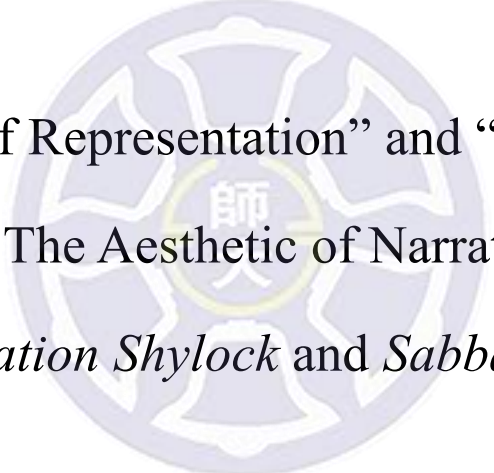


國立臺灣師範大學英語學系
碩 士 論 文
Master's Thesis
Department of English
National Taiwan Normal University

「再現的蜃影」與「敘事的深淵」：論菲力普·
羅斯《夏洛克行動》與《安息日劇場》中之敘
事美學



“A Mirage of Representation” and “An Abyss of
Narratives”: The Aesthetic of Narrative in Philip
Roth’s *Operation Shylock* and *Sabbath’s Theater*

指導教授：路愷宜

Advisor: Dr. Ioana, Luca

研 究 生：張天德

中華民國 108 年 11 月

November 2019

摘要

本論文由菲力普·羅斯早期的小說《波特尼的訴怨》所引起的爭論出發，剖析為何在 1967 年此書出版時在美國大眾與猶太美國裔讀者中會引起一片譁然。第一章處理菲力普·羅斯如何在不斷變異的自傳書寫與敘事想像中成為一位「麻煩的小說家」。由於自傳文學與虛構敘事之對立在羅斯的作品中成為諧擬、諷刺、甚至刻意操弄的議題，本論文第二章處理自傳文學理論與其後現代變異。援引勒熱訥（Philippe Lejeune）的《自傳契約》與奧爾尼（James Olney）的〈自傳的文化時刻〉，本論文強調反身性書寫在自傳文學文類中的重要性，藉此在不完全驅逐作者的前提下將「自傳文學」視為開放且無主的文本。然而「無主」的「自傳」如何可能？本論文第二章後半段探討德希達（Jacques Derrida）於 1980 年出版的〈文類的律法〉，並以洪席耶（Jacques Rancière）對文學類別的看法補述德希達對於文類的全然解構。洪席耶提出的「再現的蜃影」一方面保留文學的無用之用，另一方面亦強調文學改變世界的政治潛能。第三章以洪席耶的理論閱讀《夏洛克行動》，並強調羅斯挑戰、甚至超越自傳文學 / 文學類別的書寫方式如何開啟洪席耶所謂的「美學制閩」。第四章則延續美學與敘事的討論主軸，並導入布斯（Wayne Booth）在《小說修辭學》中提出的「預設作者」（the implied author）之概念，試圖洞悉在《安息日劇場》中的敘事者與作家菲力普·羅斯之間的關係。本論文末援引布魯納（Jerome Bruner）生命書寫與心理學理論，一方面點出《安息日劇場》中的「預設作者」與羅斯的微妙相似，另一方面凸顯在文本之外，羅斯的書寫過程如何成為一段小說家的「生命書寫」。本文試圖剖析羅斯如何將此段「生命敘述」與《安息日劇場》內的敘事軸線達成文本內 / 外之連結。文末將羅斯放置在美國文學的歷史脈絡之中，以前三章呈現的自傳文學、敘事想像、與生命書寫三個層面來理解一介小說大師的敘事美學。

關鍵字：菲力普·羅斯、賈克·洪席耶、自傳文學、敘事美學

Abstract

The first chapter of my thesis traces the early reception of the Jewish American writer, Philip Roth. Taking into consideration the controversies following the publication of *Portnoy's Complaint* in 1967, the first chapter examines the polemics about Roth's writings with an emphasis on how Roth navigates between different literary genres and narrative styles. In fact, Roth is known for incorporating different ontological levels and the interplay between them in his work. The interplay between different ontological levels are often manifested through Roth's apposition of autobiographical and fictional elements. In view of the important role the autobiographical element plays in Roth's oeuvre, the second chapter reviews scholarly debates in autobiography studies. Taking Philippe Lejeune's "The Autobiographical Pact" (1975) as a starting point, the second section traces the evolution of autobiographical studies and highlights the "post-structural turn" that Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson observe in the transition from "autobiography" to "autobiographical narratives" in life writing studies. The "post-structural turn" in life writing studies leads me to discuss the debate between Jacques Derrida and Jacques Rancière about whether literary genres should exist or not. The third chapter starts with a short overview of the idea of the "mirage of representation." My understanding of the term enables me to read *Operation Shylock: A Confession* (1993) beyond the dichotomy of autobiography and fiction. My reading will highlight "the aesthetic regime of art" in *Operation Shylock* and demonstrate how such aesthetics mediate between the written world and the material world. Chapter four continues the discussion on the aesthetics of narrative strategy and brings in Wayne Booth's idea of "the

implied author” to help elucidate my reading of *Sabbath's Theater* (1995) as an agglomeration of literary genres and styles. The concluding chapter focuses on how Roth’s narrative strategies in the two works discussed above engender a more emancipated understanding of both personal identity and the aesthetic of narratives.

Keywords: Philip Roth, Jacques Rancière, autobiographical fiction, narrative aesthetic



Acknowledgements

I have to express my foremost gratitude toward and sincere respect for my supervisor, Professor Ioana, Luca, who patiently listened to my sermonic rants about the two novels and still managed to navigate me out of the labyrinth I conjured up during the process of completing this thesis. My gratitude also goes to Professor Sun-Chieh, Liang, and Professor John Michael Corrigan, whose participation in my thesis defense means a lot for me and whose comments and criticisms I sincerely treasure. Without doubt, I am also in serious debt to the late Philip Roth (1933-2018), whose works I hope will remain “still and still moving.” Their power to excite, to challenge, and to touch upon the subtlest stimulus on the readers’ end are themselves exemplary of Roth’s genius in narrative and language. Lastly, I would like to thank L. and C., without which the completion of this thesis will never be possible.

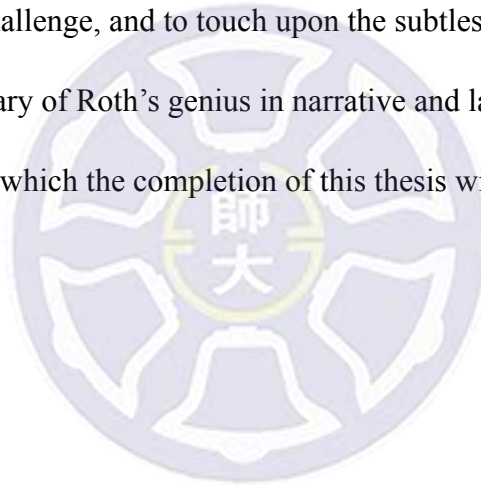


Table of Contents

Chapter One: Early Reception of Philip Roth	1
Chapter Two: Roth, Autobiography, and the Post-Structural Turn	9
Chapter Three: <i>Operation Shylock</i>: A “Mirage of Representation”	27
Chapter Four: <i>Sabbath’s Theater</i>: An Abyss of Narratives	49
Conclusion	73
Works Cited	75



I: Early Reception of Philip Roth

Scholarship positioned at the crossroad of Philip Roth Studies, narratology, and life writing can perhaps be categorized into two major groups: first, the more conventional studies tend to view Roth's early writings as "betrayals" that humiliate the Jewish-American identity which the author himself is famously known for. No sooner than *Portnoy's Complaint* was published in 1967 that attacks against Roth began to rise. Terms such as "unfocused hostility, self-hatred," "provoking anti-Semitism," "scandal," "betrayal," or what Irving Howe—who passionately praised Roth's *Goodbye Columbus* in 1959—bashed as "a vulgar book" are attached to the novel (129). In his "Philip Roth Reconsidered," Irvin Howe suggested that *Portnoy* appears to him as such a distasteful book that it would be cruel for readers to read it twice: "The talent that went into *Portnoy's Complaint* and portions of *Goodbye, Columbus* is real enough, but it has been put to the service of a creative vision deeply marred by vulgarity" (Howe 1972). Read carefully, Howe's remark is not just a one-sided lashing out at the novel: although he vehemently attacked the book, he still managed to point out "the talent" that went in it. Namely, the effect of Roth's narrative excites the reader and make them laugh: "it [*Portnoy's*] demands little more from the reader than a nightclub performer demands ... were it not for the solemn ecstasies the book has elicited" (1972). Howe's reluctant attitude towards *Portnoy* comes in line with other critics, though their dissatisfaction for the book may come from different perspectives.

While Howe detested the book for its sheer vulgarity—that the whole work is dedicated to exciting a reduced and flat emotion, in this case Alex Portnoy's desire for promiscuity—Jewish readers accused Roth of "exploiting Jewish-American culture in order to gain

acceptance as an ‘American’ author” (Parrish 1). If Howe’s leans more toward an aesthetic attack, the criticism made by Roth’s Jewish readers is perhaps more of a political one for it attacks not “how the work is written” but “what is written in the work.” In other words, the reception of *Portnoy* in the U.S. is often filled with detest because most readers of Jewish descent tend to see the book as the giving-in of Jewish tradition to American culture. For many Jewish/Jewish-American audiences, Roth’s portrait of the coming of age of an adolescent Jew sells out his own ethnic community, an exchange for literary reputation and fame at the cost of mocking Jewish tradition. What drew their anger was how Roth undermines Jewish ‘essence’ in his own favor to become a popular writer in the American market. Either via the more aesthetical approach or taking the more political perspective, it is quite clear that Roth’s writings have drawn heated controversies and discussions ever since the late 1960s.

As Timothy Parrish succinctly observes, the dissent filed against Roth were targeted to excavate the sense of tension that permeates Roth’s writings: “The tension between holding to a historically grounded identity yet suspecting that identity is something that can only be known through its reinvention has animated Roth’s works” (2). Whether it is the tension between artistic creation or vulgarity, between the “historically grounded identity” or the self-reinvention of identity/identities, Roth’s writings are explicitly characterized by these stylistic “splits” within the texts. These splits that permeate Roth’s texts, while marked as artistic or political assaults in more early studies, are nevertheless what highlight Roth’s narrative genius in a more postmodern context.¹

The turn from reading Roth’s works as mouthpiece for his Jewish-American identity

¹ For discussions on Roth and postmodern aesthetics, see “Roth, Literary Influence, and Postmodernism” by Derek Parker Royal, pp. 25-27.

to treating Roth's works as postmodern "texts" that are independent from a stable origin of reference triggered even more rigorous debates in the public domain. These mixed discussions, and reviews seem to have prodded Roth to address the intertwined relationship between his writing and his life in one of his interviews with his fellow colleague, Maria McCarthy, in 1987. When *Shop Talk: A Writer and his Colleagues and their Work* was published (2001), Roth had already been established as a widely-read, yet also widely criticized, writer and was therefore more willing to speak about his own works in public. Explaining to Maria McCarthy the reason why he comically portrays Zuckerman as a "non-believing Jew" when he goes to Judea near the end of *The Counterlife*, Roth suggests that he is less concerned about political correctness than aesthetic freedom for he is far more a novelist than a Jew (118). This split between aesthetic autonomy (being a novelist) and political responsibility (representing the Jews in writing) is precisely what excites the debates that seem to pivot around large portions of Roth's works. While political responsibility demands Roth to portray Jewish-Americans in accordance with a certain "decorum," Roth's rebellious protagonists, Alex Portnoy, Nathan Zuckerman, Mickey Sabbath, or his alter ego, the novelist "Philip Roth," just to name a few, serve as aesthetic flights from the fixture of political responsibility by deliberately and constantly reinventing the protagonists' political, ethnic, or religious identity.²

In his 1974 interview with Walter Mauro, Roth provided a possible answer to the question of politics versus aesthetics: "whatever serious acts of rebelliousness I may have engaged in as a novelist have been directed far more at my own imagination's system of

² For example, see pp. 53-55 of "Roth and the Holocaust" in which Michael Rothberg argues that Roth, far from marginalizing the presence of the Shoah, actually addresses it through distancing it from the life of a Jewish-American. This approach to the genocide naturally spurred critical reactions against Roth since many believed his style to be satirizing identity politics.

constraints and habits of expression than at the powers that vie for control in the world” (12). If Roth’s works are seen as rebellions against a certain “system of constraints” or “habits of expression,” it is less the political practicality than the aesthetic novelty that entices Roth. However, if it is Roth’s genuine belief that his work is shy of political power, why is the interview titled “*Writing and the Power That Be*” (emphasis mine) when it was collected as the opening chapter of *Reading Myself and Others*? What exactly is this “power” that Roth sees as distinctly and essentially related to the act of writing?

Hana Wirth-Nesher’s essay “Roth’s Autobiographical Writings” offers a balancing perspective regarding the tension between art and politics in Roth’s writings. Starting also from the controversy surrounding the publication of *Portnoy’s Complaint*, Wirth-Nesher suggests that the reason to such turmoil boils down to the readers’ presupposed insistence on reading Roth’s work as autobiographical rather than fictional: “Jewish-American readers have insisted on reading his satires as autobiographical works that betray his community by exposing Jewish warts to gentile eyes” (159). By reading *Portnoy* as neither wholly personal nor completely untrue, Wirth-Nesher brings into discussion the idea of oscillating between autobiographical writing and fictional imagination into the discussion on *Portnoy’s Complaint*. Wirth-Nesher’s approach is in its most basic sense a deconstructive one in the sense that the oscillation between autobiography and fiction can be seen as the deconstruction of literary genres, a rather radical argument forwarded by Jacques Derrida in 1980.³ According to Derrida, the establishment of any sorts of genre is but a limitation forced upon artistic autonomy since genre implicates norm, order, and a sense of purity (55-56). The

³ Such sliding in between genres is not peculiar to *Portnoy*. Roth’s eulogy for his father, *Patrimony: A True Story*, as well does not fit closely with the genre of memoir or fiction. For more philosophical discussions on the topic, see “The Law of Genre” by Derrida, Translated by Avital Ronell, in *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 55-81.

autonomy Derrida refers to as the gist of the aesthetic is exactly what Wirth-Nesher elaborates on in her assessment of Roth's writing. Reluctant to categorize Roth's writing as wholly autobiographical or fictional, Wirth-Nesher's approach takes for granted neither the presupposed categorization of "autobiography" versus "fiction" nor the restrictive nature of genre elaborated in Derrida's essay. Such a post-structural stance leads Wirth-Nesher beyond the discussions of Roth's intermingling of different genres to another post-structural trait prevalent in Roth's writings. Focusing on how the metafictional aspect in Roth's works juggles up and brings together both the formative style and thematic content of Roth's writings, Wirth-Nesher engages in an analytic approach that aims to deconstruct "the act of writing" itself: "the fierce repudiation of his work by many Jewish readers would be transformed into a major theme in his writing—the role of Jewish self-definition and allegiance in the dialogue between art and society, aesthetics and morality, the facts and their literary representation" (162).

Transformed from public vehemence to comical *lashon horas*⁴, "the fierce repudiation" that Roth's Jewish readers filed against the novelist appears as metafictional devices that highlight the aesthetics of narrative once Roth incorporates his literary rendition and representation of those repudiations into the text. Scenes in which Roth himself, as the narrator, reads something derogatory about himself are not uncommon metafictional scenes in Roth works. Ironically mentioning the "acclaimed" *Portnoy*, Roth writes in near the end of *Patrimony* (1991) where he is having a conversation with his dying father: "We were still

⁴ Jewish gossip, often derogatory and defamatory, is however tethered to the core of Jewish tradition on rhetoric and speech. In fact, "loshon hora" has been mentioned sparingly in Roth's texts. For further studies on the topic, see Safer, Elain B. *Mocking the Age: The Later Novels of Philip Roth*, 2006, which provides extremely informative readings of how humor and the act of speech, speaking, forms part of Roth's Jewish identity in his later novels.

laughing when my father said, ‘Maybe it’ll be a best-seller like *Portnoy*,’ to which Roth ironically replies: “Of course, A pornographic best-seller about the Holocaust” (221). This section then ended with Roth asking his father the rhetorical question: “Who knows? Maybe he’s just writing a book” (222). Such self-reflexive writing that presents the author speaking about his own works or exposes the scenes in which the author of the book foregrounds his act of writing the book, is one of the many characteristic styles of meta-fiction. In Patricia Waugh’s definition, meta-fiction refers to a “narrative form that is highly self-reflexive ... a mode of writing wherein texts are aware of and refer to themselves as constructed narratives—and as such, are usually considered an expression of postmodern writing” (26). In this light, the inclusion of “the fierce repudiation” in Roth’s later works not only stands out as metafictional practice, but also lays bare the fact that both Roth’s narrative and the criticism against that narrative are constructed texts. Missing verb in the second part of the parallelism.

