism with

Judaism, which resided in him from his much youthful years. It is a sarcasm-filled reminiscence of his cousin Heshie's torment at the hands of his father, solely for entertaining the idea of marrying a *shikse* that Heshie fell in love with.

The fourth chapter, taking up almost half of the novel, unveils the many complexities that Portnoy faced well into adulthood. *Cunt Crazy*, which is the title of the chapter, develops around Portnoy as a young man, living in New York, and embarking on a relationship with a gentile woman, named Mary Jane Reed, whom he incessantly calls "The Monkey" in his confessions. Portnoy's many vignettes about his tempestuous relationship with Reed are interwoven with other tales about his chronic self-gratification sessions during his adolescent years. The penultimate chapter, *The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life*, focuses on Alexander's streak with other gentile women, with a heavily explicit detailing of his sexual experiences with the *shikse* that followed Reed. The last chapter, *In Exile*, sees Portnoy remembering his trip to Israel, where he meets a *sabra*; a Jewish woman born there, who is a physical replication of his own mother. The woman's scornful attitude towards Alexander, purely on the grounds that he is part of the Diaspora, presents a dilemma for him. The humiliation enrages him first, and then in a Shakespearian twist of events, sexually emasculates him. As Portnoy's confessions end, Dr. Spielvogel devolves the titled *Punch Line* of the novel: "So [...]. Now vee may perhaps to begin. Yes?" (61).

As divisive as readers are about the novel's thematic elements, the general consensus among critics was that it was a radical novel. In *Philip Roth: New Perspectives on an American Author*, David Brauner asserts that the novel was perceived as being stylistically innovative. The fashioning of a non-linear narration, termed as "chunks of consciousness", as opposed to chronological sequencing of events.

The disjointed stops in his accounts are linked by none other than a natural flow of memory procession. Even for the modernist stream-of-consciousness technique, which was forwarded by the likes of Joyce and Woolfe, Portnoy's narration is still distinctive in its own right. Portnoy himself is far from the typically sympathetic protagonist. He is rather a "neurotic, self-obsessed, self-dramatizing, possibly misogynistic, arguably misanthropic, compulsive masturbator" (Braun 56). In addition to these remarkable features, the comically-charged accounts were seldom witnessed in popular literature at that time. Roth's skills as a writer are almost unanimously praised; however, the same cannot be stated on the thematic aspect of *Portnoy's Complaint*.

Nearly all of the episodes narrated by Portnoy to his doctor are permeated with Jewish overtones. Portnoy's descriptions of the Jewishness that he was raised upon, and even his own Jewishness in the present, range between mere observations, to risqué, satirical comments that may incense its discerning readers. As the reviews began surfacing following the book's publication in 1969, the latter category overwhelmed the public opinion. The novel was quickly banned from public libraries all over the United States. Even disregarding the Jewish elements did not save the book from being heavily criticized for its content. Jewish American literary critic Irving Howe, who previously praised *Goodbye, Columbus*, famously wrote in *Commentary* magazine that the "cruellest thing anyone can do with *Portnoy's Complaint* is to read it twice" (Howe, par. 29). Howe severely criticizes *Portnoy's Complaint*; however, this is not based on any anti-Jewish undertones in the novel, but based on the comedic style of the novel, the "vulgar" and pornographic content of the book (par. 43), and the futility and the flimsiness of motives expressed by the main character. Even if Howe's criticism did not include the main points that Scholem and his peers attacked the novel for, it still subverts the thematic authenticity of the novel.

In the light of the anti-Semitic charges received by the book, and its author alike, investigating the validity of these charges is a matter of significant necessity. Considering that the entire novel, with the exception of one line at the end, is a monologue delivered by Alexander Portnoy, his discourse is the only element that is intended to be used in this research. Portnoy's words, attitudes, experiences, and pronounced feelings and thoughts are set to be inspected, examined, and scrutinized in order to extract whether they are a definitive factor that would allow for the character to be labeled as a self-hating Jew or not. Considering the fact that even Portnoy himself vocalizes his acceptance to be deemed as such (Roth 59), this investigation aims to unveil the extent to which Portnoy believes that labeling, and whether he adapts into it's the established definitions of what is a "self-hating Jew".

C. Conclusion

As charges of Jewish self-hatred continue to burden the most of the Jewish American literary scene, it became important to revert back to the vogue of Jewish self-hatred in the post-war America. The influence that the aforementioned Jewish American literary figures became substantially documented, in order to understand the incessant hate campaigns that American readers often direct towards any Jewish writer, who treads across the domain of Jewish narratives. From the perspective of the American public, incorporating Jewishness into a narrative warrants an extensive treatment in terms of the motives of the author, the depiction and the message that the texts ultimately harbor.

It is the main reason why Philip Roth stood at the margins of literary respectability, and had every text, speech, and even every word scrutinized by the American public. Whatever attempt Roth made in order to censure his writing has

completely vanished by the 1960's. Inspired by the surge of liberalism that engulfed the American people at that time, and the spirit of individualism that stemmed from it, Roth subsequent novel, *Portnoy's Complaint*, managed to raise a conversation within a largely uncomfortable American community, who focused on its titular character, Alexander Portnoy, and saw him as a Jewish American insurgent, and a product of verisimilitude between him and his creator, Philip Roth, in terms of their candid, yet equivocal derision towards their Jewishness.

Alexander Portnoy's complaints are many, and his brooding over the many unfortunately farcical incidents that characterized his life spans a lengthy duration, perhaps longer than it is intended for a single therapy session. However, the core of his grievances is reduced to his Jewishness, and the internal conflicts that his Jewish part created for his American part, or vice versa. The premise of his grievances is that he is living "in the middle of a Jewish joke" (Roth 8), and it is the thematic unit that this research will be analyzing Portnoy's discourse based on.

**IV. Chapter 3: The Ethos of Alexander Portnoy: Analyzing the Character’s
Narrative Displays of Jewish Self-Hatred from Childhood and Adolescence, to
Adulthood**

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A. Introduction

Many of the central Jewish American characters in the post-war literary scene have been associated with Freudian neurosis. Tense, seemingly unhinged men who exhibit patterns of self-destructive behaviors, these characters' main outlet for displaying their psyche is through their actions, which can have unforeseen repercussions on their relationships with their milieu. However, seldom has a character been as self-aware of their neurotic behaviors and perilous outlook on life as Philip Roth's eponymous character in *Portnoy's Complaint*. Roth's main accomplishment in terms of crafting an archetypal Jewish character at that time, is the manifestation of Alexander Portnoy's conscience in action; a portrayal of a tormented psyche that resides between two distinct affiliations, wanting to assume one more than the other.

