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Shame and Its Other Family Members in Philip Roth's Sabbath's Theater and Everyman and Pierre Lemaitre's Au revoir là-haut

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Comparative Literature

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Abstract

This thesis is going to provide a comparative study of three novels: *Sabbath's Theater* (1995) and *Everyman* (2006) by Philip Roth and *Au revoir là-haut* (2013) by Pierre Lemaitre. Although at first glance these three works seem to bear little or no resemblance to each other, certain crucial parallels can be drawn between and among the dominant themes in these novels. This study considers how death, loss, and their implications affect the main characters: Mickey Sabbath in *Sabbath's Theater*, the nameless character in *Everyman*, and Édouard Péricourt in *Au revoir là-haut*. How bodily decay and trauma affect these characters will be the next problem to be interrogated. Moreover, the relation between shame, disgust and transgression will be illustrated and the reasons that trigger the characters to make transgressions will be explored. The investigation of the theme of death and its implications draws heavily on the theory and criticism of Martin Heidegger, Maurice Blanchot and Georges Bataille. Moreover, what links these characters is their confrontation with trauma and decay, their obsessional neuroses, and how these problematics will be investigated through the work of Cathy Caruth and Slavoj Žižek. As disgust and shame play pivotal roles in provoking certain reactions in the characters, my study relies heavily on William Ian Miller's ideas on disgust and Helen B. Lewis on shame; drawing on Helen B. Lewis on shame, humiliation and embarrassment, and the interconnectedness of these feelings with disgust this study is going to explain why and how shame feelings happen in the characters. A close reading of the ways these characters converse and act brings us to a better understanding of the underlying reasons behind their actions.

Lay Summary

What makes *Sabbath's Theater* and *Everyman* by Philip Roth and *Au revoir là-haut* by Pierre Lemaitre comparable is that the main characters of these novels deal with some shared themes such as death, loss, and their implications. While these characters are traumatized by their bodily decay, they suffer from shame, humiliation and embarrassment, and in order to deal with these problems, they show a tendency to make transgressions in their life. This thesis is going to consider how these problematics and their implications affect the main characters and why and how shame feelings happen in them. Therefore, a close reading of the ways these characters converse and act brings us to a better understanding of the underlying reasons behind their actions.

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Introduction

“The color, the place, the history of bodies all come alive in shame”

Elspeth Probyn *Blush: faces of shame* 40

I. Philip Roth and Pierre Lemaitre

Philip Milton Roth, the Pulitzer Prize winning writer, was born in New Jersey in 1933, and died in New York in 2018. He was the son of American-born parents and his grandparents were European Jews who were part of the nineteenth-century wave of immigration to the United States. He grew up in a working-class Jewish neighbourhood of Newark, which became the setting for several of his novels. Although he was born during the heart of the Great Depression, Roth grew up in the slightly more prosperous times of World War II. But war and its effects have left their traces in many of his works. One such impact is a persistent blurring of fact and fiction in his work. In an interview with Hermione Lee, Roth affirms that he was engaged in “Making fake biography, false history, concocting a half-imaginary existence out of the actual drama of my life is my life” (Roth). It is thus not surprising that Martin Green calls Roth a writer whose work is “very much autobiographical” (164). In many of his novels, Philip Roth plays with “therapeutic moments” and develops his fiction in a “playful interaction with psychoanalysis” and his comic, sometimes satirical interventions into psychoanalysis in his literature have the capacity to “fascinate, baffle, enrage and challenge” how psychoanalysts see themselves in their profession (Scheurer 35). These “therapeutic moments” occur notably in Roth’s *Sabbath’s Theater* (1995) and *Everyman* (2006), two novels that will play important roles in this thesis.

The other author whose work I consider is that of Pierre Lemaitre, the French author and screenwriter. Born in Paris in 1951, Lemaitre began as a teacher of literature and now devotes his time to writing novels and screenplays. He has won the Prix Goncourt for his novel of World War

One, *Au revoir là-haut*. Lemaitre's novel of trauma, melancholy, and resilience will be explored through psychoanalysis and trauma theory.

Although the time and place of Roth and Lemaitre's novels differ from each other, and indeed on the surface seem to bear little resemblance to each other, a deeper look at the novels' protagonists will shed more light on the underlying similarity between them. All three of these novels are rife with scenes of obsession and wilful transgression. Despite the fact that these two authors emerge from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, they both explore the pain and anguish of their main characters in similar ways. The way these protagonists react to trauma have uncanny similarities which I will consider in more detail.

Mickey Sabbath in *Sabbath Theater*, the nameless character in *Everyman* and Édouard in *Au revoir là-haut* are traumatized by events that prompt forms of obsessive behaviour; as they struggle with their respective losses, they develop obsessional neuroses as a problematic means of coping with trauma and melancholy. While they struggle with thoughts of death, loss, and suicide, feelings of disgust and shame emerge. As Helen Lewis argues, shame plays a pivotal role in building a healthy social relationship, and when it is unacknowledged, it can lead to destructive and irrational displays of temperament (16-17). The more the stories of these characters unfold the more their intended destructiveness becomes rooted and then becomes evident in their personality. Their perverse desire for destruction prompts in turn a tendency to transgression. In this thesis, I intend to illustrate how the characters' obsessive relationship to death is intertwined with feelings of disgust and shame, and how their melancholic relationship to trauma and loss shapes them. Finally, I will show how these corresponding themes make the three novels comparable to each other.

II. Literature Review

My methodology will combine literary analysis with those insights drawn from psychoanalytic theory. Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* offers an extensive framework in which there are different narratives by people who have had traumatic experience and their experience is read through psychoanalytic and literary theory. She contends that through the notion of trauma we come to a new understanding of the traumatic event, an understanding that eludes the survivor of trauma. Caruth explores how trauma is a deferred experience, one that returns repeatedly to haunt the survivor. In different ways, the primary characters of the novels under consideration are struggling with trauma and Caruth's insights will bring a better understanding of the characters' actions and reactions. Another overriding theme in these novels is related to George Bataille's ideas in his book *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*. He covers a wide range of topics such as taboo, transgression, death, and desire. He investigates the theme of desire prior to and beyond the realm of sexuality. He shows how and why pleasure is bound up with transgression, which is applicable to the questions of pleasure and enjoyment that become focal points in the lives of the main characters. Moreover, his theorization of death as a limit-experience and of its implications will shed more light on the psyches of the characters. By turning to the relationship between anxiety and death, I found Maurice Blanchot's *The Space of Literature* particularly rewarding and illuminating. Blanchot's exploration of suicide and its implications to questions of control and mastery over the limit-experience that is death is particularly useful when thinking through why some of the characters I explore consider suicide as a means of escaping their psychic pain. Elaborating on the idea of death and loss makes the reading of Julia Kristeva's *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* a necessity without which my discussion of death and loss would be woefully under-theorized. Kristeva focuses on the problems

of loss and death, and of the sense of deprivation, the loss of identity, and the melancholy that result from them. In addressing the subject of melancholia, she examines it in the contexts of literature and psychoanalysis. I found Martin Heidegger's contention that Dasein, as a being-in-the-world, important in terms of thinking about how Dasein's nature is not only temporal, but that, in our "thrownness," Dasein existence's is an unheimlich one. That is, Dasein is thrown into this world and exists between birth and death; in effect, we are all of us "beings-toward-death" (298). As the mystery of death plays a major role in these novels, Heidegger's text is germane to my analysis.

Since a rather large part of my thesis focuses on psychoanalysis, the books which are going to be discussed below help to build up my argument in a more comprehensive way. Andrew P. Morrison in *The Culture of Shame* argues that, as an affect, shame is pervasive in our culture. He defines shame as a feeling of intrinsic self-worthlessness which underlies a number of psychological problems. His book offers a wide-ranging exploration of texts like The Bible, the works of philosophers like Nietzsche and Sartre, and contemporary novelists like Philip Roth and Toni Morrison to show why the experience of shame is a complex dimension of human experience. Similarly, Helen Block Lewis in *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis* talks about permutations of shame and guilt, making a strong distinction between these two concepts. She contends that undischarged shame and guilt function as primary processes of transformation in those who experience them. Her book analyzes the underlying structure of neurosis and her clinical transcripts offer a comprehensive analysis of why people suffer. The knotty relationship between disgust and shame is explored by William Ian Miller in *The Anatomy of Disgust*. Miller argues that shame is a "response to others' disapproval", whether manifested as contempt or disgust. Furthermore, he contends that shame often leads to feelings of self-hatred and self-disgust; in effect, shame and

disgust become “indistinguishable” from one another (34). However, Miller also reminds us that disgust can have productive, even structural functions, bringing order and meaning to our life even as it simultaneously horrifies and revolts us.

III. Research Questions

“You are on Earth, there’s no cure for that!”

Samuel Beckett, *Endgame* 37

Being born into this world gives us a period of time and a life that will be taken away from us as death reveals itself. Therefore, “As soon as man comes to life, he is at once old enough to die” (Heidegger 289) and we can feel the impending shadow of death before us that becomes an inevitable and inseparable part of our own existence. The period between life and death is an opportunity for us to pursue our desires, a pursuit which of course can be imperilled or frustrated. While we try to fulfill our desires, the mortality of our bodies can haunt us, as they endure ageing and infirmities of different kinds. These kinds of change – whether sudden or gradual – is not necessarily accepted or reconciled by everyone. Ageing and decay can call forth feelings of anger, aggression, disgust, humiliation, embarrassment or even shame. These feelings are manifested both in the mind and on the body.

My working hypothesis is that themes such as death, shame, and disgust are intimately connected and that these themes are at work in the three novels under discussion. The following are my research questions:

1. How do thoughts of death and its implications affect the mind of these characters?
2. What do the changes in the body do to these characters?

3. Why do these characters react to their bodies in the way they do?
4. Why do the protagonists choose transgression?
5. How are the characters affected by liberation from trauma?
6. What is the role of desire in the characters' life?
7. Why can shame and disgust be studied together in the main characters of these novels?

Answering these questions can bring more insight into readers' life about the nature of taboo, transgression, death and desire which are an inseparable part of life. Moreover, since the methodology involved in this thesis is largely psychological, even psychoanalytic in nature, it invites readers to a deeper understanding of their own thinking and feeling.

IV. Critical Approach

Since the abovementioned themes deal with the psyche of the characters of the novels and the way they behave in confronting different circumstances in life, a substantial portion of the selected methodology is psychoanalytic in nature. By scrutinizing how these characters react to trauma, loss, and anxiety, and by analyzing their respective contexts, I attempt to discover the underlying reasons for their actions. This will allow me to draw a comparison between these fictional situations and their potentiality in real life.

In order to investigate the theme of death and its implications I will turn to the work of Martin Heidegger, Maurice Blanchot, and Georges Bataille. Moreover, I will draw from the work of Cathy Caruth and Slavoj Žižek to think through the characters' confrontation with trauma and decay, anxiety and obsessional neurosis, and how these problematics are represented and explored. As disgust and shame play pivotal roles in provoking certain reactions in the characters, my study

partly relies on William Ian Miller's ideas on disgust and Helen B. Lewis on shame, humiliation and embarrassment, and the interconnectedness of these feelings with disgust.

Moreover, since this study draws primarily on psychoanalysis, I do at moments turn to the work of Sigmund Freud. Because death and trauma are two major themes in these novels, I am especially indebted to Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. In addition, Andrew P. Morrison's focus on aggression and violent behaviour offers more insight into the reasons behind the characters' reactions. Therefore, the ideas in the books which are mentioned in Literature Review section can primarily highlight the importance of psychoanalysis in close reading of these novels.

V. Argument Overview

In the introduction chapter, firstly, I will introduce the three novels that I will be analyzing since they share certain common themes. Second, the important works will be discussed under the title of "Literature Review" and I will apply the concepts and ideas in the books of "Literature Review" to the novels. As the common themes of desire, death, trauma, melancholy, taboo and transgression are the focus of my study, these themes and their recurrence in the novels under study will raise questions which I am going to answer in "Conclusion" section.

Chapter one focuses primarily on two novels by Philip Roth, *Everyman* (2006) and *Sabbath's Theater* (1995). The main characters of these stories share certain similarities; their ageing bodies, coupled with their ebbing virility drive them into obsessional neuroses and shame. There is a considerable amount of struggle with death thoughts and its implications in them, which makes the theme of mortality prevalent throughout the novels. I have mainly turned to the work of Maurice Blanchot, Martin Heidegger, and Slavoj Žižek to think through the conflictual attitudes

of Mickey Sabbath and Everyman towards death. In addition, because these characters are suffering from trauma and loss, I am able to make comparisons between them.

In chapter two I will concentrate on Pierre Lemaitre's *Au revoir là-haut* (2013). Apart from some shared themes with the Roth novels I discuss later in the thesis, this chapter focuses on war, the trauma it causes, and the post-war struggles of the characters. I will ground my argument in part on Andrew Frayn's work on World War I. As disgust is another predominant theme in the novel, I will look upon this topic from the perspectives considered in *The Culture of Shame* by Andrew P. Morrison and *The Anatomy of Disgust* by William Ian Miller. Miller tells us that: "physical sensations of shame and disgust are indistinguishable" (34), and based on this idea, these two feelings are not only tied to each other, but they also inform the psyches of the leading characters of the story. Moreover, the constant source of shame in the two main characters of the story becomes apparent bodily, which will result in anger consequently. While I am going to discuss these themes, I will consider the research questions as well.

Since death, desire, sensuality, melancholy and shame are shared themes in Roth's and Lemaitre's novels, the aim of chapter three is to draw a comparison between the similar elements in these novels while offering a psychoanalytic perspective on the feelings of shame and guilt – through the work of Helen Block Lewis- to the aforementioned themes. In addition, Georges Bataille's theorization of human nature, and our desire for continuity and immortality will serve to untangle further the complexities of human relationships, to some degree sexual, that the protagonists of each story experience. As a result, making a comparison between these novels can make it possible to answer my research questions.

Finally, the closing chapter of this thesis will touch upon the main points discussed in previous chapters and the result of the comparisons drawn between and among these three novels

to come to a better understanding of their shared themes. As the title of Roth's novel *Everyman* suggests, this story can be the story of everyman and the protagonist's fixation and obsession with death and mortality can be the focal point of many people in their everyday life. Moreover, regarding the methodological approach and the analysis of each main character in every novel, I will offer in-depth answers to the research questions posed in the introduction. At the end of this final chapter, I will offer some suggestions about the possibility of applying this approach to similar themes in literature.

Chapter One: Death, Decay, and Melancholy; Taboo and Transgression in Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theater* and *Everyman*

I. Death in *Sabbath's Theater*

“What we call the beginning is often the end

And to make an end is to make a beginning.