Revealing that the author’s narrative is but a construction, Roth’s metafictional practices in his later works problematize the identity of “the author” and underline the contention between the author’s personae and the other narrative voices that occupy the text. On the one hand, by transforming the critiques from his Jewish readers into *loshon-horo* in his works, Roth manages to create comical yet self-satirical, or perhaps even self-critical situations in which the metafictional writer dramatizes the tension between the opinion of “Philip Roth” and those who criticize him. Roth’s metafictional devices, on the other hand, serve as indicators that undermine the omnipresence of the author by levelling the voice of the narrator with other voices. Scenes in which “Philip Roth” the writer and the imposter Roth fiercely scramble for the right to speech are aplenty in *Operation Shylock*. These literal

scrambles often tangle around the question of authenticity; that is, whose version of the narrative is true. In fact, the constant pressing question of “whose story is true?” arches over most of Roth’s texts. As Elaine B. Safer observes:

In his later novels Roth devotes increasing attention to the comic handling of fictional systems themselves. No longer is it enough to present readers with a novel; they now have to be involved in the creative process itself. Roth thus adopts an eminently postmodern metafictional mode ... Roth toys and experiments with narrators’ comic consciousness of their own artful skills. [I]n *American Pastoral* Zuckerman tells readers that he is obtaining the information for his narration from those involved in it—the Swede’s brother and the Swede himself. But then he acknowledges that his own imagination has also contributed so that the Swede of his narrative differs from the Swede “in the flesh.” But whether he has created “an outright fantastical creature, lacking entirely the unique substantiality of the real thing...well, who knows? Who can know?” (Safer 9)

Foregrounding the existence of multiple narrative personas and exposing that the text becomes a battlefield of not merely different but veraciously combating voices, Roth’s metafictional practices problematize the idea of authenticity as well as its relation to the authoritative voice. By complicating the relation between authorship, writing, and narrative, Roth indulges in his literary enterprise where different versions of a story or contrasting narratives may be “reconciled,” or at least may “contribute together” in Roth’s signature “sheer playfulness and deadly seriousness” (Safer 1).

The sheer playfulness can be demonstrated in various typical Rothian scenes where Roth fictionalizes or dramatizes events to make them ludicrous, ridiculous, or in most cases, even absurd. The deadly seriousness reflects in the prominent theme of memory in Roth’s works. To a certain extent, life-writing for Roth is memory-writing, especially memory writing that expands into delusions, imagination, and perhaps eventually, fiction. As Safer observes, demonstrations of such “sheer playfulness and deadly seriousness” through the

impact of “excessive memory” form major parts of *Sabbath’s Theater*. One need only revisit the passage in which Mickey Sabbath mourns over his recently dead lover, Drenka (*Sabbath’s Theater*, 77-80) to grasp how Roth’s narrative merges seriousness and playfulness. In the passage, the presence of excessive memory appears explicitly, the playfulness of the narrative tone almost overwhelming, and all the while the “deadly seriousness” cries out frantically. All these combinations of intense contradictory emotions are woven in Roth’s narratives which dangle in between different genres, styles, and tones of speech.

The different literary genres Roth often engages with include memoir, autobiography, fiction, confession, and even “a true story,” while the traits of Roth’s styles range from the Joycean free-flowing prose in *Sabbath’s Theater* to the almost dry dialogues between Philip and Herman Roth in *Patrimony* which at the same time carry formidable emotion.⁵ Addressing the overall body of his work, Roth writes in the preface of *Reading Myself and Others* that “together these pieces reveal to me a continuing preoccupation with the relationship between the written and the unwritten world” (xiii). Looking at his writing career from hindsight, Roth’s has followed a recurring thematic exploration of how the written world and the lived world affect, condition, and infiltrate one another. Following Roth’s own reflection on his works as oscillations between lived life and written texts, the following section will dismantle the relationship between Roth’s attitude toward writing and the post-structural turn in life-writing studies which came in bloom during the 60s.

⁵ As Pritchard H. Williams writes in his review of the book on *The New York Time*: “This stream of thought is of the sort Joyce invented for Leopold Bloom, and Sabbath often makes us think of that resourceful monologist” (1995).

II. Roth, Autobiography, and the Post-Structural Turn

One of the most obvious manifestations of envisioning how the written and the lived worlds infiltrate one another can be seen in the literary genre of autobiography, given that autobiography as a particular style of writing is concerned with “transforming life ... into a text” (James Olney 5). If in the previous chapter I have mentioned how literary genres and styles begin to “split” in Roth’s mischievous narratives, this section will further focus on the most intense thematic “split” in Roth’s writings—that is, the ambiguous split between autobiography and fiction. Roth’s writings are often marked by his deliberate endeavor in writing on the border of autobiography and fiction. This stylistic trait of Roth is best personified by the character Nathan Zuckerman as well as “Philip Roth” the narrator when the text is written in the first-person point of view. There is unfortunately no decisive verdict on whether Roth’s works may be read as autobiographical or fictional since the novelist’s death in 2018. Even if Roth had been alive, whatever he might have said on his work would become what Gérard Genette terms “paratexts,” which according to Genette are “more than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a threshold” (*Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* 1-2). A threshold implies that something has to come, a threshold is a welcoming gesture, a liminal pathway through which interpretations of the text may flourish. Especially after Roland Barthes’ famous declaration of “The Death of the Author” in 1967, the author of the text thereafter acquires partial, but never definitive authority over the text.

Still, documentation recorded before Roth’s passing away may trigger new ways to revisit the novelist’s works and perhaps even provide readers a peek into the bewildering, mischievous, cunning narratives of Roth through the artist’s own words. In a documentary

produced by the *BBC* in which Roth himself participated after he had announced that he would retire from writing in 2012,⁶ the novelist—whether feeling finally able to comment on his own work after retiring or attempting to leave the position as a spotlight novelist with a solid declaration—speaks quite explicitly to Alan Yentob about how he manages to maintain the precarious balance between fiction and autobiography: “fiction must be based on reality, but we also don’t want it to be too decorous” (*Literary Documentaries*, 2004).

It is precisely this desire to distance himself from a certain “decorum” that characterizes Roth’s writings as postmodern fictions—fictions constantly striving to overthrow the linguistic system from which they stem. Postmodern fictions, a term that immediately implies multiple facades façades and facets, is dissected etymologically in Brian McHale’s now canonical study, *Postmodernist Fiction*. As McHale puts it:

POSTmodernISM

This ISM (to begin at the end) does double duty. It announces that the referent here is not merely a chronological division but an organized system—a poetics, in fact—while at the same time properly identifying ... Postmodernism is not post modern, whatever that might mean, but post modernism; it does not come after the present (a solecism), but after the modernist movement. Thus, the term postmodernism if we take it literally enough, a letter, signifies a Poetics, which is the successor or possibly a reaction against, the poetics of early twentieth century modernism, and not some hypothetical writing of the future. (McHale 5)

Roth’s capricious narratives that swerve between facts and fiction stand out as precisely the “the successor or possibly a reaction against” the conventional narrative that either borders on the realistic biography or fiction. The ventriloquist behind Roth’s narratives revels in

⁶ To prevent confusion, the 2012 interview in which Roth declares his retirement from the literary scene is not identical with the *BBC* interview mentioned here. Both interviews are among the most authentic materials of attempting to capture, present, or even reveal Roth’s thoughts. The 2012 interview was conducted by *Le Monde* with Josyane Savigneau to whom Roth confesses: “I don’t wish to be a slave any longer to the stringent exigencies of literature.” The interviewer of the 2014 interview conducted by *BBC* was Alan Yentob, to whom Roth declares: “this is my last appearance on television, my absolutely last appearance on any stage anywhere.”

complicating the plot with plural voices to excite, on the end of the reader, bewilderment, and confusion. A reader of Roth's "autobiographical-fiction" will inevitably be met with the disturbing question about which "version" of the story spoken by which speaker is the more authentic, or at least the more believable one. Roth's postmodern narratives designed to stimulate bewilderment and sometimes even absurdity, in this sense, challenge radically the more conventional principles of auto-fiction writing. Roth's most evident disruption between the boundary of autobiography and fiction may be demonstrated by his violation of the "autobiographical pact," a decisive term proposed by Philippe Lejeune in 1975.

Lejeune's "autobiographical pact" examines existing critical assessments on autobiographical writings at the time and establishes a set of qualifiers through which autobiographical writings can be assessed. Lejeune's definition of the pact is based on Georges Gusdorf's revelation of the "modern autobiographical consciousness and self-consciousness" in 1956 (Olney, 8).⁷ Following Gusdorf's emphasis on the contractual nature of autobiographical writings, Lejeune evolved Gusdorf's thoughts on the autobiographical genre into a systematic analysis that he calls "the autobiographical pact." Lejeune's pact lays out a certain condition according to which the reader may "distinguish some sort of order within a mass of published texts, whose common subject is that they recount someone's life" (34). The study is not only a definitive work on autobiographical texts, but also a close examination of the diversity, differences, and possibilities within this body of work. One of the most significant contributions established by Lejeune's study is the qualifiers by which autobiographical texts can be distinguished from other texts. Such characteristics include the

⁷ Gusdorf's argument is quite straightforward: he suggests that autobiography should not be taken as record of a specific period during reality but a revelation of "the effort of a creator to give the meaning of his own mythic tale" (30). For more precise understanding of what Olney terms as "the autobiographical consciousness and self-consciousness," see "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography" by Georges Gusdorf.

“form of language,” whether it is written in prosaic or written as narrative, “the subject treated,” whether it is an individual life worth remembering or a representative of a collective history that has hitherto scarcely been recorded, and more importantly, “the situation of the author” and “the position of the narrator” (5). The third and the fourth point, according to Lejeune, are essential in distinguishing autobiographical texts from others: “the situation of the author” requires that the author and the narrator are identical, and “the position of the narrator” demands the narrator to be identical with the principal character and that the narrative is told retrospectively (5).

Despite laying out the preliminaries of judging autobiography, Lejeune also suggests that certain principles may appear unequally restrictive (4). Take Roth’s memoir/record/confession, *Patrimony*, for example; the narrative is indeed constructed in retrospection but the narrator and the main character do not seem to coincide. While it is indeed “Philip Roth” who is behind the narrative, indisputably signing on the cover and narrative arc of the book, the main character of the text is Herman Roth rather than Philip Roth. From the first sentence to the last page of the book, Herman Roth’s figure infiltrates the narrator’s voice; it is as if Herman Roth’s figurative speech impedes the narrator’s recount of how he faced his father’s last days as the narrator is constantly reminded by his father that “You must not forget anything” (*Patrimony*, 238). As Lejeune observes, there are numerous possibilities for textual exceptions and transgressions in autobiography, each following yet distancing itself from the four primers mentioned above; these literary transgressions, according to Lejeune, include memoir, biography, personal novel, journal/diary, and epistolary texts (4-5).

Given the multifarious metamorphosis that autobiographical texts are potentially

likely to undergo, the endeavor to distinguish a text as autobiographical by judging “from the inside” of the text seems in vain (Lejeune 5). Namely, the verisimilitude of the events described in a text between lived reality is contingent on whether the text itself is autobiographical or not. Rather, the autobiographical perspective comes from the “outside” of the text: “If autobiography is defined by something outside the text, it is not on this side, by an unverifiable resemblance to a real person, but on the other side, by the type of reading it engenders, the credence it exudes, and the qualities that are manifested in the critical response to autobiographies” (30). As Lejeune concludes, the autobiographical stance seems less concerned with the verisimilitude between what is inscribed in the text and what lays concrete in reality than the “historically variable contractual effect” on which autobiographical discourses prosper.

Detaching autobiographical texts from the ultimate referent of reality, Lejeune also points to the significance of acknowledging the contractual nature of autobiographical texts. This new direction in autobiographical studies leads to a perspective pervading the 80s and 90s. This new perspective on the field sees autobiography as less a recount of reality than a receptive strategy, a mode of reading that indicates the critical distance between life and writing. Writing almost at the same time with Lejeune, James Olney also highlights the self-reflexive quality that distinctly marks texts as autobiographical. For Olney, a text is autobiographical not because its content renders it inherently so, but because reading that particular text as autobiography enriches its meanings and informs its contexts. In his “Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction,” Olney positions the generic significance of autobiography as the backdrop against which numerous texts have been defined:

this special quality of autobiography—that is, that autobiography renders in a particular direct and faithful way the experience and vision of a people, which is the same experience and same vision lying behind and informing all the literature of that people—is one of the reasons why autobiography has lately become such a popular, even fashionable, study in the academic world where traditional ways of organizing literature by period or school have tended to give way to a different sort of organization (or disorganization). (8)

Drawing connections between the cultural exposure and the “disorganizing” potential of autobiographical texts, Olney addresses the autobiographical boom during the 80s and 90s through a critical lens. For Olney, the term “autobiography” is but a descriptive anchor, a “defining center” providing only for a convenient way to refer to “a literature that is very rich and highly various, heterogeneous in its composition—a literature so diverse that it cries out for some defining center” (8). For scholars that are yet to enter the field of autobiography or life narrative, Olney’s claim marks the post-structural turn in autobiographical studies. This post-structural turn in autobiography studies opens up the term “autobiography” to the extent that the autobiographical genre is judged precisely and distinctively by its diverse mode of writing instead of its verisimilitude to realistic figures.

For Olney, there should be no “inside” or “outside” in autobiographical texts since they are always already written at the border between the writer/reader, text/life, present/past, and even between the autobiographical act itself and the theoretical approach to it. This is why Olney believes that autobiography appears inseparable from open-endedness:

The open-endedness of autobiography that requires readers to continue the experience into their own lives thus becomes a virtue for recent critics rather than the defect that the New Critics would have felt to be ... If the student of autobiography is, as I believe, a vicarious autobiographer, he does not want, indeed cannot allow, the work to be whole, complete, finished, and closed. (13-14)

Olney’s conclusion to the essay suggests that all autobiographical “works” should be treated

as “texts” since the former presupposes the central referent of the author while “texts” simply stand on their own ground. Moreover, if we accept Olney’s point of view, the autobiographical text has more to do with the reader instead of the autobiographer since the continuation of the autobiographer’s experience into the reader’s own life is the parameters of autobiographical texts.

Such evolvment in autobiography studies summons up immediately in one’s mind Roland Barthes famous essay, “From Work to Text.” Written four years after his groundbreaking essay “The Death of the Author,” the 1971 text demonstrates more clearly how “the author” plays different roles in two varying perspective on literature: “It is not that the Author may not ‘come back’ in the Text, in his text, but he then does so as a ‘guest.’ If he is a novelist, he is inscribed in the novel like one of his characters ... his life is no longer the origin of his fictions but a fiction contributing to his work” (161). As a guest, the author, or in our case the autobiographer, appears irrelevant to the final verdict—if there is one—of his “work” should it be read as a “text” that knows no master.

Such an “epistemological slide” from work to text renders autobiographical texts orphans that are deprived of a “Father.” Such excursive quality in texts is laid bare in its potential to subvert “a final vindication”: “What constitutes the Text ... is its subversive force in respect of the old classifications” (Barthes 157). If we follow Barthes’ argument, it seems that “autobiography” no longer refers necessarily to what Lejeune defined in his pact—that the narrator of autobiography should be identical with the author. Moreover, the void that Barthes carved out by removing the authoritative voice resonates the “open-endedness” so valued by Olney in his discussion. This void welcomes the reader to take on a transgressive act that involves the crossing from the dimension of reality to that of “literality.” As Olney

aply puts it, “the open-endedness of autobiography that requires readers to continue the experience into their own lives thus becomes a virtue” (13). It is nevertheless more than virtue when autobiographical texts enter the living experience of the reader, or even when autobiographical texts enter the living experience of the autobiographer him/herself.

For more political critics such as Hannah Arendt or Jacques Rancière, this close connection between writing and the actual living experience exist as a “political force.” For Rancière particularly, the political force of literature depends on its power to “open up the world” for the reader. To point out a crack into “an ontological equality that is truer, more profound than the equality demanded by the poor and the workers” (*The Flesh of Words*, 158). For Rancière, the continuation of the autobiographer’s life on the reader’s end changes, or more radically, revolutionizes, the reading subject. This political dimension in literature that hovers over the field of autobiography was opened up by James Olney’s discussion on the topic, as we have demonstrated. This political dimension, or rather, this political force of autobiography will later be further expanded by Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith when they trace the evolvement from “autobiography” to “autobiographical narratives.”

Theories and literary works written after the 80s have been suffused with the spirit of emancipation and revolution, and so was the field of autobiography studies. One of the most important work is by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson who markedly trace the turn from “autobiography” to “autobiographical discourse” and then further to “autobiographical narratives” (*Reading*, 3-4). For Smith and Watson, the transition from “autobiography” to “autobiographical discourse” revises “earlier studies” on autobiography.⁸ The term

⁸ For some example for earlier studies of autobiography, see works by Georges Gusdorf and Joachim Weintraub. The purpose of brining up this topic is not to attack earlier studies on autobiography. On the contrast, pointing out the evolution of how autobiography(ies) have been assessed is to reinforce the significance of those earlier writers who pioneered the field. This thesis explores, for example, George Misch’s thought on

“autobiographical discourse” removes from “autobiography” the “politics of exclusion” which, as Smith and Watson argue, “privileges the autonomous individual and the universalizing life story as the definitive achievement of life writing” (3). From seeing autobiography as a literary genre to reading it as a form of discourse, the evolution of critical assessment on the subject underwent turbulent evolutions since “the sovereign self” has been challenged by more post-modern criticisms (Smith and Watson 3-4). As Smith and Watson succinctly put, early critical assessments of autobiography tend to be complicit with the politics of exclusion which renders “the representative life of the great man” the only appropriate autobiographical subject (196-97).

