

**CHOICE BEYOND THE BOUNDARY LINES:
SEARCH FOR SYNTHESIS IN
THE NOVELS OF PHILIP ROTH**

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CERTIFICATE

I am satisfied that the thesis entitled "'Choice Beyond the Boundary Lines': Search for Synthesis in the Novels of Philip Roth," being submitted by Kiran Modi is worthy of consideration for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, and is a record of the original bonafide research work carried out by her under my guidance and supervision, and that the results contained in it have not been submitted in part or full to any other University or Institute for the award of any degree or diploma. I certify that she has pursued the prescribed course of research.

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CLARIFICATION

I have used American spellings and followed the conventions of the MLA Style Sheet (2nd Edition), as far as possible.

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ABSTRACT

"CHOICE BEYOND THE BOUNDARY LINES":

SEARCH FOR SYNTHESIS IN THE NOVELS OF PHILIP ROTH

"Self-definition" or "search for self" has been a dominant theme throughout the western literature, yet, a contemporary writer taking up this theme finds himself faced with an added complexity brought on by such post-war phenomena as collectivism, mass education, mass communication, mass technology, and various other mass-processes. Inevitably, under such stress the dominant moods to surface in recent literature have been those of either "accommodation" or "disaffiliation," "conformation" or "nihilism." But, Philip Roth, moving from the relative innocence of the fifties to the scepticism of the eighties, has been able to actively bridge the gap between "the buoyant optimism" of the early Jewish American writers and "dark, despairing world view" of such recent writers as John Hawkes, Thomas Pynchon, Joseph Heller, Ken Kesey, Anthony Burgess, etc.

A study of Roth's oeuvre reveals that his protagonists, though "their moorings have been cut," though they have been "swept away from their native shores," are unintimidated still by recurrent failures. They strive continually to live beyond their psychological and moral means. Roth, by varying his fictional strategies from his first novel, Goodbye, Columbus (1959), to his last Zuckerman Bound (1985), tries to locate his

Jew as Man. Stretching rather than reinforcing the boundaries that define any one literary mode, he explores, in his "series of increasingly pointed fiction," the possibilities of self-realization in contemporary American society.

The quest, in Roth's own words, begins with the individual's concern with "who or what shall have influence and jurisdiction over one's life." Each of his protagonists "is seen making a conscious, deliberate, even willful choice beyond the boundary lines of his life, and just so as to give expression to what in his spirit will not be grimly determined, by others, or even by what he had himself taken to be his own nature." The process, predictably enough, reveals the consequences of "banging your head against your own wall," for even if one is able to defy such stock authorities as the parents, society, and state, how is one to escape one's own "characterological enslavement." The sense of entrapment, however, is mitigated at the end of each novel by the hero's insistence, even in the face of certain failure, on the possibility of bringing about a change.

Through a close critical analysis of the novels of Philip Roth in their chronological order, it is the endeavor of this thesis to point up that the material Roth chooses for and the artistic forms he adopts in his fiction are closely linked with his concern for self-realization through a process of conscious choice.

The thesis has five chapters. Chapter I, "Introduction," surveys briefly the themes and concerns reflected in the post-war

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American literature. It introduces Roth as a Jewish - American writer, who uses his ethnic background as a springboard to project his theme of search for synthesis of one's body, heart, and mind, and in doing so, conveys that his stand is different from those of his contemporaries.

Chapter II, III and IV analyse Roth's novels chronologically to explore the various journeys undertaken by his protagonists, fighting on various levels -- of parents, spouse, sexual relationships, and constraints of art -- in order to establish their own authority over themselves.

The "Postscript" discusses the last to date The Prague Orgy -- epilogue to Zuckerman Bound, and discovers that Roth's fictional concerns are still the ones with which he commenced his literary career.

Chapter V, "Conclusion," summarizes the main points. The conclusion reached is that a Rothian hero in searching for self ends up hooked on the double prongs of subjectivity and objectivity, individuation and participation, but his search for a synthesis of inner warring faculties is never abandoned.

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