UNVEILING BAKHTINIAN POLYPHONY IN PHILIP ROTH’S PORTNOY’S COMPLAINT

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to tackle polyphony in regards to psychoanalysis and meta-fictional discourse on Roth’s cultural mobility and his polyphonic Jewish critique. Due to his Bakhtinian approach, Roth fortifies the voices and deeds long held in suppression each of which acts as an audacious indictment to debunk the ferocity of repressive forces as well to unveil the Semitic discourse of Jewish consciousness. The authors employ a multi-method and interdisciplinary research comprising: a) a qualitative text analysis using contrapuntal techniques on Bakhtinian concept of polyphony introduced under dialogism and applied to Roth’s work, b) an in-depth and typical case sampling of textbooks in literary criticism theory and discourse analysis as well as some e-articles focused on Portnoy’s Complaint novel polyphonic analysis. As a political satire of the postwar Jewish fluid and embargoed identity within the American society, the findings of this research contribute to a Bakhtin-type polyphony by giving weight to other-voicedness and registering Jewish consciousness by dint of Roth’s iconoclastic self. The more the ego is hindered by its initial cultural conflicts (fixations), the higher is the chance to indulge itself to these forces. All these psychological dilemmas finally become masochistic at the level of sadism unconsciousness, causing moral ‘pains’ in an attempt to voice a series of emotional wounds suggesting that the organizational circumstances of Portnoy’s complaint are related to mental health disorders. This study combines Roth’s polyphonic design of psychopathology with philosophical questions raising important issues like obsessive-compulsive disorders to ensure a psychoanalytically-oriented and cultural approach that justifies the extremely symptomatic ambiguities underlining the constantly contradictory behavior of complaining. The conclusion of this article is that within the present polyphonic novel the Bakhtinian paradigm is applied as an avatar of Jewishness within the American postmodern deconstructive identity (rapacious capitalism, religious fanaticism, and canonical legal system).

Keywords: psychoanalysis; subconscious self; Bakhtin; other-voicedness; deconstructive identity

1. INTRODUCTION
1.1. Conceptual background
Roth’s most surprising, enigmatic and notorious novel Portnoy’s Complaint renders
itself to a Bakhtinian approach by the concept of polyphony. The novel introduces a multitude of chaotic events happening to real as well as to fictional characters. His dialogical, digressive and episodic narrative is a queer hybrid of obsessive sexual fantasies such as neurosis, reality and imagination in the lives of his representative Americans. It defies laws of causality, avoids a linear plot and defeats all attempts at comprehending it. Roth’s hero tries to drown his emotions into the licentiousness of a Jewish-American scathing satire.

It is in his study of Dostoevsky that Bakhtin outlines and exhibits the idea of polyphony. Firstly, this concept assigns a special position of the author within the text written by him. Secondly, in contrast to the monologic novel, the author of polyphonic fiction yields an exceptional self-determination to his characters who are capable of reaching the author on the same level. By giving up all this authorial excess, the polyphonic author refuses to ‘finish’ his characters who are not absolute objects (‘it’) but independent subjects (individuals). In this case, the author’s position, authority, and voice become relative within the text.

By empowering his characters with this remarkable autonomy, Roth’s voice becomes just another voice in the text among the consonant and dissonant polyphonic voices of his characters. As a consequence, the protagonist in Portnoy’s Complaint turns into a subject capable of standing alongside the author, arguing with him through dialogue. Furthermore, acknowledging thenovelas an independent aesthetic object, immersed into a sea of controversy over his polyphonic narrative, Roth combines the polyphonic design (Freudian obsession, merging monologues, self-loathing, homelessness and endless search of love or home or even his own self) with a plot-structure of a psychological novel for the purpose of posing philosophical questions and raising important issues such as those seen from Portnoy’s obsessive-compulsive point of view. In this development of polyphony and adventure-plot, Roth is able to criticize the established notions like Jewish identity and consciousness. In all these respects, Portnoy’s Complaint proves to be a polyphonic novel par excellence on the lines of Dostoevskian fiction. Through polyphony, Roth highlights the limited, one-sided nature of all official American discourse and authoritarian ideas. He can perform this by focusing his intentions firstly by means of satire and secondly by the doubly-oriented discourse or what is now known as Free Indirect Discourse. Such indirect, or ‘quoted’ discourse, typical to Portnoy’s Complaint, serves two speakers and expresses two intentions: the protagonist’s speaking direct intention and the author’s refracted intention.