The end is where we start from”

T. S. Eliot “Four Quartets”

Sabbath's Theater is divided into two parts: the first is titled as “THERE’S NOTHING THAT KEEPS ITS PROMISE” and the second “TO BE OR NOT TO BE”. The very first paragraph of the story ends with: “...here at the approach of the end of everything” (3), which conveys a sense of ending to the reader. The sentence “THERE’S NOTHING THAT KEEPS ITS PROMISE” that suggests instability and transience can also herald broken promises. But there is an ambiguity inherent to the phrase: nothing is the only thing that does keep its promise, and the nothingness it implies, is the unstable ground upon which we can paradoxically rely. But this reliance means that without any stable ground, Roth’s novel is a study in anxiety; we find ourselves in the opening pages “approach[ing] the end of everything,” but without a known object of which to fear. As Sigmund Freud tells us, fear, unlike anxiety, has a definite object of which to be afraid (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 161). Anxiety is governed by a fear of the unknown, and for Mickey Sabbath, that unknown is the nothing that lies beyond the end of everything, an “*everything*” that “is racing off at a tremendous speed” (*Sabbath's Theater* 306).

Mickey Sabbath is an aging puppeteer, whose obsession with the death of his mistress, Drenka Balich, coupled with his obsessive need for disruption and debauchery remain constant throughout the story. The scenes rife with death and its threatening shadow make this novel a suitable topic to look at from different points of view. I will explore how obsessive thoughts of death and its implications affect his relationship to his libido and what prompts him to make transgressions in his life. In order for us to think more specifically about death, I will now turn to Georges Bataille's *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*. For Bataille, the concept of death started to "disturb" the psyche of primitive man, viewing it as "terrifying and overwhelming, and indeed as supernatural" (43). The threat of death is a "danger for those left behind" (46) because it is directly linked with "annihilation of the individual" (55). In sum, death is a site of anxiety precisely because it is ultimately unknown, mysterious.

Although Sabbath vigorously pursues pleasure all his life, thoughts of death and loss continuously plague him. Indeed, one could argue that the latter informs the pursuit of the former. In the first place, the death of his beloved Drenka occupies a large part of his memory. This loss is compounded by the disappearance of his first wife, Nikki, the merciless haunting of his dead mother, and the death of his brother Morty. For Sabbath, death is invincible and overwhelming and at times he wonders if death is simply a tedious, but necessary task: "Is being dead just something you do the way you ran the house?" (*Sabbath's Theater* 16). Death betrays all human motivation, all human desire: "Mother ... this can't be so. First Morty, then you, then Nikki, now Drenka. There's nothing on earth that keeps its promise" (32). When people die, there is nothing left of them on the earth except their corpses; whatever promises they made to him are broken by death. In the eyes of those who, as Bataille says, are left behind with the threat of death, dead people turn into nothing; they devolve into reminders of the nothingness that is coming.

Sabbath's life – after Drenka's death – has been reduced to the rituals of mourning: “he didn't have a life, except at the cemetery” (51). Sabbath spends much time at the cemetery as if he does not have anything else to do and his daily errands end at Drenka's tombstone. The deep sorrow he experiences at the death of his beloved depresses him. His sadness is similar to “noncommunicable grief” that makes “us lose all interest in words, actions, and life” (Kristeva 3). Julia Kristeva contends that when the “meaning of life is lost, life can easily be lost” and “when meaning shatters, life no longer matters” (5). Sabbath attaches the meaning of his life to his beloved and his relationship with her; when he loses her, he seems like a deprived person. Drenka's death deprives Sabbath of the pleasure he has enjoyed for thirteen years, and he falls into depression. According to Kristeva, “... the depressed person has the impression of having been deprived of an unnameable, supreme good, or something unrepresentable” (13). In his narcissistic melancholy, Sabbath does not mourn Drenka, but instead the absence she now represents. He does not mourn the “captivating *Object of desire*” (Kristeva 14), but instead the “Thing,” or what Kristeva calls “the real that does not lend itself to signification, the center of attraction and repulsion, seat of the sexuality from which the object of desire”—Drenka—has become “separated” (Kristeva 13). Drenka is like a love object whose loss brings grief and mourning for Sabbath, which is similar to what Freud mentions about mourning that happens when the “loved object no longer exists and ... all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object (*On the History of Psychoanalytic Movement* 244). What Drenka's loss means and signifies to him is replaced with the real of loss itself. Sabbath's melancholy utterly consumes his time alone: “That's all he did there now, read book after book about death, graves, burial, cremation, funerals, funerary architecture, funeral inscriptions, about attitudes toward death over the centuries...” (*Sabbath's Theater* 88).

What is noteworthy about Sabbath's character is that he works obsessively to attach a meaning to those who are gone. He is caught in a traumatic loop, constantly talking about and mourning their deaths or disappearance. The holes left in his life by their deaths are what he is really mourning. These holes resist meaning, resist stitching up. Sabbath cannot fill the void, the void of the "Thing" that each loss produces. In Heidegger's meditation on loss, we discover that when someone dies, that person (or Dasein) is reduced to a "Being-no-longer-in-the-world ... is still a Being, but in a sense of the Being-just-present-at-hand-and-no-more of a corporeal Thing" (281). The thing which is "just-present-at-hand-and-no-more is 'more' than a lifeless material" (282). Drenka's loss and others' death in Sabbath's life is "still a Being"; on the one hand, Sabbath faces a void and loss due to his loved ones' death, and on the other hand, their loss is "still a Being," but those who have died are no longer "Being-with," in that they are no longer present. This lack of presentness, as Heidegger puts it, marks Sabbath's psyche. If our existence is predicated on the presentness of others, then their deaths could be understood as undermining Sabbath's very existence.

While Sabbath is overwhelmed by depression, he wonders if there is anything "more serious than dying?" the answer to which is a definite "No" (*Sabbath's Theater* 160). Towards the end of the novel he wishes that everyone he has lost were alive, and that their existence, their presentness, could renounce death: "What if they were *all* alive and at Nikki's house? Morty. Mom. Dad. Drenka. Abolishing death – a thrilling thought..." (302). But for him, death masters all: "And Death ... on top of us, over us, ruling us, Death" (307).

In order to subvert the overwhelming power of death, he tries to gain control over it by suicide. His fantasy can be looked at from Maurice Blanchot's perspective when he says: "the ability to die ceases to be a meaningless issue" and it can be understandable that "a man's goal

might be the search for death's possibility" (95). Blanchot continues his argument by saying: "death ... is not given, it must be achieved" and when man "makes his death; he makes himself mortal and in this way gives himself the power of a maker" (96). Although Blanchot recognizes that suicide is a lure that can only give the appearance of mastering death, his idea does offer some insight into why Sabbath thinks that by committing suicide he can change his future and seize control of his own destiny. But since Sabbath's life is on the verge of chaos and nothing holds together, the only constant is death: "... death was changeless... and flux was human life all over..." (*Sabbath's Theater* 435). As death is "changeless," he can find stability and certainty in it; by contrast human life is itself the symbol of uncertainty and change, and is thus unreliable.

While composing his will, Sabbath contends that: "To die of natural causes would be the unsurpassable insult" (*Sabbath's Theater* 443). The way Sabbath loathes and belittles natural death is compatible with Dostoevsky's Kirilov, who views suicide as "praiseworthy," admiring as he does the "power" to finish oneself, while he looks down on natural death and he calls it "a coward's death" (qtd. in Kristeva 97). In a similar way, Sabbath wants to bring about his own death in order to master his destiny, calling it "a symbolic act of closure ... that will conclude my story" (*Sabbath's Theater* 376). But the closer he gets to the moment of his proposed death, the more terrified he becomes; paradoxically, in hoping to seize death's power, he feels impotent in the face of committing suicide. The reason is that in wanting to confront death through suicide, he wants to avoid its implications. On the one hand, contemplating his suicide seems liberating:

At this I will succeed. I promise you... They can't take that [death] away from me. So pleased was he with a prudent morning's work – the scrupulous officialising of his decision, the breaking of bonds, the shedding of fear, the bidding adieu – he whistled some Gershwin" (*Sabbath's Theater* 375).

Sabbath aestheticizes killing oneself. It is simply a form of narrative mastery, even wit: “suicide *is* funny... It’s not driven by despair or revenge, it’s not born of madness or bitterness or humiliation, it’s not a camouflaged homicide or a grandiose display of self-loathing – it’s the finishing touch to the running gag” (443). Sabbath believes that “there is nothing more natural” than suicide for a puppeteer. He can simply disappear behind a screen, calling it “entertainment” when he theatricalizes being “A man who wants to die. A living being choosing death” (443).

On the other hand, the thought of this particular performance, the act of suicide, is overwhelming: “And now, thought Sabbath, the feature attraction, the thing that matters most, the unforeseen culmination for which he had battled all his life. He had not realized how very long he’d been longing to be put to death. He hadn’t committed suicide, because he was waiting to be murdered” (450). By ignoring the murderous implications of the suicide he has been planning, he disavows the responsibility of putting an end to his life.

Ulrich Haase and William Large, in their study of Blanchot, explore the paradox of the suicide, a paradox with which Sabbath struggles. They contend that in “mastery of death”, and in “reaching out for death, in making of death a decision, death escapes” the person who longs for it. “Instead of having achieved the highest point of my freedom, the power of grasping death in my hands, I find myself stripped of all my powers” (43). The paradox of suicide results in the experience of “another death: neither death as a natural event, nor the human death to which the philosopher aspires, but an anonymous, impersonal and neutral death” which is “dying stronger than death” (44). But Sabbath cannot face the responsibility that comes with this radical, stronger form of death. As a result, he has to keep living while “Everything he hated was here” (*Sabbath’s Theater* 451). Therefore, the “annihilation of the individual” as Bataille puts it (55) cannot occur because it is his very individuality that paradoxically hopes to escape death by the act of suicide.

In the same vein, according to Blanchot, the person who tries to commit suicide says to himself “I go to meet the death which is in the world, at my disposal, and I think that thereby I can reach the other death (104). But then he continues to say that even when somebody decides to “meet death, isn’t it still death that comes to meet” that person? (98).

Therefore, we see that Sabbath struggles with two forces: on the one hand, he tries to kill himself to overcome death and on the other hand, he resents that he must die in order to be free of life. Once more, Blanchot’s words apply here: he calls suicide “a leap” and “the passage from the uncertainty of an act that has been planned, consciously decided upon, and vigorously executed, to something which disorients every project, remains foreign to all decisions – the indecisive and uncertain” and that “Suicide ... wishes to eliminate death as future, to relieve death of that portion of yet-to-come which is, so to speak, its essence, and to make it superficial, without substance and without danger” (104). Unable to commit suicide and bring himself the relief from future worry, Sabbath has to go on living. Maurice Blanchot comments on committing suicide and he believes in the strength of the person who commits it by saying: “whoever kills himself is linked to hope, the hope of finishing it all, and hope reveals his desire to begin, to find the beginning again in the end, to inaugurate in that ending a meaning which ... he means to challenge by dying” (103). In hoping to hasten the “approach of the end of everything,” Sabbath must nevertheless confront the promise kept by nothing. As a result, he remains a wanderer who can only wait for death to come.

II. Death in *Everyman*

The novel *Everyman* opens with a telling quotation from John Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale”: “...youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies” (1). Not surprisingly, the main character is an aging man with no name. Because he is haunted all his life by ill-health, he develops

a hypochondriacal obsession with sickness. This obsession grows as he is slowly worn down by various operations he has to undergo. At first, when death enters his mind, he tries to undermine its effect by denying the metaphysical: “No hocus-pocus about death... There was only our bodies, born to live and die on terms decided by the bodies that had lived and died before us” (*Everyman* 24). However, reducing death to a fact does not offer much in the way of reassurance; he eventually becomes overwhelmed by the thought of death, and is vexed at “the knowledge that you are born to live and you die instead.” He finds himself “lost in nothing, in sound of the two syllables “nothing” no less than in the nothingness, lost and drifting, and the dread began to seep in. Nothing comes without risk, he thought, nothing, nothing – there’s nothing that doesn’t backfire, not even painting stupid pictures!” (47). According to Ullrich Haase and William Large, we all experience a sense of dread when we think about death as it is related to “nothingness at the heart of ... existence” (51). This dread makes *Everyman*’s protagonist question his own obsessive nature: “Why should he imagine himself on the edge of extinction when calm, straightforward thinking told him that there was so much more solid life to come?” (*Everyman* 14). Anxiety and uncertainty plague him, and knowledge and wisdom seem to be no match for death, which Bataille calls “the most violent thing of all” (16): “Yet what he’d learned was nothing when measured against the inevitable onslaught that is the end of life” (*Everyman* 72). Therefore, here two related questions arise: how can one change one’s relationship to death? How does this shift change in turn *Everyman*’s relationship to his art?

As I have already mentioned, *Everyman*’s ill-health prompts a series of hospital visits, various treatments, and a constant sense of uncertainty about his future. Blanchot reminds us that thinking of “death is to introduce into thought the supremely doubtful, the brittleness of the unsure” (95). The lack of certainty in turn produces anxiety. His every hospitalization and the ongoing

deterioration of his physical condition are traumatic wounds. As Cathy Caruth tells us, “the experience of trauma repeats itself” and the one who once experiences it, “live(s) it twice” (1). Similarly, Roth’s main character experiences the trauma of physical deterioration many times that “returns to haunt” him (Caruth 1). Trauma is governed by repetition; *Everyman* seems trapped in a cycle from which there is no escape. This traumatic circuit is reflected in the narrative trajectory, which starts with “AROUND THE GRAVE” (1) and ends with “from the start” (84). His life is marked by a beginning and an ending, an ending whose hour and minute elude him. According to Heidegger, “one’s own Dasein is always dying already ... it is in a Being-towards-its-end (298) and while there is a certainty that death comes, there is always “the indefiniteness of its ‘when’” (302). Every time *Everyman*’s health is unstable, he is beset by the threat of death and the anxious, indefinite time of its arrival.

Moreover, as his story starts with his death, it can convey another message as well. The title of the story is taken from a late fifteenth-century morality play whose character dies and the day of his final reckoning has come. While he is left all alone, the only things that accompany him are his good deeds. Similarly, the novel *Everyman* starts with the death of its protagonist and his colleagues and family have gathered “AROUND THE GRAVE” (*Everyman* 1). Opening the novel in this way suggests that the protagonist cannot change what he has done in the world. The transience of life and its limited time given to mankind can put pressure on him and while it is gone, what is left behind is “THE GRAVE” and the memories of a life that is gone.

While *Everyman*’s character has “a deep-rooted fondness for survival” (31), his illnesses drag him down and he feels trapped; however, the more his energy and virility decrease, the more he is attracted to art. While death intends to consume his body, he wants to produce art; he wants to make art and give birth to new objects—to things that will survive him. In resuming his work as a

painter, after a gap of many years, he attempts to break the traumatic circuit that ensnares him. However, his choice of living in a beach town and holding painting classes for people of his age does not seem to improve his situation. The ominous shadow of illness and death casts a pall not only on his own life, but also on the lives of the retired people he teaches. Ironically, his turning to art seems only to amplify the intensity of the threat of death in his mind. Even his pursuing of art cannot save him of the dread of nothingness that has occupied his mind. This is similar to the idea that “nothingness at the heart of our existence” is what that frightens us (Hasse and Large 51).