Using A wide array of self-pitying, self-deprecating and hostile words and adjectives, Alexander Portnoy is a cynical man with a penchant for reducing himself to a caricature of the Jewish *schlemiel*, attributing his current, adult persona to a set of chronicles that spanned the entirety of his life. While Alexander Portnoy's monologue is charged with a comedic, satirical tone, Jewish readers became irate with the political undertones behind the character's scornful monologue, with many criticizing Roth for inciting the political agenda against Jewish values from within the Jewish community, thus raising a number of Jewish skeptics and outright self-hating Jews. The main objective of this research is to investigate these allegations and their validity, and ultimately unveil the political stigma that engulfs many of the Jewish expatriate population, which is that of being riddled with shame and guilt in the face two different, almost contrasting worlds: a Jewish household, and an American society.

B. Deconstructing Portnoy's Discourse

Portnoy's Complaint is widely regarded as a postmodern work of fiction.

Although its fictionality is under question, the postmodern elements in the narrative are present. These elements range from the use of irony, which engulfs Alexander Portnoy's spoken attitude, to the subjectivity of narration, and the presence of the Freudian id throughout major phases in Portnoy's narrative, which ranges from auto-eroticism, to promiscuity, and overall sexual liberation that characterizes Portnoy's attitude. This is arguably why Roth wrote the novel in the form a monologue, as it demonstrates the subjectivity of the character, and calls the reliability of the narrator into question. In addition to that, the monologue serves as an exhibition of the thematic undertones that lurk beneath the words and the verbal tones of the character. The discourse served by the character expands long enough to reveal a plethora of motives. It is the reason why this research focuses on Alexander Portnoy's discourse as a main unit of analysis. Portnoy's discourse, which includes his choice of labeling of certain elements in his life, as well as the insight that his memory's workings allow us to access, serve as a solid ground for analyzing the discreet disclosures of self-hatred.

1. Childhood Years (*The Most Unforgettable Character I've Met*)

"The guilt, the fears-the terror bred into my bones! What in their world was not charged with danger, dripping with germs, fraught with peril? Oh, where was the gusto, where was the boldness and courage? Who filled these parents of mine with such a fearful sense of life?" (Roth 8). Alexander Portnoy's narrative in the first chapter of the novel largely revolves around his Jewish household during his childhood years, more specifically, his parents. The quote above is a culmination of an 8-page worth of heartfelt descriptions about his father, Jack, and more extensively, his imposing mother,

Sophie. Veritably, Portnoy begins his session with Dr. Spielvogel with his own childlike perceptions about his mother during his childhood. Portnoy recounts that he believed that his mother was an all-pervading entity, to the extent that she manages to morph herself into every teacher in school. Much of Portnoy's innocent imagination is a reflection of a palpable mental and spiritual occupation with his mother.

Portnoy's intimate confessions are riddled with Freudian nuances and suggestions. The foregrounded one being his relationship with his own mother, and the what is discernable about it when it comes to judging the way Portnoy perceives his father in retrospect. The earliest impressions that he developed around both of his parents are "her ubiquity and his constipation" (1). Although this description refers to a literal condition in his father's case (An irregular bowel movement that almost never permits him to produce stool), and a childhood imagining of his mother, this perception is an abstract form of a deep psychological phenomenon in formation. Sophie's ubiquity deeply refers to her presence in his mind and conscience; she occupies a deep and vast portion of his psyche. Although it is arguable that the pathological love of one's mother is an inherent case between the majority of males, Alexander's love of her is a combination of her perceptible behavior, and his interpretation of that behavior towards him.

According to Portnoy, his mother has always shown a keen, often tumultuous interest in him as a child. Sophie outwardly compared Hannah and Alexander together, pointing out Hannah's intellectual incompetence in comparison to her little brother's (1). As much as she seemed to favor him, he recalls instances where she ostracized him out of the apartment, telling him explicitly that she does not love or care for him anymore; something that he claims not knowing the reason of (3). Even though

Portnoy's recollection of his mother's discourse and impressions is detailed and vibrant, it is arguably there for a distinct purpose; and that for Portnoy to explain the genesis of his troubled psyche during the session. Memory is a deceiving mechanism. In Portnoy's case, it amplifies the bonds that he shared with his mother rather than his father, to an extent that renders him able to reiterate back to that bond in order to justify his later actions and behaviors as an adult.

Portnoy's relationship with his mother is far from being the classic kind of oedipal complexity. It is rather believed to be quite the opposite. The reason why Portnoy fixates on his mother during his confessions is due to the fact that he blames her for integrating a deep sense of shame within him. After all, he was "the smartest and the neatest little boy" in the history of his school (3); the classic kind of good, well-behaved boys. She should always be proud of him; instead, she shifts from moments of pure love and adoration for her son, to extreme punishment and castigation for simple, if known at all, reasons. Portnoy's subconscious level relates that extreme relationship with a behavioral turbulence which he still suffers from. In a manner, the hostility that his mother exuded proved to Portnoy that he was not worthy of the absolute love that he, being a mother's son, is naturally deserving of; therefore, it created a deep void of guilt, incompetence and overall self-hatred within him. However, this is the core foundation for a very specific type of self-hatred that is the subject of this research, which can also be reiterated back to his mother.

Portnoy's descriptions of his Sophie, whether physical or emotional, are generally distinguished with typical Jewish attributes. In his recollection of a time where she abruptly banished him from the apartment, he describes his mother as "vying with twenty other Jewish women to be the patron saint of self-sacrifice" (3). To

Portnoy, Sophie was the archetypal Jewish mother: overbearing, “nimble-tongued”, possessing every criterion of a good housewife in terms of her cooking and cleaning abilities, as well as her devotion and charitable behavior towards the only black lady in their block, which Portnoy describes as being more virtue-signaling than genuine kindness (3). In addition, he considers himself to be “the heir to her long Egyptian nose” (1). To him, Sophie is an all-Jewish mother, and as a direct result, he was an all-Jewish son; the archetypal victim to his Jewish mother’s inherent imperious attitude. As if he was burdened with the plight of the Jewish son: Having a love for his mother that is not adequately reciprocated.

