The Other in Everyman's Body: Self and Exchange in Philip Roth's *Everyman*

Jéssica Moreira

FACULDADE DE LETRAS DA UNIVERSIDADE DO PORTO – CETAPS

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Abstract

Departing from Baudrillard's account on economic exchange and symbols, the aim of the present paper is to demonstrate how Philip Roth's *Everyman* can be interpreted in terms of exchange – cultural instead of economic – between mainstream culture and Jewish subculture and, simultaneously, how death and sex provide the sign values for these exchanges, characterising, in themselves, cultural tendencies. These exchanges will be interpreted mainly as trades between Self – or Same – and Other since, in the same way the Self defines itself through reference to what is Other, so these tendencies will be defined – or tried to be defined by the protagonist – as existing only insofar an Other opposes to it. This attempt can be read as a form of construction of a signification theory that is defined through differentiation and pervades the whole novel. The act of binary construction, nevertheless, results in failure as the Self finds itself unable to refer back to itself through the creation of "badges of difference" (Neill 8). This failure ultimately leads the protagonist to a disenchanted attitude, provoked by a sense of alienation towards his own body – supposed centre of selfhood. What I intend to prove by the end of the essay is that the plot of *Everyman* can be read as: 1. the story of a man trying to escape historicity and 2. ascribe meaning both outside and inside a psychological theory of Otherness and differentiation just to realise it is inescapable – as is stressed by the many instances in which circularity annuls meaning and imposes time's indifference towards human affairs.

Keywords: Identity; Judaism; Historicity; Transgression; Cultural Exchange

Resumo

Partindo da reflexão de Baudrillard sobre trocas e símbolos económicos, o objetivo deste artigo é demonstrar como *Everyman* de Philip Roth pode ser interpretado em termos de uma permuta - cultural em vez de económica - entre a cultura mainstream e a subcultura judaica; e,

simultaneamente, como a morte e o sexo fornecem os valores dos sinais para essas trocas, caracterizando, eles mesmos, tendências culturais. Estes câmbios serão interpretados principalmente como negociações entre o Eu - ou o Mesmo - e o Outro, já que, da mesma maneira que o Eu se define por referência ao que é Outro, então essas tendências serão definidas – ou, melhor, o protagonista tentará defini-las - como existindo apenas na medida em que um Outro se opõe a ele mesmo. Essa tentativa pode ser lida como uma forma de construção de uma teoria de significação – que é definida através de diferenciação e permeia todo o romance. O ato de construção binária, no entanto, resulta em fracasso, pois o Eu reconhece-se incapaz de se referir a si próprio através da criação de "emblemas de diferença" (Neill 8). Esse fracasso leva o protagonista a uma atitude desencantada, provocada por um sentimento de alienação em relação ao próprio corpo - suposto centro da individualidade. O que pretendo provar no final do ensaio é que o enredo de *Everyman* pode ser lido como: 1. a história de um homem que procura escapar à historicidade e 2. atribuir significado tanto fora quanto dentro de uma teoria psicológica da alteridade e diferenciação, percebendo que esta é inevitável - como é enfatizado pelos muitos casos em que a circularidade do romance anula o significado e impõe a indiferença do tempo em relação aos assuntos humanos.

Palavras-chave: Identidade; judaísmo; historicidade; transgressão; troca cultural

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> *I think that pleasure is a very difficult behaviour. It's not as simple as that to enjoy one's self. And I must say that's my dream. I would like and I hope I die of an overdose of pleasure of any kind. Because I think it's really difficult and I always have the feeling that I do not feel the pleasure, the complete total pleasure and, for me, it's related to death. Because I think that the kind of pleasure I would consider as the real pleasure, would be so deep, so intense, so overwhelming that I couldn't survive it. I would die.* (Foucault 12)
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> *Mankind conspires to ignore the fact that death is also the youth of things. Blindfolded, we refuse to see that only death guarantees the fresh upsurging without which life would be blind. We refuse to see that life is the trap set for the balanced order, that life is nothing but instability and disequilibrium.* (Bataille 59)

As Lacan's reading of the Oedipus complex of Freud stages the drama of the child's arduous efforts to situate himself/herself through the parameters of the Other, so for the protagonist[1] of Philip's Roth *Everyman*, Otherness will be used as a way to define, by opposition, his subjectivity – i.e. identity, Self, I – in terms of bodily existence. Or, more importantly, in fields in which he finds his body – precisely because it is the "vehicle of mortality" (Brooks 8) – may oppose to Death. After all, asks Debra Shostak, "how can one ask about the meaning of the body in relation to the self unless one can test that self against some ultimate physical otherness?" (Shostak 31).