The potential defect in the assessment of autobiography can be slightly detected in Georg Misch’s work. As one of the writers who pioneered the field of autobiography studies, Misch wrote in his definitive *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity* (1950) that “among the special relationships in life it is chiefly the self-assertion of the political will and the relation of the author to his work and to the public that show themselves to be normative in the history of autobiography” (14). Markedly influenced by the Hegelian tradition of *Geistesgeschichte* (“the spirit of the historical moment”), Misch’s work displays “the politics of exclusion” in the sense that it excludes “other kinds of life narrative practiced for much of human history—letters, diaries, journals, memoirs, and other autobiographical modes of everyday and private life” (Smith and Watson 196). For Misch, autobiography should serve the function of “self-assertion of the political will” and illuminate “the relation of the author to his work and to the public.” Other forms of autobiographical narratives are considered inappropriate not only for their narrative mode, but also for the subject under scrutiny.

autobiography and his intellectual background of the Hegelian *Geistesgeschichte*.

Marking certain texts as inappropriate while establishing certain “canons” in autobiography, Misch’s work, if read partly as autobiography, ironically reveals itself as the “public presence” of Misch in his historical period. In other words, Misch’s work, if read as a “text,” presents exactly the intellectual context out of which Misch comes up with this particular argument in *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity*.

The underlying ideology of Misch’s work, according to Smith and Watson, implies “an important historical use ... of ‘autobiography’ ... as a master narrative of Western rationality, progress, and superiority” (194). Here one can sense the stratifying meanings engendered by different approaches to autobiographical narratives: one can read “autobiographically” criticisms of autobiographical narrative to identify the cultural/historical undercurrents that run through the arguments presented; when autobiography appears, through re-reading and critical revisions, as less a literary genre than an interpretive strategy, the epistemological slide from “work” to “text” manifests itself in the sense that the *autobiographical narratives* detach themselves from the referential origin and exclusive politics which pervades the term *autobiography*.

If the subjects of autobiographical narrative are no longer reserved for “the representatives of history,” can we say that autobiographical narratives have hence been rid of all limitations? For James Olney as well as for other scholars who attended the topic after the 1960s, the polemics of autobiographical narrative lies not part and parcel in the autobiographical subject but perhaps more significantly in the “*autos*,” or in Olney’s words, “the ‘I’ that coming awake to its own being shapes and determines the nature of the autobiography and in so doing half discovers, half creates itself” (12). For Olney, the ‘I,’ who through the act of writing starts to recognize and make sense of him/herself points toward a

correlation between the writing subject 'I' and the act of writing *per se* (12). In fact, the shift of focus from the *bios* to *autos* in autobiographical studies not only draws significant attention to the act of writing but also implicates a split in the genre. For refocusing on the *autos* implies that “autobiography” can be split into “the I who is writing” and “the life that is being written down.”

The autobiographer emerges as a subject for scrutiny since the separation of “the ‘I who is writing’” from “the life that is been written” shifted scholars’ attention from the written content to the writing subject of autobiographical texts. Of course, it would appear rather naïve to insist that the ‘I’ and the writing are two wholly separate subjects. As Olney points out, “neither the *autos* nor the *bios* is there in the beginning, a completed entity, a defined, known self or a history to be had for the taking” (12). The shift of attention from *bios* to *autos* cannot therefore be taken as the same as the refocusing on the act of writing from the ‘I.’ Rather, it is the reaffirmation of autobiography as literature, a solid recognition of autobiography as a form of layered text that involves conjugations between the subject written, the act of writing—half-creating and half-discovering—and the ‘I’ who is doing the writing. It is critical that the relationship between the subject written and “the ‘I’ who is doing the writing” remains elusive: the narration and the narrating act, the personae that the autobiographical narratives attempts to summon and the personae that digests memory and makes it speak through the act of writing. The separation and connection between these two dimensions in autobiography studies came into attention after the post-structural turn renders the subject written—that is, the text—different vis-à-vis the ‘I’ who is writing.

This space—carved out from the narrative by the act of writing—lies in between the writing subject and the textual version of him/herself. This is precisely where the aesthetic

approach relates to autobiographical studies.⁹ This elusive space between the written and writing subject marks the aesthetic dimension of autobiographical texts for it involves the discussion the matter of style, voice, and the use of language. It is also this elusive space that marks the significance of narratology in autobiographical studies, for narratology, to a certain extent, can be seen as the transitive bridge between the ‘I’ and the text. Together the threefold dynamic between the text, the ‘I,’ and ‘the I’s narratology’ sparks a reading that sees the text as a translated ‘I’ no more than seeing the ‘I’ being a translated text. Or perhaps, as post-structuralism reveals, both the ‘I’ and the ‘text’ are but translations?

James Olney’s reply to this paradoxical question, though full of playfulness and sarcasm, reveals a possible route out of the logical mire between the ‘I’ and the text: “as French critics tell us ... the text takes on a life of its own, and the self that was not really in existence in the beginning is in the end merely a matter of text and has nothing whatever to do with an authorizing author. The self, then, is a fiction and so is life” (12). It is perhaps too convenient to cast the shadow of “fiction” over the multifarious complexities between translating life to text and vice versa, but Olney’s observation still presents an important notion regarding the understanding of the dynamic between the ‘I’ and the ‘text.’ The “self”—which belongs to the writing ‘I’ but only manifested through the act of writing in the ‘text’—in this case rises as the hinge of Olney’s answer to the paradox of life and fiction. If life and text are both fiction for the post-structuralists, the “self” stands out as the ground on which fiction and life compliment one another. Essentially, for Olney, the study of autobiography is a study of how “self” comes into consciousness, or in other words, how the

⁹ In other words, while texts like *Patrimony* and *The Facts*—which are thought to be Roth’s more autobiographical works—demonstrate that writing can be a powerful way to record and remember the past, texts like *Operation Shylock* demonstrates that writing can disrupt the stability of facts through fictive narrative strategies.

“self” manifests itself through writing: “this is the crux of the matter, the heart of the explanation for the special appeal of autobiography to students of literature in recent times: it is a fascination with the self and its profound, its endless mysteries and, accompanying that fascination, and anxiety about the self, an anxiety about the dimness and the vulnerability of that entity that no one has ever seen or touched or tasted” (12). Interestingly, this sense of “self” only comes into being after the text is bereft of its author.

We seem to be led to an understanding of autobiography as a literature of the self, which includes not only the productive part where the ‘I’ spells out the self but also the act of interpreting on the receptive end, as I have demonstrated in my “autobiographical reading” of Misch’s critical assessment on autobiography. Functioning both on the productive and receptive end of literature, autobiography seems to take on a more flexible generic guise when infused with perspectives from post-structuralism. Naturally, as anything beginning with “post” may suggest, the post-structuralist turn in autobiographical studies suggests that the field of autobiographical studies has hence moved beyond a fixed “structure,” that a previously presupposed “structure” appears obsolete after the boom of critical attention to autobiographical studies after the 60s. This ‘structure,’ as we have discussed above, may refer to various limitations that attempt to contain autobiography in vicarious ways: for instance, the urge for an *appropriate* subject to occupy the front stage of autobiographical narratives or the insistence on the “representational regime of art” which results in the generic expectation of an autobiographical text to converge with realistic representation of history.¹⁰

¹⁰ The term “representational regime of art” will be discussed in the following sections. At this stage I understand the idea as a restrictive force that demands writing to certain conformity. For Rancière’s original exposition on the term, see *The Politics of Aesthetics*, pp. 19-24.

We have now discussed matters regarding the content and the act of writing involved in autobiographical narratives. However, there is still a more general structure resisting emancipation that lies behind our affirmation of autobiography as literature. This is the structure of literary genres. The function of literary genres is both illuminating and restrictive: the use of genre is illuminating in the sense that a genre summons up prefiguration in the reader's mind even before they read the text. Namely, since the text fits the literary genre of "autobiography," one will be informed beforehand by one's knowledge of the author and therefore conjures up a presumption of the text before actually reading the text. Informative as they are, such generic codes are nevertheless also restrictive because they may function as shackles that keep the text from speaking for itself. A demonstration of the restrictive aspect of generic codes can be found in Smith and Watson's discussion on how "autobiography" becomes "autobiographical narratives." Circumventing the "politics of exclusion" in "autobiography," "autobiographical narratives" incorporates life discourses from minority groups into the genre. Such incorporation of previously unaccepted or ignored voices, while revising old definitive codes, reveals the restrictive nature of literary genres. Isn't this the start of the new paragraph, since it opens a new conceptual argument? While certain critics value the illuminative aspect over the restrictive side, post-structural French critics were fast to discover the fact that such dichotomy between illumination and restriction originates from the tension between reality and fiction. One of the most radical arguments that discusses how the dichotomy of "reality versus fiction" is established as a "structure" is Derrida's "The Law of Genre," which appears five years after Lejeune's publication of "Le Pacte Autobiographique."

The main argument of Derrida's essay is that not merely the autobiographical genre, but

the general idea of “literary genre” as a whole, *cannot* exist. Derrida starts his essay by asking his readers to muse upon a scenario in which one utters the sentence “Genres are not to be mixed” twice. For Derrida, the proposition itself, namely, the two series of utterances we recognize as ‘sentences,’ can be subject to at least two modes of interpretation. The first mode of interpretation refers to “a fragmentary utterance, the sense of a practice, an act or event” (56). Treating the proposition as a contingent utterance, the first mode of interpretation suggests that the subject of speech is merely descriptive of a prescriptive claim: that genres, any out of all the genres in all kind of practices, are not to be mixed. The second mode of interpretation sees the utterance as “a sharp order.” Once grasped as an “order,” the presence of an authoritative immediately emerges out of this proposition, therefore stretching the proposition from a contingent utterance to a “law,” a mechanism which implicates the establishment of restrictions.

According to Derrida, “as soon as the word ‘genre’ is sounded, as soon as it is heard, as soon as one attempts to conceive it, a limit is drawn. And when a limit is established, norms and interdictions are not far behind” (56). The limiting effect of “genre” originates from the simple implication that immediately comes into being when someone says “genres are not to be mixed.” Thus is the conception of “purity” within the genre; pure in the sense that “genre” demands a norm which is not necessarily “natural” but nevertheless imposed and followed by practitioners: “as soon as genre announces itself, one must respect a norm, one must not cross a line of demarcation, one must not risk impurity, anomaly, or monstrosity” (57). What Derrida demonstrates here is that a sense of purity has often been carelessly attached to the utterance of “genre” and that a self-disruptive dynamic is generated simultaneously when one says “Genres are not to be mixed.” Derrida’s thoughts seem to invalidate, if not nullify, the

concept of genre, since art[s] are supposed to transcend and revolutionize restrictions and limitations rather than following them. Derrida's line of argument, often taken as "deconstruction," is distinctly known for its dynamic to undermine the underlying structures within existing systems or structures.

Arguing against Derrida's point on the significance of literary genres, Rancière writes in *Mute Speech* (2001): "A fiction belongs to a genre. A genre is defined by the subject represented. The subject represented takes place in a scale of values that defines the hierarchy of genres ... Determined by the subject represented, the genre defines the specific mode of its representation. The generic principle thus implies a third principle, which we will call the principle of decorum" (45). Quite different from Derrida's radical claim that literary genres should be torn down entirely for the absolute emancipation of reading and writing, Rancière's stance seems more inclusive as well as elusive. For Rancière, literary genres can and must exist; and the conventions tied to a particular genre function as the formative "representational regime of arts." It must be emphasized, nevertheless, that literary genres exist not because they are convenient labels to classify texts but because they are supplements, guides and roadmaps for the reader. More importantly, as Thomas G. Couser points out, genres should be taken "not as matters of rule but as matters of convention, implicit agreements between producers and consumers of culture ... These conventions may be violated, of course. But that does not mean that they don't matter. On the contrary: the flouting of a convention can register only if the convention is recognized" (34).

For Rancière, the "aesthetic regime of art" occurs only on the premise that a certain "representational regime of art" exists as a limiting "structure" which should be "deconstructed." Nevertheless, this "aesthetic regime of art" becomes obsolete and turns into yet

another “representational regime of arts.” This is when a new “aesthetic regime of arts” creates a crack within the overall “structure” and by so doing engenders both the political and aesthetic aspect of literature. The meandering or excursive dynamic underlying Rancière’s thought implicates as well a sense of movement and mobility within literature. In its core, Rancière’s thoughts on the relationship between “the representational regime” and “the aesthetical regime of art” is that the former serves as a norm—a norm that requires certain “art” to retain traits of the world we experience—while the latter serves as a series of disruptions, struggling to expand and push afore the limits and strictures of the previous “representational regime of art.” When this new regime of art, in time, becomes obsolete, a new contingent event carrying “the aesthetical regimes of art” will start to shake the once-aesthetical, but now-representational, regime of art. This process goes on and on, new regimes folding over and over again old strictures that no longer cohere to its social/political context.

Other than these important sets of terms which are crucial to understand Rancière’s thoughts, the other distinguished debates between the Deleuzean “anti-representational” and the Rancierian “post-representational” also illustrate how Rancière’s thoughts on literature and the world manifest themselves in Roth’s writings. Taken from Rancière’s *The Flesh of Words* (1998), “post-representational” writings aim to undermine the conventional idea of representing the world through language, that the text is but a literary transcript of the realistic world (151-58).¹¹ To read literary texts from a “post-representational” perspective,

¹¹ Rancière seems reluctant to go so far as Deleuze in terms of the thoughts on how reading can *do*. As he further elucidates in *The Flesh of Words*, “It is this anti fraternal equality that Deleuze rejects. The people literature invents cannot be reduced to the population of local affections of universal substances” (158). Although both Rancière and Deleuze exhibit certain individualist view—the former by seeing reading people as participants of *politics* and the latter by perceiving the world through quantum lenses, in which matters become free molecules that disrupt and penetrate boundaries—the marked difference between their thoughts on literature persists. Discussing *Bartleby, the Scrivener*, Rancière suggests that Deleuze’s analysis leads only to a

as Rancière intricately argues, does not mean that the representational function of writing should disappear in the face of the “aesthetic regime of art;” instead, Rancière tries to preserve both the privilege of literary excursions in the text and what I term the “mirage of representation” which language conjures (159).



dead end, if not sheer chaos: “Under the mask of Bartleby, Deleuze opens to us the open road of comrades, the great drunkenness of joyous multitudes freed from the law of the Father ... this road leads us to contradiction: the wall of loose stones, the wall of non-passage. We do not go on, from the multitudinous incantation of Being, toward any political justice. Literature opens no passage to a Deleuzian politics. There is no Dionysian politics. And this wall, as free as its stone may be, is one before which the joyous expansions of the philosopher-children of Dionysus comes to a stop” (*The Flesh of Words*, 164). For more discussions, please refer to *The Flesh of Words*, pp. 150-166.

III: *Operation Shylock*: A “Mirage of Representation”

Perhaps none of Roth’s fiction can bear the term “a mirage of representation” better than *Operation Shylock*. The term “a mirage of representation” indicates a political connotation as well as an aesthetic one. On the one hand, the political connotation of the term refers to Rancière’s critique of the “buffooneries of representation” pervading the French political scene after the 1848 revolution (381). As Rancière writes in his insightful yet relatively less-read essay, “How to Use *Lire le Capital*,” the 1850s was a time “when men of power wore the costumes of a different political play in order to represent interests directly opposed to those they were supposed to represent” (380).¹² As a critique, “a mirage of representation” bears the dynamic of resisting and disrupting existing regimes and systems. On the other hand, the aesthetic connotation of the term refers to the metafictional aspect that Rancière observes in the act of representation: “the divergence is no longer between *reality* and the illusions of ideologues, but between a scene whose reality is that of representation and the device which sustains it” (380-81, emphasis original). My appropriation of “a mirage of representation” refers to the mirage of narratives conjured up by Roth in *Operation Shylock*. These “mirages” includes the uncanny “double Roths,” the contradictory peritexts of the text, and the mirage-like narratives implemented by Roth to complicate the idea of expressing personal identity/ies. Through these “mirage of representations,” Roth presents precisely in *Operation Shylock* the divergence between “a scene whose reality in that of representation and the device which sustains it” through transgressing literary genres, playing with metafictional narratives and problematizing the relation between the form and content of

¹² As Jim Kincaid writes in “A Critique of Value-Form Marxism,” Rancière’s 1976 article, “How to Use *Lire le Capital*,” appears to be a “scintillating but neglected paper” (107) in view of recent Marxist studies.

a text.