The present study emphasizes the need to refrain from laying an unchanged monologic

2Alexander Portnoy embodies “the quintessential construction of Jew-as-nervotic” (Steed 2005), projected by the discipline and obedience imposed by his strict family, in exposing his painful life experience, this being the origin of the rising displeasure that gradually shapes Portnoy’s behaviour.
3Polyphony is a musical term signifying the simultaneous existence of mixed voices in which the stress falls on the quality of each voice rather than the full harmony/polyphony.
4Polyphony is defined as ‘many-voiced’, incorporating several narrative styles, references, and assumptions within the text.
pattern on Roth’s fiction. All these aspects of his fiction are brought out by a Bakhtinian approach\(^5\). Roth’s present novel shows that the ambiguities inherent to the text were creating difficulties\(^6\) in interpretation even for the text’s author. There are enough contextual and textual marks to ensure a psychoanalytically-oriented approach that justifies these ambiguities. As such, analyzing *Portnoy’s Complaint* requires adaptability in any framework used. Consequently, the following psychosexual dynamic is rather linked with the novel’s argument of social identity or social potency (i.e. Portnoy’s erotics of racial transgression). Furthermore, this case-study also comes in defending Roth on the charge that Portnoy’s desire (limitlessness) finally becomes masochistic at the level of sadism unconsciousness, causing him moral ‘pains’ in an attempt to voice a series of emotional wounds\(^7\).

The Bakhtinian reading of *Portnoy’s Complaint* proves that the presentation of the subconscious self, the ambivalent images and the genuine polyphony of voices in this novel disprove charges of obsession often raised by Roth’s critics. Thus, through analyzing the dynamics of generational conflict, the images in *Portnoy’s Complaint* unveil the dual, ambivalent nature of all the bodily/sexual imagesthat label the novel as polyphonic and which leads to a moral conflict in the protagonist, while in a later phase this conflict arises from within the protagonist himself giving rise to a histrionic personality disorder according to DSM-IV-TR diagnostic criteria\(^8\). Starting with a debauchery of sexually arousing representations, Philip Roth suddenly switches to asophisticated performance of voices in an attempt of his hero to find the rightnarrative voice\(^9\). In *Portnoy’s Complaint* the polyphony of voices and the resulting double-voiced prove beyond any doubt Roth’s manifesto that reality is stranger than fiction. This Bakhtinian approach, besides unveiling elements of his fiction and techniques of presentation previously hidden, acquits Roth of the charges levelled by his critics up so far.

1.2. Contextual framework

Despite the fact that Philip Roth could not have had access to Bakhtin’s ideas or adapted his works on Bakhtin’s polyphony, some of Roth’s works precede the publication of Bakhtin’s theories in the West. As a result, some charges may be raised against the anachronistic use of critical theories in interpreting literary works created prior to their espousal, however, they are well exculpated in *Encyclopaedia of Aesthetics*: “Artists of anytime might see and record the effects of the psychological processes and social forces analyzed by Marxism, psychoanalysis,

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\(^1\) This does not mean that a Bakhtinian analysis excludes other possible critical approaches to Roth. Such an attitude would be against the very spirit of Bakhtin who always appreciated the genuine open-endedness and other-voicedness.

\(^2\) These anxieties substantiate the distorted and precarious position of the novel.

\(^3\) As a matter of fact, Portnoy’s so-called *phallogocentrism* seen as a pleasure exploration is linked with “what we might call ‘rights of desire’ (…) – with the normative framework of civil rights” (Franco 2009).

\(^4\) Portnoy’s psychological dilemma reveals thehistrionic traitsin his personality disorder, i.e. constant attention-seeking, overt sexuality, emotional overreaction, and suggestibility [online]. Available from http://maretwebproject.com/users/docs/histrionic.pdf [Accessed 7 July 2016]

\(^5\) We recall here Alexander Portnoy’s protracted scream of pain at the end of the novel.
and feminism, because these processes and forces *predated* their systematic description and categorization’ (Kelly 1998). Moreover, Roth acknowledged and often recalled Bakhtin’s literary influences on his writing. If the latter had exerted any influence on the former, Roth would certainly have mentioned it. Similarly, Bakhtin’s theories (which he had developed out of Rabelais and Dostoevsky) and their validity is confirmed by the fact that they have been used in this research to support Roth’s present novel, which belongs to the Jewish-American late 20th century fiction. Such is the impressiveness of Roth’s fiction as well as the vision behind Bakhtin’s theory. The ‘surprisingness’ of Roth and the ‘unfinalizability’ of Bakhtin may perhaps be outlined by Bakhtin’s own words:

“They have conveniently not yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future” (Bakhtin 1984).

Whereas the surprisingness of polyphony discloses the existence of several voices each one speaking for an easily distinguishable individual self-consciousness, unfinalizability regards the chance that an individual can change and that he is never completed, totally accepted, acquainted, or labelled. Notwithstanding these two concepts – polyphony and unfinalizability – are specific to a group, the interaction between the social and the literary stands for the carnivalesque which merely describes the polyphonic style according to which each individual is strongly outlined while the reader substantiates the critical bi-univocal influence of each character upon the other.

Psychoanalysis often deals with the absence of what is important rather than the intrinsic ways of polyphony more common to intertextual approaches, a polyphony reflected even in the range of approaches that “intertextuality” comprises, which can make the very act of definition difficult.