Anxiety towards death and the mechanisms of resistance employed towards it seem, however, to stress and serve as symbols to another type of anxiety: one towards cultural Otherness, necessarily related to Jewishness. Jewishness assumes a very particular form in the eyes of Roth's protagonist – perhaps because Roth himself has a troubled relationship with his own Jewish heritage.[2] Jewishness is, then, assumed not merely as a fabricated amalgam of religious Otherness and old, puritanical morality – as, perhaps, the protagonist himself would put it – to which (consequently) the mainstream can define itself against with. It is also perceived as an established social and cultural institution that sets the terms to which the protagonist (tries to) define – by contrast – his Self: as an 'ordinary man', 'everyman', "he never thought of himself as anything more than an *average human being*" (Roth, *Everyman* 31).

This Self exclusion from Jewish culture is accompanied by the protagonist's (attempt of) inclusion in mainstream culture. This movement concerns, simultaneously, his necessity to escape historicity – represented both by 'his Jewishness' and by death – and the establishment of an ambiguous imaginary space that allows him to transgress Jewish morality and constrictions without stepping in the unarticulated field of the Other.[3]

Accordingly, the affirmation of the Self is done through the negation of the Other performed through transgression. Transgression here assumes the form of the crossing of a psychological border that, both for Roth's and for the protagonist's position as "American Jews", means opposition towards Jewish subculture. It is transgression against collective Jewish identity and morality that allows the Self to be constructed in terms of social liberation. This implies, consequently, a migration from the collective (even if of a minority) experience of history to an individualised, self-referential experience of history that is, thus, interrupted and reinterpreted through the performance of transgression. The protagonist's refusal of Jewish culture is done through a negation of collective history, an attitude presented, in many instances, in the form of revulsion and irritation towards normative and puritanical Jewish morality. This attitude is portrayed, for example, in the scene of the protagonist attendance to a Jewish wedding, an event "he and Howie hated" (Roth, *Everyman* 21).

Yet, while transgression allows a defiance of the taboo, once a theory of signification is established in the form of binarism (in the form of Same versus Other), it also gives meaning to the taboo it proposes to transgress, as it establishes its possibility of existence. Nevertheless, as emphasised, individuality is a necessary condition for transgression as it allows the transgressor to accentuate a disparity from the norm: it enables him "to penetrate resistant domains and go where he feels

excluded psychologically and socially" (Greenberg 82) and to enhance social boundaries in order to displace himself from Jewish culture.[4] This displacement, accentuated by the sense of liminality "between repression and transgression, regression and manipulation" demands "a way out" to be "found. . . through a form of the symbolic" (Gane 112).

So, even if the "ultimate physical otherness" that Debra Shostak argues for refers – evidently – to Death, both Death and Sex serve as symbols of a cultural orientation of exclusion and inclusion, respectively, in mainstream culture. Thus, if Death serves as a metaphor for the tendency to Jewishness, so the need of affirmation and re-affirmation of the protagonist as an average man defined through his sex drive is symptomatic of the need to transgress the Otherness of cultural (and familial) constrains and, finally, to escape history. As highlighted by Greenberg "Roth's major theme is located and delineated in terms of cultural dynamics and subcultural perspectives on mainstream existence" (Greenberg 81). The body is, consequently, used as the medium of resistance to subcultural standardised morals and institutional organisations, since it is defined as the center of selfhood, standing in opposition to this type of Otherness (i.e. Death), on the one hand, and the vehicle of exchange of cultural symbolic meanings, on the other.

But, asks Baudrillard, "what is it that cannot be negotiated over? What is it that has no place in the contract, or . . . in the structural interaction of differences? What is founded on the impossibility of exchange?" (Baudrillard, *The Melodrama of Difference: or the Revenge of the Colonized* n.p.). The answer seems to be evident for the protagonist: Death cannot be exchanged. And wherever exchange is impossible, the Self cannot be, as is expressed by Michael Neil when he states that "death [is] conceived as a threatening Other, or a morbid anti-self" (Neill 8). Death represents a radical Otherness to which the only response is terror, as the protagonist lets us know after the 9/11 attacks allusion that is said to have "subverted everyone's sense of security and introduced an eradicable precariousness into their daily lives" (Roth, *Everyman* 66). Terror is, thus, also a form of Otherness as it is defined as a deviation from a "normalcy" state. As terror subverts "everyone's sense of security"[5] so Death (and fear of Death) is what makes the protagonist aware of his corporeality, recognised as the "literalness of. . . bodies" (Shostak 44). And the strong – sometimes even pathological – opposition to Death and search for definition of Self relates to the way in which Death forces a form of alienation that abolishes the Self – and forces him the displacement represented by his Jewish heritage – via the eradication of the body but also via trauma.