Published in 1993, *Operation Shylock* seems to be a fiction, although the first-person narrative adopted throughout the text, as well as the subtitle suggest its confessional nature. More precisely, this “confession” tells the story of how Philip Roth the writer meets his imposter while both of them are in Israel attending the trial of John Demjanjuk—or according to the Holocaust survivors, “Ivan the Terrible,” who acted as a guard in the Treblinka camp during WWII. In fact, Demjanjuk has been on trial multiple times in Israel, and verdicts were repeatedly overturned and appeals unwaveringly filed. One of the most notable trials convicted Demjanjuk in 1988, but the verdict was later overturned in 1993, which is what will be “attended and described” in *Operation Shylock* (Roth 13).

Paralleling the ambiguity over the true identity of John Demjanjuk—whether he is indeed “Ivan the Terrible”—is the even more bewildering identity crisis of the multiple “Philip Roths” in the text. As Roth in the text “confesses,” knowing the existence of Moishe Pipik, the imposter, haunts him for he thinks that “a person’s identity is his private property” and this private realm cannot “be appropriated by somebody else” (75). Moreover, as Josh Cohen observes, characters that are subject to the dynamic of “doubles” also include the “inner Roth” and the “external Roth”: “Even if he[Roth] should never again meet the double ... the very thought of his presence in the world condemns him to ‘insufferable sieges of confusion’” (84). Following Cohen’s thought, I read these sets of characters, which function as sets of doubles, as Roth’s problematization of personal identity as whole and united entity. By creating these sets of similar yet different characters, Roth demonstrates how complicated the idea of personal identity can be and the difficulties of narrating one’s identity. As Smilesburger, Roth’s Mossad handler, says to Roth near the end of *Operation*

Shylock, “[t]he divisiveness is not just between Jew and Jew—it is within the individual Jew ... inside every Jew there is a mob of Jews. The good Jew, the bad Jew. The new Jew, the old Jew. The lovers of Jews, the hater of Jews” (334). The performativity of personal as well as ethnic identity, the representation and *mis*-representation of the self, the representation of other self(ves) are all related to the identity crisis that sits at the core of *Operation Shylock*.

Together, these “Roths” form “a mirage of representation” that manifests Roth’s attempt to write on the border of realistic confession and fictional inventions in *Operation Shylock*. For instance, the characters in *Operation Shylock*, while involving realistic people around Roth, also include fictional inventions which ironically declare themselves to be authentic, or to be “truer than real.” Consider the following episode in which Moishe Pipik tries to convince Roth that he the imposter is the “real” Roth:

‘You go around pretending to be me.’

This brought the smile back—‘You go around pretending to be *me*,’ he loathsomely replied.

‘You exploit the physical resemblance,’ I went on, ‘by telling people that you are the writer, the author of my books.’

‘I don’t have to tell them anything. They take me for the author of those books right off. It happens all the time.’ (72)

According to Pipik’s line of thought, he is by no means responsible for the identity crisis of Roth, since it is “they”—namely, the general mass who read the news about him—that take him for “the author of those books.” This logic of defense suggests that the recognition of the self lies not in the immanence of the subject but rather in how others perceive him/her. The more conventional understanding of the self is hitherto challenged by this breaking of the “law,” as in Roth’s reply to Pipik’s defense: “the law ... says a person’s identity is his private property and can’t be appropriated by somebody else” (75). In this conversation, the law that

requires the unity and the particularity of one's personal identity is problematized, challenged, and perhaps even transgressed.

As Debra Shostak suggests, “the reader is displaced from identification with the narrating voice when the author seems to hold the position of the subject. The novel resists the imaginative act that every reader engages in when confronted by a work of fiction” (33). Applying the “narrating voice” of a “confession” in *Operation Shylock*, Roth drastically problematizes the question of literary genre and narrative. The resistance of the imaginative act pointed out by Shostak, further contributes to another level of “a mirage of representation” by involving Roth “the author” in the text. First, we have Roth the author who wrote the novel *Operation Shylock*, and secondly, we also have the Roth in the text who seems to provide the confessional narrative that carries out the plot of the novel. In other words, while Debra Shostak reads the authoritative voice of Philip Roth as the displacement from identification on the reader's end, I read the authoritative voice as yet another guise, another representation that gathers into a “mirage of representation” that further complicates the narrative aesthetic of *Operation Shylock*.

There is, moreover, a third Roth that presides in this mirage of representation. This Roth is an imposter who advocates a radical counter-Zionist ideology called “Diasporism.” He is later referred as “Moishe Pipik” by Roth the narrator. The fourth Roth appears in the episode where the real Philip Roth in the text pretends to be Pierre Roget, a French columnist who is interviewing Philip Roth—played by Moishe Pipik—on the cause and effect of the “diasporist” movement taking place in Israel at that moment. This Roth, who avoids being exposed while trying to interview his own imposter, can be seen as another representation of the entangled identities, another pressing identity crisis of the personae “Philip Roth.” An

interesting scene, which I will discuss below, appears emblematically and characteristically Rothian: intense yet humorous, absurd yet nakedly sharp, all topped off with a sly treat of confusion.

The deliberate confusion of narrative voices and authorial personae present in *Operation Shylock* has attracted scholars who work in the fields of autobiography, fiction, and Jewish American literature. Derek Parker Royal notes for instance that the paratexts of *Operation Shylock* render the factuality of the text extremely ambiguous (32-33). Although written in confessional, first-person narrative, the content of the book—especially the paratexts—indicates conversely its fictionality. Paratexts, referred to as “a guiding sets of directions,” for Gérard Genette appear to be what surround and extend the text “precisely in order to *present* it” (1-2, emphasis original). According to Gérard, paratexts can be further divided into peritexts and epitexts with the former referring to the paratext *within* a text, such as the preface, the title of the text and chapters, and the author’s name, while the latter referring to the paratexts that came into being since the publication of the text, such as interviews, reviews, as well as public acclaims.¹³ While the epitext of *Operation Shylock* renders it a work of fiction, the peritext of *Operation Shylock* seems to complicate the verisimilitude of this “confession” even more.

While the Preface declares the text as “an accurate account” that presents the “actual occurrences that I [Roth] lived through during [his] middle fifties and that culminated, early in 1988” (13), the ending “Note to the Reader” suggests that “this book is a work of fiction” which consists of “products of the author’s imagination” (399). According to the ending “Note to the reader,” “any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead,

¹³ For further discussions on paratexts and autobiographical writings, see *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* by Gérard Genette (1997).

is entirely coincidental,” and that the confession is indeed “false” (399). Nevertheless, the episode in which Roth’s interviews Aharon Appelfeld, the famous Israeli novelist and Holocaust survivor, in Israel is later collected as a non-fictional piece in Roth’s *Shop Talk: A Writer and His Colleagues and Their Work* (2001). Moreover, some passages from the interview appear in *Operation Shylock* without even the tiniest amendment.¹⁴ If so, how should Roth’s readers apprehend the peritexts of the “confession”? Immediately we get a sense of how Roth’s paratexts go beyond the text they caption and involve other texts.

According to Parker Royal, the exact meaning of the peritexts in *Operation Shylock* is rather irrelevant to the overall reading of the text, as Royal suggests, “Roth does not require that we ultimately distinguish fact from fiction” (32). For Royal, Roth’s ‘operation’ is a probing into the “comfortable differentiation” between what is fabricated and what is true (31-32). In this case, *Operation Shylock*, as well as most of Roth’s works, can be seen as the novelist’s attempt to write in between fiction and autobiography. Complicating the understanding/reading of peritexts even more, Royal points out the plural indication of the final admission: “Is it the ‘confession,’ of fiction as expressed in the Note is false, or is the entire text itself, one that professes verisimilitude and whose subtitle bears the word ‘confession,’ that is false?” (32). Royal’s question concerns two emphatically contrasting readings of the text: if “the ‘confession,’ of fiction as expressed in the Note is false,” then the reader can confirm that the peritext of *Operation Shylock* declares itself autobiographical. However, if the Note to Reader suggests that “the entire text itself, one that professes verisimilitude and whose subtitle bears the word ‘confession’” is false, the peritexts of

¹⁴ For instance, see pages 85-86 in *Operation Shylock* and page 27-28 in *Shop Talk*. The section in *Operation Shylock* which contains Roth interviewing Aaron Appelfeld appears as well in *Shop Talk* without the tiniest amendments. The non-fictionality of *Shoptalk* therefore adds to the overall verisimilitude of *Operation Shylock*.

Operation Shylock indicate the text's own fictionality.

Performing its ambiguous signifying function on multiple layers, the peritexts of *Operation Shylock* function more than metafictional practices in the sense that they not only reveal how the text comes into being but also undermine its own legitimacy. Moreover, they also echo the thematic concern of expressing one's identity through narration in the sense that the reader cannot decide if the Preface or the ending Note is the more believable, just as readers find it difficult to identify the "real" Roth in *Operation Shylock*. In other words, the truer Roth insists the texts are, the falser it seems. The writing of *Operation Shylock per se*, in this light, can be read as not only meta-fictionally self-sufficient but also self-cancelling and self-countering. Such self-countering writing can also be seen in Roth's other works. As Josh Cohen points out, in the penultimate chapter of *Deception* (1990), the harder the writer "Philip" tries to prove that his affair is merely "fiction," the truer it seems to both his wife and his readers: "his insistence on the fiction laity of the affair only intensifies it ... the affair remains permanently suspended between fiction and reality, such that to read the novel is to be condemned irremediably to deception" (82). The same logic goes on in *Operation Shylock* as Cohen observes: "the more he [the Roth in the text] strives to differentiate himself from his false counterpart [Moishe Pipik], the more undifferentiated they become" (Cohen 92).

Addressing the self-countering logic of Roth's writings, Michael Rothberg argues that Roth's self-countering trait actually bespeaks Roth's identity as a Jewish American. The counter-writing in *Operation Shylock* is for Rothberg the marker of Roth's original representation of the Holocaust: "Emphasizing the Holocaust's distance rather than its overwhelming proximity leads to ... Roth's quite original perspective on the Shoah: the greater the significance accorded to the Holocaust as an event of modern history, the more

distant a role it plays in the lives of American Jews” (53). Though primarily focusing on how the Holocaust is represented in Roth’s works—either as backdrop or deliberate absence—Rothberg’s argument foregrounds the self-countering logic of *Operation Shylock* in the sense that it evokes something when precisely undermining it.

Rothberg’s reading of how Roth’s writings represent the divergence between American-Jewish people and the victims of the Shoah further foregrounds the political aspect of *Operation Shylock*. This divergence preserves the political dimension of “a mirage of representations” in Rancière’s original use. In the sense that the “mirage of representation” in *Operation Shylock* serves as the volatile bond by which Roth connects with his Jewish identity and along with it, the entire communal history and memory. In Rancière’s original use, the political dimension of “a mirage of representation” serves as a critique of the political state of Paris 1850. In my usage, the “mirages of representation” in *Operation Shylock* becomes a critique, or rather an alternative, to most literary representations of the Shoah.

For Emily Miller Budick, however, the ingenious narrative devices, along with the multiple (mis)representations of personal identity, differentiate *Operation Shylock* from a “political tract” and makes it “fiction.” Reading *Operation Shylock* alongside *The Counterlife* (1986)—one of Roth’s earlier novels which is also set in Israel—Budick suggests that by bracketing the text in countering peritexts, Roth problematizes the notion of attaching a simplistic “responsibility” to an author and his/her works. For Budick, the ending note of *Operation Shylock* reveals the fact that not only the confessor gets to decide what is presented in the text but also Roth’s Mossad handler, Smilesburger, can attempt to “impose on Roth and his writing” (68-73). Smilesburger’s imposition on the text, still, by no means seals the text

into a final say, for it is still met with the reader's resistance, which the "Preface" of the fiction emphatically informs.

An episode in which Roth is locked inside a room with Smilesburger who verges on threatening him to alter the final chapter of the book he is writing, which is, *Operation Shylock* (387-389), demonstrates how "a mirage of representation" presides in between both the content and the form of *Operation Shylock*. The form of the text seems to be itself a "mirage of representation" since the text borders on confession and fiction. The literary genres of confession and fiction, in this case, become "mirages" in *Operation Shylock* since both genres seem to be engaged with but also not quite exactly so.

On the content level, the preface urges the reader to believe, and the ending note suggests otherwise. Moreover, the incident between Smilesburger and Roth further complicates the peritexts of *Operation Shylock*. As Roth in the text reveals, Smilesburger politely requires Roth to alter the end of the novel or publish it without the ending, while locking him inside a room for hours. Roth's reply to Smilesburger's "offer"—"Not possible. Not possible in anyway"—demonstrates his veracity to present the true account of the events he witnesses (287). Not only does Roth in the text think the offer preposterous, he goes on to accuse Smilesburger for recruiting him as a secret agent in the first place:

You yourself drew my attention to the professional possibilities the operation offered. As an enticement, if you recall. 'I see quite a book coming out of this,' you told me ... It was what you said that put it into my mind. And now that I've written that book you've changed your mind and decided that what would truly make it a better book, for your purpose if not mine (382).

Smilesburger's rationale appears, however, not entirely insane because according to his reasoning, preventing Roth from publishing the last chapter will protect Roth from political

revenge which the ending chapter of the text apparently incites.¹⁵

As Smilesburger confesses, “I *am* responsible to you ... I recruited you, perhaps even with a false enticement and now I will do everything to prevent your exposing yourself to the difficulties that the publication of this last chapter could cause for a very long time to come” (386). Here we encounter not only the question concerning the artist’s autonomy but also the collaboration between the form and content of *Operation Shylock*. The collaboration of form and content can be found in Roth’s final decision: “I cannot know things-in-themselves, but you can. I cannot transcend myself, but you can. I cannot exist apart from myself, but you can. I know nothing beyond my own existence and my own ideas, my mind determines entirely how reality appears to me, but for you the mind works differently. You know the world as it really is, and I know it only as it appears” (392). In short, the writer Roth refuses absolutely. Even until the last page of the novel, Smilesburger is still persuading Roth to do him and himself “a little favor” in exchange for a suitcase apparently filled with money. When at last the narrative ends with the ambiguous “Let your Jewish conscience be your guide” (398), it marks again the presence of the author by putting a stop to the plot in an ambiguous point so as to end the story in suspension.

This suspension and indecisiveness that preside over *Operation Shylock* may indeed characterize the work as a typically postmodern work. However, the same ambiguity also leads to a deeper understanding of the novel; with the threatening episode (discussed above) in mind, readers are present with the question: whether the writer Philip Roth accepted the offer or not? Although he ensured his literary autonomy, readers can still not be sure whether

¹⁵ The ending chapter, which the reader of *Operation Shylock* never really had the chance to read—if it exists as Roth in the text confesses in the Epilogue, “I have elected to delete my final chapter.” The final chapter “to come” seems to contain partly Roth’s anti-Zionist stance and moreover, how Smilesburger appropriated him to serve political interests.

this ending that we read is itself already a changed version. If the writer Roth did alter the final chapter as Smilesburger asks him to, can the ending note which suggests that the whole confession is false be read as inauthentic, contrived, and therefore “fake”? Whichever way readers attempt to approach the problem of which claim is authentically valid, the further it seems to slip away, coiling back to the pit where mirages of representation reign. This incident demonstrates how the content level subversively re-informs the already confusing paratexts and adds another interesting possibility to the novel.

It is Roth’s intent that such intense confusion characterizes the readers of *Operation Shylock*. As Budick confesses, “[i]t seemed to me indelicate, to say the least, and perhaps even endangering to me and my family personally living in Israel, for Roth to use the dire political reality of Israel in order to play frivolous postmodernist games with Jewish identity” (72). Like the criticism against Portnoy’s *Complaint*, the backlash engendered by *Operation Shylock* comes primarily from Jewish readers, especially those who, like Budick, experience Israel as their home. Although Budick eventually “came to see that *Operation Shylock*, like Roth’s earlier works, is in every way a work of literary genius” (72), her initial dissatisfaction remains essential to the overall reconciliation between Jewish readers and Roth for it is precisely the initial uneasiness in Roth’s writings that expresses the “Jewish dis-ease” that resides in Roth’s conception of being Jewish, or more precisely, Jewish-American. The ‘Dis-ease’ writing that hovers above Roth’s works reflects, in this respect, Roth’s complicated rendition of his ethnic identity. “Dis-ease,” in Budick’s words, “is *not* a pathology or illness, and it is certainly not in search of a cure. It does not, therefore, require performing surgery or any other operation of that sort” (73, emphasis original). Instead of seeing Roth’s disputed portrait of Israel in *Operation Shylock* as a political assault on the Jewish people and Israelis,

Budick suggests that such ‘dis-ease’ is “itself a performance . . . an *operation* of the mind by which we humans express that conflict and pain that defines all of us as human beings and some of us as Jewish human beings” (73, emphasis original).