The dominance of death, whether it decides to take someone’s life – the case with *Everyman*’s protagonist – or decides to make someone keep living when he cannot commit suicide – which is the case with Sabbath – is clearly visible in both novels and this is how the idea of death seizes control of their psyches, becoming their sovereign. While Sabbath tries to gather his courage to face death, and *Everyman*’s character tries to avoid it, they are confronted by the overwhelming power of death, a power that seems to drain them of agency and dignity.

III. Decay, Obsessional Neurosis, and Melancholy

In these novels under the study, the protagonists, in an unacknowledged effort, try to prove their manhood in different contexts, in various ways and for different reasons. However, the effort they put in this endeavour may not turn out as they have planned for or expected. Their propensity to obtain what they need and want sexually as a man is undermined by the inevitability of old age and its consequences. They mourn, however melancholically, the disappearance of their youth, resulting in a sense of shame that I will discuss in the following chapters.

In the novel *Everyman*, we see how masculine anxiety over decay and bodily integrity deeply marks the protagonist. The persistent blows to his confidence become evident in his

obsessive concern over his performance in various situations. Masculine anxiety about decay and degeneration is a consistent theme in Roth's late work; the troubled body on the verge of collapse and death also appears in *Sabbath's Theater*. Both Sabbath and Everyman become obsessed with what they are losing and what they experience is similar to "the object-cathexis" over which the subject, Freud suggests, has "little power of resistance" (*On the History of Psychoanalytic Movement* 249). Moreover, the characters' movement towards "fragmentation" and "disintegration" increases their anxiety of being destroyed from within (Kristeva 19). As they cannot resist their obsession, this growing concern overwhelms many aspects of their life and while the story unfolds, there are more and more examples of this concern.

The feelings of *Everyman's* protagonist toward impotence in the lines "All these procedures and hospitalizations had made him a decidedly lonelier, less confident man than he's been during the first year of retirement..., and he was hounded by the sense that he was headed for the end" (*Everyman* 36), show his own disappointment with the predicament caused by his poor health. As he goes on living, he has to deal with more and more diseases that turn him into a struggling person to improve his health. To him "Old age is a battle...an unrelenting battle" (65). *Everyman's* character sees himself "impotently putting up with the physical deterioration and the terminal sadness and the waiting and waiting for nothing" (74). The feeling that he is "becoming less and less" (74) can arouse a sense of pity which is described well in Ewa Mazierska's view who believes that in works of art, the image of failed men is manifested in a kind of representation of their bodies that evoke disgust or pity (217). Not only does the character in *Everyman* fail in his attempt to improve his health, but he also becomes a failure in all his relationships. Most relationships in Philip Roth's novels fail and in many of them, to name a few *American Pastoral* (1997), *The Dying Animal* (2001), and *Indignation* (2008), the failure of relationships is quite

evident. The failure in the life of the protagonist of *Everyman* is clearly manifested which then becomes corporeal. Consequently, this manifestation arouses a sense of pity in the reader as Mazierska claims (217). *Everyman*'s protagonist's obsession with his infirmities seems at first as an unwanted pressure imposed upon him, but as his obsession continues, it becomes more understandable that he lapses into obsession and loneliness. The word 'decidedly' in "decidedly lonelier" (*Everyman* 36) can not only convey the meaning of definitely but it can also carry the meaning of certainty and consciousness of a decision. It seems as if he determinedly decides to be lonely and that's why he chooses to live in the beach town, a place not very close to where his daughter lives.

Although the protagonist tries to cope with this self-loathing image of his which is getting worse day by day, his passion to cling to life does not go away and this passion becomes obvious in the number of marriages and sexual partners that he has had. His impotence causes a feeling of inadequacy resulting in his shrinkage from publicity which makes him enter a state of nonexistence by moving to a retirement beach village where he deals with people of his own age. Despite all "estrangement brought on by his bodily failings," he wants and tries to find his way back to normal life and "to enter more vigorously into the world around him" (*Everyman* 36). His desire for a normal life is manifested in his organizing painting classes for the village residents whose members are retired and old people like himself. As they get together weekly, their "conversation invariably turned to matters of sickness and health" and they "identified one another by their ailments than by their painting" (36). It seems that the protagonist is stuck in a maze where he has no way out of sickness and he is overwhelmed by diseases and people's suffering, like himself, from various ailments.

His purposeful self-isolation seems like an exile that he forces on himself, one that makes him reluctant to call his grown sons: “If he yielded in the solitude of his long evenings to the temptation to call one or the other of them, he always felt saddened afterward, saddened and beaten” (42). His self-isolation is a conscious self-punishment that he thinks he deserves: “They [his sons] elected to make the absent father suffer, and so he did, investing them with that power. Suffering his wrongdoing was all he could ever do to please them” (44). It seems that the guilt he feels over having left his first wife and two sons manifests itself in making himself suffer and this imposing suffering is similar to the “violence of the superego” that punishes the ego and “relentlessly attacks” it (Peixoto Farias and Rezende Cardoso 33-34). *Everyman*’s character tries to identify with his sons’ gaze, with their perspective of him, by way of “symbolic identification” a term Slavoj Žižek appropriates from Jacques Lacan (116). But the result is too painful. In seeing himself in their eyes, he struggles with the feeling that they continue to view him with hostility, even contempt: “they persisted in minimizing everything worthwhile that he believed was apparent to everyone else. Minimized his decency, then magnified his defects for a reason that surely could not continue to carry such great force at this late date” (*Everyman* 44). The problem is that his attempt to identify symbolically with his sons’ perspective is marred by the imaginary identification with his own image of himself. He can accept responsibility for his failures as a father, but only so far. This image brings him a kind of humiliation that he masochistically enjoys. An enjoyment which, along with constant brooding on death, is one of the symptoms of an obsessional neurotic. This is the jouissance that occurs when his “being-for-the-other” becomes his “being-for-himself” (Žižek 118), and he uses the gaze of others to punish himself. The effect is that, as an obsessional neurotic, he must exact a price for his enjoyment. He pays for his profligacy by deriving a masochistic pleasure from his sons’ judgment of him. He never asks for

their forgiveness, nor does he apologize for having abandoned them and their mother. Everyman, in rationalizing both his failures as a parent and his failure to make amends with his sons, “builds up a whole system enabling him to postpone the encounter of the object ad infinitum: the moment is never right” (Žižek 218).

As he does not prevent himself from suffering, it seems that he also derives enjoyment from it, a masochistic suffering that brings him satisfaction. While his sons bear a grudge against him and make him suffer – and he does suffer – there comes a point in which he rails against them for their accusations. By justifying his decision, he feels relieved of their punishment. But in his melancholy, he keeps reminding himself of his failure, and isolates himself accordingly. This idea reverberates in Žižek’s words as “failure procures pleasure” (118). In Žižek’s terms the hysterical neurotic cannot realize this “other” that he is “enacting a role” for is not the other and is, in fact, himself. Therefore, the “being-for-the-other” is in reality “his being-for-himself” and he is “identified with the gaze for which he is playing his role” (118). Therefore, what we can infer about Everyman’s railing against his sons is that he is creating this argument with them, and the accusations – supposedly made by his sons – are in fact made by himself. While he feels guilty of what he has done to his family, simultaneously he enjoys it. By creating his failure in his mind, he brings himself a kind of masochistic pleasure.

IV. Decay, Obsessional Neurosis, and the Absurd

The opening of chapter one in *Sabbath’s Theater* acknowledges the existence of a sense of decay by mentioning some decline happening to the physical state of its main character. The opening lines of the novel write of “hormonal infusion ebbing, with the prostate enlarging, with probably no more than another few years of semi-dependable potency” and the reader is heralded

what is waiting to be read of the protagonist in the following pages. Mickey Sabbath, the erstwhile puppeteer, “with unnerving green eyes and painfully arthritic fingers” (3) is seen as the very epitome of a person whose downfall, specifically physically, is depicted and built up page after page. This in turn can be paralleled to natural course of aging in the life of every human being who experiences it at some point in their life and there is no way out of it. The cruel and gradual destruction of the protagonist’s body reminds the reader of the “instability and disequilibrium” brought by life. A kind of instability that can turn life into a “swelling tumult continuously on the verge of explosion” (Bataille 59), which finally this explosion manifest itself in death. How Sabbath has mixed feelings towards his aging body manifests itself in these lines where he has lost his glass eye and he is trying to show his friend’s servant, Rosa, what he does every night with it:

...he began to mime for her how before going to sleep he popped the eye out of his head and, after looking and finding nowhere to put it – and fearful that someone who came in and saw it on Deborah’s desk, say, would be horrified ... – he just dropped it out into his trouser pocket... Then he showed her how he had turned *his* pants upside down to hang them in the closet and how, of course, the *ojo* had fallen out of the pocket and into one of her running shoes on the floor... She [Rosa] was laughing so hard ... “Here,” he said and, taking one of her hands in his own, drew it toward his right eye. “Did you ever feel a glass eye before? Go ahead,” he said... Most men are ashamed of their infirmities. Not me; I love’em. Make me feel alive. Touch it.” ... He was dying, had given himself a heart attack by going all out for Rosa’s amusement. Final performance. Will not be held over. Puppet master and prick conclude career. (*Sabbath’s Theater* 178-80)

In this scene, Sabbath as a puppeteer stages a play in which he acts for Rosa and despite the fact that his glass prosthesis is meant to hide his blindness, he boldly flaunts it, encouraging Rosa to

touch his glass eye. He apparently feels no shame, not only in admitting his blindness, but also in transforming his disability into the stuff of farce. The *mise en scène* he stages revolves around making fun of his bodily decay and he seems to be enjoying the degradation in Rosa's eyes. The melancholy that shapes his shame about his aging and incipient impotency turns, as Freud has argued elsewhere, into a form of mania (*On the History of Psychoanalytic Movement* 253). He deliberately humiliates himself and lets himself look like an idiot. These acts of self-sabotage bring him humiliation, but in a way, give him enjoyment, which is in line with the "masochistic logic" of the "compulsive acts" of an obsessional neurotic who enjoys his own humiliation and failure (Žižek 118). His performance is a perversion of the *jouissance* of sex. Instead of orgasm, there is laughter, and instead of the pleasure of exertion and release, there is the absurdity of flirting with death.

Žižek's idea about "imaginary" and "symbolic" identification can be applied to Sabbath's perspective on his body. As I have suggested above, Žižek argues that "imaginary identification" is identification with an image in which the ego reassures us that we are likeable to ourselves, and "symbolic identification" is identification with the gaze of the other, we identify with the perspective of the other, "so that we appear to ourselves likeable" (117). On the one hand, Sabbath acts like a self-confident man and this confidence allows him to pursue women. He justifies pursuing satisfaction as his way of going beyond reason since "pleasure mocks at toil" and hard work is seen as "unfavourable to the pursuit of intense pleasure" (Bataille 168). His confidence is boosted as he identifies himself with the "imaginary" perspective and, as a result, he apparently crafts an acceptable image of himself; but in his half-blindness, we realize that his lack of vision is both literal and metaphorical. On the other hand, when he asks Rosa to find his glass eye, he engages in a parody of symbolic identification. He wants to identify with the gaze of the other

(Rosa), to see himself from her perspective, but he wants to remain in control of how Rosa interprets what she sees. In this case, Sabbath's image is that of an object of ridicule, making Rosa "laugh... so hard she had to squeeze herself with her arms as though to prevent her belly from splitting open" (*Sabbath's Theater* 178-79). These two images of his body, one as a falsely confident Lothario, and the other as an absurdly pitiful comic spectacle, together produce a tragicomic result.

This incident explains the gradual shift in Sabbath's temperament throughout the story. The more the story unfolds, the more carefree and manic Sabbath becomes. His manic attitude is seen in his inadvertently bringing on a heart episode in working to amuse Rosa, ironically calling this his "Final performance" (80). This is the play, Sabbath's theater, that he wants to stage; but death is much more overwhelming, much stronger and insurmountable that he cannot conclude his theater by death, but by only turning it into an absurdity.

V. Taboo and Transgression

In his book *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, Georges Bataille allocates a rather integral part to two themes of taboo and transgression and he relates them to topics of life and death. He believes that man's life has been torn between "two irreconcilables" of taboo and transgression (40). Sigmund Freud also writes on taboo and divides its meaning into two branches: as something "sacred" and as something "dangerous, forbidden, and unclean" (*Totem and Taboo* 55). Juxtaposing taboo with the concept of transgression makes it clear that here the second meaning of taboo is meant by Freud. There should be a taboo, as something forbidden, in order to be transgressed or violated. In the same vein, Bataille believes when taboo is no longer forbidden, it "loses its force...[and] transgression is impossible" (140). Moreover, he reconciles these two ideas

with the concept of violence, reminding us that taboos “reject violence”, while transgression “sets it [violence] free” (49). Therefore, each of these concepts finds its full meaning in the presence of the other concept. The manifestation of the themes of taboo and transgression becomes central in the development of *Sabbath’s Theater* and *Everyman*, and I will show what prompts these protagonists to make transgressions in life.

Since Sabbath is obsessed with the death of his loved ones, their absence has left a void in him that resists filling. Their loss is traumatic; he is haunted by his memory of them; in the case of his mother, her ghost continually plagues him. Trapped in the “incommunicable grief” (Kristeva 3) of losing them, he tried to set himself free. To triumph over the void of those losses, his only recourse is pleasure. But the pleasure he wants to pursue drives him to the verge of transgression as he is “indifferent to the untransgressive run of normalized pursuits” (*Sabbath’s Theater* 126). In order to break the taboo, he chooses transgression, clinging to the disorder that will sustain his desire. As Bataille claims, “nothing heats the passion more than irregularity” (196). Indeed, Sabbath goes so far as to insist: “I am disorder” (*Sabbath’s Theater* 203). Bataille insists that pursuing pleasure and the degree of enjoyment it produces has a direct relation to the “destruction of life”; therefore, to derive the extreme form of pleasure he pursues, Sabbath longs for the drawn-out disaster of his self-destruction:

...he felt uncontrollable tenderness for his own shit-filled life. And a laughable hunger for more. More defeat! More disappointment! More deceit! More loneliness! More arthritis! More missionaries! God willing, more cunt! More disastrous entanglement in everything. For a pure sense of being tumultuously alive, you can’t beat the nasty side of existence. I may not have been a matinee idol, but say what you will about me, it’s been a real human life! (*Sabbath’s Theater* 247).

He wants the more of everything, but in driving his life to more destruction in the hope of getting more pleasure out of it, he is not simply pursuing his desire, and instead, he is controlled by the excess of life that marks Freud's death drive. The thrill Sabbath experiences in breaking taboos is paralleled with Bataille's juxtaposition of pleasure and taboo: "the taboo never makes an appearance without suggesting sexual pleasure, nor does pleasure without evoking the taboo" (108). Or elsewhere he mentions that "the forbidden" object and "the very prohibition attached to it" is what that feeds the desire (72). As Bataille claims that transgression sets violence free (49), Sabbath feels an insatiable hunger and aggression to experience that which is destructive to gain more pleasure, and the negation of restrictions brings him a "surge of life" and a "desire that triumphs over the taboo" in Bataille's terms (113, 256).