The trauma the protagonist experiences toward death – a kind of premonition that tells him, as it does in the vineyard scene with Phoebe, that "eluding to death" will be "the central business of his life" (Roth, *Everyman* 71) – can be traced back to three past experiences reported in the novel. The first experience that will later define the protagonist's problematic relation to death is his encounter, as a child, with a bloating body on the beach; the second, the witnessing of a young boy's death next to his hospital bed; and the third, the acknowledgement of the fact that his historical of hospitalisation starts precisely on this last occasion, *at the age of nine*, with an operation to a hernia located in his *groin*. These traumatic experiences end up serving as justifications for the protagonist's excesses. They also lay the basis for the novel circularity as the order of life is subverted, starting and ending with the death of the protagonist. This circularity functions, in turn, as a plot device responsible for the organisation of the whole novel, both symbolically and in terms of narrative construction "because, life's most disturbing intensity is death" (Roth, *Everyman* 169). The thrust that propels the protagonist is, then, the intention to eradicate Death itself, and this obsession, as pointed out previously, has pathological effects not just for the protagonist but "throughout all the social separations of our societies, in religion as the desire for eternity, in science as the desire for eternal truth, and in production as the desire for infinite accumulation" (Gane, 117). In like manner the protagonist – would he not be an *average* human being – finds a way to expurgate Death through Sex. Sex is thus, made banal, ordinary and obscene, in order to permit the (over)compensation from Otherness – that state of imposed alien-ness, of Death – since the metaphor for the mainstream in opposition to the subcultural is necessary as "sexual penetration becomes cultural penetration" (Greenberg 83).

Mike Gane – analysing Baudrillard's work – articulates this dialectic relationship between culture and sex affirming that "all culture is affected by this specific sexual character, not sex itself but sexualization" (Gane 107). Hence, the friction between Eros and Thanatos implies a socio-temporal friction between past and present which implies a quasi-back-to-nature movement. Sex becomes, in this way, the Other of Death providing the means to define the Self through the Body: Body and Self become undistinguishable.

Mainstream culture's fascination with primitivism relates to this issue, bell hooks maintains, allowing its "members" to overcome "alienation from the body, restoring the body, and hence the self" (hooks 376) and, consequently, to re-establish the body as the medium of exchange. Bell hooks thus argues that mainstream culture's necessity for a return to primitivism is answered by sexual engagement with people

from other races and ethnicity – with the perceived Other. In *Everyman*, however, sexual encounters are used as forms of transgression of cultural Otherness only symbolically (it does not imply a movement from Self to Other in sexual intercourse but is used instrumentally, as Sex represents the Other to Jewish culture). Thus, while sex is used as a form of transgression and of breaking taboos, this transgression is not the same as a back-to-nature movement,[6] contrarily to what bell hooks proposes. Yet, while this is true, a return to primitivism is still conveyed through a tension between past and present, especially if one relates Jewishness to the first and mainstream culture to the last. Where? In the act of burial.

As Eva Rimers suggests "ethnicity is actualised and brought to the fore as essential traits of individual or collective identity through ritual practices, mostly funerals" (147). In a similar way, in *Everyman,* ethnicity is stressed out by the novel's circularity given that the act of burial – that initiates and concludes the novel – is always connected to a Jewish background. In fact, the protagonist starts and ends in Jewish ground, which intertwines his individual sense of history to a sense of communitarian or collective history (the Jew cemetery is where the burial of his Jew relatives were buried, for example); and the plot of the novel revolves around an attempt to escape that condition simbolised by the cemetery. This indicates "that death rituals can be employed to enhance, subsume, or to fuse social boundaries" (Rimers 147). In *Everyman* the protagonist wants to enhance these boundaries through transgression in order to keep Otherness at bay. These acts of burial are, moreover, attached both to an idea of transcendence – or a negation of it by the protagonist – and to the reinforcement of Jewish ethnicity, which nullifies the pretences of the protagonist as an "average human being".

Additionally – and in consequence with what was argued in the previous paragraph –, since death is regarded by the protagonist as a ceasing of the possibility for symbolic exchange, so its status of abnormality is reinforced by the funeral rite. These rites trigger both cultural and anthropological anxiety, since everything that cannot be exchanged over is as much a threat to the individual as it is for the group. In Jewish funereal practices,[7] nevertheless, the exchange is, indeed, thought to be possible and the burial act has the particularity of conceding to the reversibility of death. For the protagonist of *Everyman*, however, the same is not true: the rite of burial represents exactly the irreversibility of death. This is particularly evident during the protagonist's father's burial – the scene around which the book gravitates. In this scene we are told that "all at once he saw his father's mouth as if there were no coffin, as if the dirt they were throwing into the grave was being deposited straight

down on him" (Roth, *Everyman* 59). Roth's description hints at the fact that the funeral act means nothing for the protagonist: the coffin, which is representative of that act, disappears in front of the protagonist and its meaning is eradicated, "the space taken up" by his father's body is left "vacant" (Roth, *Everyman* 55).