Depending on a more explicitly psychoanalytic methodology, placing the reader in a quasi-analytical role as the novel attempts to unveil the stories hidden behind the layered, consistent narrative, psychoanalysis is explicitly coded as a mechanism that encourages irresolvable debates in *Portnoy’s Complaint*. This psychoanalytic influence encompasses a sense of hidden narratives in Roth’s novel that can seem familiar to readers of Freudian or Lacanian clinical analysis of a haunting pathological narcissism, as a symptom of psychological disorder thus turning the novel into a narrative of psychotherapy in terms of a social and cultural diagnosis.

2. HYPOTHESES AND METHODS

10 Psychoanalysis and intertextuality must not be seen here as two competing modes of interpretation.
11 Moreover, ‘pathological narcissism is a psychological disorder, unlike neurosis and hysteria, the narcissist does not want to be the object of Other’s desire, or he does not want to convince any other agents. What a pathological narcissist does is to satisfy himself, and in this satisfaction he doesn’t care for any other person or any communities or authorities’ good. He misuses all the subjects and rules to gratify his own desires.’ (Delbandi 2015)
As aforementioned in the Introduction, polyphony is a substantial aspect to be aware of in order to faithfully explore the Rothian novel. In the following sections, the concept of polyphony will be exemplified and the methods to analyse it will be discussed, with regard to its relevance to psychoanalytical and cultural studies. In Portnoy’s Complaint, Alexander’s authoritative speaking voice encompasses various aspects that form his voicedness, polyphony being inextricably bound up with language. In order to conduct a psychoanalytical analysis, a research method is needed. Thus, portraying polyphony and identifying what exactly makes a polyphonic novel special can be an utter topic, as several distinct elements need to be taken into consideration, as well as the sophisticated aspects of the Jewish-American fiction.

Perhaps more than any other of his literary works, Roth’s Portnoy’s Complaint is the most susceptible novel to be psychoanalytically read through a Bakhtinian lens. Alexander Portnoy, the text’s central protagonist, experiences drastic repressed aspirations attributed to him either by the members of his family or society. From this kaleidoscopic perspective, he is characterized as a man whose repressed impulses call his conscious mind into action in disguised, queer, and hybrid tones. Correspondingly, the addressee of such calls, here Alexander Portnoy, is committed to run abnormal or even radical actions, the most familiar of which on Alex’s behalf, could be his sexual obsessions. In this way, through Portnoy’s competing narrative voices, Philip Roth tries to fortify and reverberate those aspirations heretofore interdicted on the side of novel’s main character (in literature) and Jews (in reality) in a polyphonic manner.

The first hypothesis proposed in this article suggests that within the process of self-disclosure, Portnoy, both as a son and an adult, is charged with quite abnormal acts to the extent that in some phases of the novel they are committed of deconstructing social, religious, and familial norms. By and large, whatever these acts of desacralization be, they all share one characteristic in common: after being done, a kind of appeasement fall quiets down on Portnoy’s consciousness.

If, however, the authors’ analysis is accepted as a working general hypothesis then the question that raises the second hypothesis of this article is why the main character of the novel exposes such abysmal behaviours? Undoubtedly, the best answer to this question would be one with a recourse to psychoanalytic schemes posed by Sigmund Freud. However, the aim of this paper is to herald new horizons to the answer by assimilating a Bakhtinian view to the psychoanalytical examinations of the work. What makes Bakhtin’s study of language par excellence is that contrary to his predecessors, he directs social aspects of language to his linguistic pursuits. To Bakhtin, language is composed of stratified layers or voices each of which is used by different classes of society in their own idiosyncratic manner generating in the novel what could be exhibited as a ‘polyphonic’ narrative. Bakhtin avers that among the manifold stratifications of language that of the dominant social class gains ascendancy over the

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12 Louise Trolle Hjelmslev, Émile Benveniste, Ferdinand de Saussure, and Roman Jakobson are pre-Bakhtinian linguists who examined language in its isolated units – phonemes, morphemes, single words, phrases, figures, and sentences – irrespective of any of its social implications.
other’s.

This article also aims to explore the third hypothesis according to which once the ideology\(^{13}\) – in a Marxist sense – and language of the ruling class shaped, the subsets must speak through the base settled by the authorities. To actualize its domination and control, the ruling class respectively tries to define and dictate a set of ideologies to the mass. In doing so, officials set standards for example of culture, art, language, literature, etc. This act of establishing regulations paves the way flat for the formation of an agenda that unites each and every political, religious, social, or cultural movement with the dispositions of the ruling class. But as a matter of fact, the association of the dominant class and the social class has been always at stake\(^ {14}\). With an extrapolation from the past trends, it can be inferred that the controversy between tendencies – centrifugal and centripetal approaches – toward established norms is an inevitable order. In a similar critical tone, it can be argued that among the most important factors behind the persistent norms is a sense of ethnic submission/belonging together with its idea of unconditional national commitment and defending its ideological stances. As a result, Portnoy radically rejects such obligations to the national cause, however his radicalism testifies a personal renunciation of his ethnic legacy bondages: ‘But I am something more, they tell me. A Jew. No! No! An atheist, I cry. I am nothing where religion is concerned and I will not pretend to be anything that I am not!’ (Roth 1969). When this act of establishing regulations comes to language, its usage would be structured and schematic. The framework designed by officials for this social phenomenon determines some dos and don’ts, and users are supposed not to transgress the lines of demarcation drawn for the employment of language.