On the contrary, Portnoy’s father remains as a mere footnote in his memory, and has one prominent quality attributed to him: His constipation. Portnoy describes Jack as a hardworking, loving man, who only wanted Alexander to have the future that he could not have (1). Yet Portnoy’s language does not harbor a sense of affection towards his father. He even admits that the love that his father had for him made matters harder. Portnoy’s descriptions of his father are generally condescending; making anecdotes of his father’s toilet habits and his struggles with his bowel movements. It serves to highlight a deep perception that he has about his father; that the latter was an unfortunate, meek and embarrassing man. Mockery is a way for Alexander to assert superiority over this simple-minded Jewish man, whose other misfortune, beside his chronic constipation, was that Alexander “was his wife’s favourite” (1). It is a clear Oedipal dilemma that Portnoy emits through his discourse, fractured only by the fact that his mother was not the typical oedipal mother.

Researcher Catherine Herzer reports that a section of Bruno Bettelheim’s psychoanalytic research around the novel is congruent with the idea of the reverse-

Oedipus Complex that characterizes Alexander Portnoy. Herzer quotes Bettelheim, stating that Alexander felt “an incredible deep disappointment that [Sophie] was not even more exclusively preoccupied with him” (Herzer 23). Herzer explains this in relation to the initial idea of the void of shame and self-hatred created by his mother’s conditional and sometimes insufficient, love for him. The analysis presented in this research adds that it is that same love, which Portnoy subconsciously understands as a typically Jewish mother-son relationship, that creates a disdain towards his Jewish identity. The revocation of Jewishness, which is both implied and stated by Portnoy during the session, can be attributed back to an unfulfilling love from his mother, whom he outwardly labels as “castrating”, foreshadowing a significant point in Alexander’s adult life, where he becomes impotent when is met with a woman who is a replica of his mother.

2. Adolescent Years and Sexual Awakening (*Whacking Off*)

What is stated about Portnoy’s relationship with his mother, and the implementation of the seeds of self-hatred, becomes more discernible during Portnoy’s recalling of his adolescent years. Although Portnoy’s most resonant quote: “Let’s put the id back in Yid!” (27) is not expressed until later on in *Cunt Crazy*, it can be arguably placed here to explain Portnoy’s sudden outburst of serial self-gratification acts during his adolescent years. In *Whacking Off*, Portnoy reminisces about his adolescent days as a compulsive performer of self-eroticism. He recalls an instance where he locked himself in the bathroom, where he self-gratifies (For the third time that day), as his mother knocks frantically on the door berating him for eating street food, thinking that a bowel issue was the reason he kept going to the bathroom. His mother’s pleas for an

answer turn into tears, and this is when Alexander begins to put his shameful deeds into a context.

“What have they done for me all their lives, but sacrifice? Yet that this is precisely the horrible thing is beyond my understanding- and still, Doctor! To this day!”

(6). Feelings of guilt tug at Alexander’s conscience. However, this guilt does not leave him pondering whether he should stop descending into his shameful acts or not. Instead, it can be considered as a catalyst for Alexander’s self-hatred. Humans generally tend to avoid confrontations with their bitter reality, which is why many tend to fall into abuse of different kinds of stimuli (Substance use, Alcoholism, and other kinds of addictions). In Portnoy’s case, his aberrant masturbation sessions are his stimulus, which he escapes to in order to forget that his parents, as typically and deprecatingly Jewish as they are, are good people. Portnoy is aware of how sacrificial and loving his parents are; however, he does his best to deny that, and resorts –instead- to openly deprecate them, and remind himself of their faults and shortcomings, their ultimate one being their Jewishness.

Certainly, Alexander’s compulsive masturbation can also be regarded from one of Sigmund Freud’s own explanations of the phenomenon. The seduction hypothesis asserts the role of early exposures to sexual seduction in the development of the sexual libido and, more precisely, masturbation. Freud deduced this by analyzing several cases of different children who were introduced to masturbation from an early age, and all have been –in one way or another- been seduced, and even abused, by nursemaids, governesses, or any occupying female figures in their lives (FD: SSS 7). This applies to Portnoy in terms of his relationship with his mother. Particularly as he admits during his session of the many times Sophie called him her “lover” via phone calls, and him

realizing the uncommonness of it, as he reveals that she calls him that while “her husband is listening on the other extension” of the phone (21). However, Freud’s theory is lacking in conviction, according to researcher Paul Vitz.

Vitz wrote an analysis on Freud’s seduction hypothesis, while arguing that Freud based his findings on his own personal experiences. In *Freud and the Devil: Sexual Seduction and Splitting*, Vitz quotes several of Freud’s personal letters to his colleagues, in order to justify that Freud himself was sexually seduced “or at least eroticized” as a child, particularly by his nanny (Vitz 1). The argument that Vitz establishes is that Freud builds a general conclusion out of the similarities between his case, and several of his patients’ cases; trying to find a correlation between the presence of a female caregiving entity, and the male sexual drive (3). Vitz reportedly conducted a thorough investigation on Freud’s family history. Thereby, he stipulates that Freud’s seduction theory is severely flawed. This is why this research reserves this explanation of Portnoy’s sexual habits in favor of the earlier explanation, as Sophie’s behavior towards Alexander was never explicitly seductive, it can only be extracted from the aforementioned case of her calling him her lover, and even her intentions there are ambiguous (The boundaries of intimacy between mothers and sons are generally lenient and varied).

As much as Portnoy’s sexual acts represent an escape from his mundanely Jewish life, he is simultaneously aware that they are punishable sins. Portnoy remembers discovering a lump at the end of his sexual member, and immediately jumping to the conclusion that it is a cancerous lump which he was branded as a punishment for “all of that pulling and tugging at [his] own flesh” (4). Unbeknownst to him at that time, it was only a freckle, but Alex’s quick jump to a fateful, pessimistic

conclusion is an indicator that he was expecting something of such sorts to occur to him. Portnoy knows that not only his masturbation is wrong, but the incentive which drove him to masturbation is wrong. He knows that he should not escape the reality of his life, nor resent his parents for the negative image that he tried –and continues to try- to associate them with. In the first chapter, the research included a review on how Jews are inherently unsafe from persecution. Although the referred persecution was the hostility from the outside world, it is only reasonable to include a fatal illness like cancer as a form of persecution, a persecution from God that is.