This seems to relate to the fact that, for the protagonist, the renegotiation of the Self occurs in the form of a psychological movement from subcultural to mainstream culture, from death to sex that implicates a definition of the Self as the body-Self or, put another way, in its materiality, which *excludes transcendence*. The idea of transcendence – identified, in the novel, as religion –, on the other hand, is antithetical to the terms the protagonist has established to define his body-Self. For him, "all religion is offensive" and "there are only our bodies, born to live and die in terms decided by the bodies who have lived and died before us" (Roth, *Everyman* 50). Thus, the panic the protagonist feels when they are covering "his father's face and block[ing] the passages through which he sucked in life" (Roth, *Everyman* 60) is enhanced by the abolishment of the symbolism of those "rites of exchange" that religion provides. And it is precisely because of this that the image of the dead body, which "cannot be called nothing at all, but . . . is stamped straight off with the sign 'nothing at all'" (Bataille 57) is intolerable for the protagonist and creates that sense of panic and terror towards death that never ceases to torment him.

Yet, later in the novel in a moment in which the now old protagonist returns to the cemetery to revisit the grave of his parents we are told that "the flesh melts away but the bones endure. The bones were the only solace there was to one who put no stock in an afterlife and knew without a doubt that God was a fiction, and this was the only life he'd have" (Roth, *Everyman* 170). The bones comfort him, give him solace, since they provide the protagonist the means of exchange with his family without having to concede to the otherness of religious' transcendence. "These white bones do not leave the survivors a prey to the slimy menace of disgust" (Bataille 56), Bataille explains, but, instead, restore some of the dignity that death took from the Self, making them more bearable. They provide "the first veil of decency and solemnity over death" (Bataille 56) making Death's presence less convincing. The dead body, by contrast, establishes the connection between the flesh – source of life and desire – and death. It emphasises the paradoxical condition of the body as both the container of the Self and the "vehicle of mortality" (Brooks 1).

This argument can be developed further and tied to the issue of Eros. In fact, I argue, there is a possible connection between the feelings of Otherness and revulsion that the dead body produces in the protagonist and his relation to Sex as a form to

expurgate Death that relates both to transgression[8] and control over the fact of Death. Sex thus becomes more empowering and appealing when it is transgressive, or, as Peter Brooks argues in *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative*, the "*libido dominandi*" (Brooks 11) becomes the centre of sexuality, providing a way for the Self to resist Death. And it is this sense of subversiveness and dominance that is implicit in the thought of anal sex throughout the novel. Supporting these claims in psychoanalysis, we can turn to the considerations put forward by Bataille who suggests there is a relation between human excreta, decay and sexuality:

> The horror we feel at the thought of a corpse is akin to the feeling we have at human excreta. What makes this association more compelling is our similar disgust at aspects of sensuality we call obscene. The sexual channels are also the body's sewers; we think of them as shameful and connect the anal orifice with them. (Bataille 57)

These libidinal tendencies are expressed through engagement in perceived obscene behaviour and are presumably reinforced by the proximity between the sexual organs to the orifices of waste, whose imagery remits us to Death and decay. In the novel the relation between the human excreta and sex is made explicit in the overlapping imagery of death (or illness) and sex used by Roth. One instance that proves this point is when, in the beginning of the novel, at the protagonist's funeral, Maureen, who had been his lover, is said to "with a smile, let the dirt slip slowly across her curled palm and out the side of her hand onto the coffin, the gesture looked like the prelude to a carnal act" (Roth, *Everyman* 14).

This thesis could be further supported if one considers the protagonist's description of Merete's (who had also been his lover and, later, his wife) anus as her "little hole" (Roth, *Everyman* 111), description that later serves as a characterisation of Merete herself: "he identified her as his very own treasure. . . whose little hole had come to afford them such delight" (Roth, *Everyman* 112). This imagery is recuperated, later on, to describe a grave 'hole': "it's six foot deep, it looks good, you could jump down in the hole" (Roth, *Everyman* 176). Thus the protagonist erotic attachment to his third wife revolves around her 'hole', her anus, that, conceding to the association stressed that the anus orifice has with Death, is used as a medium for the protagonist to flaunt his power and establish dominance of the Self over Death. Through anal sex, he is playing Death against Death, conquering it and making "human sexuality something other than mere genitality – makes it what Mitchell calls 'psychosexuality'" (Brooks 13). Only erotic desire, contrary to "obsolete promises of heaven" (Roth, *Everyman* 51) – the same would be transcendence for him – could offer him a true

revolutionary escapism from Otherness. The psychosexual motif of domination and transgression makes anal sex - and extramarital sex – more exciting, a renewal of the erotic self, because "beyond the question of sexuality there is another which affects even more profoundly the fate of the body: death" (Gane 112). It is through – and precisely because – the perception that the protagonist has of "the connection between the promise of life implicit in eroticism and the sensuous aspect of death" (Bataille 59), that he establishes his Self in terms of the erotic self. Sex provides the body renewal and resistance to this absolute Otherness. Therefore, if death – and its byproducts such as illness, impotence and old age – are the Other of and in the body – its antithesis – then sex, as transgressive individualisation, is the Other of these two.