According to Slavoj Žižek, a person who suffers from obsessional neurosis is trapped in a masochistic attitude towards himself and as a result, he humiliates himself while "preventing his success" and "organizing his failure" (118) and this person's plan to prepare his failure creates pleasure in him. Regarding Žižek's contention, Sabbath, like Everyman, can be seen as an obsessional neurotic. In order to meet his own failure, he tries to break the taboo related to committing suicide and death and as a result, he organizes his own burial and funeral. His approaching death brings him a sense of pleasure and dying becomes his major goal as he says: "*At this I will succeed. I promise you... They can't take that [death] away from me*" (*Sabbath's Theater* 375). As he gradually gets closer to face his death that he tries to organize by committing suicide, he seems to postpone its moment. This is in line with one characteristic of obsessional neurosis that is an "incessant procrastination" (Žižek 217). Žižek believes that an obsessional neurotic "builds up a whole system enabling him to postpone" the encounter with the object that gives him pleasure and enjoyment. The obsessional neurotic believes that "the moment is never

right”, and while he postpones reaching what he wants, he gets to a point that he doesn’t know what he really wants. As a result, he “is tortured by doubt and cannot decide” (218). This character trait can also be seen in Sabbath who postpones encountering his own death while he cannot transgress the taboo of committing suicide, and as a result he becomes a wanderer at the end of the novel who has to keep living.

Now turning the discussion to the novel *Everyman*, a trend similar to Sabbath’s lifestyle is apparent. A trend which goes around taboos and impermissible pleasures and consequently going beyond them. While he does not anymore feel “a full human being” (*Everyman* 59) in comparison to his past, the feeling of becoming a less human being undermines his confidence. These lines read:

Thirty years ago he wouldn’t have doubted the result of pursuing her, young as she was, and the possibility of humiliating rejection would never have occurred to him. But lost was the pleasure of the confidence, and with it the engrossing playfulness of the exchange. He did his best to conceal his anxiety – and the urge to touch – and the craving for just one such body – and the futility of it all – and his insignificance – and apparently succeeded (*Everyman* 61).

In effect, he must work to perform a desire he no longer feels. Why? To alleviate his growing anxiety about aging. *Everyman*’s deteriorating health and approaching old age create a sense of shame in him as he does not feel as vigorous as he used to be. This feeling of shame manifests itself in his growing aggression. Andrew P. Morrison argues that rage is “as a spontaneous response to the sudden appearance of shame: in an attempt to rid ourselves of shame, we attack someone in our environment ... As shame sensitivity lessens, these enraged outbursts of temper become less frequent” (113). While *Everyman*’s aggression towards old age and his physical

condition increases, he seems to be at war with his condition as he says: “Old age isn’t a battle; old age is a massacre” (*Everyman* 72). At this imposed war upon his body, Everyman looks at his body from a scrutinizing and criticizing eye. He becomes one with the “superego gaze” that humiliates him (Žižek 118), and, outside of his relationship to his sons, he persists in looking at himself from his own perspective in a self-judging manner, which makes him feel more ashamed and aggressive towards his debility. As his gradual decay gallops forward, he uses transgression to assure himself of his physical and sexual prowess. His carnal obsession leads him into having affairs with women. He seems to be in competition with time and approaching death and as the number of his visits to hospital increases, he gets more obsessed with transgression in life. Obviously he becomes depressed by his physical condition and as Kristeva claims that a depressed person feels “disinherited of” something good (12), this feeling of disinheritance of his youth and health drives him to transgression to prove his sexual power to himself and to deny his gradual but steady decline.

The abovementioned parts on *Everyman* and *Sabbath’s Theater* are a proof of characters’ transgression which can be the result of their bodily decay that is fueled by melancholy; in order to compensate for their melancholy caused by their “lost objects” – youth and health – they wander, as Kristeva puts it, “in pursuit of continuously disappointing adventures and loves” (12).

VI. Conclusion

This chapter focuses on two works by Philip Roth: a long novel called *Sabbath’s Theater* and a novella named *Everyman*. These two works are compared and contrasted with each other while subjects of death, melancholy and mourning, decay, taboo and transgression are investigated and discussed in these works. The opening of both stories – a part of the “Ode to a Nightingale”

in *Everyman* and a line from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: "Every third thought shall be my grave" in *Sabbath's Theater* – is the harbinger of the dominant theme of instability and death. In *Everyman*, the nameless character struggles with his aging body and he goes through many operations to evade death as it is said in the story: "...now eluding death seemed to have become the central business of his life and bodily decay" (*Everyman* 71). Similarly, Sabbath in *Sabbath's Theater* is afflicted by old age and arthritis, while his arthritic fingers stop him to work as a puppeteer which he has chosen over everything even women. Therefore, it can be seen that decay and death become intertwined themes reigning over both stories. The death of their dear ones and the upsetting bodily decay they have to deal with turn them into melancholic characters who mourn those losses in their life. There is a part in *Everyman* where the main character shows an interest in writing his own biography and he thinks that if he writes it, he would call it: "*The Life and Death of a Male Body*" (52) and interestingly in one radio programme Roth himself admits that he had wanted to call this novella "The Life and Death of a Male Body" before he decided to call it *Everyman* and this potential title can well convey the mood and theme of the story. In addition, both works allocate a large portion of their stories to the theme of decay which is the inevitable consequence of aging. Many pages of *Everyman* concentrate on the protagonist's struggle with health issues which haunt him for many years, and the only freedom from these problems would seem to be death. Moreover, *Sabbath's Theater* brings many chronically devalued images of the protagonist who has to face his old age. Confrontation with death is looked at by Heidegger, Blanchot, Bataille and Freud and their ideas have been applied to the issues that these characters are struggling with. The depression and melancholy they are faced with are looked upon through Maurice Blanchot and Kristeva's ideas on these subjects.

As there is no way out of the difficulties these characters are dealing with, they cling to a last resort – which is clinging obsessively to their sexual desires – in a destructive kind of desire that is an inescapable excess of life: the surplus known as the death drive. Their obsession with gratification of their sexual needs is in contrast with their married lives; when their sexual excitement and marital fulfillment are not reconcilable, they do away with their spouses. As Roth scholar Mark Shechner reminds us about Roth's novels, "where there is desire, there is disaster" (9). Fundamentally, the obsessional neurosis and the absurdities that characterize Mickey Sabbath and Everyman are marked by avoiding the problem of other people's desire, even as they punish themselves for their failures. Their self-destructive tendencies are accompanied by transgression, and the breaking of taboos. The topics of taboo and transgression are the ones which are attended to in detail by Bataille, revealing a paradox: while transgressions bring them a sense of guilt, this guilt creates an enjoyment derived from self-punishment. The urge to punish themselves gives them a sense of enjoyment that they masochistically want to have in their life and this perverse pleasure is something that they have longed for.

To put it in a nutshell, *Everyman's* character and Sabbath deal with problems of aging and every time they try to elude this unavoidable fact, they are assaulted by the bare fact of the appearance of death in their life which leads to a frustration from which they cannot escape. These are the subjects that can appear in daily activities and their repercussions can be mirrored into our own private life, and eventually we may be left with a feeling of insecurity and vulnerability that death is waiting in the corner and may come into our way at any moment.

Now that I have discussed these problematics in these two Roth's novels, I will now turn to Pierre Lemaitre's *Au revoir là-haut* to consider how these questions manifest themselves in a different cultural context.

Chapter Two: Trauma and Death, Desire and Transgression in Pierre Lemaitre's *Au revoir là-haut*

There is a potential killer in every man;
the frequency of senseless massacres
throughout history makes that much plain

Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality* 72

This chapter focuses on the French novel *Au revoir là-haut* by Pierre Lemaitre who was awarded the 2013 Prix Goncourt (Adele 104). This novel explores a culture that wishes to honour soldiers who lost their lives in the First World War, while ignoring the physical, mental and economic suffering of its veterans. The story opens on November 2nd, 1918 just prior to the armistice. A professional soldier, Lieutenant Henri d'Aubray Pradelle sends his youngest and oldest soldier respectively into battle and then surreptitiously shoots them in the back to provoke his men into vengeance against the enemy, thus perpetuating the conflict. Meanwhile one of his soldiers, Albert Maillard, realizes what Pradelle has done; the latter silences him by throwing him into a ditch, where he is then buried by roiling earth after an explosion. Another soldier, Édouard Péricourt accidentally becomes aware of Pradelle's action and despite the fact that he is badly injured, creeps to save Albert. Once he digs the half-conscious Albert out of the earth, he attempts to revive him, but is suddenly hit by a shell which virtually destroys the lower part of his face.

The story concentrates on the repercussions of life after the Great War and the plot revolves around the post-war life of veterans Albert Maillard and Édouard Péricourt. After having fought much and having seen too many deaths not only are Albert and Édouard physically wounded, but they are also emotionally traumatized. I am going to focus on answering the questions of how the

trauma makes them respond to death, to survival, and why they sometimes behave as if they are immortal. Moreover, I will explore how struggling with trauma can inform the relationship between transgression and art.

I. Trauma and Death

It took the war to teach it, that you were as responsible for everything you saw as you were for everything you did. The problem was that you didn't always know what you were seeing until later, maybe years later, that a lot of it never made it in at all, it just stayed stored there in your eyes.

Michael Herr (qtd. in Caruth 10)

Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* describes trauma as an “overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (11). She believes that trauma “consists not only in having confronted death but in having survived, precisely, without knowing it” (64). Similarly, Freud describes trauma by offering the example of a train accident. A person leaves the accident “apparently unharmed”, but after an “incubation period” that he also calls “latency”, the survivor begins to develop some serious physical symptoms which are related to the accident; he calls trauma as “a theory of the peculiar incomprehensibility of human survival” (qtd. in Caruth 16-17, 58). Freud claims that in a traumatic event “an interruption of consciousness” happens; this interruption takes place “too soon to be expected” (qtd. in Caruth 104). The “latency” called by Freud is “belatedness” in Caruth’s terms (17). She believes that trauma occurs when it is not completely understood by the person who experiences it, but the forming core of this traumatic experience is “*the act of leaving*” (22).

The departure from this symbolic accident scene remains unclear for the person who experiences it, and later, struggles to remember it—to narrate the event in historical terms. Moreover, the traumatized person suffers from “returning dramatic dream” (59). Similarly, Freud focuses on the experience after the survival since the dreams and flashbacks of that experience go beyond the consciousness of the traumatized person. He calls these flashbacks as “repetition compulsion” which in his opinion is a determined repetition of the negative event that had happened to the traumatized person (qtd. in Caruth 63).

Caruth claims that the reason behind the return of a traumatic experience is an attempt to understand completely and master what has really happened in the first place. The survival for the traumatized becomes an “endless testimony to the impossibility of living” (62). This impossibility is caused by “incomprehensibility” of the traumatic experience and this incomprehensibility is the result of “lack of preparedness to take in a stimulus that comes too quickly”, as Caruth states (62); in effect, the threat comes before the mind can comprehend it. As a result, they have experienced the event, but they have missed *the time* of the event.

The *fright* – the term used by Freud – of an accident, which is the traumatic effect of not being ready for the catastrophic event, lies in the *experience of waking from* the nightmare of the incident and the survived person comes to *consciousness* of the accident. (qtd. in Caruth 64). As a result of waking into consciousness, the traumatized person relives the catastrophic experience many times over; the psychic repetition of the experience can eventually lead to emotional and physical deterioration. Caruth suggests that the incomprehensibility of the accident is located “at the heart of Freud’s formulation of death drive” (64); that is to say, the incomprehensibility of the death drive is, paradoxically, an excess of life in which the traumatized subject has effectively survived a death, “of having passed beyond death without knowing it” (65), prompting an

identification with death and destruction that manifests themselves in aggression, repetition compulsion, and self-destruction.

The interval between a traumatic incident and its recurrence, that is, belatedness, can make changes to the recounting of the reality of the accident. Therefore, memory can be altered by trauma and is one of its consequences. As there might be a break within the understandings of two different people of the same incident, each of these people can “establish their own history” while narrating the incident (Caruth 32).

The theme of trauma is one of the main overriding elements in this novel. In the opening pages of the story, the incident in the battlefield – Albert’s being buried and trying desperately to breathe through the rotting head of a dead horse, and Édouard’s severe injury caused by an explosion – leaves these characters traumatized. What Albert and Édouard have experienced becomes internalized, which turns into a recurring nightmare and makes them suffer internally. Caruth contends that in a traumatic experience “the outside has gone inside without any mediation” (59). While Albert and Édouard try to come back to a normal life and make the “impossibility of living” possible (Caruth 62), Albert knows that nothing would be the same after the accident:

Albert sentait que quelque chose, il en était certain, ne reviendrait jamais: la sérénité... il savait qu’une peur indéfinissable, vibrante, Presque palpable, était peu à peu venue l’habiter. À quoi s’ajoutaient les effets dévastateurs de son ensevelissement. Quelque chose de lui était encore sous la terre, son corps était remonté à la surface, mais une partie de son cerveau, prisonnière et terrifiée, était demeurée en dessous, emmurée.” [Albert was convinced that one thing at least he would never recover: serenity ... he knew that he would forever be inhabited by an indefinable, pulsing, almost palpable fear. This had been made worse by the devastating effects of having been buried alive. Some part of him was still

buried in the earth, his body had emerged, but some captive, terrified part of his brain had remained trapped below] (*Au revoir là-haut* 64).

According to Kristeva, “the anxiety of being destroyed from within remains active” in the traumatized person (19). This is the anxiety that plagues Albert and Édouard and changes their life into “a devitalized existence” (4). Their no-longer-achievable serenity caused by the trauma of the battlefield makes Albert and Édouard wear masks, though for different reasons. Édouard becomes obsessed with making many different, colourful masks to cover his mutilated face (indeed, he is rarely seen without one), while Albert also wears a mask, made by Édouard, that is shaped like a horse’s head, in an uncanny repetition of the horse’s head through which he had managed to breathe while buried under the ground. There is a dark irony in this attitude: one wears it to hide physical trauma, and the other to contend with its psychic counterpart. Albert’s first encounter with the horse mask made and worn by Édouard is described as follows:

Stupéfié... il a la bouche grande ouverte pour ne pas défaillir, ses jambes n’en peuvent plus, il tombe enfin à genoux sur le parquet, bouleversé ...il a envie de l’embrasser en plein sur sa grosse bouche veloutée. Il se contente de s’approcher, de tender l’index, de toucher ses lèvres. Édouard reconnaît le même geste que celui de Louise, naguère, l’émotion le submerge. Tout ce qu’il y aurait à dire. Les deux hommes restent silencieux, chacun dans son univers, Albert caresse la tête du cheval, Édouard reçoit la caresse [so shocked ... his mouth gapes as he pants for breath, finally his legs give out and he sinks to his knees, hysterical... he wants to kiss the horse’s soft lips. Instead, he simply reaches out and traces them with his index finger. Édouard recognized the gesture, it is the one Louise once made; he is overwhelmed. Everything they have to say is in this gesture. The two men sit in

silence, each in his own world, Albert stroking the horse's head, Édouard accepting the caress] (*Au revoir là-haut* 282-283).