Alexander's awareness of God's wrath is enough of a reason for him to develop a disdain towards himself as a Jewish person. Being raised within a community of strict religious and ethical teachings from a very early age, Alexander became naturally wary of breaking the rules, and the consequences that come from straying away from traditions and moral codes. Even the idea of having cancer strikes him as a punishment, not as a result of health complications that can occur to anybody. He, as any other Jewish boy, was prepared from the start to spend his life dodging the missteps of disobedience in order to be safe from plight; a plight that does not seem to threaten the other *goy* boys, or any other non-Jew person, as far as Alexander knows. There is an emphasis among their community on the idea of raising a "good Jewish boy".

Alexander, as well as Ronald Nimkin and his cousin Heshe (Both of which are set to be discussed later), are examples of that image; however, Portnoy is aware of the expectations and the pressure, both from his community and the traditions of his heritage, which is why it can also be inferred that Alexander's masturbation is a form of rebellion. Understanding that requires analyzing Portnoy's confessions in the coming chapter.

3. Conflicts with Jewish Ideals (*The Jewish Blues*)

Much of Portnoy's stance towards his Jewishness has been ambiguous for the first two chapters; however, the third chapter sees him unveil the extent of his disdain towards his heritage. He shifts his talk towards his father, the *shikse* that almost led his parents towards divorce, and his own dysmorphia, which –conveniently enough– affected his sexual organ. Portnoy's fixation with the latter goes beyond the functional practices, it also includes the physical appearance. From the lump problem, which led him to believe that he was stricken with cancer, to the significant difference between his testicles' sizes, Portnoy's emphasis on the problems of his genitals arguably occupies an unnecessarily amount of development throughout his monologues. However, it is important to perceive the genitals within the Jewish community, and how it can affect the core identity of Jewish males.

Early in the chapter, Portnoy recounts his first noticing of his testicles, and how one did not descend properly in comparison to the other. Although he does not offer any introspection on the emotional ramifications that this problem brought him, he refers to it again in the final chapter, where he begins citing his successive plights which led to him becoming sexually impotent (57). For males, the topic of genitals –with all of their constituents– has a resounding impact in their psyche, as it is usually referenced when the issue of masculinity is brought to the discussion. For Jewish males, the impact is amplified and extended to include whether they are embraced as part of the Jewish fellowship or not. In the book of Deuteronomy, it is asserted that “He that is crushed or maimed in his private parts shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord” (Kirsch, par. 6). A Jewish man who had harm inflicted upon his genitals is not a Jew, nor should he be associated with Jews.

By association, it can be reasoned that Portnoy is indeed precarious about his testicles being deformed, because he is afraid that it means his Jewish identity is also distorted. It is an unconventional relationship that this deduction hints to; that beneath all of the belittling and the disregarding of Jewish traditions, lays a solid appreciation that Portnoy holds for being part of the Jewish congregation. An appreciation that essentially derives from the fact that Jewishness is an integral part of Portnoy, and that he is well aware that he cannot disassociate himself from it, and more importantly, his life would be extremely challenging to live without it. This is where all indications of self-hatred can appear to be contrived, as this demonstrates that he harbors a deep gratitude to be a Jewish individual; a part of a community. Nevertheless, it is the same association that can be regarded as a fuel for his self-hatred. Being a part of a group that is generally despised and ridiculed, while also acknowledging that he can never free himself from the shackles of Jewishness, is bound to amplify his self-hatred to profound levels. In addition to that, a third theory is bound to be examined, one that employs a personal element of Portnoy's life.

One of the many attributes that Portnoy associates with his mother is the word "castrating" (25). The incident where his mother threatened to castrate him is mentioned more than once. Suitably, one of the times in which it is mentioned is in the same passage where he also mentions his deformed testicles (57). To him, it is not so much the fear of being a pariah in a Jewish community that he associates with his testicles, but the condemnation of Sophie. Internally, he believes that his disparate testicles are a result of her constant berating for the simplest of matters. As if she cast a curse upon him, the curse of being self-conscious of the only thing that he is set to use in order to liberate himself from his Jewish identity. Alexander's genitals were his weapon of rebellion against any Jewish ideals that his parents imbued in him, whether it was by

ferocious masturbation, or leading a life of promiscuity with the *shikse* later throughout adulthood, and Sophie impaired that weapon. It is enough of a motive for his anger, frustration, and self-hatred to be elevated to higher status.

A ramification that ensues as a result of that frustration is the increasing hostility upon his unsuspecting father. Portnoy unleashes a hurdle of adjectives and descriptions relating to his father during his monologue, calling him “kindly, anxious, uncomprehending, constipated” (9). It is challenging to observe to which extent Portnoy dislikes his father, as he acknowledges his kind and sacrificial nature; nonetheless, what comes after is what explains the source of frustration: the fact that his father is well-endowed, and him having a genital deformity. It is conceivable that Jack having well-formed genitals only means –from Alexander’s perspective- that he is worthy of being considered as a Jew; that he deserves to be in the company of Sophie and this tight-knit community of Jews, while Alexander does not merit being there. This frustration that Alexander holds is not towards everything that his father is, but particularly towards his father being an embraced Jew, while simultaneously transmitting that rage towards the community of Jews that ousted him.

A pivotal moment in Portnoy’s speech about his genealogy comes when he remembers his cousin Heshie, and the attempt at breaking the Jewish rules that led to a significant moment of aggression. Heshie, naturalized as Harold, was his cousin from his father’s side. A star athlete in Weequahic High school in Newark, where Portnoy went, Heshie was a handsome young man who was idolized by Alexander from a very early age. However, when his father, Uncle Hymie, found out that Heshie was planning to marry a *shikse* named Alice, his frustration towards the young man turned from him appointing a rabbi to come and talk him out of marrying her, to resorting to violence.

The fights that ensued between Uncle Hymie and his son were a show of pure brutality. At the end, Uncle Hymie bribed Alice into ending her romance with Heshie, who was drafted to war in 1943, where he died. Portnoy states that even though Heshie's death was tragic to the family, and his parents in particular, their only consolation was the fact that "at least he didn't leave [them] with a shikse wife. At least he didn't leave [them] with goyische children" (13).