At this point, it is significant to note that this establishment of centre for language spontaneously means that another becomes decentred, and here it is exactly the place where those opposing tendencies toward norms come into being. For Portnoy, breaking the taboo turns out to become the imposed norms or regulations, which he avoids, but concurrently he does not find a way to live a meaningful existence beyond the culturally determined ideological limits, hence Alex’s polyphonic radical actions. However, unlike the others around him who are aware of their own identities and achievements, Roth’s protagonist is at least aware of being a caricature of himself, this finally leading to a sense of estrangement. This self-consciousness diminishes Alex’s self-tolerance and predisposes him to despair since society is more universal than culture. Bondages are not determined solely by culture. There were also political, religious,

\(^{13}\) It is in fact a kind of ‘symbolic capital’ of the ruling class that catches hold of control over society; therefore, it would be ‘the expression of the relation of the average members of the ruling class to the conditions of domination common to their class.’ (Nelson and Grossberg 1988)

\(^{14}\) In this respect, several critics laid some theoretical contexts on the novel which determined some critical results. Therefore, with regard to the Marxist narrative employed in the novel, there have been a couple of articles focusing on the ethnicity and class such as that of Tenenbaum, D., 2006. Race, Class, and Shame in the Fiction of Philip Roth. Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies, 34-49, for a comprehensive further reading on race and class within Portnoy’s Complaint. By mastering sexuality, with regard to psycho-analysis, in his article David Brauner sets the novel in a psycho-analytic conceptual framework, which becomes a difficult turn of characters through verbal confusion and schizophrenia.
and racial bondages alongside with cultural ones.\textsuperscript{15}

In his critique of the problems of power and language, Edwin Ardener calls the decentralized articulations of language as ‘muted’\textsuperscript{16}voices which are disenfranchised from an autonomous torturing existence in case of Alexander Portnoy. From this perspective, this muted group must mediate their other-voicedness through the allowable forms defined by the dominant power. To put it differently, all languages are in fact the language of the dominant power and if one aims at speaking, he or she must speak through it. Provided that one speaks obstinately, his or her use of language\textsuperscript{17} would be charged with centrifugal linguistic movements and in turn some punitive measures would be directed against this infraction. This statement easily apply to Roth’s hero. In \textit{Portnoy’s Complaint} this should be regarded as a narrative veil for the main character’s plight. Hence, the centripetal forces of language are unremittingly taking a defensive mood against the intransigent endeavours which are inevitably demotic in social life. Authorial forces have been always accoutred with such stifling acts and it is justified on the ground that for the conservation of ideology and protection of integrity, every struggle at any expense is essential to be launched against any movement that tries to make noise in and stir up trouble for the system. This being the case, a chronicle plot for a running system would take a shape like this: the story is introduced as an endless monologue on the couch in the psychiatrist’s office. The doctor is very similar to Freud, and various references to him and his work that occur throughout the novel points out the control of psychoanalytic discourse.

The clash between Portnoy’s high ethical ideals and his current condition in showing what might be the outcome of his own psychological strategy to compensate moral pain or to accept it more easily limns his pursuit of identity that is invariably fixed to an inchoate point. In this way, he is never done with his psychoanalyst’s rhetorical question ironically asked at the novel’s closure: ‘Now vee may perhaps begin, yes?’ (Roth 1969) This being the case, Portnoy thus becomes a rolling stone that in search for identity keeps flying at a tangent. It justifies polyphonic behaviours he conducts throughout the novel: his oscillation among Jewish, Jewish-American, and non-Jewish sentiments, and his radical ideologies, self-indulgence, off-coloured language, and use/abuse of several women.

\textsuperscript{15}Portnoy’s sexuality is in fact related to the politics of race, racial difference (including his critique on American racism) and the ‘ethical bases of civil and human rights’ (Franco 2009), hence, the Jewish-American concern about race and rights.  
\textsuperscript{17}Alexander’s outstanding use of English and his perfect word choices demonstrate he is a well-educated man, a successful lawyer who mostly follows the conventions of societal behaviour norms, though his Jewish legacy is reinforced through his Semitic discourse. This ethnic heritage acts as a permanent reminder of his Jewish identitarian background. Sometimes, Alexander’s discourse becomes so informal to such an extent his American accent can be perceived. For example, he could easily use \textit{ain’t} instead of \textit{isn’t}. However, this rarely happens. Alexander is a dominant, eloquent speaker and he asks rhetorical questions, thus suppressing the need for an answer by Dr. Spielvogel or the reader.
3. RESEARCH VARIABLES AND ANALYSIS

At the heart of all these procedures lie unsettled stories subsumed with scientific principles registered by two great thinkers of history, namely Mikhail Bakhtin and Sigmund Freud. The authors’ aim here is to state those principles mentioned above by applying them to *Portnoy’s Complaint* case study.