The protagonist's sexual drive may thus be defined both as a form of negation of Death and as a form of transgression of cultural codes (related to a migration from the terror of cultural Otherness to inclusion in mainstream culture – it is a double transgression). Kelleher emphasises this transgression in the following terms:

> Thus, accompanied by radically antisocial promises, the act of sex indeed seems to imply an ultimate *transgression* – a violent thrust beyond the bounds of social organization into a realm of existence that not only **emancipates the sexual body** from social constrains but actually endangers all ideological and institutional securities. (Kelleher 167, my emphasis)

The form of individualisation sought by the protagonist via sex is mostly reached by the degree to which a sexual affair relates to the deviance of moral stigmas. Sex is, additionally, more exciting when it is the "antithesis of moral goodness" (Greenberg 83), when it is subversive. Extramarital sex is the antithesis of domestic life and represents vitality, renewal and excitement against stagnation. The protagonist shows, for example, through the sexual excitement Merete provides – and then later again with Maureen –, a wish to regain what is lost or perceived to be lacking (his youthfulness, his sexual prowess, lost in marital stagnation) through the possession of young women who are said to renew his self.

However, this does not seem to be obvious to the character. We are told that "he hungered for something stable, all the while he detested what he had" (Roth, *Everyman* 32), and that sometimes he envied his brother Howie, not because of his "athletic or academic prowess, for his financial wizardry and his wealth" or "when he thought of his sons and wives and then of Howie's – four grown boys who continued to love him and the devoted wife of fifty years who clearly was as important to him as he to her", but because of "Howie's robust health" (Roth, *Everyman* 99-100). Another

instance that one could point to prove this premise is when the protagonist first cheats on Phoebe with Merete, scene during which we are told that the protagonist "who started out hoping never to live two lives was about to cleave himself open with a hatchet" (Roth, *Everyman* 111). The conflict between what the protagonist wishes to be, and his dissonant behaviour seems, however, to remain unknown to the protagonist given that negation is necessary for the manifestation of the binarily-constructed Self. This negation, as becomes evident in the last example, enables for a clearer manifestation of the erotic Self and for the fissure between (sub)cultural expectations and erotic identity to sharpen. He hungered to be the reliable son, all the while he detested being a Jew.

Through sex, the protagonist finds himself able to contradict the frightening threat of stagnation imposed by Jewish culture, marriage and Death. And it is via his determination to transgress cultural boundaries – that he tries to enhance – that he is able to construct resistant domains to the reification that is thought to be imposed by Jewish norm. Sex, defined, as it has been, as transgressive to Jewish morals and to Death, offers the protagonist the means of renewal of the body-Self – which is what delays Death. This is even more evident if we consider that the older he gets, the more preponderant becomes his eroticism. In fact, this claim is supported by Sigmund Freud who has enunciated in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that desire is 'inherent to organic life to restore an earlier state of things" (Freud 60).

Eroticism – as Death -, then, always implies embodiment or, as Baudrillard sustains in *Plastic Surgery for the Other*:

> An identification and an appropriation of the body as if it was a projection of the self, of a self no longer seen as otherness or destiny. In the facial traits, in sex, in illnesses, in death, identity is constantly 'altered' … The body is invested as a fetish, and is used as a fetish in a desperate attempt at identifying oneself. The body becomes the object of an autistic cult and of a quasi-incestuous manipulation. And it is the likeness [*ressemblance*] of the body with its model which then becomes a source of eroticism and of "white" [fake, virgin, neutral, ...] self-seduction to the extent that this likeness virtually excludes the Other and is the best way to exclude a seduction which would emerge from somewhere else (Baudrillard, *Plastic Surgery for the Other*).

So, eroticism is self-referential and infers a perspective on the body as the centre of Self-hood – an erotic Self. Nevertheless, even if eroticism is self-referential in this way and involves seeing the body as subject, the protagonist still has sexual relations with women, in which he deposits his eroticism. This issue may raise the question as to if

the sexual act is not, after all, a concession – even if momentary – to the Other, as is proposed by Peter Brooks, for example. How does the construction of the erotic self relates to the fact that the woman is the socio-cultural "Other" of man and yet, Baudrillard asks, it is through them that Otherness can be escaped? The problem risen here, however, Baudrillard points out, is not with the answer that one expects but rather with the formulation of the question itself: the woman is not the Other, the woman is an-other. And the mismatch between the question and the answer arises from the fact that Otherness is – mistakenly – described as difference, although this does not seem to be the case, particularly in regard to the psychological and social distinction between genders. Baudrillard says that "in order to escape the world as destiny, the body as destiny, sex (and the other sex) as destiny, the production of the other as difference is invented. This is what happens with sexual difference" (Baudrillard, *Plastic Surgery for the Other*). What is implicit in this, then, is that womanhood is not the Other, it is the different. Baudrillard goes even further to say "difference is what destroys otherness" (Baudrillard, *The Melodrama of Difference: or the Revenge of the Colonized*). Difference is what destroys otherness not just due to the obvious preponderance of sex in excluding Otherness but because difference – like Otherness in this respect – is subjective, it presupposes to establish the different from the inside out.