It is a tragic outlook on how Portnoy's ripe consciousness at that time registered the cruelty of Jews around him. His favorite cousin was deprived of happiness because his parents did not want to taint the ethnic essence of the household. It is enough for Portnoy to recognize the fallacy within his Jewish community: These people desire to be assimilated, curse the anti-Semitism of the *goyim*, and yet rebuke the mere idea of one of them wanting pursue a life with an innocent *shikse*. Portnoy does not demonstrate the ideological modification that this incident brought him; however, there was no other reason for him to tell the story other than to justify his hatred for the Jewish community. How they treated Heshie, and any other Jewish skeptic, was hypocritical by the least standards. This is where the first seeds of self-hatred really started to expose themselves to Portnoy, as he started to recognize the general scheme of events, and that he does not want to take part of it.

This is what appears to be the case when he remembers blurting out the words "I don't have a religion" and "I don't believe in God" (13) outwardly in front of his family. Portnoy targeted Judaism because it has been the core ethical platform which gathers the Jews that he knows and dislikes, but what he really meant was that he does not believe in the Jewish values; that he does not identify with anything that is believed by the other Jews. Portnoy, a fourteen year-old at that time, defied his father by

announcing his secularism in *Rosh Hashannah*, the Jewish New Year. Thus far, never has Portnoy's self-hatred been more pronounced than it was at that moment. His father's outrage over that declaration does not appear to faze him, although he recalls the scattered, passionate speech that his father performed at that moment. It is perhaps one of the many moments of rebellion and disillusionment that often come with teenage angst, but Portnoy has seen enough of the misbeliefs of his people that it became a quintessential revelation to him. It was arguably the moment that Portnoy knew that he hated being a Jew in America.

The hatred towards Jews appears to have slowly developed into a Jewish self-hatred after reflecting on a conversation he had with his sister. As he continues to denounce Jews in front of her, she plainly tells him: "But you are a Jew [...] You are a Jewish boy, more than you know, and all you're doing is making yourself miserable, all you're doing is hollering into the wind". She further reminds him that if he had been born in Europe instead of America, he would have been "Dead. Gassed, or shot, or incinerated, or butchered, or buried alive" (17). Although he continues to argue with the idea, her words must have had a profound impact within him, as he, by the end of the chapter, says that while his sister began to cry for all of those Jewish lives who have met their fate in Europe, "I shed mine only for myself. Or so I think" (17). Portnoy has come in terms with the fact that he inseparable from his Jewishness, and that he is as much of a Jew as his father, his mother, and Uncle Hymie. It is the beginning of a successive streak of rebellious practices that Portnoy embarks on later throughout adulthood.

4. New York, the *Shiksés*, and the Inescapable Pull of Shame (*Cunt Crazy* & *The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life*)

“Did I mention that when I was fifteen I took it out of my pants and whacked off on the 107 bus from New York?” (18). *Portnoy’s Complaint’s* lengthiest chapter begins with a carnal statement that is expressed with an ostentatious flare. *Cunt Crazy* finds Alexander Portnoy delivering a series of vignettes from the age of fifteen, till his adult years, which are mostly sexually charged and constitute more-or-less a saga of Portnoy’s new life as a persona non-grata, who was once an unwitting Jew. In a way, the tender age of fifteen was the beginning of adulthood for Portnoy, having gone through an existential crisis before, finding out who he is, and how he does not want to be who he is. It was then the time to start a systematic, spiritual uprising against his Jewishness. The first line is indicative enough of the fact that he no longer harbors any shame in his sexual habits, and is even aware of the true motives behind it. As Portnoy’s chronicles unfold, it becomes understandable that his emancipation from Jewishness extends to different other habits.

“That taboo so easily and simply broken, confidence may have been given to the whole slimy, suicidal Dionysian side of my nature” (17). Portnoy indulges in a variety of day-to-day customs and practices that defy the Jewish teachings that he was raised upon, from eating lobster (A forbidden food item in Judaism) with Morty for dinner one night, to being so stimulated by the act of eating the lobster, that the idea of masturbating in a public place becomes easily appealing to him. It is a chain reaction where one instance of rebellion becomes a fuel for the next one. Portnoy admits that he has given up to other side of his Jewishness: a wild, untamed, free, and typically

American spirit. It is these moments of escapism that allow him to forget about his lineage, and immerse himself completely in the *goyim* world.

Portnoy does not gratify himself to just about any female, only the *shikse*, and he does so because “a *shikse* has never been in our house”, just as much as lobsters were never cooked in their kitchen. However, he recalls the instant his father may or may not have broken the Jewish ethical protocol, by bringing a gentile coworker to their house. Jack told them that he brought her “for a real Jewish meal”. Portnoy states that it never occurred to him –for twenty five years- to question why his father brought a *shikse* to their home that night. One theory that Portnoy thinks about is that he felt obliged to educate any *goy* who was nearby on the lives of Jews, hence the consistent mentioning of the word “Jew” at the table that night. The other one was that his father wanted to confront their mother about his unforgivable sin head-on; that he had been unfaithful to Sophie with that coworker. Yet, when the screaming match between Jack and Sophie ensues that night, Portnoy hides behind his father, “behind the culprit himself” (19). The act alone represents a shift of perception that suddenly engulfed young Alexander.

Portnoy had previously slandered and cursed his father for being a meek, obedient, and dutiful Jew. Nevertheless, what Jack did that night was far from the dutiful image. Portnoy knew what happened between him and the *shikse*, or at least what the fight that occurred later implied in terms of what Jack did. For one night, Jack was not the anxious, uncomprehending, constipated father, but rather one that broke traditions, and defied the rules of a clan that imposed a plethora of senseless rules upon its people. That night, Alexander felt a deep connection and understanding towards his father. For a moment, they were alike in their tendency to rebel against the anti-*goyim* regulations that so many Jews treated as religion. Perhaps it is the only time that his

father showed a certain amount of assertion above Sophie. Portnoy would not have been a self-hating, spiteful Jew if his perceptions about both of his parents were revered, and he even alludes to that idea in the early bits of his monologue, citing that there was no one to “fill the patriarchal vacuum” in the household (9).