Alexander Portnoy and his family live in Jersey City, a residence where they are regarded as minorities. His father, Jake, works in an insurance company and what makes his position significant there is that ‘there has not been a Jewish manager in the entire history of Boston & Northeastern.’ (Roth 1969) Likewise, Portnoy experiences the same standing aloof in his years of school. It makes the family and more especially Portnoy conscious of their being ‘the-other’ in a society whose members are rarely Portnoy’s coreligionist. Being subordinated to the goyim, Portnoy discovers that as secondary players in the major phases of social life, Jews are deprived of the main civic performances and attendances. This problem of being subordinated becomes twofold for Portnoy since he has to as well undergo the pressures of being controlled by his own family. Portnoy’s parents are too punctilious in raising their son up because in this way they think they can change Portnoy’s destiny different than theirs. But as a matter of fact, Portnoy feels bitter with the taming pressures imposed on him first by the society in which he is marginalized and second by the family in which so much considerations are employed for nurturing. This explains the breaking of many social and familial norms; demotic deviations in *Portnoy’s Complaint*.

Alex Portnoy, his family, and generally speaking American Jews are members of a society whose ideology falls under the doom of that of the dominant class – the Christians – and it is this ascendency that determines the social and even personal movements of the minorities. All movements are supposed to revolve around centres defined by the dominant social class. The implication of such one-dimensional suppositions would be nothing more than the desiccation of dialogue, other-voicedness, and mutual respect in social life. And worse here, under the auspices of such one-dimensional condition dominant in the hybrid American society, Jews in general, and Portnoy in particular, discover the hollowness of their own identities. Wherever they turn, they would descry some anti-Semitic (repressive) notions exactly because they are in fact minorities whose aspirations and voices are immersed in those of the mass. Among all Jews in *Portnoy’s Complaint*, Portnoy is the only person who is aware of these facts and fully conversant with the ferocity of the repressive forces employed against the Semitic discourse. This explains the radical discrepancy of his character that is designed as a Bohemian who steps out of his fellow sufferers’ line. ‘No,’ says Portnoy, ‘you don’t have to go digging where these people are concerned – they wear the old unconscious on their sleeves!’ (Roth 1969) Understanding this well, Portnoy delivers a sharp riposte through ‘other-voicedness’ to

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18 Within his poetics, Bakhtin introduces the concept of exotopy or ‘outsideness’, referring to the authors’ potential to ‘speak’ their protagonists’ authentic voices – all being associated with particular conflicting values, priorities and ideologies.
the repressions yielded on Jewish consciousness. In doing so, he gives weight in queer hybrid voices to the very deeds repressed either by his family or society. In this regard, Anatole Broyard corroborates that “he masturbates continually, as if to say, ‘I feel: therefore I am’” (Broyard 1972). Another significance of Portnoy’s indulgence in sex is feeling the state of equipoise when his gentile partners fill the vacancy fallen on him by the repressions and controls of the non-Jews dominant society. To put it differently, these affairs are indemnities reimbursed not by the dominant society but gathered by the laboring of Portnoy himself. In this manner, they are in fact acts of revenge. Anyway, whatever the cause and implication of these licentious behaviors be, two tied-in points about them need to be explained. Portnoy’s other-voicedness is a centrifugal complaint set against the stifling regulations and forces inculcated in his and other Jews’ consciousness, and yet at the same time it becomes a shell in which he can search for his lost self, a ‘symbol Roth has chosen to impose on Portnoy’s search for self-through-sex’ (Broyard 1972). It is for example predetermined for him how to act, where to go, what to say, what to wear, and even what to eat: ‘I couldn’t even contemplate drinking a glass of milk with my salami sandwich without giving serious offense to God Almighty.’ (Roth 1969)

As a polyphonic novel, *Portnoy’s Complaint* is an organization of several kaleidoscopic autonomous identities. It offers a plethora of definitions for subjectivity. At the core of the novel, although characters are all of the same religion, different versions of Jewishness are embedded. These vital concerns of the manifold imaginations of the Jewish self have only one reason. That is Roth wants to give way and validity to each and every voice attends in society because he is apprised that conducting an authorial narrative mood is ‘a failure to respect the autonomy of the other’s voices’ (Robinson 2011). In man’s civic life, no voice should be subordinated to the other since each is as autonomous as its counterparts. In this regard, Portnoy rhetorically asks: ‘why should I bend to the bourgeois? Do I ask them to bent to me?’ (Roth 1969) Moreover, when talking about a single shared subject, Roth directs various and disparate voices to that. It is important to note that among the voices lodged with or against that subject, none is to surpass the other. In his argument about religion with his father, Portnoy is stubborn in his stance toward it and after a long dialect he avers that ‘there is no such thing as God, and there never was, and I’m sorry but in my vocabulary that’s a lie!’ and after the argument remained inconclusive, Portnoy is directed to be ‘Quiet! Still! Enough!’ (Roth 1969) when Hannah, his sister, wants him to go to his room. When God is not defined in his ideology (vocabulary), he is not forced to believe Him even if his father rationally talks to, loudly scream at, or compellingly daunt him. Portnoy’s voice has such a strong warp and woof that it is not going to be jeopardized or weakened by any counterpart. And naturally so does happen for the voice of Portnoy’s father who is a believer.