As a consequence of this, desire is no longer about the object of desire, but about the inner image that is created of that object. So too eroticism is no longer about seduction as, for example, the protagonist is said to have – in one sex scene with his third wife, Merete – an "utter disregard for discovery" (Roth, *Everyman* 109). Seduction is rather about idealising or inventing the woman (or the object of desire in general). This changes the direction of the "entire erotic machinery" that is said to shift "to the side of the Same, to the side of similarity and likeness [*ressemblance*]. Auto-eroticism? Incest? No, but rather a **hypostasis of the Same**. Of the same that eyes the other, that invests and alienates himself in the other" (Baudrillard, *Plastic Surgery for the Other*).

What the protagonist seeks in the Other that is the woman is not her specific traits, something that is outside, in the object, but of something that is inside, in the subject, which is the constant pursue of realisation through eroticism. Femininity, then, is no longer spontaneous – for it dispenses the actuality of the woman – but functional: it is a psychological utopia – or, better, a Cockaigne – of fictional differentiation that serves to realise and confirm the Self.

If sex, then, can be defined in terms of a system of exchange, then the sign value must be comprehended as being the phallus given that the transference is done in order to define the phallic identity of the protagonist. This causes the sexual act to be only possible "on condition that the woman is converted into a phallic object and is available to be caressed as a phallus" (Gane 109). That is, since the body of the protagonist is determined in terms of its self-eroticisation, of its phallic identity, when the woman's body takes on the role of the erotic, it becomes phallic.

In consequence of this, as old age advances and Death and Otherness become less and less a far-future possibility, the bodies of the women he desires becomes deposit of his own identity: they become the source of his own sexuality. The scene in which the protagonist gives Merete the diamond neckless is symbolic of this exchange. By giving the diamond, recognised by himself as *the* imperishable article, to the object of his desire and deposit of his eroticism, the protagonist is both trying to make his phallic identity imperishable and, as a consequence, postpone indefinitely Death, for "imperishable was a word he liked to savor" (Roth, *Everyman* 116).

Yet, once the Self is defined in terms of phallic identity – and bearing in mind that the moment of confirmation of the phallus is, simultaneously, the moment of its death –, so identity fails to be stated and sexual prowess negates itself in its affirmation. The Self is thus denied the condition of the Same, becoming Other. Indeed, as Baudrillard puts it, "any system approaching perfect operationality is approaching its own death." (Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* 122).

This circularity and paradoxical condition of the phallus is confirmed in very literal ways. Firstly, in the sexual affair that the protagonist has with Merete whose "raw supremacy" threatens, in the very act of renovation of his erotic Self, to take "over his instinct for survival, itself a force to be reckoned with" (Roth, *Everyman* 113); and, secondly, through the gravesite metaphor: "you are born to live but you die instead" (Roth, *Everyman* 103). Thus, the phallus confirmation and extinction possess a dialectic function with the novel's circularity: it highlights and at the same time it is highlighted.

So, the body that was once subject – through his phallus –, in a relation of sameness, gives place to the body as mere object, given that in old age the protagonist is no longer capable of "germinating the masculine joys". In old age, the protagonist fails to *feel* his body as the centre of his selfhood. His body becomes alien to the protagonist, disconnecting him from his perceived erotic-body Self as it has lost its exchange capability, making renovation impossible. The sense of fear and alienation seems to be, in turn, derived from the fact that the protagonist does not

see the body as "both ourselves and other" (Brooks 1), as subject but also as object. This is most likely due to the protagonist's denial of spiritual realisation (be it through religion, love or any other kind of transcendence).

The only other instances in which the experiences his body as object (mainly during his various hospitalisations), he does not feel the 'owner' of it. Instead, a discontinuity is implicit. In the description of one of his hospitalisations, for example, he is said to be "under the lightest sedation and able to follow the whole procedure on the monitor as though his body were somebody else's" (Roth, *Everyman* 72). But then again, this seems to be due to the fact that seeing his body as object is conceding to the Other. Both the Other of Death – given that the body as object is the "vehicle of mortality" – and the Other of religion, that insists on taking the Self out of the domain of body with all its "hocus-pocus about death and God or obsolete fantasies of heaven" (Roth, *Everyman* 51) and promises the dissection of the body and the transcendence of the soul. Yet, the protagonist is determined to "make the material body into a signifying body" (Brooks 8). In fact, for the protagonist, "there are only our bodies".