For Budick, the distinctive characteristic of ‘Dis-ease’ appears to be part and parcel of Roth’s writing. What exactly is this ‘Dis-ease’ writing that Roth professes? To dissect the meaning of ‘Dis-ease’ writing, first we have to recognize that there are different levels of “diseases” between which Roth’s narrative oscillates. In other words, the ‘Dis-ease’ aspect of Roth’s writing functions on different levels: first the literal meaning of “*dis*-ease,” that is, to make someone feel unease, discomfort, or going in a more psychoanalytic direction, to make someone feel the presence of the uncanny.¹⁶ If ‘dis-ease’ refers to the state in which the subject experiences the feeling of uneasiness and angst, for Otto Rank, this unsettling feeling also reveals the fact that the subject may be appearing vis-à-vis his/her uncanny double (Otto Rank 76).¹⁷ Merely visit the scenes where Moishe Pipik and the Roth in the text face each other. The scenes involve conflicts and assaults, physical or verbal, direct or mediated, and most of the incidents are also accompanied by a sense of suspension and confusion. Perhaps most uncannily, most of these scenes are also suffused with a dense fog of weird familiarity, or more precisely, the sense of the uncanny.

Right from the beginning of the novel, we are introduced to an uncanny scene, the

¹⁶ The relationship between feeling uneasy and experiencing the uncanny is elaborated in Freud’s canonical study, *Das Unheimliche* (1919). The uncanny, according to Freud, is something familiar yet also unfamiliar, something that evokes out of the subject a sense of unsettlement and angst. For detailed discussion on different definitions of the uncanny, please refer to *The Uncanny* (2003) by Nicholas Royal pp. vii-11

¹⁷ The concept of the double and its relation to subjectivity has long been under scholarly debate. However, an exhaustion of the topic is yet to come. For my discussion of the double and how it summons up the sense of the uncanny, I have referred to the text of Otto Frank, who pioneered in the study of literary narratives of the double. As Freud’s disciple, Frank sees literary narratives of doubles manifestations of Freud’s “the return of the represses.” For the course of this thesis, it is sufficing to note how the presence of double engenders the subject’s sense of the uncanny. For more discussions on literary narratives of the double, see *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study* (1925), translated by Harry Tucker in 1989.

presentation of two “Philip Roths”: first, Roth the novelist whose voice occupies the overall tone of the book, the persona who *writes* and writes that it is he who put the words on the pages of the novel; and second, the Roth who is organizing the Diasporic movement in Israel (18-19). Their first encounter, interestingly enough, happens over the telephone after Roth suffered a sleepless night: “I got out of bed early in the morning and, before I had even washed my face, telephoned suite 511 of Jerusalem’s King David Hotel ... I asked if this was Philip Roth. “It is,” he replied, “and who is this, please? (19).” On that eerie questioning tone, the paragraph starts; and this is when the third Roth reveals his presence as the *author* of the novel *Operation Shylock*. Immediately after the dialogue ends—or at least after the author Roth decides to cut it off—the Roth *outside the text* deliberately adds a bold line separating the unfinished conversation over the phone and what happens next in the plot (19). As if a taunt on the reader or a device of suspension, the author Roth manages to exaggerate the sense of tension when the two Roths meet by cutting off their conversation on the phone and inserting a quarter rest to the duet performed by the two Roths.

Even if the content in the conversation mentioned above does not seem to contain vehement conflicts, it does, however, summon up an agitated atmosphere by depicting Roth’s unrest behavior when he gets out of bed: ““Finally, having convinced myself during a largely sleepless night that some flusky series of errors had resulted in a mix-up of identities that was in my best interest to disregard, I got out of bed early in the morning” (11). In contrast with Roth’s behavior is the overwhelmingly calm over perhaps even phony “please” which the imposter returns with on the phone. At this point, it seems that the “real” Roth has been seriously invaded, or ‘dis-eased’ by his imposter.

Budick sees Roth’s ‘Dis-ease’ writings as “the expression of conflict and pain” (73). It

is nevertheless more than conflict and pain that the 'Dis-ease' writing of Roth is capable of generating. Take for instance the incident when "the real Roth" pretends to be "a French journalist based in Paris" called *Pierre Roget* and phones the imposter Roth out of curiosity (40-41). In this scene, "Pierre Roget" interviews "Philip Roth" about Philip's plan to start a 'diasporist movement' that will "resettle Europe with Israeli Jews of European background" (40). Not long before the interview started, an interview where Pierre asks and Philip answers turned into a heated debate between two "doubles," each unwaveringly defending their personal identity. The scene now seems less an interview than a battlefield of personal identity between the two Roths. To and fro, the two Roths keep cutting each off as if they were fighting for the right of speech, fighting for the voice that should supposedly belong to one but now frantically divided. Without doubt the interview ends without avail, after all, there is little hope for a novelist pretending to be a French journalist who happens to be interviewing the imposter of himself to make any progress. Their conversation ends in a somewhat reluctant agree-to-disagree manner:

"I think I have made my position sufficiently clear to you for now," he replied most courteously. "In what journal will our interview be published?"

"I am free-lancer, Mr. Philip Roth. Could be anywhere from *Le Monde* to *Paris-Match*"

"And you will be kind enough to send a copy to the hotel when it appears?"

"How long do you expect to remain there?"

"As long as the disassociation of Jewish identity threatens the welfare of my people. As long as it takes Diasporism to recompose, once and for all, the splintered Jewish existence. Your last name again, Pierre?"

"Roget," I said. "Like the thesaurus."

His laugh erupted much too forcefully for me to believe that it had been provoked by my little quip alone. He knows, I thought, hanging up. He knows perfectly well who I am. (48)

While the previous call is ended by Roth the author who boldly separates the conversation with a short line of rest and by doing so demonstrates his privilege *outside* the text, this time the conversation is ended by the Roth *within* the text, although he does not seem to end with the same authoritative tone of “the Roth outside”. The Roth in the text, after hanging up the phone, feels provoked, exceeded, and worst of all, exposed: “He knows, I thought, hanging up. He knows perfectly well who I am” (48). The sense of ‘Dis-ease’ prevalent, the feeling of being exposed, revealed, this scene woven by Roth ‘dis-ease’ writing demonstrates not only the uncanny presence of the double but also the polemic of perceiving identity as a unified, whole, and a privately personal affair.

While the ‘Dis-ease’ overtone-suffuses the dialogue, the imposter exposes his political claim as such: Israeli Jews should undergo a “counter-Zionist” operation that sends the Jews back to Europe, where the Jews truly belonged before the “exile”. The imposter calls this ideology "Diasporism," and advocates with it the return of Israeli Jews to their true “home.” While the imposter justifies his claim of “Diasporism” in fragmented fashion for the bewildered Philip Roth who reluctantly listens at the other end and the phone keeps interrupting, the “real” Roth cannot help but wonder whether the impersonator is mentally damaged or whether he sounds like him or not: “Could it be, I asked myself while he pedantically continued on in this vein, that the history he’s most intent on erasing happens to be his own? Is he mentally so damaged that he truly believes that my history is his; is he some psychotic, some amnesiac, who isn’t pretending at all? If every word he speaks he means, if the only person pretending here is me” (43).

Here the “real” Roth undergoes an inner personality split, not only because apparently he cannot help projecting himself onto his role but also because the Roth outside the text

impatiently and slyly reveals to his readers the thought of the “real” Roth: “‘But Hitler did exist,’ I heard Pierre Roget emotionally informing *him*” (43, emphasis my own). There are at least three different voices in this polyphonic ventriloquy generated by “Philip Roth.” The starting “I” refers to the real Philip Roth talking to himself in his mind, and Pierre Roget is the character who the real Roth tries to play, and last but not least, the “him” at the ending line also refers to Philip Roth the imposter. Here we have a scene where plurality resides within singularity. Such polemics surrounding different descriptive renditions and narrative voices of a singular perspective have been discussed in Olney’s “Autobiography and the Cultural Moment” in which he observes: “there was nothing problematical about the autos, no agonizing questions of identity, self-definition, self-existence, or self-deception—at least none the reader need attend to—and therefore the fact that the individual was himself narrating the story of himself had no troubling philosophical, psychological, literary, or historical implications” (20). This problematization of how to narrate the self is precisely what occupies the central concern of *Operation Shylock*—among many of Roth’s works.

As the real Roth struggles to play Pierre Roget, wavering between the ambiguous difference that hardly separates him and Pierre, the imposter continues to lay out his rationale for his political agenda: since there were populous Jewish population in the West—and most of them fitted well into different cultural milieus—before they were forced to leave during WWII—the Jews now overpassing the historical context of the Holocaust should be dispersed back to the West where “everything once flourished” (44). Instead of limiting the Jews in Israel, “Diasporism” seeks to spread Jewish population all over the West—including France, Poland, or Germany—just like they once did. The imposter’s idea to disperse Israeli Jews back to their European origins does not, however, mean that he wishes to evacuate all

Jews out of Israel. For the Jews that do not inherit European roots—such as the Ashkenazi Jews, Sephardi Jews and Mizrahi Jews—according to the imposter, must stay in Israel:

For those Jews, Israel must continue to be their country. Once the European Jews and their families have been resettled and the population has been halved, then the state can be reduced to its 1948 borders, the army can be demobilized, and those Jews who have lived in an Islamic cultural matrix for centuries can continue to do so, independently, autonomously, but in peace and harmony with their Arab neighbors. For these people to remain in this region is simply as it should be, their rightful habitat, while for the European Jews, Israel has been an exile and no more, a sojourn, a temporary interlude in the European saga that it is time to resume. (43)

Although it is not the nature of this thesis and I am neither qualified enough to engage in serious debates surrounding Zionism and the state of Israel, it is still interesting to follow the imposter's rationale. Nonsensical as it seems, the imposter affirms that the Jews should be sent out of Israel to return back to their home and to further prevent a second Holocaust, which he seriously worries will happen in Israel where all Jews are literally "concentrated."

It is, of course, not coincidental that the Shoah is brought up in a novel set in Israel and written by a Jewish-American novelist. It is, however, interesting that Roth manages to apply the same 'Dis-ease' writing to refer to the Holocaust in *Operation Shylock*. At the first glance, Philip Roth the author seems to frame the Holocaust quite indecorously, showcasing the imposter's amnesiac attitude toward the trauma: "Do not confuse our long European history with the twelve years of Hitler's reign" (42). Under close reading, nevertheless, Roth's technique of bringing in the Holocaust through the imposter's frantic ideology actually signals a moment of "the aesthetic regime of art" in *Operation Shylock*. The spark of "the aesthetic regime of art" is triggered by how the imposter argues against Zionist claims: "If Hitler had not existed, if his twelve years of terror were erased from our past, then it would seem to you no more unthinkable that Jews should also be Europeans than that they

should also be Americans” (42-43). The problem of the imposter here is naively straightforward—the oversimplification of the existence of the Holocaust as something written in History, something which is already past and should be “erased from [the] past.” We can return to Rothberg’s essay “Roth and Holocaust” to discover the nuances in the imposter’s rhetoric. As Rothberg argues, the more the world Roth presents in his works (Newark, New Jersey) distances from the Jewish communal experience of the Holocaust, the more significant a role the Shoah plays in Roth’s Works. In fact, *Operation Shylock* for Rothberg is a work that engages “at pains to establish the distance between Jewish-American security and European tragedy. The figure central to this aspect of the novel is the ‘real’ survivor Appelfeld, who serves as Philip’s ‘counter self’” (62).

If “the mirage of representation” in *Operation Shylock*—the constant mimicking, the doubles, the unauthentic usurping the authentic, and the authentic pretending to be someone else; if all of this can be read as distraction, the central figure of the novel, as Rothberg suggests, appears to be Aaron Appelfeld, the real survivor of the Holocaust who in the novel stands at the opposite end of the spectrum from John Demjanjuk, or, Ivan the Terrible (62). Rothberg’s reading sparks the “aesthetic regime of art” because it provides a specific reading of *Operation Shylock* with an alternative that frees the limited narrative which largely centers on the binary opposition between the foes in the feud, namely, Philip Roth and his imposter. This transition of narrative focus, or rather, the total abandonment of the need of a narrative focus, reflects precisely Rancière’s idea of “the excursion of words” and what he calls the “principle of non-preference.”

Rancière’s discussion on “literarity” and “the excursion of words” inspired my reading of *Operation Shylock* as “mirages of representation.” The “excursion of words,” as

mentioned above, directs and distracts the reader at the same time because the idea, on the one hand, embodies the mimetic function of words and accepts that words are there to convey certain meanings. The “excursion of words,” on the other hand, also rejects the idea of steering words under the principle of resemblance. As Rancière puts it, “the problem is not that resemblance is unfaithful, but that it is too faithful, still attached to what has been said when already it should be elsewhere, near where the meaning of what has been said must speak” (3). Resemblance for Rancière is part of the power of words, and the verisimilitude with realistic events is the mere tip of iceberg in literary writings. This is where Roth’s narrative aesthetics and Rancière’s politics converge: while the former stretches the boundary of the text with ‘Dis-ease’ writing and even ‘counter-writing,’ the latter advocates a demonstration of the power of words in multiple dimensions.

Considering Rancière’s Marxist background and his involvement in the 1968 event, it is not difficult to detect that the idea of “literarity” so central to his theory of literature contains also a sharp political perspective. For Rancière, “literarity” refers to a state of “democratic disorder,” a state in which the “excursion of words” opens up for the reading subject new perspectives and means of signification (151-58). As a result, the reading subject becomes subject to his/her own reading, henceforth goes through a political act that revolutionizes him/herself. According to Rancière, this political dimension of the aesthetic opens up a crack in “the representational regime of art” and allows the “the aesthetic regime of art” to emerge. Once emerged, the “aesthetic regime of art” re-orientes the ways readers perceive the world and leads eventually to the “redistribution of the sensibles.”

The “redistribution of the sensibles” is important for Rancière for its potential to

disrupt “the representational regime of art.”¹⁸ Nevertheless, the “aesthetic regime of art” should not be taken as an anti-political stance since “the principle of non-preference” points toward an egalitarian perspective that renders literally everything subject to portrayal. This revolutionized way of looking at literature challenges the tradition of narrative rhetoric which tells the story along the perspective of protagonists, heroes/antiheroes, the narrator or even just around a central “plot.” With this narrative democracy in mind, a rose petal is as important as and as central to the character who readers project as the protagonist of the novel, even if it attracted less narrative focus. Just as Rothberg reads the text with the focus on Aaron Appelfeld and his parallel experience with Roth, the “principle of non-preference” in *Operation Shylock* seems to avoid a narrative focus deliberately. Again, this is typically Roth since this “principle of non-preference” contradicts the form of the text as a confession. Similar to what Roth tells Smilesburger when he tries to persuade Roth to delete the final chapter of the book he is writing, “I am here on a journalistic assignment for an American newspaper. I am not a Jewish soldier of fortune ... I am here to interview another writer. I am here to talk to him about his books” (345), the narrative center of the book seems to be centered around Roth’s conversation with Aaron Appelfeld instead of Roth acting as a “Jewish soldier of fortune” or “a Jewish undercover agent” (345).

For Rancière, this radical understanding of “non-preference”, or in his term,

¹⁸ In Rancière’s analysis of *Le Temp* where the narrator recalls Saint-Loup in a conversation at Doncière, Rancière explicates this relation between the “aesthetic regime of art” and the “redistribution of the sensible”: “What truth did these conversations bring out, then? “That the smallest events are only the sign of an idea that must be brought out and that often covers over others, as in a palimpsest.” This phrase recalls the very program that *Time Regained* assigns the writer: to decipher impressions which are like the signs of so many ideas and laws. The strategy appears to be a variant, if not an example, of the science of signs that allows one to find ideas and laws in events, in arrangement of bodies. There is a military semiology that allows us to transformed the confused narrative into a rational sequence, as any good physician does ... by identifying its elements and the logic according to which they are present there, obedient to tradition, to texts, or some other necessity” (*The Flesh of Words*, 115)

“democracy”, is the political aspect that is inherent to the metaphysics of literature.¹⁹ This politics leads from the equality of human individual in society to a greater equality that is truer, more profound than the equality demanded by the poor and the workers” (*The Flesh of Words*, 157). It is on this level that Rancière’s aesthetic theory converges with his political agenda: “The population of the novel is also the promise of a people to come. This political stake is inscribed in the very project of literature, in the principle of non-preference ... the reduction of all hierarchy of representation to the great egalitarian power of becoming, involves a relationship of literature to equality” (*Mute Speech*, 157).

Just as Roth incorporates all kinds of voices in *Operation Shylock*—from the self-countering peritexts, the personality crisis when faced with Pipik, to the peculiar presentation of the Holocaust and the framing of Aaron Appelfeld as the nemesis of John Demjanjuk, the “principle of non-preference” requires texts to be read in both “the representational regime of art” and “the aesthetic regime of art.” As Roth refuses vis-à-vis Smilesburger to alter the final chapter of the novel, he stands for an authentic narrative that belongs only to Philip Roth, even if this name is deliberately surrounded with “mirages of representation”. Together, these “mirages of representation” construct the narrative prowess of *Operation Shylock* and reveal elusively some parts of the author of the novel, Philip Roth. In this case, *Operation Shylock* is indeed a confession, a confession that somehow counter-writes itself.