From this perspective, *Portnoy’s Complaint* turns out to be a novel whose characters are yielding their own self-determined voices. They are no longer the objects of the author but the independent subjects who carry a voice equal to that of the author. So, the “polyphonic text thus puts the much-argued issue of the author’s ‘disappearance’ into a significantly new light. The character ceases to be the object of the choices and plans open to the implied author” (Childs and Fowler 2006). This is one of the main reasons that polyphonic novels, as does
Portnoy’s Complaint, become incompatible with any kind of finalization. When there is no encompassing voice (authorial monologue) axiomatically there shall be no finalizing word.

Unsteadiness on the level of word’s content is another agent that splash the colour of unfinalization to the polyphonic novels. A word’s meaning is ephemeral to Bakhtin, not consolidated. It means that it is in fact contextualized by spatial-temporal factors. Rafey Habib believes that Bakhtin ‘draws attention to the temporal nature of language, to the fact that the word exists in real time, that it has a real history, a real past, and a real future (as opposed to the static time constructs posited by linguistics), all of which conditions its presence’ (Habib 2005).

In Portnoy’s Complaint, the word ‘center field’ in a single paragraph bears two opposite meanings as it is located on different spatial-temporal grounds. Portnoy raves about it when it is put on the context of the baseball playground where he is a professional centre field who can ‘understand what’s happening the instant it happens,’ (Roth 1969) but quite on the contrary, when this word comes to the context of his personal life, all of a sudden Portnoy gets bent out shape when he says: ‘Oh, how unlike my home it is to be in center field, where no one will appropriate unto himself anything that I say is mine!’ (Roth 1969) As well as spatial-temporal factors, ideology also makes a word’s meaning unsteady. Novel is structurally the host of multiple worldviews and since ‘each character speaks and thinks his or her own truth,’ in response, novel would become the host of many truths which none is going to be steady. In other words, ‘although one truth may be preferred to the others by a character, a reader, or the author, no truth is particularly certain’ (Bressler 2006). In his argument on religion with his father, as expatiated on earlier, Portnoy’s concept of religion falls exactly on the opposite camp to that of his father. There is one single shared word but since ideologies are different and autonomous, various concepts of that word would take shape. Here is exactly the point where the mission of a polyphonic author becomes actualized; he artistically resonates each and every ideology, concept, and truth in a dialogic environment – which in terms of Bakhtin is called dialogic heteroglossia – without partializing or repressing any of them. Thanks to Roth, the centrifugal movements including acts of deserialization and licentious behaviours into which Portnoy seeks sacrilege are registered as autonomous voices. Voices which are in possession of the very weight and validity as their repressive voices do. These being the case, Roth’s mission in Portnoy’s Complaint becomes paragon of virtue in the canon of polyphonic novels.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Since the introductory section, it has obviously become clear that Alexander’s feeling of oppression influenced his speaking style. This following section aims to describe Alexander’s speaking voice which is of great quality, therefore a polyphonic analysis is recommended to provide insight of it. The issues Alexander has oppressed for decades emerge

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19 Bakhtin believes that polyphonic novels are an organization of multiple worldviews. As a result, multiple languages and a variety of experiences would appear and each is involved in a verbal and ideological exchange in a dialectic and dialogic mood.
in a stream of consciousness way: he starts to unveil his most hidden secrets.

In Portnoy’s Complaint, Roth’s narrative voice encompasses a number of similar penetrable ‘voices,’ generating a ‘polyphonic’ choir where contrastive voices move in and out of the one core narrative voice. Thus, on one polyphonic level, Portnoy’s voice as narrator can be read as having two primary competitive voices: Alex’s ruling narrative voice, as the politic adult storyteller and that of Alex as the Jewish-American voice of history.

As the only narrator of the story, Alexander speaks in first person (homodiegetic narration) about situations that are both embarrassing and ironic occasionally, as well as relevant learning consequences, recollecting memories and switching between them at a very rapid pace (heterodiegetic narration). Through his stories, Alexander also reveals his inability to find the right woman, or why he cannot meet his parents’ great expectations. He also talks about the cultural particular items mostly referring to American symbols or Jewish laws which will be further discussed: ‘What law? Whose law?’ (Roth 1969)

Regarding the ideological struggle between Judaism and Americanism as two considerable topics within the novel, it becomes more than clear that as he tries to escape himself from his ‘Jewishness’ (hence, his escapist nature), Alexander feels suffocated by his Jewish identity and as a consequence he oscillates between the alternative to break free from Judaism or to accept it. For this, he experiences a sense of guilt and self-loathing for his relationships with shikses or gentle women (i.e. racial otherness). Alexander’s never-ending monologues are not monotone, but his discourse is emphatic and he employs different coarse language. Alexander is so frustrated that when he changes the subjects, his narration amounts to a blatant pastiche the connections he makes seem almost irrational. He even repeatedly describes his parents as caricatures: they are constantly too intrusive, too worried, too innocent as if he adjusted the stories of his childhood recollections to justify his rebellious behaviour or to prove that he is a victim.