Much earlier before his encounter with the horse head mask, Albert had asked Édouard to draw it, and Édouard was trying many times to get the right picture, in which he finally succeeds. As an artist Édouard should be good at sketching and why he has to draw many heads to get the right picture? One assumption that we can make is that Édouard's trauma interferes with the events that led to his saving Albert and to his own mutilation that he cannot remember or reconstruct the right image of the horse's head. His intentional not-remembering gives him a pass "into the freedom of forgetting" (Caruth 32), which can bring a break with his past. Moreover, the reason behind Albert's request to have a sketch of the horse head can indicate Albert's intention and will to face it and to "master what was never fully grasped in the first place" (62). It seems that their first encounter with the mask is their belated encounter with the incident of the battlefield whose trauma has inflicted a wound upon their mind. Here, the mask works with a dual role. Unlike Édouard, Albert finds comfort, first in the drawing, and then, after a state of shock, in the mask of the horse head. Although it reminds him of his horrifying burial under the roiling earth, to a large extent it brings him the memory of his survival so that "il devait dormir avec sa tête de cheval à côté de lui, en cas de panique" [he had to sleep with the horse head mask next to him in case of panic] (*Au revoir là-haut* 363). The ambivalence of Albert's feeling towards the mask – from a shock to a caress – takes a turn from a negative one to a positive one because of his survival. Albert's experience can best describe the "paradoxical relation between destructiveness and survival" at the heart of the traumatic experience (Caruth 57).

The other role that the mask has taken on is the one that brings a sense of destructiveness and following disgust to Édouard. He has been a victim in a fraction of a second and his whole life

after the incident has been negatively affected. Having come up with a soothing, satisfying image of the horse, he decides not to draw anymore; “Maintenant qu’il avait donné à son camarade sa tête de cheval, il posa son crayon et décida de ne plus le reprendre. Il ne dessinerait jamais plus [Now that he had given his comrade his horse’s head, he set down his pencil. He would never draw again (*Au revoir là-haut* 111). In a way, he tries to stop the intrusion of the incident’s recurrence and as he has been a victim of the incident where he has had no active role in his own destruction, he passively receives Albert’s “caress.”

The trauma Albert and Édouard are suffering is not only caused by their own survival in the battlefield. They have also been traumatized by seeing too many deaths of their fellow comrades in the war. Writing on death, Freud argues that death is “the necessary outcome of life” and that “everyone owes nature a death,” many people are “accustomed to behave” as if they are immortal, and in unconscious terms, do not believe in their own deaths. As a result, this attitude “reduces death from a necessity to a chance event” (*On the History of Psycho-Analytic Movement* 289). For Freud, war prompts a shift in our attitudes: “we are forced to believe in it [death]. People really die ... and the accumulation of deaths puts an end to the impression of chance” (291). Death is inevitable, and liable to happen at any moment, grimly altering our very perspectives on cause and effect. But the truth of death that war makes us face produces other paradoxes. Having witnessed so many deaths does not necessarily make Albert and Édouard more fearful of death; rather the survival boosts Édouard’s confidence, making him bold enough to act like a hero in saving Albert’s life. It is the deadly fact of war that paradoxically, in Freud’s words, “compels us once more to be heroes who cannot believe in their own death” (299). Although Albert and Édouard have experienced war and loss, the subsequent trauma they contend with is not absolutely debilitating and devastating. The enfeebling force of trauma gives Édouard an enlivening urge to

use his art in a project ironically called “Patriotic Memories” in which he draws soldiers and swindles people with non-existent sculptures based on those drawings. The courage to take a risk gives Édouard a goal; it becomes a way of reclaiming agency, of resisting the lure of melancholy (*On the History of Psycho-Analytic Movement* 276). The trauma has acquired a new function in Édouard and Albert’s lives which brings them meaning. The meaning-making function of trauma manifests itself in this project through which they can escape the misery and poverty against which they struggle. Édouard boldly deceives people for whom he has fought and now he turns them into his victims.

Lieutenant Henri d’Aubray Pradelle, who has brought this endless misery to Albert and Édouard’s lives also functions as an embodiment of their trauma. He is described as having an “allure aristocratique, il semblait à la fois terriblement civilisé et foncièrement brutal. Un peu à l’image de cette guerre. C’est peut-être pour cela qu’il s’y trouvait aussi bien” [With his aristocratic bearing, he seemed at once terribly civilized and utterly brutish. A little like this war. Which was perhaps why he felt so at ease here] (*Au revoir là-haut* 15). What we can conclude here is that Lemaitre tries to convey the message that war has two sides: while war is declared in the name of civilization and that, in Bataille’s terms, it is made for the “hoped ... political results” (77), it is simultaneously merciless and cruel, the very qualities seen in Pradelle’s attitude towards his own men. It seems that his repeatedly appearing as a threat to Albert and Édouard is something that he truly enjoys, which is similar to “sadist’s enjoyment” in transgression mentioned by Lode Lauwaert (64). The reason behind Pradelle’s insistence on the continuity of war emanates not only from his interest in and empathy with conflict, but also from the obscene enjoyment he derives from the exercise of power. His threatening shadow in Albert and Édouard’s lives can be likened to Walter Benjamin’s idea that the power of the police—that, like the military, represents the

violence and power of the state--is a “formless ... all-pervasive” and “ghostly” presence in civilization (243). Pradelle’s presence, like his power, seems omnipresent: “Pradelle, mais il avait l’impression qu’il était partout, comme un mauvais esprit, qu’il planait toujours quelque part, à proximité, prêt à fonder sur lui” [Pradelle, but it seemed to Albert that he was everywhere, like an evil spirit, constantly hovering close by ready to swoop] (*Au revoir là-haut* 117). In a sense, Pradelle is the spectral embodiment of the trauma that Édouard and Albert try to escape. He keeps returning like a traumatic nightmare, one that the witness struggles to avoid or master. According to Caruth, the “determined repetition” of a traumatic event brings destruction to the traumatized person. She believes that trauma turns into “uncontrolled repetitive appearance” of nightmares (10). Pradelle’s ubiquity haunts Albert and Édouard, and as Caruth suggests, makes them “relive” their traumatic experience (10).

In sum, in Albert and Édouard’s life there has been a recurrent reference to the trauma of death and survival that they have been trying to escape; but as the prevalence of the trauma and its inevitable negative impacts still exist, they have to endure it and their survival is changed into a life sentence from which they cannot go beyond.

II. Physical Trauma and Decay

While he is hospitalized, Édouard is encouraged to have a facial surgery to gain a more tolerable look after the battlefield incident, while his surgeon

“Maudret évoqua les prothèses. Édouard n’attendit pas la suite pour attraper son grand cahier et écrire à nouveau: -Non.

-Quoi, non...? Demanda le chirurgien. Non à quoi?

- Non à tout. Je reste comme ça” [Maudret talked about prostheses... Édouard did hear him out before grabbing his books and once again writing: “No.”

“What do you mean, no?” The surgeon asked. “No to what?”

“No to everything. I stay as I am.”] (*Au revoir là-haut* 108)

The bombshell causing the irreversible damage to Édouard’s face divides his life into two parts. As a result of this incident, there comes into existence a pre-war and a post-war identity that he cannot reconcile. The injury in Édouard’s body can be likened to what Jason Szabo says about a patient’s body that tends to “tyrannize both mind and spirit” (74). Édouard’s new appearance is something that he cannot come to terms with; the devastation done to his face leaves him traumatized. According to Caruth, “trauma is not simply an effect of destruction but also, fundamentally, an enigma of survival” (57). Not only does the wound traumatize him but also his coming out of war with that face causes and intensifies the trauma he is suffering. According to Kristeva, “depression like mourning conceals an aggressiveness towards the lost object” and this aggression results in a “dialectic of idealization and devalorization of self and others” (11). Being deprived of his face and his identity, Édouard feels too much psychic agony to agree to have cosmetic surgery. He, in a way, directs his aggressiveness towards others as if he wants to take revenge on them for what he did at war – the sacrifice.

According to Katherine Feo, after the Great War facial wounds were “worse than other injuries” because of their “social and psychic ramifications” (20). Similarly, J. Howard Crum notes that “the world felt that horrible disfigurement of face was too great a price for one to pay for his patriotism” (qtd. in Gilman 166). We can liken Édouard’s loss of his face to “the lost object”; that is, he embodies the Thing, the real of the loss over which the melancholic perpetually grieves, as Kristeva contends (9). In effect, his mutilated face stands as the melancholy Thing [that] interrupts

desiring metonymy, just as it prevents working out the loss within the psyche” (Kristeva 14). Édouard’s post-war life is similar to a suicidal mobile artisan who described his own life as a “sorry existence” and it is mentioned in Szabo’s book about the people who suffer from incurable and intolerable happenings in their life. The disfigured survivor experiences feelings of inadequacy, self-loathing, and a desire for concealment. The experience of these feelings in psychologist Brierre de Boismont’s words (qtd. in Szab 80) is defined as “social death” which may lead many people with incurable diseases to end their lives. This can explain Édouard’s alienation – while he is obsessed with and disgusted by what has happened to his face – from the society that seems to have washed its hands of the soldiers who have fought for it and he feels devalued and stigmatized.

Katherine Feo states that after the Great war there was a high rate of suicide among the veterans with disfigured faces. As a result, making masks became common and they became the “mementos of war”. These masks “made pre-war life a possibility in the post-war period” that tried to hide the “unsettling and unresolved” consequences of war (25). Moreover, Sander Gilman argues that after the war, the bodies and faces of the survived soldiers “were read as signs of war” (168). When these signs became intolerable in the public eye, there were more and more struggles to equip and enhance the appearance of the survivors. David M. Lubin believes that those masks allowed soldiers “regain ... the social visibility” that they had “forfeited” after the war because of their wounds. However, Katherine Feo believes that these masks had paradoxical functions: while they were trying to conceal the loss, they “inadvertently” reproduce and project that loss (17). Uncannily, something that had to “remain hidden”, came to light and became even more evident (18). The explosion of the images of “the war-wounded” after the Great War was an example of “pointlessness and meaninglessness of war”, and in those images the “missing face” was

understood as a “loss of humanity” (Gilman 162); therefore, we can interpret that those masks came as concealing agents over the pointlessness and meaninglessness of what had happened to the mutilated survivors.

We can conclude that the paradoxical functions of these masks often created a dilemma for the soldiers. On the one hand, they wear them and they can hide the horror of the war as they work to return to “la vie civile” [civilian life] (*Au revoir là-haut* 112); on the other hand, these masks foreground the harsh reality of war, making civilian onlookers all the more aware of their implications, and arousing their curiosity to know or guess what lies hidden behind them. Here, Oscar Wilde’s notion that “a mask tells us more than a face” is particularly ironic (qtd. in Lubin 6).

By looking at Édouard with the abovementioned points in mind, we may come to understand the underlying reason behind Édouard’s obstinate refusal to have the surgery and his determination in making so many colourful masks to wear. The paradoxical effects of a mask make an onlooker remember the harshness of the war more and this can justify Édouard’s decision. His not having the surgery becomes a form of resistance against forgetting and repressing the memory of war. As an operation can alleviate the harshness of an off-putting face and can lessen the out-of-proportion power having caused the disaster, not undergoing the surgery can rub in the fact that Édouard has been one of those many soldiers whose lives have been adversely affected by a disfigurement in the body or in the face.

Another underlying reason behind Édouard’s decision to resist the surgery may go back to his response to the trauma he is suffering. The trauma makes him sink into deep melancholy causing “cession of interest in the outside world” (Freud *On the History of Psycho-Analytic Movement* 244). According to Freud, melancholia is a reaction to “the loss of a loved object” (245);

his idea can be reverberated in Édouard's attitude of self-torment, which is one of the symptoms of melancholia (251).

According to Kristeva, melancholy results from "intolerance for object loss" and the person "disinherited" of the lost object wanders while pursuing adventures (12). Édouard while coping with what he has lost in war tries to gain control of his life which has got out of his control by war; and he does that by committing suicide "in defiance of an exterior omnipotence" mentioned by Blanchot (96). Édouard, transitioning between "melancholic and manic phases" (Freud *On the History of Psycho-Analytic Movement* 253), in the last scene seems to voice this sentence mentioned by Blanchot: "I will kill myself to affirm my insubordination, my new and terrifying liberty" (97) while he is running out of the hotel.

III. Artist at War and Transgression

Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things.

Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* 177

According to Walter Benjamin in "Critique of Violence", "moral relations" can be defined by two concepts of "law and justice" and he believes that in any legal system "the most elementary relationship ... is that of ends to means" (*Selected Writings Volume 1* 236); and "just ends" can be achieved by "justified means" (237). Similarly, in speaking about the relative morality of the state, Freud expresses the hope "that the pages of an impartial history will prove that that nation, in whose language we write and for whose victory our dear ones are fighting, has been precisely the one which has least transgressed the laws of civilization" (*On the History of Psycho-Analytic Movement* 279). In sum, every nation in a war is complicit in transgressing the laws of civilization;

the only question is how much. Therefore, violence is the prerogative of the state, not the individual; however, it is the fate of the citizenry to pin its hope on achieving the desired results of the state, though it is they who must kill, die, mourn and survive—not the state itself. To get results, Benjamin states that “Military force is used quite directly, as predatory violence, towards its ends” (*Selected Writings Volume 1* 240). In military terms, the violence implicit to the power of law exercised by the state forces soldiers to fight to reach the intended objectives of the state for which they are fighting. But here in the case of Albert and Édouard what happens is that the veterans of the war who have been used as pawns, ostensibly as the correcting principle of unjust ends, are forced to embody the unscrupulous, unjust ends that the state has manipulated them into fighting for. The state’s disregard for its own citizens, in reducing them to cannon fodder, reveals how it is when war becomes futile and absurd and the desired results of war spiral out of control. Albert and Édouard are the veterans of war who have been deprived of the honor they deserve and this paradox leaves a trauma in them for the reason that they have fought for nothing.

Édouard’s attitude towards the preposterous war can be viewed from Andrew Frayn’s perspective on disenchantment that is “combatant discontent” (195). According to Frayn, disenchantment has become accepted as “a popular narrative of the war” (202); and Lloyd George’s idea of the existence of a “fit” and suitable country for the returned heroes of the war becomes impossible (qtd. in Frayn 195). Frayn believes as “the emotional and physical privations of the war” continue, the act of remembering the war becomes a painful experience for soldiers because of two factors: to reintegrate and to mourn the death of the departed” (194). On the one hand, there is a “heroic mode” of the returning soldiers, and their “physical experience” of the war on the other (200). Frayn continues to say that memorials are works that make remembering “highly visible” (195) and Jay Winter believes that “remembrance” becomes a “part of the

landscape” in post-war period (qtd. in Frayn 195). Therefore, Édouard wants to make this absurdity completely visible as death and trauma in war is not the stuff of glory.