If indeed *Operation Shylock* can be read as a “confession” of “a mirage of representation,” and if the narrative principle of non-preference in the novel prevents the reader to reduce identity to a flat understanding, does Rancière’s idea on literature relate to

¹⁹ For Rancière’s further discussion on the politics of literature, see his insightful essay “The Politics of Literature” published in *SubStance* in 2004.

the question of literary genres? Or do we find ourselves once again returning to Derrida's critique against the existence of literary genres, "*Et quand une limite vient à s'assigner, la norme et l'interdit ne se font pas attendre: «il faut», «il ne faut pas», dit le « genre », le mot «genre», la figure, la voix ou la loi du genre*" (1980)?²⁰



²⁰ Avital Ronell translates this section in *Critical Inquiry* as "As soon as the word 'genre' is sounded, as soon as it is heard, as soon as one attempts to conceive it, a limit is drawn. And when a limit is established, norms and interdictions are not far behind: 'Do,' 'Do not,' says 'genre', the word 'genre', the figure, the voice, or the law of genre" (56). The section cited above is from Derrida's original 1980 article "La Loidu Genre" which is later collected in *Parages* in 1986. The text is based on Derrida's talk during a conference focused on "Genre" held in John Hopkins University in 1979.

IV. *Sabbath's Theater*: An Abyss of Narratives

In the previous chapter, I have demonstrated how the intricate narratives in *Operation Shylock* form “a mirage of representation” which Roth utilizes to make the narratives ambiguous, elusive, and also constantly counter-writing. Through the technique of meta-fiction, the counter-writing in *Operation Shylock* problematizes the idea of literary genres as well as the understanding of ethnic and personal identities. Published two years after *Operation Shylock*, *Sabbath's Theater* (1995) further explores the important role narratives play in distinguishing or even disrupting literary genres—if they still exist. Closely dissecting the narrative voices in *Sabbath's Theater*, I wish to explore the free transition of narrative perspectives, the presence of “the implied author,” and its divergence from Roth the novelist. My coinage of “an abyss of narratives” implicates that narratives seem to form an abyss in *Sabbath's Theater*. Seemingly bottomless, empty, and dark, an “abyss” implies contrastingly, also the idea of a perspective in the *light* which observes the void. Through inspecting how different narrative voices form a Rothian “rhapsody” orchestrated by the “implied Roth,” I wish to highlight the “freedom of writing” in *Sabbath's Theater* as well as its intricate political references. As Roth himself reveals in a rare interview conducted by PBS, “Philip Roth Unmasked,” the novelist seems particularly fond of *Sabbath's Theater* among all his works: “I’m particularly partial to a book called ‘Sabbath’s Theater,’ which a lot of people hate. Now, that’s not the reason I like it” (PBS, 2005). The reason Roth liked the novel hinges on the “freedom” which the novel provided for Roth: “I think it’s got a lot of freedom in it. That’s what you’re looking for as a writer when you’re working. You’re looking for your own

freedom ... So I liked 'Sabbath's Theater,' I advise you all to read it. (*PBS*). Connecting the freedom of constructing narratives and expressing Roth's "own freedom" *through* narrative, I wish to try out a rather bold idea at the end of this chapter by reading the writing of *Sabbath's Theater* as yet another narrative, a narrative that belongs to Roth's life narrative. I hope the idea will open up a new direction of Roth studies that focuses on the significant connection between Roth's works and his life.

The definition of "life narrative" can refer to very different understandings of the term. As Smith and Watson point out, "self-representation may take any guises as narrators selectively engage their lived experience and situate their social identities through personal storytelling," life narrative can take many guises and are focused on the "lived experience" of the narrator (18). In fact, the discrepancy between autobiography and life writing—two closely related but also distinctly different terms—hinges on what the autobiographer/narrator *selects* to present in the text. Autobiographies are often drawn from "historical documents, interviews, and family archives" whereas life narrators often anchor their narrations in their personal experiences or past memories (Smith and Watson 7). My attempt to read Roth's writing of *Sabbath's Theater* as yet another narrative comes from Jerome Bruner's idea in "Life as Narrative." Agreeing with the more conventional scholarships that sees life narratives as retrospectively constructed texts, Bruner further argues that the living experience is itself a ongoing narrativizing act, that life and narrative is somehow inseparable (Bruner 11, 31-32). My usage of life narrative(s) in this chapter will try to navigate in between Smith and Watson's and Bruner's idea by reading the "life narrative" of Mickey Sabbath—which connects seamlessly with the narrator's narrative in *Sabbath's Theater*—side by side with the "life narratives" of Philip Roth the novelist as the writing and reading

process of the novel, according to Bruner, can also be read as narratives. The plural form of “life narratives” suggests that the narratives cannot be taken as a unitary, complete entity. Rather, scholars in the field of narrative identity have pointed out that the self-narrativizing act which all of us constantly engage in—consciously or unconsciously—is in fact, diachronic rather than linear. Therefore, the plural form of the term implies that the life narratives Roth produced during his writing of *Sabbath's Theater* cannot be taken as a linear monologue. Rather, these narratives are scattered, fragmented and sometimes covered by the fictional elements in *Sabbath's Theater*.²¹

Critics who discuss *Sabbath's Theater* in relation to its intricate narratives seem to foreground the characters' urge to expressing him/herself in the text. As Debra Shostak writes in a special issue focused on Roth in *Shofar*, “Roth's gesture of self-exposure creates peculiar tensions within the novels as well as within the reader-text relationship, allowing inquiry not only into the meaning of ‘autobiography’ but also more broadly into the relationship between fiction and fact and into the process by which readers interpret evidence” (20). For Shostak, the urge to expose or express oneself is a means by which Roth tackles his remarriage and affairs during the 60s. Although Shostak's central argument connects Roth's self-exposure with the writer's personal life, her attention to “Roth's gesture of self-exposure” requires recognition and further exploration.

Addressing also the “gesture of self-expression,” James M. Mellard also writes in “Death, Mourning, and Besse's Ghost: From Philip Roth's *The Facts* to *Sabbath's Theater*”

²¹ The question concerning life as narrative or not is still under serious debate. For a more comprehensive understanding of the issues that are often discussed in the field of narrative studies and life narrative, please refer to Mark Freeman's insightful essay in *Life and Narrative: The Risk and Responsibilities of Storying Experience* recently published by Oxford UP in 2017. For the debate between “diachronic” and “synchronic” life narrative(s), please refer to Galen Strawson's resounding article “Against Narrativity,” published in *Ratio* in 2004.

that the connection between Roth's writings after the 80s and the death of Besse Roth (the author's mother) seem to emerge more and more conspicuously. For Mellard, Roth's writings after his mother's death are seen not only as forms of mourning and coping with, but also as a pivotal point around which Roth's new life may be spared (70). The nature of Mellard's argument echoes that of Debra Shostak's: writing for Roth is a constructed move by which the novelist copes with his life. However, what exactly is there in the act of *writing* that provided for Roth to cope with his life experiences?

Returning to the one of the epitexts of *Sabbath's Theater* may further answer our question. As the *PBS* interview reveals, the act of writing *Sabbath's Theater* is closely related to the "freedom" of the artist, and of Philip Roth the writer. The "freedom" in *Sabbath's Theater* may refer to its notorious length—being Roth's longest work, the novel contains nearly 500 pages—in the sense that the length of a text enables more room for writing and therefore, more narratives. Conversely, "freedom" also implies the unstable and excursive nature of the narratives in *Sabbath's Theater*. Such instability is expressed by the peritext that separates the two sections of texts that forms *Sabbath's Theater*: "TO BE OR NOT TO BE" (199).²² The Shakespearean quotation immediately connotes a sense of indecisiveness and suspension. As David Gooblar further points out, Roth seems to "relocate 'the bard' in the millennium" in some of his texts: "Roth hybridizes the plays. He makes them relevant to the American national theme ... These re-inventions of Shakespeare consciously depict identity,

²² In fact, Roth does not structure *Sabbath's Theater* in chapters but in the two capitalized sentences that occupy page 1 and page 199. My reading of the two pages as the peritext of *Sabbath's Theater* is based on Genette's idea that paratexts are adornments of the text which function as "more than a boundary or sealed border, ... rather *"thresholds" (seuils)* that leads to deeper understanding of how paratexts ensures "the text's presence in the world, its 'reception' and consumption in the form ... of a book" (1-3). However, as Genette writes, a paratext is also "a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of transaction" which engenders "better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it." The two pages belongs, indeed, in the overall "text" of *Sabbath's Theater*; but read as paratexts, they reveal further intricacies of the text.

genre, and the palimpsests of patrimony as hybrid and complicated, the necessary condition of the contemporary American epic” (115). Interestingly, Gooblar’s analysis on Roth’s American epic and Shakespearian plays also involves the attention to “identity” and “genre.” As we have discussed, these two terms remain essential in reading *Sabbath’s Theater* as the narratives in the text seem to incorporate, challenge, transgress or even manipulate the idea of literary genres through “hybrid and complicated” narrative transitions.

The “TO BE OR NOT TO BE” in *Sabbath’s Theater* might not carry the intensity implied for theatric performance in *Hamlet*, but it certainly conveys several important messages to the reader in a rather elusive way. The first message has to do with the major theme of the second section of *Sabbath’s Theater*: Namely, how Mickey Sabbath comes to terms with his own death. As the later part of the novel reveals, Sabbath’s urge for death has reached to the point that he starts to visit a cemetery regularly while envisioning his own death monument: “Morris Sabbath/ “Mickey”/ Beloved Whoremonger, Seducer,/ Sodomist, Abuser of Women,/ Destroyer of Morals, Ensnarer of Youth,/ Uxoricide,/ Suicide/ 1929-1994” (404). The last definitive term, “suicide” exemplifies the Shakespearean quote which started the chapter, “TO BE OR NOT TO BE”, for in the simplest meanings of the words, “not to be” imply an end of an existence while “to be” infuses a being into existence. Nevertheless, as the other peritext of *Sabbath’s Theater* reminds us, “THERE’S NOTHING THAT KEEPS ITS PROMISE” (1), the “to be” can also be read as “to commit suicide” while “not to be” as “not to kill myself.” Conveying two contrasting meanings, the peritexts of *Sabbath’s Theater*, like those in *Operation Shylock*, seem to put the reader in a state of suspension in which little can be assured or decided.

Interestingly, while Sabbath appears indecisive on which “spot” is best for him to be

buried, the narrator reveals to the reader that next to the spot Sabbath is choosing stands a monument of a Holocaust survivor: “to his left, lying down—was Captain Schloss. He slowly read once again the substantial portrait of his eternal-neighbor-to-be. ‘Holocaust Survivor, VFW, Mariner, Businessman, Entrepreneur. In Loving Memory Relatives and Friends May 30, 1929-May 20, 1990.’” (403). The mentioning of the Holocaust survivors, marginality in terms of the portion of the text, manifests exactly what Michael Rothberg brilliantly argues in “Roth and the Holocaust”:

In this essay, I argue that it is less the Holocaust and its impact on American life that obsesses Roth than the unbridgeable distance between the Holocaust and American life—and the inauthenticity of most attempts to lessen that distance. Such an observation does not mean that Roth minimize or relativizes the significance of the Holocaust. To the contrary, he has been ... one of the earliest and most articulate writers to address the genocide’s devastating singularity. But its singularity is precisely not American. To use a term inspired by Roth, the Holocaust is something like the ‘counter-history’ of American life. (Rothberg 53)

Although Rothberg makes his argument based on his reading of *The Counter Life*, in *Sabbath’s Theater*, the role of Captain Schloss also demands a further examination.

The passage that entails Sabbath’s monument involves a passage written in exemplary Rothian style. Reading the inscriptions on Captain Schloss’ monument, Sabbath suddenly remembers a gravestone he saw “some twenty-four hours earlier”:

A nameless gravestone stood on display, beside it was a sign, headed “What Is a Monument?” and, beneath that, simple, elegant, script avowing that a monument ‘is a symbol of devotion ... a tangible expression of the noblest of all human emotions—LOVE... a monument is built because there was a life, not a death, and with intelligent selection and proper guidance, it should inspire REVERENCE, FAITH, and HOPE for the living...it should speak out as a voice from yesterday and today to the ages unborn...”

Beautifully put. I’m glad they have clarified for us what is a monument. (403-404)

As the passage above shows, the narrator of *Sabbath's Theater*, through Sabbath's suddenly-evoked memory, explicates the meaning and importance of monuments. Does this explication not remind the reader of the wider project of remembering the Holocaust by monuments? As Rothberg concludes in his essay, "[w]hile always aware of the shifting contexts through which the Holocaust first entered and then permeated American life, Roth has proven himself consistently skeptical about the historically understandable Jewish tendency to see enemies everywhere and to embrace the Holocaust as a pillar of identity" (64). Skeptical in embracing the Holocaust as a pillar of his identity, the "implied Roth" reminds us that the "pillars" or monuments should "inspire REVERENCE, FAITH, and HOPE for the living" and more importantly, "should speak out as a voice from yesterday and today to the ages unborn" (404). For Roth, it seems, monuments should remind people of life, not death, for monuments are supposed to be a source of inspiration for the ones who are still alive. In this stance, this passage bonds together the mnemonic function of monuments with "life"; This connection between the mnemonic nature of monuments and their effects to the living suggests that for Roth, life writing seems to involve inevitably the act of memory writing as well.

Ironically, the narrative transition after the optimistic description of monuments presents rather an odd line after the "beautiful" explication of what a monument is: "Beautifully put. I'm glad they have clarified for us what is a monument" (404). Is this the narrator's comment on the inscription which Sabbath now suddenly remembers? Or is it Sabbath's monologue, which, throughout the text, has been 'interrupting' the narrator's omnipresent speech. In fact, if we pay attention to the shifting between multiple narrative perspectives, the transition runs so smoothly that it is hardly possible to detect the role of the "arranger" between the dialogues and prose. That being said, there are still multiple instances

where the deliberate use of “I” indicate the definite presence of a narrator. Nonetheless, in *Sabbath’s Theater*, this narrator is sometimes Mickey Sabbath, sometimes his wife, Roseanna, sometimes his mistress Drenka Balich, and sometimes just “the narrator.” The origin of narrative seems so difficult to identify in *Sabbath’s Theater* to the extent that the reader might get a sense of narrative-overload, or be presented with a wrestle between narratives. As Ross Posnock points out in his chapter on *Sabbath’s Theater*: “Often the narrative voice when inside Sabbath’s mind shifts almost seamlessly from ‘he’ to ‘I’ (whereas conventional free indirect discourse retains a third-person narrator who mimes first-person thoughts and feelings). The relation of third and first person could be described as collaborative, a not inappropriate word given that Sabbath describes his lovers as collaborators” (156). Such collaborative narratives mark again the “freedom” that Roth so values in *Sabbath Theater* in the sense that the seamless transition “from ‘he’ to ‘I’” enables Roth to narrate from different perspectives and distances.

As one of Roth’s stylistic traits, the sense of instability or “freedom” is expressed not only in both the peritexts and epitexts of *Sabbath’s Theater* but also in the narrative transitions in the text. In the penultimate episode of “THERE’S NOTHING THAT KEEPS ITS PROMISE,” Mickey Sabbath—the “typical dirty old man”—scavenges the drawers of Deborah Cowan, daughter to Norman Cowan who, manipulated by Sabbath’s rhetoric, hosts Sabbath in his apartment out of sympathy. The narratives in this particular episode will be my focus for its exemplary “freedom” of shifting between different strands of narratives and narrative subjects. In Deborah’s room, while Sabbath searches for some incandescent secret of Deborah—which Sabbath certainly believes exist—a silent transition of narrative perspectives demonstrates one of the many intricacies of Roth’s narratives: “His finger still

sticky with the sweet jam, Sabbath ended up back in Deborah's room sifting through the drawers of her desk. Even Silvija had them. They all had them. Just a matter of finding where they stash them away" (174). The willful transition between different narratives can be detected by differentiating between the short, commentary, or even affirmative sentences, "Even Silvija had them. They all had them," and the third-person depiction of Sabbath's returning to Deborah's room which entails the short commentaries. It is difficult to judge if these comments come from Sabbath or the narrator, for there seems to be no clear indication from whom these speeches are voiced. Despite the difficulty to differentiate the subject of speech, there is certainly a shift in narrative perspectives as the third-person perspective give way to the short, commentary affirmations.

The free transition between narrative perspectives is further exemplified in the following paragraph, which starts interestingly with "Now where have you hidden them, Deborah? Am I hot or am I cold? The desk was a big oak antique with polished brass handles, originating probably in some nineteenth-century lawyer. Unusual. Most kids like the plastic crap. Or is this called camp? He began removing the contents of the long top drawer" (174). This paragraph demonstrates the complexities Roth invest in his narratives; the paragraph starts with two questions, indicating that the one speaking is not the omniscient and omnipresent narrator, for he/she would have known where exactly "Deborah had hidden them." Unless the all-knowing narrator is pretending to be an observer who does not know the location of the hidden object, we can be sure that this sentence and the one that follows will not be the narrator's narrative. The two questions would, in the context of the plot, reasonably be thought of as Mickey Sabbath's narrative as he imagines himself talking to Deborah. In this case, can this passage be taken as Mickey Sabbath's narrative masked as the

narrator's?