To sustain what was already stated above and to investigate the previously-mentioned hypotheses, the authors use Bernard Rogers’ statement according to which through his discontent and rebellion, Portnoy does not manage to acquire his goals. Rogers goes on saying that his vital hatred just makes him feel insecure. Thus, the sociologist Alan Segal declares that the irony of Portnoy’s rebelliousness against his origin is caused by precisely those morals,
values and norms he firstly wants to oppose\textsuperscript{25}. Alex is able to perform masturbation and have sex with all the *goyim* (non-Jews) he wants, even if they are ‘morally inferior, but omnipotent’ (Segal 1971), thus trying to emancipate *per se* (aiming to the New Liberalism). What Segal suggests here is that he would never be able to emerge from his in-between persecuted position, ‘half in, half out’ (Roth 1969). Thus, Roth’s Alex strives to create a very specific new self that is the opposite of his old ethnic self, which is, however an inevitable point of reference\textsuperscript{26}: ‘he can only express his desire from independence from the Jewish world against that world and in terms of the Jewish scheme of things’ (Segal 1971).

Following Dostoevsky’s theme of pain and persecution, Roth introduces his protagonist within the stifling labyrinth of guilt (which Portnoy cannot possibly overcome), despair and fear of punishment thus searching desperately for the redeeming light! On the contrary, instead of finding a solution for his salvation, he plunges into sexual debauchery (i.e masturbation), which further deteriorates his unrest. Alex Portnoy even confesses: ‘I am the Raskolnikov of jerking off’ (Roth 1969).

Since the beginning of the novel Portnoy suffers from spiritual misery in his self-created hell followed by ecstasies of carnal pleasures. The main cause of affliction and tragic feeling is the sense of the wide gap between his potentialities and actual achievements. Moreover, Portnoy is always haunted by the intense sense of loss over the unaccomplished chances of his life. He suffers as he could not marry any nice Jewish girl, settle down and provide grandchildren to his parents. Even Naomi seems to echo the voice of his self-consciousness: ‘And you are a highly intelligent man—that is what makes it even more disagreeable. The contribution you could make! Such stupid self-deprecation!’ (Roth 1969) So, the core ethical dilemma lies in the conflict between his private life and Portnoy’s public role. In fact, his Bakhtinian personality closely corresponds to the pleasure principle of the self (kind of *self-hedonism*) and the reality principle of the surrounding human society respectively. When the conflicting state between his private and public self becomes unbearable, he approaches the psychoanalyst for help and guidance.

Consistent with the hypotheses and previous findings of this study, Portnoy’s multiple voices come into contact, overlap, rise and fall producing a form of ‘double-voiced discourse,’ a concept Bakhtin proposes to depict a polyphonic zone ‘in the hybridized […] dialogized, heteroglossia of the author’s own voice’ (Morson 1990) in which ‘a dialogue is played out

\textsuperscript{25} Seen as instruments of the progress of social identity, ‘these values, prohibitions and practices have a total and multivalent quality: reference to one involves the same intellectual, emotional and moral responses as does reference to all others.’ (Segal 1971)

\textsuperscript{26}Within this context, the assimilation controversy, dealing with the dichotomy between full integration and split ethnic attachment, allows some highly satirical attacks regarding the cultural stereotypes, especially with regard to the novel’s ending. Yet, within this large-scale ideological ‘voice’, the voice of the assimilated Jewish-American is a permanent narrative ‘thread’ that runs through textual embroidery. This assimilated Jewish-American ‘voice’ is itself double-voiced, a voice that converses and competes with other ‘Jewish’ voices (as Jewish values clash with the American ideals) in *Portnoy’s Complaint*, while also tackling the voices of anti-Semitism that move in and out of the text.
between the author and his characters’ (Bakhtin 1981). Roth is as such a master of this kind of discursive doubling.

Furthermore, in order to grasp the ‘multi-voicedness’ that occurs in Portnoy’s Complaint and to investigate the interaction of the imbued, competing voices of history, youth, Judaism and Americanism that surface from the text, the authors of this article will uncover how Roth’s stratification of language/terminology and voices still evolves into one ‘stream of consciousness’ narrative technique.

Taking into account Portnoy’s ethnic background/pride and in order to make a social and cultural introspective diagnosis on the American symbols or Jewish laws, having Jewish roots as well as a typical perspective on both cultural and ideological integration enables Roth with the expertise to describe what it is for Alexander Portnoy to be a dissatisfied community member of an American minority by closely examining the traditional Jewish values as opposed to the values of the third generation of American Jews. This latter generation or the so-called the New Jewish-American Diaspora distinguishes itself by lacking any common and steering philosophy and therefore having no gathered experience to entail – a significant denial of the life conceptions of the previous generation’s traditional behavioural patterns.