The nation these soldiers have fought for share a collective memory of the war they have undergone. James Fentress and Christopher Wickham assert that “social memory seems to be subject to the law of supply and demand. Memories must be supplied; they must emerge at specific points” (qtd. in Frayn 201). Having survived the war with a permanent facial injury, and with his sacrifice not appreciated, Édouard feels disadvantaged. He looks at post-war memory of people as an opportunity that he should seize to implicitly send a message. As there is a high demand on people’s part to keep the memories of dead soldiers alive, Édouard responds by drawing Albert’s attention to an extract of a newspaper: “...ici comme partout, les villes, les villages, les écoles, les gares même, tout le monde veut son monument aux mort” [here, as everywhere in France, towns, villages, schools, even railway stations, all want their own war memorial] (*Au revoir là-haut* 286). Édouard, as a transgressive artist mourning, however melancholically, an enormous loss, finally works to come to terms with it by using his art to gain the control of his life and destiny. The melancholia caused by his disfigured face paradoxically becomes the means by which he finds his artistic urge again, but this time in a larger transgressive dimension. Freud believes that when “the work of mourning is completed, the ego becomes free and uninhibited again” (*On the History of Psycho-Analytic Movement* 245). Édouard’s enthusiasm is fired and this is similar to what Freud states about mourning in these words: “mourning impels the ego to give up the object to be dead and offering the ego the inducement of continuing to live” (257). Once Édouard feels liberated, he starts making art. But this time he goes to extreme by his art. As Bataille says of pleasure which “plunges deep into evil and the greater the horror the deeper the joy” (127), Édouard plans the “Great Swindle” to defraud people of money by selling non-existent statues based on his drawings.

He transgresses the taboo around profiting from people's loss, refusing to recognize, as Laura Makarius reminds us, that a taboo offers "protection" (538). What Édouard does is in line with Bataille's idea of transgressing a taboo. Bataille states that "when a negative emotion has the upper hand we must obey the taboo. When a positive emotion is in the ascendant we violate it" (64). Édouard's positive feeling which urges him to go on with that transgressive project is apparent in his eagerness to draw soldiers for the catalogue they are preparing for the Patriotic Memory project. His obstinacy and determination are similar to "manic subject" that shows that he is free from "object which was the cause of his suffering" (Freud *On the History of Psycho-Analytic Movement* 255).

Making an attempt to cash in on people's patriotism and being careful not to arouse any public skepticism, Édouard writes a letter to the mayor about the project: "Je vous propose ici un catalogue de sujets et d'allégories destinées à pérenniser le souvenir de vous chers disparus" [In the present, I humbly propose a series of figures and allegories created to perpetuate the memory of your dear departed] (*Au revoir là-haut* 365). Here, we should look at Édouard's offer to make "figures and allegories" from Walter Benjamin's viewpoint. He claims that "Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things" (*The Origin of German Tragic Drama* 177). According to him the basic feature of allegory is "ambiguity" and "multiplicity of meaning" and therefore what makes it distinguished from symbol is its "richness of meaning" (177). As a result, allegory can exceed symbolism and go beyond the finite meaning a symbol can carry. As ruins can bear more than broken and remained parts of a structure and in a sense ruins can represent the accumulation of history it has withstood, we can interpret that allegories can embody accumulation of thoughts and what Édouard is trying to convey might be a message that should go beyond the meaning of the allegory he is drawing. The richness of the ambiguity of allegory makes it a proper

means for Édouard to depict the underlying layers of meaning that he sends out to his unwitting customers. His drawings for the catalogue are described by Albert as:

“Ce qu’il voit là est très bien rendu, très travaillé, avec beaucoup de soin, mais ... il cherche le mot, c’est ... figé. En fin, il trouve: ça n’a rien de vrai! Voilà. Lui qui a connu tout cela, qui a été un de ces soldats, il sait que ces images-là sont celles que se sont forgées ceux qui n’y sont pas allés. C’est généreux, c’est sûr, destiné à émouvoir, mais c’est un peu trop démonstratif [The pictures he is looking at are well drawn, skillful, painstaking, but ... he fumbles for the word ... they are stilted. Finally, it comes to him: the pictures are not real. That’s it! He was there, he was one of these soldiers, he knows that these are images made by those who did not go to war. They are noble, designed to move, but they are a little too effusive] (*Au revoir là-haut* 285)

We can also find another layer to the meaning of these figures as allegory. The depiction of the gallantry of those soldiers seems completely false to a person who has been fighting; as Albert has been in the business, he understands this lie and knows it well. But the people who have only heard the news of the war cannot find something unreal in it. Though, they believe the beauty and grandeur of the soldiers’ fighting, they cannot see the underlying ugliness of the war. In a way, we can see that Édouard is making an imaginary wall between those who have been to the war and those who have just witnessed it. His art becomes a device in separating him and his fellow soldiers from ordinary people, which is similar to his mask that separates him from people and makes them unable to see the ruin that really lies under the mask. Moreover, his drawings of heroic battle that seem so unreal to Albert, can convey, in their stiltedness, a message to soldiers who have been to war that they have been through is, in allegorical terms, understandable only to themselves and not to their naïve civilians.

In addition, Édouard determinedly commits himself to using his art in two important ways. First, as a way to disavow the trauma that has been haunting him. In his earlier sketch book “jamais un mort. Jamais un blessé. Pas un seul cadavre. Que des vivants. C’était plus terrible encore parce que toutes ces images hurlaient la même chose: ces hommes vont mourir” [there were no pictures of the dead. Nor the wounded. There was not a single corpse. Only the living. And that made it more terrible, because every drawing seemed to scream the same message: these men will die] (*Au revoir là-haut* 67). By drawing soldiers as vivid, alive and without injury, he offers a fantasy that opposes the reality of war and its catastrophe; but like the masks he wears, this comforting fantasy points negatively to the very ruins and loss that drive their demand and their production. Second, he uses his art as a lie to manipulate the memory of the war that must be imposed upon and inculcated into people’s mind by the government. In this way, the soldiers are remembered as heroic and noble figures. The cynicism informing his art makes Édouard culpable in assisting the state’s prevailing narrative of the war. His illustration of soldiers as heroic figures is intended to stir patriotic, even nationalistic feelings in people from which he can extract money. In a way, we can find an uncomfortable resemblance between Édouard and Pradelle, who also profits from the memorialization of dead soldiers, the former in response to trauma and poverty, and the latter by re-inscribing the very forms of nationalism that produced the war in the first place to accumulate even more money. What Édouard calls the Patriotic Memory project is only a version of the great swindle writ small: The Great War.

IV. Conclusion

The focus of this chapter has been on Édouard and Albert as the main characters of the novel *Au revoir là-haut*. Having survived the war, they start their lives while they have been

traumatized and the dizzying pace of their experiences of the battlefield leaves them haunted, struggling with unclaimed memories. The “incomprehensibility” of the trauma described by Caruth (62), leaves them in a precarious, confused state. Édouard’s cruel disfigurement prompts a sense of disgust, anger and aggression towards the state, its violence, and its hypocrisy. This aggression is the direct result of the depression caused by his mutilation. While he tries to understand his situation, his survival and the memory of seeing so many dead soldiers give him the impression that he has a strange power over death, and this resolve, coupled with his artistic talent, gives him more courage to launch the “Patriotic Memory” project. The trauma that he had been struggling with becomes a source of motivation for him and brings more meaning to his life. The change in the function of trauma, in his relationship to his trauma, leads to new decisions that he makes in his life.

By his refusal of having surgery and his option of wearing a mask he determinedly and implicitly tries to convey a message to the society for which he has fought. The masks he makes to cover the heart-rending wounds on his face can, in a way, make the harshness of the war bolder. He also uses his art to set up a project to convey two contradictory messages to those who, respectively, have and those who have not been to war – for the former, war is ugly, unjust and harsh and for the latter, war is chivalrous, gallant and glorious. In order to do that, he transgresses a taboo around mourning, becoming as it were an artistic ghoul, deceiving and profiting from the families and loved ones of dead soldiers. He unscrupulously deceives people who long for keeping the memory of their veterans alive by putting up their sculptures. Not only does he not feel any guilt for his transgression, but he also experiences moments of extreme and manic exaltation and enjoyment at the success of his scheme. Édouard, once a victim of this very war, becomes the victimizer by implicitly depicting the war as a Great Swindle.

Chapter Three: Desire, Disgust and Shame in *Au revoir là-haut*, *Sabbath's Theater* and *Everyman*

In the last two chapters, I have explored how trauma and decay produce long-lasting detrimental effects on the mind and the body and how the characters become plagued by anxiety and thoughts of death. One of the ways in which the subject works to overcome trauma is through transgression, by tarrying with the negative, and by inviting the excitements borne by the death. It seems that the characters – Sabbath in *Sabbath's Theater*, the protagonist of *Everyman*, and Édouard in *Au revoir là-haut* – struggle to avoid poisonous thoughts of death by transgressive excitation; they search for a kind of pleasure that promises to be experienced beyond pleasure, beyond the pleasure principle, in Freud's parlance. Although these transgressions are expected to bring satisfaction and exhilaration, an in-depth analysis of their actions and reactions suggests that their desire to go beyond the pleasure principle is caused by a deeply-rooted feeling of shame, a hidden shame that when revealed, produces different kinds of feelings. In addition, I shall argue that the shame they feel is not only experienced mentally, but is also written on their bodies as a somatic reaction. In what follows I will explore the complex relationship between and among desire, disgust and transgression. Moreover, I will consider how and why disgust, which is a radical failure of a subject or object to live up to or to satisfy one's desire, leads to shame and how desire urges characters to transgress. In this way, we will see how shame and transgression are themselves related. Before I proceed, we must first think more deeply about what shame is.

I. Definition of shame

According to Andrew P. Morrison, shame is basically “a feeling of loathing against ourselves, a hateful vision of ourselves through our own eyes” (13). As a result, when we feel shame, there is not necessarily a “shamer or ...viewing audience”, but there may be “internalized figures” that have become a part of ourselves (16). Moreover, there is another kind of shame that he calls “external, public shame” that when it happens, it makes us “shrink from the gaze of others” (40). Therefore, what makes shame a tricky subject is that it is both intimate and public.

Helen Block Lewis argues in *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis* that “shame, by its nature, is contagious” and then elaborates by contending that when something shameful occurs, it can prompt both the ashamed person to hide his secret desire and the person who witnesses someone else’s shame to “turn away from” the other’s shame (15-16). In this way, shame is not simply personal; it can wander, transmitting itself from one person to another. Shame is thus not stable; even identifying the source of and reason for shame is a “volatile experience” that brings a “devalued self-image” to the person who experiences it (198). Her idea of shame as contagion is aligned with Andrew P. Morrison’s idea when he tells us that “shame begets shame”. Morrison argues that when someone feels ashamed, his or her shame can remind us of our own feelings of “failure, inferiority, and incompetence” (8). He believes that we try to hide our feelings of shame under different “disguises” such as “anger, contempt, depression, denial, or superiority” (10). By this, we can conclude that shame can be an umbrella term that includes a variety of feelings, and there are many “channels and permutations” of shame (11). Similarly, in *Shame in Context*, Susan B. Miller argues that shame covers a wide range of meanings; shame “represents an indistinctly bounded category of feeling and behaviour” (2). In sum, shame is not an easily identified emotion, and it is an affect.

The “devalued self-image” brought up by Helen B. Lewis is also discussed by Silvan Tomkins who states that a feeling of inferiority may prompt the ashamed person to shrink from the world. Tomkins continues by saying that the feeling of inferiority may even come from other people’s success when a witness to this success feels himself incompetent (161). Shame and feelings of inferiority are thus a result of comparison with others, and the way one feels depends on how he is seen from others’ point of view. In Jean-Paul Sartre’s words: “shame...realizes an intimate relation of myself to myself. Through shame I have discovered an aspect of my being... I recognize that I am as the Other sees me” (qtd. in Morrison 6), which substantiates the comparative quality of shame as it can come from the way we see ourselves in comparison to others – Lewis and Tomkins’s view – and the way we think we are being seen in others’ eyes – Sartre’s view.

Michael Lewis, who looks at shame as a self-conscious emotion in his book *Shame: The Exposed Self*, calls shame a ubiquitous feeling that can be found in many circumstances. According to him, shame is not only common, but it can also excite reactions like embarrassment, guilt, or aggression. This view is closely aligned with Helen B. Lewis’s idea of shame’s volatility and Morrison’s description of the various “channels and permutations” of shame. In Michael Lewis’s words shame can occur when these factors are in play: “(1) standards, rules, goals, (2) one’s own behaviour in regard to these standards, and (3) oneself” (85). Therefore, a kind of self-awareness becomes necessary when it comes to understanding one’s shame. However, after one admits one’s shame, it is not uncommon to evince different stratagems like “forgetting/denial, laughter, and confession to eliminate or compensate for the feeling of shame (139). Like Lewis, Susan Miller focuses on self-awareness in her book *The Shame Experience*. She relates shame to self-consciousness and she contends that once a person becomes self-conscious, he can become

familiar with his “emotions and personal characteristics” and work to present himself in different situations accordingly (45-46). Furthermore, she identifies shame as a character trait of “shrinking away from others and pulling inward” (37). Although Susan Miller calls shame as a “self-reflective experience” (80), she reminds us that in shame an observer is required to witness one’s misdeeds and it is only then that shame can be experienced (32). As a result, in a shaming occasion the presence of an observer is needed, and that the observed person is in some way being watched or perceived; as Francis Broucek contends in *Shame and the Self*, the observed person is transformed into an “object for others” becoming “an object of reflection” (37).

Yet we must keep in mind that shame and guilt are not synonyms. As Helen Block Lewis tells us, there is an interconnection between shame and guilt. But she takes issue with scholars like Erik Erikson (1950), Gerhart Piers and Milton Singer (1953) and Leon Wallace (1963) who uncritically place shame and guilt in the same group (19). However, she believes that Piers and Singer look at shame “as a less internalized reaction than guilt” (22), which suggests that guilt is a more intrinsic feeling and depends on oneself, while shame depends on another person or an observer to occur. Although Lewis does not thoroughly dismiss their view, her conception of shame is that it usually happens to the person who experiences shame, but that can also happen when other people do not approve of that person; for her, the feeling of shame is largely internal rather than external.

Now that I have offered a rather comprehensive look at the concept of shame, I shall now turn to some of the feelings or experiences that can lead to feelings of shame.