After the two questions, a long sentence describing in detail an antique desk further problematizes the attempt to identify the subjects behind these narratives. Not only is the sentence written from a third person perspective, but also the sentence reveals some detailed information about the desk which Sabbath probably wouldn't have known. The second part of the sentence, "originating probably in some nineteenth-century lawyer" suggests again that the speaker possesses some knowledge about antique furniture, but the "probably" reminds the reader that the speaker's knowledge of antique furniture might be limited as he/she cannot be certain where exactly this desk *originates* from. Who is this persona behind these sometimes descriptive but sometimes uncertain or even misleading narratives that keep popping up? Whose narrative are blended with Sabbath's and the narrator's?

The other half of the passage reveals further details to our inquiry. As the following text shows, the remaining part of the passage consists of, in sequence, two short, dialogic monologues, another question, and lastly a short description from a third person perspective: "Unusual. Most kids like the plastic crap. Or is this called camp? He began removing the contents of the long top drawer" (174). The two short sentences, along with the question, according to my analysis above, will not be the omniscient narrator's narrative since he/she would probably know whether "this is called camp" or not. The three sentences seem to be, in fact, again Sabbath's monologue. While searching for "the gold" in Deborah's drawers, Sabbath appears to be speaking to himself and asking himself questions in his mind.

Not even before the reader is certain that the three sentences are indeed Sabbath's inner narratives, the following sentence, "He began removing the contents of the long top drawer," infers that the speaker of this sentence takes strangely the third-person perspective

instead of the subjective stance of Sabbath. Such free transition between narratives reminds the reader of the distinct style of James Joyce, whose narrative style is deliberately appropriated, if not parodied in *Sabbath Theater*.²³ Moreover, the free transition between narrative voices also reminds us of the “TO BE OR NOT TO BE,” the sequence of which is, I believe, arranged after serious deliberation, followed by precisely the passage that leads to Sabbath’s musing on his obituary and then the parody on Joyce’s prosaic free verse. Of course, it would be naïve to take the “TO BE OR NOT TO BE” simply as a hint for the reader to notice the blending of distinct literary styles in the following chapter. In this case, the motto may be taken as “to be this author—in our case James Joyce—or not to be this author.” Perhaps more generally and significantly, “To be this style or that style.” To explore further meanings of the “TO BE OR NOT TO BE”, we need to return to the free transition applied in the episode where Sabbath scavenges Deborah’s drawers.²⁴

As I have demonstrated above, the narrative transition between Sabbath’s monologue and the unidentifiable “commentator” reveals that there is indeed a narrative more than that of the omniscient narrator’s and Sabbath’s. These narrative transitions, however, do not tell the reader exactly the source of the narrative; only that there is *a narrative*. The “TO BE OR NOT TO BE” in this case, can be taken as “to be Sabbath or not to be Sabbath,” in the sense that Sabbath’s monologue is tangled up with another narrative which does not come from the omniscient narrator. Where do these narratives come from? Or rather, who is deciding which

²³ Take for instance pages 206-211 where Sabbath rides the subway with “the-desire-not-to-be-alive-any-longer.” During the ride, Sabbath muses on his obituary along while discussing it with a personified idea of suicide. The signature Joycean passage appears right after the obituary, starting from “a blur wizzing blur why now most pleasant invention nobody think ticker tape like this I don’t head ...” (208). The parody ended on page 211 when the narrator announced the Joycean style which is appropriated here: “So Sabbath passeth the time, pretending to think without punctuation, the way James Joyce pretended people thought ...”

²⁴ The free transitions between narratives are, in fact, all over *Sabbath Theater*. I mention this particular episode not only because it is exemplary of Roth’s narrative but also for an interesting connection which I will discuss in a later section.

narrative should be presented in the text and which should not? Scholarships on narrative studies and the rhetoric of fiction may help us reveal the identity of this amorphous narrating subject.

Borrowing from Wayne Booth's idea of "the implied author" (1961) and Genette Gérard's further explication of the term in 1983, I argue that this narrative comes from an implied author who occupies the *internal focal position* in *Sabbath's Theater*. Booth introduced "the implied author" in his definitive *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, in which he writes: "Whether we call this implied author an 'official scribe,' or ... the author's 'second self'—it is clear that the picture the reader gets of this presence is one of the author's most important effects" (71). In other words, the implied author is the personae the author of the text constructs for the reader when the narratives are read.

The "implied author" is to be cautiously taken as different from the author *per se*, as the former appears as an imaginary figure while the latter was a living human being. Booth further illustrates the crucial difference between the implied author and the real author: "However impersonal he [the author] may try to be, his reader will inevitably construct a picture of the official scribe who writes in this manner—and of course that official scribe will never be neutral towards all values. Our reactions to his various commitments, secret or overt, will help to determine our response to the work" (71). With the idea of "the implied author" in mind, Booth seems to suggest that pure objectivity is impossible in narratives for the more the "implied author" tries to stay objective or tries to persuade the reader that he/she is neutrally observing the events in the novel from distance, the less "neutral" he/she appears to be, given that any gesture of yoking the reader of the text can be read as a piece of constructed narrative, even those that serves precisely the function of authenticating

themselves.

If in Deborah's drawers we detect the "implied author" who keeps jumping into Sabbath's monologue while he searches and searches, are there more clues to understand this figure? In the afterword to the second edition of *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Booth explicitly clarifies the idea of "the implied author" and lists out some general characteristics of the figure. Written twenty-one years later, the afterword suggests that "the implied author" is:

- A: Who has chosen, consciously or unconsciously ... every detail, every quality, that is found in the work or implied by its silences;
- B: Who knows that the story is not literally true (that *Oliver Twist*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Emma* are invented), that some of the work's norms may not hold in 'real' life...
- C. But who, like that implied reader, *pretends* that it is all true, if read properly (correcting for irony, unreliable narration, other wheel within wheels, etc.), and that all norms hold in reality; thus creating the teller of the tale who *believes* that it all really happened. (429, emphasis original)

Having these guidelines in mind, the reader of *Sabbath's Theater* can attribute the amorphous narrative subject in the Deborah episode to the implied author who "has chosen, consciously or unconsciously ... every detail, every quality, that is found in the work or implied by its silences" (429). This "implied Roth," the figure accounted for all the textual arrangements and narrative transitions in *Sabbath's Theater*, differs from Philip Roth the novelist and from "the career writer" which, according to Booth, is the culmination of all the implied authors of Roth's works (431). In the case of *Sabbath's Theater* and the "implied Roth" that presides within, the "implied Roth" seems to bear interesting similarities with Roth the novelist. Although the epitext of *Sabbath's Theater* renders it a fiction loosely based on R.B Kitaj, a Jewish-American artist who was one of Roth's long-time confidants, can the free transitions in narratives and the idea of the implied author elicit a different reading of the text?

Returning to yet another epitext that surrounds *Sabbath's Theater* (PBS), the freedom

in the work that leads to Roth feeling “especially partial to” *Sabbath’s Theater* seems to be rooted in the fact that *Sabbath’s Theater* enables Roth to freely express himself and his identity through constructing and directing narratives. Such relation between narrative, life, and identity has been discussed by scholars who are in the field of narrative studies. As Jerome Bruner argues in “Life as Narrative,” life and narrative seem to be inseparable, for narrative is for Bruner “world making,” “the principle function of the mind” (11). Bruner further contends that the principle function of the mind is to come up with “the form of thought that goes into the constructing not of logical or inductive arguments but of stories or narratives” (11). Bruner’s theory faces the problem of self-reflexivity, for the narrator and the narrated appear to be the same figure in Bruner’s contention. As Bruner himself writes:

The story of one’s own life is, of course, a privileged but troubled narrative in the sense that it is reflexive: the narrator and the central figure in the narrative are the same. This reflexivity creates dilemmas ... problems beyond those of verification, beyond the issue of indeterminacy (that the very telling of the self-story distorts what we have in mind to tell), beyond “rationalization.” (13)

The reflexivity in narrating one’s own life story implies a split between the narrating subject and the object narrated. This, for Bruner causes the dilemma of trying to narrate one’s life while simultaneously living it.

In the case of reading *Sabbath’s Theater* as yet another piece of Roth’s life narrative, the dilemma mentioned above is reflected through the “metafictional narratives” applied by the “implied Roth.” Such metafictional narratives not only expose the presence of the narrator but also add more complexity—if not confusion—to the free transition between narrative subjects in *Sabbath’s Theater*. In an episode where Sabbath and Kathy—a former student of Sabbath who is almost a third of his age—discuss their “scandal” (that one of their intimate phone-sex recording has leaked), the narrator writes: “So little in life is knowable,

Reader—don't be hard on Sabbath if he gets things wrong. Or on Kathy if she gets things wrong. Many farcical, illogical, incomprehensible transactions are subsumed by the manias of lust" (247). By directly addressing the reader, the narrator in this episode serves the purpose of reminding the reader his/her presence.

Conversely, the metafictional narrative also lays bare the fact that the narrator is also a constructed "character" in the text created by "the implied Roth" who selects and strings the narratives together. Considering the two-sided effects of this particular metafictional device, the "implied Roth" seems to be telling the reader implicitly: don't be too hard on me, for "many farcical, illogical, incomprehensible transactions are subsumed by the manias of lust" (247). In other words, the metafictional device in this episode—an explanation following an imploration of excusing Sabbath for his promiscuous affair with Kathy, a girl a third of his age—reflects the "freedom" of writing that the real Roth talks about in the interview. By implicitly yoking the reader into excusing Mickey Sabbath, the narrator is also yoking the reader of *Sabbath's Theater* to excuse the "implied Roth" for choosing to show explicitly extreme promiscuity and unashamed scenes of desires. Subtly yet still detectable, the metafictional narrative in this particular episode urges the "freedom of writing" which Roth the novelist emphatically foregrounds in *Sabbath's Theater*.

Scholars who study the topic of narrative identity see the urge to construct a narrative not only as one's coping with events in one's life but also, as Bruner suggests, as one's making sense of his/her living experience. To grasp the interesting intimacy between Bruner's definitive essay, "Life as Narrative," and Roth's life narratives in *Sabbath's Theater*, I will return to the episode in which Sabbath scavenges Deborah's drawers. After Sabbath "ransacked the remaining drawers," he finally found what he was seeking all this while in

Deborah's room (177):

There it was. The gold. His gold. At the bottom of the bottom drawer, where he should have begun in the first place, in among a jumble of old schoolbooks and more teddy bears, a simple Scotties box, design of white, lilac, and pale green flowers on a lemony-white background “Each box of Scotties offers the softness and strength you want for your family...” You're no fool, D. Handwritten label on the box read, “Recipes.” You cunning girl. I love you. Recipes. I'll give you teddy bears up the gazoo!

Inside the Scotties box were her recipes—“Deborah's Sponge Cake,” “Deborah's Brownies”, “Deborah's Chocolate Chip Cookies,” “Deborah's Divine Lemon Cake”—neatly written in blue ink in her hand. A fountain pen. The last kid in America to write with a fountain pen. (179)

It is quite interesting that, for Sabbath's, his gold turns out to be just “recipes” instead of more intimate objects of Deborah. Throughout the text, Sabbath has hardly missed any chance for getting in contact with a teenage girl like Deborah. Out of all the things in Deborah's drawers, why are these recipes that are “neatly written in blue ink in her hand,” Sabbath's “gold”?

The significance of these “recipes,” I argue, has something to do with Jerome Bruner's 1987 essay, “Life as Narrative.” Interestingly, the title of the concluding section of “Life as Narrative” also involves “recipes”—— “Recipes for Structuring Experience.” In the concluding section, Bruner not only foregrounds how narratives and life experience are somehow inseparable: “I believe that the ways of telling and the ways of conceptualizing that go with them become so habitual that they finally become *recipes* for structuring experience itself, for laying down routes into memory, for not only guiding the life narrative up to the present but directing it into the future” (31, emphasis my own). Bringing in his personal experience, Bruner further adds: “My life as a student of mind has taught me one incontrovertible lesson. Mind is never free of precommitment. There is no innocent eye ...

any story one may tell about anything is better understood by considering other possible ways in which it can be told.” (32). The connection between Bruner’s “Recipes for Self Construction” and the “recipes” in Deborah’s underwear drawers, at a first glance, seem to be hinged on the word “recipe” only. Nevertheless, considering that “identity”, “narratives”, and “life-writing” are all Roth’s major thematic concerns throughout his career, there seems to be more connection between Bruner and Roth.

As shown in multiple interviews, Roth, like most novelists, has always been a ferocious reader. However, it is difficult to determine whether Roth had read Bruner’s essay while he was writing *Sabbath’s Theater*, though I believe he probably might have, given Roth’s interest on (personal) identit(ies) and narratives. Moreover, Jerome Bruner, like Roth, is a Jewish descendent;²⁵ and Roth was still teaching in the academia while Bruner’s essay was published. These elusive connections—coincidence or not—led me to surmise that Roth, as a novelist whose works are concerned largely with narrative and identity and as an academic who taught comparative literature at the University of Pennsylvania, had perhaps read Bruner’s essay and transcribed part of Bruner’s ideas into *Sabbath’s Theater*, the book he felt “most partial to.” Not to mention that Bruner proves to be a reader of Roth, as he sometimes demonstrates his theory on narrative and identity by quoting from Roth’s works.²⁶ Picking up all these subtle connections, the “freedom” that Roth so enjoys when writing *Sabbath’s Theater* seems to suggest that the life narratives produced during that period of time has to do with the freedom of Roth expressing himself—or more precisely, expressing his identity as

²⁵ Various but implicit traits in *Sabbath’s Theater* mentions certain public figures in the Jewish-American community. For instance, Leonard Bernstein, the first American-born musician to stand up as the conductor of New York Philharmonic, is briefly mentioned on page 466 of the novel.

²⁶ For example, see Bruner’s “The Autobiographical Process” in *Current Sociology*, vol. 43, no. 2, Sept. 1995, pp. 161–177. The discussion of Roth’s *The Facts* is on p. 175.

not only an artist and a Jew but also as an American. In this case, Deborah's recipes, which Sabbath renders as his "gold" and the "recipes for structuring experience" that Bruner deems as the essential activity of human experience, share the mutual attention to narrative and identity. As Roth repeatedly expressed to the public that he is "a writer who is a Jew" instead of a "Jewish writer." In this case, can we say that Roth values the autonomy of writing over his identity?

A more comprehensive attitude toward this dichotomy between artistic freedom and ethnic heritage, in the case of Roth, can in fact be found again in the motto "TO BE OR NOT TO BE." The constant oscillation between artistic autonomy and ethnic responsibility does not only seem to bother Roth but also Mickey Sabbath, as Brett Ashley Kaplan points out, "the main character is marked at once as embodying a tension between a peaceful practice and rabble rousing with the Devil" (74). If "TO BE OR NOT TO BE" reveals the tension that hovers over both Sabbath's and Roth's life decisions, are there any other similarities between the two? As I have demonstrated in chapter three, similarities between the protagonist and Roth is hardly a new topic in Roth's works. Roth could have simply named the protagonist Philip Roth—as he does in his "Roth books"—if he wants to emphasize the autobiographical dimension of *Sabbath's Theater*. Nevertheless, this would probably be too "convenient" for Roth, for during the time *Sabbath's Theater* was written the novelist had already published most of his "Roth books"—with the exception of *Deception*, which was published in 2004. If Roth consciously or unconsciously exposes himself through his characters, it would be an attempt with more "elegance and filth" (*Sabbath's Theater*, 186). Nevertheless, this reading strategy should not be taken as reading the text *according* to the author. Rather, by untangling the autobiographical dimension and fictional elements in *Sabbath's Theater*, I try to read

Roth's writing process of the text as a piece life narrative that can be read side by side with *Sabbath's Theater*.

Such reading probes not only into the "freedom" of *Sabbath's Theater* but also the mechanism through which the "implied Roth" chooses to present himself on the page. As Bruner writes in his conclusion, "any story one may tell about anything is better understood by considering other possible ways in which it can be told," there seem to be all sorts of alternatives the "implied Roth" could have chosen. First of all, why naming the protagonist Mickey Sabbath? And how does reading *Sabbath's Theater* as a loosely based biography of R.B. Kitaj—the general reception of the "novel"—reveals to the reader further meanings of the text? These questions do not seem to be aptly answered through previous and limited scholarships on *Sabbath's Theater*, given the length and the complexity of its narratives.