In this bitterly nostalgic trip down the memory lane, Portnoy remembers Ronald Nimkin; the boy whose faithful Jewishness took his life away. A pride of his neighborhood due to being a prodigal pianist, Ronald hung himself one day using the shower head. The last thing he wrote was a note to his mother that read: “Mrs. Blumenthal called. Please bring your mah-jongg rules to the game tonight” (26). The way Alexander sees Ronald is that they were both victims of Jewish expectations; both were groomed to be “the good Jewish boy”, except that Ronald did not take solace in an anti-Jewish refuge the same way Alex did with his masturbation habit. Portnoy surmises that Ronald never found a manner by which he can retaliate against the Jewish oppression; that he spent his whole young life assuming the character that his clan wanted him to assume. The pressures of assuming that life mounted to the extent that death was the only guaranteed freedom from them, and so Ronald committed suicide. There is a certain pride in the way Portnoy tells his doctor this story in particular. The condescending tone by which he describes Ronald is evocative of how Portnoy pities Ronald for never resorting to sexual exploration, *shikse* fixation or mockery of parents the same way Portnoy did.

His memory shifts from Ronald to all of what Ronald had abandoned which would impress his folks and all Jewish folks: a successful, noble job, although not the same that that thirty year old Alexander has. By his early thirties, Alexander had been promoted by the Mayor to be Assistant Commissioner for The City of New York

Commission on Human Opportunity, an impressive title considering that Portnoy uses it as an instrument to retaliate against Sophie constantly scolding him for still not being married, nor fathering any children. Portnoy explains his parents' criticism of him by declaring that "they can't get over what a success and a genius" he is (23). Envy was a quality that Portnoy associated exclusively to his father, but now he insinuates that both of his parents envy him; therefore, they strive to find the smallest imperfections in his new life and hound him on them. Adult Alexander arguably feels differently about his mother than when he was as a child, whatever Oedipal sentiments that guided his behavior then, is substituted now with an affection that he receives now purely from none other than gentile women.

As Portnoy's memories become more and more recent, it is evident that the New York' Alexander Portnoy is merely a fervent, scandalous, and extreme version of Newark's Alexander Portnoy. Moving to New York achieved a level of physical displacement that finally matched his already-established mental one. It allowed him to openly embrace an American side of his identity that he spent years polishing in order to counter his Jewish one, which is why it is only fitting that his job is as holy and pure as any job that would suite a *goyim*: a civil servant; "conducting an investigation of unlawful discriminatory practices in the building trades in New York- racial discrimination!" (24). It is conventional for members of privileged groups to occupy positions that would allow them to assume the heroic character, by voicing the concerns of minority groups to the public and the superiors. Although there is no denying the possible noble intentions behind it, it also gives them a sense of permanent superiority; to feel that minorities will forever be indebted to them for the great deeds that they conducted in their favor. Most importantly however, is that it permanently excludes

them from that group, as they are superior and disaffected by the plight that subdues these minorities.

It would not be implausible to theorize that this was the reason that Portnoy chose this job, out of every possible opportunity that was laid before him due to his excellent academic credentials. Fighting for the disenfranchised spiritually excludes him from that category that his parents, sister, and Newark friends belong to. It is a palpable sense of vanity that engulfs him when conducting his investigations into racial discrimination, as it is the closest that he can ever achieve to being the archetypal white savior, and as far as he can distance himself from the comic, pious, and woeful Jewish schlemiel. This theory permits the diagnosis of Portnoy as someone with an inferiority complex, incited by two decades of shame from being within a marginalized group, and finally compensating for that by observing other people's shame, and attempting to alleviate it while simultaneously luxuriating in it. It is also the same virtue signaling that his mother often demonstrated when it comes to her treatment towards the black lady in their apartment building. It could be that Portnoy understands his mother's motives more than she understood them herself at that time.

One token of Jewishness that remained intact with Portnoy while away from Newark is his strong fixation with the *shikse*. The forbidden fruit of the Jewish tradition, which both his father and his cousin Heshie fell for, gentile women were at the free disposal of Portnoy, now that he is no longer bound by the watchful eyes of Newark. Taking comfort in Bubbles Girardi, Sally Maulsby, and many other gentiles was Portnoy's own hedonist paradise. However, no other woman made him simultaneously indulge, reflect, and grieve himself as much as the so-called "Monkey" did. Being with Mary Jane Reed drove Portnoy to his most extreme rebellious nature. His self-

gratification was replaced by the pleasures that the Monkey consistently performed upon him, without a moment of hesitation from her part. He pities her for being at his disposal and for the love and dedication that she shows him, and he is reminded by his own shortcomings whenever he is in her presence: “at long last the figure who had dwelled these many years at the heart of her dreams (so it turned out), a man who would be good to a wife and to children . . . a Jew. And what a Jew!” (35).

His own sense of insufficiency and low self-esteem leads him to treat Mary Jane in a callous manner. He berates her openly for her spelling errors and dense remarks, and leaves her in a suicidal state in a hotel in Athens, after telling her that he is not willing to marry her, despite knowing that it was her intention all along (3). This can be explained in terms of the *goyim* world that Portnoy thrust himself into, yet remains beyond his reach. It could be that Portnoy is still alerted by his Jewish inferior status every time The Monkey states something that threatens him with a *goy* future: a *goy* wife, *goy* children, and a *goy* Alexander Portnoy. He is not so much different from Heshie’s parents, or any other Jew for that matter, in thinking that anything, even death, is more merciful than an intermarriage with *goyim* ideals. Thus, what Portnoy is running away from here is not the commitment to the American side; it is the thought of completely abandoning his Jewishness. Here, Portnoy is at his most conflicted state; neither fully American, nor fully Jewish, yet not wanting to commit to either side, though his stance is much more clarified when he reaches his final complaint.

5. The Self-hating, Jewish *Schlemiel* (*In Exile*)

Thus far, the behavior displayed by Portnoy supports the theory that he does his best to evade any reminder of his Jewishness. This is why it is only appropriate that he reaches the ultimate event in his life, the phase where he experiences a form of

degradation that is even more prevalent than the one he experienced when he was with The Monkey (40). Portnoy embarks on a trip to Israel, where “the Jewish people first came into being” (54). It is possible to accept that Portnoy going to Israel should be more appropriately termed “going back”, a homecoming of sorts. He returns to the place where all conflict residing within him can be finally dismantled, and he can finally be a fully Jewish man, exclusively Jewish. However, he discovers that he has never felt more alienated in his life than when he landed in Israel. Claudia Gorg suggests that Jews living outside of Israel are typically labeled as exiles, but for Portnoy, “the place where everything and everyone is Jewish” was, in fact, his exile (2). What Portnoy recites from this critical point in his life serves as a demonstration for that idea.