II. Disgust, Humiliation, and Shame

Modern psychology's interest in the concept of disgust begins with Charles Darwin when he focuses on the "rejection of food and the sense of taste". He states that "The term 'disgust', in its simplest sense, means something offensive to the taste. It is curious how readily this feeling is excited by anything unusual in the appearance, odour or nature of our food" (256). Using his ideas on disgust, contempt, and disdain as touchstones, several writers elaborate on the issue of disgust. William Ian Miller in *The Anatomy of Disgust* pushes Darwin's notions further by arguing that it has the power to rank people in an order (2), and how we use disgust to structure our world and "our stance toward that world" (18). Disgust is considered as a "feeling *about* something and in response to something", which can be referred to as an "evaluating" feeling of looking from a superior position to an inferior one and that's why disgust is usually studied in close relation to contempt (8,9). In speaking about the position of superiority and inferiority, Miller links disgust to offense: when the status of a person is high, an offense which is committed before him/her can seem larger, more heinous in comparison to those who do not have a lot of "jurisdiction" (50). Moreover, he believes that a concern about offending has "contaminating powers" and that is how it can be used as a "motivator of discipline and social control" (80). From the abovementioned quotes it can be concluded that the area of jurisdiction of a person has a direct relation to the offense which has been committed and this offense by having a power can have an influence over the effects and intensity of the feeling of disgust which is caused. Moreover, apart from disciplining and controlling power of disgust, another strength that can be attributed to disgust is its defensive power. It has a power to "defend against the impure" and it "punishes for our failures to be pure" as well. He believes that disgust is not the only protective agent in supporting purity and there are other feelings at work such as "shame, guilt, a sense of duty, or ... habit" to protect purity (107).

Another writer who has written on this theme is Mary Douglas who has formed a categorizing and structural theory of pollution and purity. She believes that “there is no such thing as absolute dirt” (2) and dirt should not be looked at an isolated material; in other words, dirt gains its denotative “dirtiness” from being positioned in a system and this is the system that creates and names something as dirt. According to her “Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter” (35). What makes her argument interesting is that dirt is just “matter out of place” (2). Taking her idea into account, we can conclude that nothing can be absolutely deemed disgusting or polluted. What is considered polluted is simply an object that is radically out of place.

William Ian Miller proposes that when anger is explained and justified, it can elicit guilt, and on the other hand, “contempt and disgust” can elicit “shame and humiliation” (24). The categorization that his definition brings to mind is that anger and guilt are grouped together and shame has a direct relation to disgust. As a result of this grouping, the feeling of disgust with oneself transmogrifies into shame. The shame engendered by disgust makes the person avoid contact, shrink and have a “slumped posture,” responses that David M. Clark and Adrian Wells describe as “safety behaviours” adopted to escape or avoid embarrassment (qtd. in John P. Wilson et al. 124). Miller also remarks upon the “somatic lexicon of disgust” that includes “recoils and cringes” (86). The body language in response to shame and disgust is thus similar. For Miller, shame is a public agent that organizes relations, while disgust functions more as a private one. As it has been discussed earlier that shame and disgust are interrelated, Miller states that “Any action which ought to elicit shame in the doer can elicit disgust in an observer” (80). That is why shame is a public feeling, while disgust is considered a private one – the move from shame to disgust tracks exactly the move from public to private (173) – and this is how disgust creates a kind of feeling that can eventually lead to humiliation and shame.

III. Disgust and Desire

In the previous part, it has been discussed that disgust can be found in a situation when somebody is imperiously looking from a high position to a lower one; in this way a sort of ranking is generated. Another aspect of disgust that needs attention is its relation to desire and prohibition. What makes William Ian Miller's ideas related to these themes is his specific focus on the relationships that exist between disgust and desire, and the connection between desire and prohibition. Looking at the concept of disgust from Miller's point of view brings us to the idea that what is considered disgusting or acceptable comes from culture and in Miller's words, it is culture that "draws the lines between defilement and purity, clean and filthy" (15). This situation can be likened to a position where something dirty permeates cleanliness, and the result is that a feeling of disgust is formed, felt, and experienced by the person who observes the overlapping of cleanliness and dirtiness. When repulsion reaches its most intense form, it becomes "disgust"; interestingly, the less intense form of repugnance is named "boredom" (30). Therefore, there are different degrees of repugnance, ranging from mild boredom to extreme disgust.

William Ian Miller groups the disgust felt by the observer into two categories. He borrows the first type of disgust from Freud. Freud calls this kind of disgust a "reaction-formation" and he offers the imagery of a dam, a defense mechanism as a "barrier to satisfying unconscious desire" (qtd. in Miller 109). Founded on Freud's idea, Miller describes one kind of disgust "as a dam" blocking or preventing the flood of unconscious desire; in this regard, disgust works with shame to keep the unconscious desire for an object at bay. When this type of disgust happens, it makes us avert our eyes. This prohibition withholds from the observer whatever looks or feels immoral (109). The second kind of disgust exists in the notion of "surfeit" and "overindulgence". At first,

the subject desires an object and there is a wish to acquire or consume more of the desired object. The subject starts indulging himself or herself to excess, which leads to another form of disgust: self-disgust (110). And it is at this point where disgust and desire are imbricated in one another. In sum, disgust can function as a form of prohibition preventing or disrupting desire, or it can function as a form of punishment or self-recrimination for having yielded to it in the first place.

IV. Depiction of Desire, Prohibition and Disgust; Shame and Transgression in Philip Roth and Pierre Lemaitre

“One loves ultimately one’s desires, not the thing desired”

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 94

At first glance Philip Roth and Pierre Lemaitre selected for this study seem to differ greatly and the novels written by them appear to have no apparent similarity to each other; yet these two authors do deal with similar themes and certain parallels can be drawn between them. The most significant similarities are informed by the issues of physical trauma and death. The body’s vulnerability, its mortality, and its decay are dominant themes in the minds of these characters. Despite the fact that the novels concern different national and cultural contexts, they offer intriguing insights into death, and into the uncertainty and contingency that governs life. The narratives vividly and variously depict struggles with trauma, aging, decay, and death; all of these struggles can arouse shame and disgust. In what follows there will be an analysis of the reason of the interconnectedness of desire and disgust and how and why shame leads to forms of rebellion and transgression.

Sabbath's Theater has been considered as one of Philip Roth's raunchiest works since it is rife with openly sexual language and encounters (Posnock 156). Ross Posnock likens Roth to D. H. Lawrence and Saul Bellow in their interest in perversity and self-exposure (159). Frank Kermode calls *Sabbath's Theater* a "splendidly wicked book" (*Pleasing Myself: From Beowulf to Philip Roth* 265). In his article "Howl", Kermode appreciates *Sabbath's Theater* for being outrageous in a time when "it is increasingly difficult to be "erotically" shocking" (21). For Posnock, Roth has intentionally made Mickey Sabbath "the most minimal of artists" (162). A similar notion is argued by Mark Krupnick who describes Roth as a writer who "has a flair for portraying his main characters as the quintessence of '-lessness'" (24). Roth himself in an interview with Joyce Carol Oates about his National Book Award says: "I have written a wicked book and feel spotless as a lamb" (98). Much of the book's notorious wickedness goes back to its main character, Mickey Sabbath, and his insatiable desire: his desire for his work, for women, and for continued virility. It seems that puppets, coupled with his lust for women and life both confirm and continue his existence. According to Susan Bordo, "desire feeds on the perception of need, want, and lack" (232). What we can conclude from her insight is that Sabbath's overweening desire is marked by a conspicuous lack – puppets, women, and vitality that are but means to an end in him. He is caught in a repetitive circuit; the lack which drives his desire for objects—artistic success, success with women, success in re-affirming his masculinity—are themselves merely the fuel for his desire, and not its satisfaction. Sabbath remarks grimly on the emptiness of his desire:

No wonder you either go crazy and die or decide to disappear. Too many urges, and that's not even tenth of the story. Mistressless, wifeless, vocationless, homeless, penniless... This is aging, pure and simple, the self-destroying hilarity of the last roller coaster (*Sabbath's Theater* 158)

and later, he confesses his failures to his friend, Norman:

Norman, I have so much to put up with in life. Professional failure. Physical deformity. Personal disgrace. My wife is a recovering alcoholic who goes to AA to learn to forget to speak English. Never blessed with children. Children never blessed with me. Many, many disappointments (326)

Together, these passages demonstrate how the absences in Sabbath's life have marked him. As the story unfolds, we see the domain of "-lessness" (Krupnick 24) grow larger, putting him in a depressive mood as he sees "his status as mere puppet at the mercy of an omnipotent Other". According to Pierre Skriabine, when the object of interest is missing, its loss casts a "shadow of the object" on the ego that results in melancholia (LACAN). Disgusted by his growing impotence, Sabbath turns his anger and frustration on himself. Another factor justifying his anger is the result of his mother's indifference towards him. Under the light of his mother's lack of attention to him he has to face "premature independence" which makes him feel "insufficient" as an individual (Susan Miller *The Shame Experience* 111). His sense of insufficiency is multiplied with the Oedipal loss caused by his mother's indifference which leads Sabbath to "a series of compulsive efforts to substitute the original Oedipal wound" (Louis 88). Ansu Louis suggests that Sabbath's life goes around an "unconscious wish" to symbolically dominate his mother who has been ignoring him after his brother's death (89). While Sabbath is unable to gain this symbolic mastery over his mother, he turns to women and puppets as substitutes, hoping to master them. As a puppeteer, his fascination for puppets resides in his ability to control them—their appearance, their gestures, their responses—and as such, he fulfils his fantasy of being a great wirepuller. He finds them easier to handle rather than people since their world and their fate are utterly governed by him. In the same way that he once literally manipulated puppets, he works feverishly, and with

limited success, to manipulate and control the women in his life. This, in part, is how he justifies his love for Drenka; he easily manipulated her, as one who had been his “gifted pupil” (*Sabbath’s Theater* 27). Now, when he turns to the world of puppets, his arthritic fingers mock him, prompting even more disgust and disappointment. This, in turn, urges him to function as a puppet-master with other people. But here again the harsh realities of old age and death do not let him achieve the mastery he always strove to achieve. According to Susan Miller, when a person has to set aside the “mastery-through-fantasy” and must function in the real world, “self-hate” occurs (*The Shame Experience* 137). She claims that this self-disgust expresses itself in the form of a “self-attack” and aggression (136). In losing his dexterity, Sabbath’s career as a puppeteer is finished. The loss of his mistress to cancer only adds to his misery and depression. Physical infirmity and death work as two major obstacles that prevent him from enjoying. He is no longer the master, but merely a spectator. For example, when he loses his temper by seeing his wife, Roseanna, sleeping with another woman, we can conclude that his anger emanates from losing his control over her and from his being rejected by her. In addition, his look at his deteriorating body, badly “in need of repair” (445) confirms the harsh, objectifying gaze he has trained on his body. His own body is reduced to a commodity to own and control. As he ages, arthritis and old age count against his expectations of his body and this leads to his increasing disappointment and anger with his body.

Apart from his job and women, he has a desire for life. We can look at his undressing before Norman’s wife, not only as a source of enjoyment for himself but also as a way of prolonging the fantasy of his hold on masculinity. In Georges Bataille’s words, “only men appear to have turned their sexual activity into erotic activity” and he describes life as the “pursuit of pleasure” (11-180). While Sabbath seems to be bereft of whatever he has wanted in his life, now he pursues pleasure as his only and last resort. This attitude of his is obvious is his thinking of

“The final investment of everything in sex” and the way “How tenaciously he clings to life! To youth! To pleasure! To hard-ons!” (*Sabbath’s Theater* 347-157).

Sabbath’s viewpoint of having children as a blessing can confirm his desire for going beyond what death imposes on him, which is discontinuity of his existence. Therefore, his failure to have children also comes as another blow to his confidence and increases his sense of disgust. Behind Sabbath’s mask there is “a depressed human being who has lost all those who have been connected to him” (Safer 64).

Sabbath’s state of mind can also be looked at from Helen B. Lewis’s viewpoint who has written much about shame. For her, shame is similar to an aggressive attack on oneself in response to failure and rejection. She contends that “shame is a relatively wordless state” and that it happens “in the form of imagery, of looking or being looked at” and this is the space where “the whole self is condemned by the ‘other’” (37). This condemnation wounds the pride of the shamed person, and in turn, functions as an “inhibitor of pride” (25). Susan Miller’s idea that “aggression is associated with a shameful revelation” (*The Shame Experience* 36) is in line with Helen B. Lewis’s insight into the relation of anger to shame. Sabbath’s state of “-lessness” puts him in an inferior position that he has to deal with. This “injurious situation” brings about “inferiority feelings” in Susan Miller’s words (*The Shame Experience* 16), which is consistent with Sabbath’s situation. Susan Miller believes that shame is the result of “a failure to reach one’s ego ideal” when there is a “discrepancy between one’s ideals and one’s actual behaviour” (19). Falling short of his ideals, Sabbath feels shame at his impotence. In order to reassure himself of his sexual potency he sleeps with countless women, which is a kind of defense against shame and “vulnerability”, as Susan Miller suggests (139).

Therefore, as we have discussed in preceding paragraphs, Sabbath fails at whatever he wishes to own and master. His failure at what he desires leaves him aggrieved: “We are immoderate because grief is immoderate, all the hundreds and thousands of kinds of grief” (*Sabbath’s Theater* 407). For Sabbath, grief is a vast wound, an admission of weakness, a feeling that fuels his self-disgust. In turn, his disgust with himself brings him shame, which prompts his desire for self-punishment as he tries to master the anger he directs at himself. His anger at his failures, at the humiliations of loss leads to a desire for self-destruction, yet even at this he proves to be a failure. His only comfort, absurdly, is his own dissatisfaction: “And he couldn’t do it. He could not fucking die. How could he leave? How could he go? Everything he hated was here” (451).

If we now turn to the discussion of *Everyman*, we can see how shame and disgust mark themselves on the protagonist. Since Everyman tries to step aside from the hustle and bustle of the city, he moves to a beach house. This idea of moving which he thinks later not as a very good decision as

...this was stagnation. There was an absence now of all forms of solace, a barrenness under the heading of consolation, and no way to return to what was. A sense of otherness had overtaken him – “otherness,” a word in his own language to describe a state of being all but foreign to him ... Nothing any longer kindled his curiosity or answered his needs, not his painting, not his family, not his neighbors, nothing except the young women who jogged by him on the boardwalk in the morning. My God, he thought, the man I once was! The life that surrounded me! The force that was mine! No “otherness” to be felt anywhere! Once upon a time I was a full human being (*Everyman* 59).

We can interpret his voluntary act of moving to the retirement village as one of the important signs of his shame. In Freud's view, the "self-diminishing, self-hiding quality of the shame" works like a "dam" against the "exhibitionistic excitement" (qtd. in Susan Miller *The Shame Experience* 10). Feeling ashamed and frustrated by his physical defects, Everyman resorts to living in a place where his infirmities are not so noticeable, surrounding himself with people who are "more readily identified ...by their ailments than by their paintings" (*Everyman* 36). Susan Miller believes that "one's defect stands in the context of others as superior and others as witnesses" (*The Shame Experience* 33). We can look at his sense of "otherness" from two different perspectives. On the one hand, "in his own language" otherness is the feeling of being different that overwhelms Everyman, a feeling that emanates from his comparing himself to the fullness of his past life. On the other hand, "otherness" can suggest the presence of an "other", a presence of an onlooker which does not necessarily exist in his world, but exists in his mind—in sum, this can be the internalized gaze of the superego. That is, he subjects himself to an omnipresent onlooker who has been judging his not being a "full human being". He is disgusted by his inadequacies and the consequent shame resulting from them. This is in line with Susan Miller's idea that shame and disgust both express "disapproval of an aspect of the self" (*The Shame Experience* 84). She claims that shame is experienced "with or without an audience present but it seems to require at least an inarticulate sense of audience and a sense of being visible" (39). Moreover, we can come to this idea that Everyman intensifies the sense of "disapproval of an aspect of the self" by situating himself in an "abased" position when he flirts and has affairs with much younger women, and then a loss of control and virility are felt all the more in him, resulting in an "impotent rage" (Susan Miller 84-44). Similarly, Helen B. Lewis claims that when a person faces failure or incapacity, he feels a kind of "shame-anger" (208). While Everyman seemingly feels enraged by the humiliation

imposed by old age, he paradoxically seems to be taking a “masochistic” enjoyment from his predicament (Žižek 118). He, like Sabbath, is caught in a repetitive circuit: he continues to flirt with and proposition young women, even as he continues to be rejected by them. One is tempted to say that it is precisely because of, and not in spite of, his embarrassment that he keeps inviting rejection.