According to my reading, going with a name that is totally invented in *Sabbath's Theater* seems to be Roth's attempt to start with a clean slate. This state of a clean slate, ridding all conformity and decorum, echoes the freedom that Roth expressed in both the text and the paratexts of *Sabbath's Theater*. If this is the case, why adding similarities between Sabbath and the novelist himself? For similarities between the protagonist and the author seem to put *Sabbath's Theater* into "one of Roth's autobiographical fictions;" another sort of Zuckerman, so to speak. As the novel reveals, Sabbath, like Roth, comes from a family with Jewish descendants, worked as an artist, and is approximately the same age as the novelist himself. Moreover, both Sabbath and Roth were married to an actress—the former to Nikki, the first wife whose disappearance haunts Sabbath throughout the book while the novelist himself married Claire Bloom in 1990, four years before *Sabbath's Theater* would be published and the couple would decide to have a divorce. Even more uncannily, Mickey

Sabbath is the second son of a Jewish family; his brother, Morty, died in the war at 1944.

Also was Roth the second son of his family, brother to Sandy Roth. Despite the fact that Roth didn't have to suffer the trauma Morty's death brings to Sabbath, the similarities between Mickey Sabbath and the novelist himself seems painstakingly difficult to ignore. It would be quite farfetched to argue that Mickey Sabbath is the most authentic literary rendition of Philip Roth. Nevertheless, as Jeffrey Berman succinctly points out, "Roth both encourages and discourages public scrutiny of his life" (94). The encouragement in *Sabbath's Theater* relies on the similarities between Roth and Sabbath while the discouragement is expressed in the naming of the protagonist and the imaginary setting of the text. These encouragements and discouragements, in *Sabbath's Theater*, balanced and often appearing in free narrative transitions, make it difficult for the reader to determine if "is Roth here or not." At last, do we find ourselves back to the motto which separates the two sections of the book, "TO BE OR NOT TO BE"?

Perhaps revisiting the end of the novel might provide possible ways out of this dichotomy between *Sabbath's Theater* as a piece of life narrative or a fictional text. After Sabbath steals the carton containing Morty's reminders from cousin Fish, Sabbath finds himself still unable to commit suicide. When Sabbath gets hold of the carton, the narrator writes, "How could he kill himself now that he had Morty's things? Something always came along to make you keep living, god-damnit! ... I cannot walk into the waves and leave this stuff behind" (446). Reluctant to leave Morty's stuff behind and recognizing that he now is the "custodian of Morty's things" (462), Sabbath decides to commit suicide on the condition that Morty's things should be buried with him (476-77). Feeling the weight and intensity of the memories carried by Morty's reminders, Sabbath seems unable to commit suicide before

visiting Drenka's grave one last time. On his previous visits, Sabbath often fantasizes Drenka's sumptuous body and ejaculates on her grave, as a secret ritual kept between the couple. This time, before greeting death, Sabbath urinates on Drenka's grave, as the scene reminds him of the night he spent with Drenka, during which the couple pissed on each other willingly while having sex in the Grotto. As the narrative flows: "The stream was painfully slow to start, and he was fearful at first that he was asking of himself the impossible and that there was in him, nothing left of him" (477). The description echoes the ending of the first chapter when Sabbath indulges himself with Rosa, the housecleaner at Norman Cowan's studio: "Sabbath felt as though he were porous, as though the last that was left whole concoction that had been a self was running out drop by drop" (198).

Either feeling porous or painfully emptied, Sabbath seems to become "an empty vessel" in the ending of both the first and second chapter of *Sabbath's Theater*. If the porous feeling Sabbath felt when half-faking a mental collapse to lure Rosa into hugging him only brought Sabbath "the-desire-to-not-live-any-longer" (198-203), the second urinating scene in the cemetery brought Sabbath "the-desire-not-to-leave-anymore": "And then the stream began...a trickle at first, just some feeble dribbling ... then a spurt followed that, and a second spurt, and then a flow, and then a gush, and then a surge ... (478). The unusual success of peeing at Drenka's grave—"he could not remember when he had peed like this last"—does not, however, entail a narrative flash back about the pleasant time Sabbath and Drenka shared. Rather, the flowing of the urine—or according to Sabbath "the juices of the human vine"—further reminds Sabbath that no matter how hard he tries to "water" Drenka's grave, "he could not bring her back" (478). Farcical and nasty as it might be, Sabbath's realization of the irreversibility of time and death is not without a deadly

seriousness: “There is nothing on earth more firmly established, it’s all that you can know for sure—and no one wants to know it” (478).

The final pages of the text include a short episode with Drenka’s son, Matthew, whom Sabbath encounters when he is performing the promiscuous affair at Drenka’s grave. Arguing ferociously to Matthew about taking him into prison, Sabbath hopes that by receiving some sort of punishment, he “can purge [him]self publicly of my crimes and accept the punishment that’s coming to me” (484). Eventually, Matthew does not take Sabbath in for he fears that Sabbath’s affair with his mother—as well as plenty other men’s—will attract public attention and further deprave any reputation Drenka had. While being dragged out of the police car, Sabbath yells: “But I am going free! I’ve reveled in the revolting thing one time too many. And I’m going free! I’m a ghoul! I’m a ghoul!” (485). Eventually, Sabbath’s crying out turns out in vain for eventually “the cruiser had driven off, leaving Sabbath ankle-deep in the pudding of the spring mud ... with no one to kill him except himself” (485). Sabbath’s futile crying demonstrates his unwillingness, if not inability, to actually commit suicide; namely, to eventually face death face to face. The will to be taken in seems just a procrastination for Sabbath not to end his own life, as if adding this episode may be taken as “the implied Roth’s” reluctance to put an end to the novel at this point. After all, there is no one to kill Sabbath except for himself: “And he couldn’t do it. He could not fucking die. How could he leave? How could he go? Everything he hated was here” (485). Similarly, there is no one the end the novel except the author Philip Roth. Perhaps not killing Sabbath at the end of the book reveals, although implicitly, how the implied Roth navigates between the aesthetics and politics of fiction. Sabbath’s inability to commit suicide seems to imply a will to stay around, to keep going, and to come up with more narratives; this will to live, again, echoes the urge

for speech which, as I have demonstrated, appears prevalent in Roth's narratives. In other words, Sabbath's procrastination or even impotence to commit suicide enables the novelist Roth to put more narratives into *Sabbath's Theater*. It seems that the reader of the novel, after 500 something pages, is waiting for Sabbath's climactic death which in the end is denied by the "implied Roth."

I would like to conclude the chapter with a final revisit to Deborah's lowest drawers to further illuminate how Roth plays with the ideas of and connection between narrative, identity, and life in *Sabbath's Theater*. In the lowest of the drawer, Sabbath finds the "gold" that he has been searching for all the while: the recipes "neatly written in blue ink." Through the word "recipe," I connect Jerome Bruner's thoughts on narrative and Roth's writing of *Sabbath's Theater* to surmise that both Bruner and Roth hold quite the same attitude toward identity and writing. As Bruner writes in "Recipes for Structuring Experience", "I believe that the ways of telling and the ways of conceptualizing that go with them become so habitual that they finally become *recipes* for structuring experience itself ... for not only guiding the life narrative up to the present but directing it into the future" (31, emphasis my own). Both Roth and Bruner seem to suggest that life narratives, despite being extremely tormenting at the time, must to be preserved and recorded for the reason that these narratives connect with the "ages unborn."²⁷ Reading side by side Bruner's narrative theory and some particular intricacies of *Sabbath's Theater*, the novel seems to foreground deliberately the pain of narrating one's losses. Moreover, Bruner's imperative of seeing life as narratives seems to suggest that there are no other ways except constant narration that enables one to structure the past, present, and future of one's life. These life narratives, diachronic or synchronic, seem to

²⁷ For "the implied Roth's" attitude toward preserving life narratives as they guide the future generation, see the beautifully written explication on monuments on page 403-404.

form an abyss in *Sabbath's Theater* in which narrating voices and subjects are intermingled and intertwined.



Conclusion:

In this thesis, I started with the early reception of Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*. As the reception of the novel demonstrates, the general problem when reading Roth's works is that one can barely tell if the texts are wholly autobiographical or fictional. Therefore, I have reviewed scholarly debates in the field of autobiographical studies in the second chapter and referred to Derrida's argument against establishing literary genres. Theories from the field of autobiographical studies provided me a lens through which I read Roth's texts as both gestures of self-concealment and self-exposure. In my reading of *Operation Shylock: A Confession*, the concealing, or even deceiving, nature of Roth's works is exemplified by the "identity crisis" that "Roth in the text" constantly suffers from. Through Rancière's idea of "a mirage of representation," my analysis of *Operation Shylock* attempts to underline how Roth the writer presents such an identity crisis through both a political dimension and an aesthetic one. The political dimension of *Operation Shylock* relates to the question of Roth's identity as a Jewish-American novelist. The aesthetic dimension of the text demonstrates the "self-countering writing" through metafictional devices and the peritexts of the text. Although, perhaps, one of Roth's most autobiographical works, I contend that in *Operation Shylock*, Roth the writer is actually little to be found.

My second case study on *Sabbath's Theater* focuses on Roth's further disruption of literary genres as well as the free narrative transitions in the novel. My reading started with a piece of the epitext recorded by PBS in which Roth himself reveals that *Sabbath's Theater* is the novelist's favorite work. Closely following the narrative transitions in *Sabbath's Theater*, I try to sketch out the contour of the "implied author" of *Sabbath's Theater* and argue that the

figure of the “implied author” provides freedom for the writer Philip Roth to express himself as liberally as he wishes in the novel. I argue that this freedom so treasured by Roth is not only the freedom of artistic autonomy but also the freedom of being a Jewish American writer which in many respects prevents Roth from facing the dichotomy between being responsible to his Jewish root or being able to “escape from history” as a Jewish American novelist. I ended my second case study with a rather bold surmise: *Sabbath’s Theater* seems to be the perfect hiding haven for Roth the writer. In *Operation Shylock*, the reader finds so many Roths in “the mirage of representation” that eventually, it seems impossible to distinguish the real from the fictional. In *Sabbath’s Theater* the reader seems to see so little of Roth that one cannot help but trace the similarities between Mickey Sabbath, the narrator of *Sabbath’s Theater*, and Philip Roth, the author of the novel. Borrowing from Jerome Bruner’s idea of “life narrative” as an encompassing term for how people structure life experiences, my thesis ended with the attempt to point out the “light” in “the abyss of narratives” which occupies *Sabbath’s Theater*. The light refers to a closer examination of Roth’s life narratives—including the text, the manuscripts, his letters and interviews—which perhaps may welcome the author back into the text as yet another character which, like those in most of Roth’s works, borders on reality and fiction.

Works Cited

- Aarons, Victoria. "American Jewish Identity in Roth's Short Fiction." *The Cambridge Companion to Philip Roth*, Cambridge UP, 2007, pp. 9-21.
- Adams, Tim. "RB Kitaj: An Obsession with Revenge." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 10 Feb. 2013, www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/feb/10/rb-kitaj-obsessions-tate-war
- Alvarez, Al. "Profile: Philip Roth." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 11 Sept. 2004, www.theguardian.com/books/2004/sep/11/fiction.philiproth.
- Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." *Image, Music, Text*, edited and translated by Stephen Heath. Hill and Wang, 1977.
- . "From Work to Text." *Image, Music, Text*, edited and translated by Stephen Heath. Hill and Wang, 1977.
- Battersby, James L. "Narrativity, Self, and Self-Representation." *Narrative*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2006, pp. 27-44.
- Berman, Jeffrey. "Revisiting Roth's Psychoanalysts." *The Cambridge Companion to Philip Roth*, edited by Timothy Parrish, Cambridge UP, 2007, pp. 94-110.
- Booth, Wayne C. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. University of Chicago Press, 1983.
- Bruner, Jerome. "Life as Narrative." *Social Research*, vol. 54, no. 1, 1987, pp. 11-32.

---. "The Autobiographical Process." *Current Sociology*, vol. 43, no. 2, 1995, pp. 161-177.

Budick, Emily Miller. "Roth and Israel." *The Cambridge Companion to Philip Roth*, edited by Timothy Parrish, Cambridge UP, 2007, pp. 68-81.

Cohen, Josh. "Roth's Doubles." *The Cambridge Companion to Philip Roth*, Cambridge UP, 2007, pp. 82-93.

de la Durantaye, L. "How to Read Philip Roth, or the Ethics of Fiction and the Aesthetics of Fact." *The Cambridge Quarterly*, vol. 39, no. 4, 2010, pp. 303-330.

Derrida, Jacques. "The Law of Genre," translated by Avital Ronell. *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1980, pp. 55-81.

---. *Parages*. Galilée, 1986.

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, translated by Brian Massumi, Minnesota UP, 1980.

Génette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, translated by Jane E. Lewin. Cornell UP, 1988.

---. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Cambridge UP, 1987.

Gooblar, David. *Roth After Eighty: Philip Roth and the American Literary Imagination*. Lexington Books, 2018.

Howe, Irving. "Philip Roth Reconsidered." *Commentary*, 1 Dec. 1972,

<http://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/philip-roth-reconsidered/>.

Kaplan, Brett Ashley. *Jewish Anxiety and the Novels of Philip Roth*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016.

Kincaid, Jim. "A Critique of Value-Form Marxism." *Historical Materialism*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2005, pp. 85–120.

Lejeune, Philippe. *On Autobiography*. Translated by Katherine Leary, edited by Paul John Eakin, University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

Hyvärinen, Matti. Foreword. *Life and Narrative: The Risks and Responsibilities of Storying Experience*, edited by Brian Schiff et al., Oxford UP, 2017, pp. ix-xv.

Freeman Mark. "'Narrative at the Limits (Or: What Is 'life Really Like,')'" *Life and Narrative: The Risks and Responsibilities of Storying Experience*, edited by Brian Schiff et al., Oxford UP, 2017, pp. 11-27.

McHale, Brian. *Postmodernist Fiction*. Routledge, 1977.

Mink, Louis O. *Historical Understanding*. Edited by Brian Fay, Cornell Univ. Press, 1987.

Neelakantan, Gurumurthy. "Trauma, Ethics and Psychoanalysis in Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theater*." *Philip Roth Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2017, pp. 93-104.

- Olney, James. "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction." *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, Princeton University Press, 1980, pp. 3–27.
- Parrish, Timothy, editor. *The Cambridge Companion to Philip Roth*. Cambridge UP, 2007.
- . "Roth and Ethnic Identity." *The Cambridge Companion to Philip Roth*, Cambridge UP, 2007, pp. 127-141.
- PBS, "Philip Roth Unmasked," 2003, www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/film-philip-roth-unmasked/2467/.
- Pritchard, H. William. "Sabbath's Theater." *The New York Times*, 10 Sept, 1995.
- Posnock, Ross. *Philip Roth's Rude Truth: The Art of Immaturity*. Princeton UP, 2008.
- Rancière, Jacques. *The Flesh of Words: The Politics of Writing*. Stanford UP, 2004.
- . "How to Use *Lire Le Capital*." *Economy and Society*, vol. 5, no. 3, 1976, pp. 377-384.
- . *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. Continuum, 2006.
- Rancière, Jacques, et al. *Mute Speech: Literature, Critical Theory and Politics*. Columbia University Press, 2011.
- Roth, Philip. *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography*. Vintage, 1988.
- . *Operation Shylock: A Confession*. Vintage International, 1993.
- . *Patrimony: A True Story*. Vintage International, 1991.

---. *Portnoy's Complaint*. Vintage International, 1969.

---. *Reading Myself and Others*. Vintage, 1976.

---. *Sabbath's Theater*. Vintage, 1995.

---. *Shop Talk: A Writer and his Colleagues and their Work*. Vintage international, 2001.

Rothberg, Michael. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Stanford UP, 2009.

---. "Roth and the Holocaust." *The Cambridge Companion to Philip Roth*, Cambridge UP, 2007, pp. 52-67.

Royal, Derek Parker. "Texts, Lives, and Bellybuttons: Philip Roth's *Operation Shylock* and the Renegotiation of Subjectivity." *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, vol. 19 no. 1, 2000, pp. 48-65.

---. "Roth, Literary influence, and Postmodernism." *The Cambridge Companion to Philip Roth*, Cambridge UP, 2007, pp. 22-34.

Safer, Elaine B. *Mocking the Age: The Later Novels of Philip Roth*. SUNY Press, 2006.

Schiff, Brian, et al., editors. *Life and Narrative: The Risks and Responsibilities of Storying Experience*. Oxford University Press, 2017.

Shostak, Debra. "Philip Roth's Fictions of Self-Exposure." *Shofar*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2000, pp.

19-39.

Shostak, Debra, and Philip Roth. "The Diaspora Jew and the 'Instinct for Impersonation':

Philip Roth's 'Operation Shylock.'" *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 38, no. 4, 1997,
pp. 726-754.

Smith, Sidonie and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life*

Narratives. University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

Strawson, Galen. "Against Narrativity." *Ratio*, 17, pp. 428-452.

Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction*. Routledge,

1984.

Wirth-Nesher, Hana. "Roth's Autobiographical Writings." *The Cambridge Companion to*

Philip Roth, Cambridge UP, 2007, pp. 158-172.

---. "Facing the Fictions: Henry Roth's and Philip Roth's Meta-Memoirs." *Prooftexts*, vol. 18,

no. 3, Sept. 1998, pp. 259-275.