It occurs when Portnoy manages to seduce a female soldier, a *sabra* named Naomi, into engaging in sexual relations with him; yet, he discovers that he is unable to perform with her. It is an astounding revelation for Portnoy, who managed to copulate with a string of American *shikse* with an accomplishing attitude, but when he is faced with the “Jewish Pumpkin, the Heroine, that hardy, red-headed, freckled, ideological hunk of a girl” (57), he is sexually impotent. In addition to that humiliation, Naomi appears to understand Alexander Portnoy better than he ever wished to acknowledge understanding himself, noting his tendency to make himself “the butt of [his] own peculiar sense of humor” and making sure that he understood that he was “the epitome of what was most shameful in the culture of the Diaspora”:

Those centuries and centuries of homelessness had produced just such disagreeable men as myself-frightened, defensive, self-deprecating, unmanned and corrupted by life in the entire world. It was Diaspora Jews just like myself who had gone by the millions to the gas chambers

without ever raising a hand against their persecutors, who did not know enough to defend their lives with their blood. The Diaspora! The very word made her furious. (59)

When he dismisses her observation, she finally utters the words in his direction: “a self-hating Jew”. It should be an overwhelming fact for Portnoy to finally receive this labeling from someone else, after smothering it for years beneath layers of mockery and deprecation for his own people, but it is not. Bernard Avishai, a professor at the University of Jerusalem, and a longtime friend of Philip Roth, conducted several analytical endeavors on this novel in particular. Contrary to Irving Howe, Gershom Scholem, and any other critic who absorbed the negativity in Roth’s attitude via Alexander Portnoy, Avishai sees that Roth and Portnoy are as different as reality and fiction should be, considering that “the joke was meant to be especially on Portnoy, because Portnoy was no more than a young man” whose frustration, angst, and sexual hunger was typical of any individual. Portnoy’s self-hatred in particular, was an announcement of the coming of American Jews (Avishai, par. 12), a group of individuals whose self-perceptions were as different from those of Israeli Jews as any *goyim* group, and they are not inclined to be in any way associated with Jews.

Alexander Portnoy’s self-hatred was acknowledged all along before. It was not this peculiar experience that resided within Portnoy and Portnoy alone. Therefore, when Naomi accuses him of being a self-hating Jew, he immediately declares: “Ah, but Naomi, maybe that's the best kind” (59). Portnoy does not deny his self-hatred, he merely considers it as a prerogative for this new group of Jews, the exiles, the Diaspora, by which they can assert their moral disassociation from Israeli Jews and the textbook rituals of Jewish people. Perhaps Alexander Portnoy’s complaint does not differ much

from that of any individual who was burdened with feelings of abnormality in their host environments from an early age. This is why this analysis culminates in the final deduction that Alexander Portnoy is, indeed, a self-hating Jew. However, this self-hatred is not an outrageous political commentary on Jewish values, as Roth's critics have been so quick to deduce, but one attribute of a man whose sense of individualism clashed with the outdated collectivism of his parents. What Roth painted in *Portnoy's Complaint* are the trials of a young man who is considered to be one of the early trial subjects of the 1960's American liberalism, with the newfound sense of individuality allowing the newer generations at that time to express their own moral apparatus, and voice skepticism with that of their heritage. Alexander Portnoy is a self-deprecating, sardonic, sex-crazed, self-hating, Jewish man, and that is the worst thing that he can be, but not everything that he is.

C. Conclusion

The analysis of a character that is as intricate as Alexander Portnoy proves to be a vast field for multiple approaches to be employed. His objectification of women as well as his reliance on them to achieve self-fulfillment calls for a feminist analytical approach, whilst his frustration with being part of a group that is inherently inferior in the social hierarchy system requires a Marxist analysis. However, this research employs the psychoanalytic approach at large, which is appropriate for a narration that manifests in the form of a monologue delivered during a therapeutic session with a psychiatrist. An uninterrupted monologue is possibly the most apt format for a novel about a man whose self-perceptions are as meddled as his own recollection of past events, and is rendered more evident by the fact that the psychiatrist's only utterance throughout the entire encounter happens to be a verbal initiation of the actual session, as if to say that

Portnoy's sermon is merely an introduction to himself that may or may not be fit to reality, as all peoples' introductions of themselves are. Portnoy has been an unreliable narrator of his own story all along.

In spite of the comedic effect that Alexander Portnoy's complaints are set to, they are feasibly resonant with an entire body of Jews in the United States. American Jews have instilled a culture of their own, one that is based on self-doubt, and neurotic behavior. This is an issue that is rarely spoken of when it comes to discussing the Diaspora communities; that complete assimilation rarely, if ever at all, works. No matter how far an individual's attempts at self-emancipation extend, they will always be reminded of who they are, and the heritage that will perpetually bind them within a certain social category. However, what Alexander Portnoy, and Philip Roth by extension, offers is the benefit of the doubt with the Judeo beliefs. Roth and other American Jews who are deemed to be self-hating increased the possibility for Jews to adopt a more critical stance against the Jewish community. Perhaps what Portnoy and Roth strived to declare through their discursive endeavors, both written and spoken, is that being self-critical is their prerogative as American Jews, a part of their culture. Forever being reminded by a Jewishness that they did not assume, rightfully earns them the right to complain about it.

V. General Conclusion

The idea of Jewish guilt is so entrenched within the Jewish community, that it is considered to be more of a genetic attribute than an arbitrary psychological syndrome. It is found that the most outspoken opponents against the Jewish ideals are Jews themselves. However, the definition of a self-hating Jew encompasses both who acknowledge their participation in the Jewish lifestyle, and the Jews who choose to disassociate themselves completely with anything Jewish. If any morality can be extracted from Theodor Lessing's journey of self-discovery, it is that the self-hating Jew always runs the risk of being the embodiment of the Jewishness that they hate. It is the irony that most self-hating Jews are rendered subjects of; the more they distance themselves from the prototypical image of the Jewish individual, the harder they are thrust back into their Jewish origins by the public. Philip Roth sustained allegations of Jewish self-hatred, despite never explicitly voicing an antagonistic stance against his Jewish heritage; yet, the issue with Philip Roth is proven to be much more complicated than that of other self-hating personalities.