Thus, although perceiving his material body as Self, the protagonist lacks the perception of Self in opposition in the very act of trying to establish an ontology based on this opposition. Yet, what he is denying is not the corporeality of the body as object. Rather it is the experience of Self, of ego that is not able to stabilise itself as dual. Contrary to postmodern conception of the Self, in Roth's *Everyman*, the Self is constructed in a one-sided, atomistic and physicalist, manner since the refusal of transcendence must be complete. This, however, is precisely the reason why, while eroticism identified his youthful self as Self, the Other characterises his older Self. Whereas exchange is possible, there is a fetishisation of the phallus; once exchange is no longer possible, one is confronted with castration or death – which are almost equated. Impotence and its association with the impossibility of exchange is furthermore metaphorised through the imagery of terrorism, in face of which the protagonist can do nothing. The metaphor, however, is taken even further: by conjoining the simile of the doctors with that of terror, the author seems to be hinting at the irrationality of the attempt of establishing a system of exchange both with terror and with the inevitability of Death.

"To get old is to enter the borderland of the flesh" (Shostak 60), says Debra Shostak, to see the flesh that once was categorised as your own body weaken and die, to experience the in- betweenness from "being a full human being" to its antithesis, death. The loss of the Self is then gradually made through the ageing and deterioration

of the body but mostly through sexual incapacity to perform and, therefore, for the protagonist to recuperate his masculinity and renew himself through sex.

The protagonist's experience of his own body in old age is of Otherness, a constructed image of how he thinks others see him. It is a relation of displacement which affects the experience of the erotic towards the others (as his depicted in the scene with the jogger). He, that has always been affirmed and identified by his body, now experiences it as a displacement of his self-constructed image. Ultimately, sex denies the protagonist his phallic identity, depriving him of his thrust of resistance that once defined him. The sense of castration and Otherness arises not only from bodily decay but also from the loss of the idea of Self which had its epicenter in the phallus and in resistance that is transgression. For "prolonged illness' deadliest trap, [is] the contortion of one's character" (Roth, *Everyman* 157).

He thus fails to grasp that the unsustainable practice of defining his Self through Sex – and hence the phallus – is paradoxical in its relation to death; that, as previously pointed out, in its confirmation, "every system extinguishes itself". The failure to grasp this fact – or the realisation of the fact only during old age – is the reason the protagonist feels himself to be Other. By defining himself through his eroticism, the protagonist is, inadvertently, plotting against himself. As Baudrillard adverts, "identity is untenable: it is death, since it fails to inscribe its own death" (Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* 123). The failure to recognise this is what ultimately leads the character to the feeling of disenchantment he is overwhelmed with in old age in which infertility and erectile disfunction is made into a parody, "a symbolic articulation of a lack" (Gane 109).

Besides – and returning to Lacan's imagery referred to in the beginning of the present paper – the protagonist, during old age, seems to be trapped in the "mirror stage", unable to make correspondence between the body and the Self. The protagonist has been "seduced into managing [his] own alienation, but in a world in which the division between good and evil has been relocated in the general process of secularization and **disenchantment**" (Gane, 127). Simultaneously,

> When all is said and done human reactions are what speed up the process; anguish speeds it up and makes it more keenly felt at the same time… Man has leant over backwards in order not to be carried away by the process, but all he manages to do by this is to hurry it along at an even dizzier speed. (Bataille 61)

This is particularly verifiable if we consider that the method of resisting Death is the thing that, ultimately, realises it: sex. That is the supreme irony: that sex is the

antithesis of death – it produces life – while, at the same time, it is the reason why death is realised in the first place (for we must die and decompose so that others may live). Truly, there is "deceit and simulation" that exists "in the supposed authenticity of phallic rising" (Kelleher 170) for it ends up being the source of de-personification and estrangement of the protagonist in and toward his own body. In the same way that Death and Sex were defined in terms of symbols of cultural tendencies, the protagonist is not capable to fixate himself culturally, and, therefore, to escape historicity.

Firstly, however, it may be useful to elaborate on the concept of authenticity and how it relates to mainstream culture. Authenticity, thus, refers to the sense of authentication of the Self; which, again, for the protagonist, is inscribed in his sexuality and in his eroticism. Nonetheless, since sexuality is used as the social tendency to mainstream, once erotic authenticity is confirmed, it also loses itself in its distinctiveness. Such is the – other – paradox of the phallic *authenticity* and mainstream culture: the mismatch between individuality and normalcy. The loss of distinctiveness particularly destabilises the protagonist – response that seems to be at odds with his integration in the mainstream culture. But in order to understand this assumption, a useful concept must be made explicit first, which is that of *shameful death* put forward by Michael Neil. The idea behind the concept has to do with the terror of the Other: not just of the Other but of becoming the Other. For, as Death implicates a depersonalisation of the Self or a "morbid anti-self" (Neill 8), it becomes the ultimate experience of the mainstream – it ceases to be personal.