As a consequence, having a bewildered idea of social inclusion, the young American Jews’ polyphonic behaviour restores itself in a rather dialectical way that becomes very symptomatic to Portnoy. His authentic Jewish identity cannot be fully restored/unveiled due to his constantly contradictory behaviour to complaining. Portnoy is a bewildered hero for whom his ethnic consciousness acts according to one of his mother’s cultural beliefs following the white ethnic revival in post-civil rights America: ‘The very first distinction I learned […] was […] goyische (white) and Jewish’ (Roth 1969).

The authors’ discussions raise an interesting argument here with regard to Alex’s narrative ‘voice’ and the suppressed ‘voice’ of the Semitic discourse (Jewish consciousness), namely that they are textually-separated, exchanging places throughout the novel while simultaneously providing the reader with Roth’s story and its corresponding events in history. Both as ‘storyteller’ and ‘historian’, each of Portnoy’s dominant competing voices in the narrative blends a sense of ‘personal’ history with ‘national’ history. However, in many instances in the novel, both dialogically related voices, that of the Jewish fluid and embargoed identity within the American society seem to entangle, often being difficult to differentiate them within the Rothian polyphony.

Occasionally, these competing voices become almost identical, creating in the polyphonic narrative what Bakhtin refers to as ‘double-voiced discourse,’ which by including heteroglossia into the novel, enables the text to convey ‘authorial intentions but in a refracted way’ (Bakhtin 1981) where a unique voice ‘serves two speakers at the same time and expresses

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27Heteroglossia should not be confused with polyphony. By heteroglossia (a hybrid construction), Bakhtin regards the stratification of any language into various ideological ‘languages’ (Bakhtin 1981). Fundamentally, polyphony has to do with novel’s ability (as a genre) to reveal ‘authorial intentions but in a refracted way’ (Bakhtin 1981), with the relationship between the characters and the author.
5. CONCLUSIONS

In keeping with the spirit of Bakhtin’s polyphonic theory and that of Roth’s narrative skills, the following remarks are presented by way of conclusion. In examining the complex narrative structure and the ‘double-voiced’ Alex of Portnoy’s Complaint, this article has offered lots of examples of how Roth unveiled the generic layers and polyphonic voices regarding Jewish-American identity and the anxieties and problems brought about by American Jewish assimilation, thus breaking the cultural barriers between ‘self’ and ‘other’.

The authors also explored whether the potential achievement of an alternative American voice leads to a fictional cognitive dissonance, a sense of anxiety that arises from Portnoy’s Complaint’s to challenge the confusions of how much is reality and how much is fiction inside the text. As a liberal humanist, Alexander Portnoy, in a complete desperation, changes into an obsessive-compulsive mentally unstable character – an alienated, obsessively meditative Portnoy –, but one which could undoubtedly voice and deplore the issues of a postmodern society. For example, Portnoy’s final five-line scream ‘Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhh…..!!!!!’ (Roth 1969) can be interpreted as his last act of rebellion from a psycho-analytic viewpoint, an extension of his childhood rebellion against the superimposed fixed position in which Alex finds himself as a provisional character in the Jewish joke as well as his repulsion towards some American icon, or as Alex puts it, ‘the real McCoy!’ (Roth 1969). Another interpretation of Portnoy’s final scream may comprise the outburst of a great frustration the protagonist confronts throughout his life. However, this outburst may have been a direct consequence

28 As a young adult, Alexander Portnoy becomes a highly respected assistant attorney general for civil rights in New York, in his search for his ‘rights of desire’ seen as the hidden side of his role as a human rights supporter.
29 Within this particular type of socialization, ‘while safety emanates from Jewishness, danger and fear emanate from non-Jewishness’ (Segal 1971).
30 Trying to completely obey the American non-religious humanist ideals, Alex thought he could call off his Jewishness within the American postmodern/postcolonial, deconstructive identity. However, Alex’s subconscious self unearthed by his psycho-analytic uninterrupted monologue reflects the idea that the secular humanism fails to comply with the postmodern cultural conflicts.
31 His alienation derives from the classic perception of the Jewish values and traditions.
32 See Portnoy’s resistance against society’s expectations.
of the postmodern changes that he had to rely on linguistic norms with which to compare his hostile and rebellious actions or behaviour. In this regard, the present research provided an important insight of the need for a postmodern identity voiced by Portnoy, as he seeks to be a postmodern hero.

To conclude, this research study provided initial support for our general hypothesis according to which Roth joined the Bakhtinian approach of the polyphonic novel by portraying the temporary phase between modernism and postmodernism. In this context, Portnoy’s Complaint remains in-between this change as moving towards a postmodern future, since the protagonist’s rebellion and the way Roth handled it finds its origin in the postmodern tradition.

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