While previous authors of Jewish origins made their best attempts at capturing the chagrin of Jewish immigration to foreign lands, Roth is nonchalant about the tragic aspect of it. His characters are far off from the trope that appealed to Jewish sympathizers. They speak English as a first language, and belong to neither a synagogue nor any other Jewish convention in America. These characters are stranded in an oblivious affiliation; Jews in a gentile world, and gentiles in a Jewish world. Therefore, their opinions regarding Judeo conventions do not necessarily stem from the same self-hatred those previous Jewish generations had. For Roth and his characters, the Jewish experience and the American one are often one and the same, with enough interceptions

that provide them with doubt about their identity and heritage, which eventually constitutes the bulk of their stories. There is an identity crisis at the heart of every story written by Philip Roth, and arguably Roth's story himself, yet none of the characters that he wrote over the course of nearly half a century represented that inner conflict with that much heart, thoughtfulness, and raunchiness as Alexander Portnoy.

Alexander Portnoy is Philip Roth's most salient achievement in terms of depicting the role of ethnical lineage in developing psychological deviances. Portnoy reiterates back to his Jewish upbringing, and his unapologetically Jewish parents, in order to validate the reasoning behind many of his patterns of social conduct. The reader witnesses Alexander's candid accounts of a meddling, imposing mother, a subdued and debased father, and a plethora of caricatures of women whom he uses for nothing but to achieve self-fulfillment and spiritual release from the chains of shame. The sum of analytical passages throughout the third chapter agrees with the general consensus that Philip Roth, in *Portnoy's Complaint*, crafted an insightful portrait of a self-hating Jew. However, based on Bernard Avishai's previous observation, Alexander Portnoy does not serve to represent the modern Jewish man, but rather the modern American Jew who is ambivalent about his true affiliation and identity.

This revelation is enough to raise a conversation about which field of study should characters like Alexander Portnoy be discussed and analyzed within. Many of the psychological manifestations inhibited by American Jews resemble those of postcolonial people, as the formers are labeled as "exiles" after all. Relations of shared subjugation, being regarded as the "Other" within a largely Caucasian society, and feelings of displacement bind colonial subjects and Jewish exiles within the same field of studies. The more exiled Jews are perceived as such, the less likely there would be

any need for terms such as “the self-hating Jew”. Accordingly, a self-hating Jew, much like Alexander Portnoy, is simply someone who perceives the Jewish values from the perspective of an outsider to that collective consciousness, therefore allowing for a much more critical stance of the traditions, customs and religious practices that Jews embrace. Alexander Portnoy and Philip Roth are two outlanders from a generation that stands witness to a heritage that they do not identify with; hence, they seethe, vilify and complain.

In a review of Zuckerman Unbound, Harold Bloom states that “Roth indeed is a Jewish writer in a sense that Saul Bellows and Bernard Malamud are not, and do not care to be... Roth seems prophetic in the biblical tradition” (Weinberger 1). Roth’s vulgar assessment of Jews, as well as his crass language, can be regarded as innovation from his part, indicated by the notoriety and the intrigue that he quickly garnered. In *The Ghost Writer*, he quotes Kafka’s saying that “We should only read those books that bite and sting us”. Alexander Portnoy bit and stung as many Jewish critics as possible; yet, he is perceived as an icon of Jews who see their Jewishness more of an annexed attribute, than a developed identity with its own history and story. However, a recurring theme that persisted even with this relatively new breed is the myth of Jewish guilt. American Jews are still characterized by a crippling sense of guilt that is more treated as a comedic punch than a field of investigation and inquiry, and it is arguably for their benefit. If readers can learn anything from Alexander Portnoy, it is that dwelling in self-hatred only leads to a fragmentation of morals, an irrevocably negative outlook on society, a bitterness that leaves its traces in every human relationship the self-hating individual attempts, and an inclination to complain, and complain some more, in spite of the futility of complaints in the face of a deeply troubled psyche.

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ملخص

منذ بداية القرن العشرين، امتد الادب اليهودي الامريكي بثبات الى حد اوسع ليشمل جمهورا ابعد من الجالية اليهودية. في هذا الصدد، يبرز الادب اليهودي الامريكي التجربة اليهودية الامريكية، و يلحق صراع العيش في امريكا بصعوبة التعبير عن الهوية اليهودية. ان ابرز مشكلة تواجه المجتمع اليهودي في امريكا هي انتشار معاداة السامية. لكن هنالك افة اخرى تسربت بسرية داخل المجتمع اليهودي، وهي العداوة النفسية، واللفظية غالبا، التي يوجهونها نحو انفسهم، وبين انفسهم. كانت عبارة "اليهودي الكاره لذاته"، والتي دخلت المعجم اللغوي في منتصف القرن العشرين، موضوعا لم يتطرق اليه المثقفون اليهود عن وعي، وهذا على الرغم من مظاهرها البارزة بين العديد من اليهود. في عام 1969، ارغم نشر رواية فيليب روث "امتعاض بورتنوي" بعض النقاد ان يتدارسوا افة الكراهية للذات اليهودية، و ان يقدروا قيمتها كمشكلة تميل بقرب نحو معاداة السامية، بل و اكثر خطرا منها. كانت رواية فيليب روث جدلية لكثير من الاسباب، ولكن الموقف و الخسف اللذان ظهرا خلال مجرى الوعي للشخصية الرئيسية، الكساندر بورتنوي، اذ هلا المجتمع اليهودي الامريكي و اكدا سمعة روث كخصم لليهود. باستخدام منهج انتقائي، والذي يدمج النهج التحليلي الفرويدي بالنهج التفكيكي، يضع هذا البحث خطاب ألكساندر بورتنوي، وهو الشخصية الرئيسية في الرواية، تحت عدسة التحليل والتحقيق، من أجل الكشف عن مؤشرات الكراهية اليهودية الذاتية، وفي نهاية المطاف الكشف عن حالة خاصة باليهود الأميركيين، والشتات اليهودي بشكل عام.

الكلمات المفتاحية: معاداة السامية، نهج تفكيكي، نهج تحليلي فرويدي، التجربة اليهودية الامريكية، الادب اليهودي الامريكي، الشتات اليهودي، الكراهية للذات اليهودية، اليهودي الكاره لذاته.