In a mainstream society "obsessed with boundaries and badges of difference" (Neill 8), death is regarded as shameful in two different ways: first for its normalcy – which destroys authenticity – and secondly because it removes the reference to the Other through which the Self extracts his definition. It is the protagonist of *Everyman* who tells us that it is "the commonness that's most wrenching, the registering once more of the fact of death, that overwhelms everything" (Roth, *Everyman* 14-15). And while still trying to inscribe himself under the schism of 'average', the protagonist never ceases to face the normalcy of death and the obliteration of the source of authenticity with terror. More essential for the protagonist, as the "time to worry about oblivion" approaches, is that the 'commonness' of the 'fact of death' also means the death of the Other – for "where is no longer anything, there the *Other* must come to be" (Baudrillard, *The Melodrama of Difference: or the Revenge of the Colonized*). The death of the Other forces the Self to continuously refer back to itself

only to state once more that "a *sense of otherness* had overtaken him" and that "once upon a time [he] was a full human being" (Roth, *Everyman* 129-130).

Hence, the question of normalcy versus embattlement imposes: how can the protagonist be authentic and yet be average? How is the migration to mainstream done while preserving phallic authenticity? But is that not what an average human being does? Try to be authentic? The question seems to offer resistance to the rigidity that a proper answer would require, so maybe the answer is precisely there. The protagonist never manages to be within, or without mainstream culture. He is neither completely bound to Jewishness nor to mainstream culture – he is lost in a middle ground of moral, cultural and sexual ambiguity. And I believe it is precisely the fluidity and ambiguity of cultural definitions that Roth is trying to create through the dialectics of indecisiveness between mainstream and subcultural, normative and transgressive, authentic and standardised that his novels find coherence – or, maybe, stress the necessary incoherence of trying to fixate identity.

If this is true, then, and in follow-up with Greenberg,[9] the protagonist must be perceived as an *outsider* as he ends up positioning himself as neither a Jew nor as an 'average human being'. He cannot concede to Jewishness nor can he fit in the mainstream culture; he is neither within nor without. He has rather become the Other of these two. This is stressed out in the novel through the inadequacy that he fells both in New York – where he would live in constant terror – and in the retirement village – where, even despite his efforts, he lives deranged from his Self. Ultimately – and since the protagonist has the pretences to universality, for he is an everyman –, the concept can be made universal as well: everyone is an outsider, trying to define themselves within a theory of differentiation.

So, again – and to be as circular as possible –, the idea of identity through differentiation becomes an unrealisable psychological utopia or an escapist Cockaigne that can only exist in terms of social, moral and cultural construction. By trying to define himself through – in opposition – to the creation of a perceived Other, the protagonist ends up alienated from himself and disenchanted with life. For if the idea of Other is an illusion – if we are born to live but die instead –, then the definition of the Self through its transgression of the Other is doomed to fail. Once that failure is realised (as happens with the protagonist) then identity, sameness, also fails to be stated. If the Otherness defined by the protagonist as Jewishness and Death, does not actually exist – at least not as Otherness –, then the Self cannot define itself through differentiation that is Sameness (with mainstream culture for example), resistance or transgression. And if the psychological boundary that he created fails to be stated

then the sense of Otherness is inescapable. Disenchantment is, then, an inevitability 'to one who' puts all 'stock' (Roth, *Everyman* 170) in a "beat[ing] on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (Fitzgerald 683), only to find out that it was inescapable all along: the (his)story will inexorably begin where it started. History is inescapable, Jewishness is inescapable, Death is inescapable, Otherness is inescapable.

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[1] I have chosen to address the main character as "protagonist", instead of "everyman" – term adopted by some critics, probably for simplification – not only for clarity sake, but also because Roth makes it explicit, in an interview, that the protagonist is intentionally left unnamed – which will corroborate my thesis about the importance of inscription in mainstream culture for the protagonist.

[2] Philip Roth has dealt with the issue of alienation in relation towards Jewish culture in many of his books, mainly through the fictional character/alter-ego of Nathan Zuckerman. This relationship has been advocated by other authors such as J.P. Speed in "The subversion of the Jews: post-World War II anxiety, humor, and identity in Woody Allen and Philip Roth" and Allan Cooper in *Philip Roth and the Jews*.

[3] Whenever the term "Other" is used with capital 'o', it has to do with Otherness; otherwise it refers to 'different'.

[4] Issue dealt with more profoundly later in the paper. Something similar is argued by Ross Posnock in his reading of Roth's *The Human Stain* in *Philip Roth's Rude Truth: The Art of Immaturity* in which he affirms: "in his act of imagination at graveside that conjures the cabin Nathan competes with death by, paradoxically, miming it. The cabin scene images art not as death's opposite but its displacement or deflection into a less lethal force, a force of unsettlement—of notions of autonomy, of absolute knowledge, even of bodily integrity (brain is splattered on the walls)" (Posnock 212).

[5] It is an Other in the American 'body'.

[6] The same seems to be true for the novel – after all it is rather a movement from subcultural to mainstream.

[7] As in the majority of religions.

[8] Related to deviance of moral stigmas and obscenity, which makes their mark in other novels such as *The Dying Animal* or *Sabbath's Theatre*.

[9] Even though he applies this rule to Roth's fiction in general.