As we see, there is no materialistic interest in the pleasure he seeks. As Bataille puts it: “pleasure has no end product...[it] is ... an end in itself” (168) and he emphasizes the connection between “ecstasy” and “an active sense of transgression” (248). He also stresses the interconnectedness of taboo and transgression by stating that transgression becomes possible when taboo has its own force (140). Therefore, we can conclude that Everyman can find happiness and enjoyment wherever he finds a taboo to transgress; it is thus no surprise when he finds enjoyment in his marriage by having an affair. As his marriage works like a prohibition – a taboo that should not be transgressed – his enjoyment is greater when this taboo is transgressed. His leaving the former wife or mistress for a younger mistress becomes a pattern in his life: “decomposing families was his specialty” (*Everyman* 73). In his pattern we can see what he follows is enjoyment, a pleasure beyond mere pleasure. The driving force behind his activities is transgression. But his desire can only be sustained by more transgression. To sustain enjoyment, he needs his body, which explains his obsession with his various infirmities. Infirmity functions as a limit to pleasure against which he rails. As the story unfolds, his look at his body becomes an objectifying look through which he sees an object that should be at his service and bring him not only pleasure, but an enjoyment beyond pleasure. This, in part, can justify his rage and shame when his health takes a turn for the worse and his bodily decay undermines his ability to transgress.

In comparison to the characters of Everyman and Sabbath, Édouard in *Au revoir là-haut* manifests his shame quite differently. Albert describes Édouard's state of mind as: "...pendant toute la guerre, comme tout le monde, Édouard n'a pensé qu'à survivre, et à présent que la guerre est terminée et qu'il est vivant, voilà qu'il ne pense plus qu'à disparaître. Si même les survivants n'ont plus d'autre ambition que de mourir, quell gâchis ...le voici condamné à vivre" [...like everyone else, Édouard spent the war thinking only of coming out alive, but now it is over and he is still alive, all he wants is to die. If even the survivors have no greater ambition than to die, what a waste ...he is condemned to live] (*Au revoir là-haut* 90-91). Having lost a part of his face, Édouard has to deal with this loss that understandably overshadows his ego and his identity. As Freud suggests this "object-loss" overshadows the ego and this loss is transferred into an "ego-loss" (*On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement* 249). Similarly, Édouard's loss of face results in his loss of identity and consequently in Gilman's words as a "loss of humanity" (160). Another contributing factor to Édouard's sense of loss of identity is Albert's and his own decision to change their identities and replace their names with those of two dead soldiers. Therefore, after his mutilation on the battlefield, we can see that Édouard tries to hide not only his face, but also his identity. In his trauma, Édouard engages in "shrinking from the world" as a typical reaction to the experience of shame, in Silvan Tomkin's words (161). Elspeth Probyn tells us about the "interplay between shame and the desire for connection" (21) and she contends that "being out-of-place" produces a desire for the outcast to try to fit in (14). Édouard has lost his face, he knows that he cannot socialize with people while he thinks to himself that "Dans un monde sans visage, à quoi s'accrocher, contre qui se battre? [In a faceless world, what was there to cling to, who was there to fight against?] (*Au revoir là-haut* 217). As he has to isolate himself from the world, this unwanted isolation multiplies his shame as he wouldn't be welcomed by anyone. In addition,

according to Elspeth Probyn, shame is a kind of reaction to our interest; she contends that shame questions “the nature of the loss of interest” (64). After the trauma to his face, Édouard loses interest in the world, and especially in his art. Interestingly, he seems even ashamed of not being interested in it anymore. This is where he becomes impassive and doesn’t show any reaction to compliments Albert gives on the drawings. Édouard cannot “restaurer quoi que ce soit” [recover a shred of what he once had been] (*Au revoir là-haut* 214). While he is not able to reconcile his past with his present, his shame increases and he becomes more isolated.

Morrison claims that when we feel ashamed, we want to “become invisible” because of “a hateful vision of ourselves through our own eyes (7-13). In addition, he also talks of the overlapping of shame and depression and concludes that mania is the “defense against deep depression and despair” which comes from profound shame (184).

Therefore, the initial disgust Édouard feels after having seen his shattered and deformed face makes its way to a shame that makes him want to disappear. Édouard “ne lui [Albert] reprochait rien ... Encore que ... un peu quand même. Somme toute, c’est en lui sauvant la vie qu’il était arrivé là où il était [Édouard did not blame him [Albert] for anything. Well, maybe a little ... After all it was in saving Albert’s life that he had ended up this way] (*Au revoir là-haut* 105). As a result, in blaming Albert in part for his trauma, he feels a kind of self-disgust at his own sacrifice. But the anger and aggression he feels are being directed in the wrong places. Moreover, Susan Miller suggests that when one disapproves of oneself or one’s actions, shame and disgust are likely inevitable (*The Shame Experience* 84). The self-disgust that produces aggression becomes visible in the death drive that pushes Édouard towards self-destruction and his future does not matter to him anymore. His indifference to his future becomes evident when he plans for the

“Patriotic Project” while he does not consider the consequences despite Albert’s warnings. This is where he uses his art and talent to swindle people out of a million francs.

However, Édouard’s liberation from his cause of suffering – his disfigured face – takes some time and before this transformation which manifests itself in mastering the ego and pushing it aside in a manic phase (Freud, *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement* 254-255), he seems to be showing no shame in exhibiting his face before his friend Albert. There have been scenes throughout the story where Albert is disgusted at what he sees when he looks at Édouard’s face. When – to his surgeon’s suggestion of having a surgery on his face – Édouard determinedly says “Non à tout. Je reste comme ça” [No to everything. I stay as I am] (*Au revoir là-haut* 108), there might be another reason behind his seemingly illogical and obstinate decision. While he is struggling in a “circular insanity” of “melancholic and manic phases” (Freud, *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement* 253), the stark exhibition of his face is done in a carefree, but aggressive way. Helen B. Lewis contends that shame which comes from “self-reproaches” combine with guilt feelings and the fusion of guilt and shame produces “hostility” that is directed at the reason of those feelings (267). As a result, we can see that the hostility and aggression of Édouard can be a result of blaming himself for what he has done for Albert.

As he succeeds in stopping his mourning over his lost face and liberating himself from it, Édouard enters a manic phase where he plans for the “Patriotic Project”. Susan Miller contends that when there is a movement from “shame to aggression”, this move is a “shift from a passive state ... to a state in which the self mobilizes around an action” (*The Shame Experience* 130). Therefore, we can look at the reason behind Édouard’s plan from different perspectives; like Sabbath and Everyman, he is caught in a circuit, but of a different type. The overriding reason that drives him to make such transgression comes from the aggression he feels; he derives enjoyment

from swindling people, from profiting by their grief and melancholy. He wishes to make them look like fools, just as he was by sacrificing his face to the war. However, this aggression is fueled by different sources. First, it is fueled by the shame of hiding from the public eye, and the resulting self-disgust contributes to this aggression. Second, his relative liberation from mourning and melancholy generates a vengeful mania in him which contributes to his planning. Third, the shift from shame to aggression puts his plan into action. All three of these contributing factors justify Édouard's plan for the "Patriotic Project" and the great swindle.

V. Conclusion

Looking closely at these three characters can give us the images of three people whose transgressive natures enjoy going beyond the boundaries imposed on them. On the surface, they all seem to be people who do not care about the presence and judgment of others; but when they are scrutinized more closely, we detect a strong sense of shame in all of them. The shame here emerges from affects of anxiety about their bodies and their inability to control their bodies and how they are viewed by others both enslave and trap them in their respective repetitive circuits. While they come increasingly under the control of the power of their shame, they acquire a desire to disappear and even in two of these characters – Sabbath and Édouard – the inclination to disappear becomes that much strong that they show an increasing tendency towards suicide. The succession of losses creates an intense suffering in them and eventually makes them become isolated and remain aloof from people around them.

The three characters in these novels suffer from a great lack, a traumatic twisting of their desire. The trauma and humiliation they feel about their bodies have a profound negative impact on their spirits. The underlying shame takes different forms and as Helen B. Lewis claims:

“Mortification, embarrassment, humiliation, chagrin, feeling ridiculous, and shyness are all variants of shame” (29). These feelings of inferiority drive the characters towards a tendency to make themselves disappear. Shame, which Helen B. Lewis reads as a response to weakness and impotence, comes to obsess people whose lives have been rife with loss and failure. These characters’ manifestation of shame takes on different forms, but in each case, they resort to transgression and fantasies of violence.

Conclusion

In an interview with Philip Roth, Jonathan Brent asserts that Roth has often been accused of relying too heavily on the facts of his life in crafting his fiction. Roth responds that “every genuine imaginative event begins down there, with the facts” (Searles 236). As a result, the reciprocity between works of literature and life demonstrates the intimate connection between them. Perhaps fact is not enough—perhaps literature is a means of exploring the truths lurking behind the facts. Therefore, literature is a means of expressing and exploring what, in life, is hidden in plain view.

Susan Miller argues that recently there has been a resurgence of interest “in the relationship of words to feeling states” (*The Shame Experience* xiii) and that’s why feelings such as shame and guilt can be noticed not only physically but also can be studied through words. This is where literature can reflect and provide insight into feelings and emotional states; in a nutshell literature can offer, in its exploration of the psychology of characters, a true reflection of how people behave in the real world. There must have been times that people have not been able to fully express their feelings, and their feelings are conveyed only laconically. This is where I think the uncanny relation between literature and psychoanalysis makes the writing of this thesis possible. What I have attempted to do in this study is to look closely into the way the characters – Mickey Sabbath, the nameless character in *Everyman* and Édouard – behave in order to understand better how and why they feel and act as they do; consequently, we can achieve a better understanding of our own feelings and reactions; as Stanley A. Leavy says, the aim of psychoanalysis is “to learn to live with greater self-knowledge” (76).

I. Enjoying the Crisis?

In the preceding part of this study, I found some common ground on which to compare these novels. The three main characters are faced with a hole – literally and figuratively in case of Édouard and figuratively in case of Everyman and Sabbath – in their lives that they cannot fill. Sabbath faces many deaths and disappearances of his loved ones and this situation positions him in a traumatic loop. Founding on Heidegger’s meditation on loss that “Being-no-longer-in-the-world ... is still a Being” (281), Sabbath mourns the uncanny presence of the many absences in his life. His prolonged mourning is in a way masochistic as he does not let go of the things related to those absences. Based on Susan Miller’s claim that masochism manifests itself in “the perpetuation of suffering”, I have looked at Sabbath as a masochist who enjoys himself, even as he tortures himself (*Shame in Context* 152-153). Not only does he choose to fetishize the sadness befallen him, but he also pursues more sadness, more loss in order to sustain his psychic pain. His repeatedly going to cemetery after Drenka’s death, his going after Morty’s things in their cousin’s house and his inability to commit suicide at the last page of the novel – “Everything he hated was here” (*Sabbath’s Theater* 451) – show how determinedly he clings to the things that make him suffer. Moreover, his suffering multiplies by his gradual debility brought by old age, which makes him adopt an ambivalent attitude towards his situation. On the one hand, his old age and gradual decay – while depriving him of the things he likes – develop a sense of disgust in him and on the other hand, bring a sense of “unarticulated ... gratification” to him (Susan Miller *Shame in Context* 153).

II. Feeling Disgusted by the Crisis?

The hole everyman tries to fill – at which he proves to be unable – is the deep hole of nothingness into which his ailing health is poured. As he tries to stand on his feet again after each operation, an image of self-devaluation is projected by his inability to remain healthy. The feeling of degradation attending his old age is exacerbated when he self-mockingly identifies with the gaze of others, specifically the gaze of young women. This parody of “symbolic identification” claimed by Žižek (116) brings him a sense of shame. Under the cover of shame there is a narcissist who cannot articulate his sense of self-centeredness, but the progress of the story towards more medical jargon illustrates his egotistic interest in himself since he seems more focused on his heart problems than the consequences of his recklessness and neglect of the people he loves. Susan Miller contends that the “narcissistic person usually denies shame”, but when this shame is acknowledged the narcissist react in a “narcissistic rage” (*Shame in Context* 155). Although his failing health provokes his anger and at times disgust, his attempt to look at himself from others’ gaze is a proof of his masochistic enjoyment of the sense of degradation and failure.

III. Ashamed of the Crisis?

The mortar shell which mutilates Édouard’s face initiates a cascade of events which changes his path in life. While he seems isolated and aloof from the rest of the world after the battlefield trauma, he makes a dramatic re-appearance into society. His initial voluntary solitude which hides him from the public eye changes later and he appears with his colourful and flashy masks; but this transition from private to public happens as the “belated” understanding of the trauma done to his face takes place (Caruth 17). He makes his masks deliberately flamboyant and

in so doing, manages to attract attention. Although wearing a mask would seem to hide the trauma he has undergone, the flashy faces decorating his masks make him and his trauma stand out all the more. Therefore, Édouard seems to be trying to convey a deeper message since wearing a mask simultaneously places the remembrance of the war in the background and in the foreground. Despite all his efforts, Édouard still feels ashamed of his face, transforming it into a memorial of the effects of war. As Andrew P. Morrison claims that shame can cover other feelings such as anger, contempt or depression (10), Édouard's initial shame loses its power and his anger becomes more overwhelming to him; in order to voice his anger more loudly, he turns to his art.

IV. Transgression through Art

I can draw an analogy between characters of Roth's novels and Lemaitre's as three of them are transgressive artists who use their art in a way to go beyond the limits that have been defined for and imposed upon them. This is where we can interpret their using art becomes like a weapon to defend themselves against the problems they are struggling with. Sabbath's using his fingers as a puppeteer in a street show costs him his job as he touches a girl's nipple; when he is told by the police that he must give up his trade, Sabbath answers: "But it's my act, it's my art" (*Sabbath's Theater* 314). Similarly, Everyman holds painting classes for people his age and even when he is surrounded with people suffering from the infirmities of old age, he shows a deep affection for one of his students, Millicent Kremer who is his best student, and who he has once had a dream about "lying naked beside" her (*Everyman* 75). We can clearly see that what Everyman does not follow is "art for art's sake"; but he does art for transgression's sake. In a similar manner, Édouard, uses his art of painting to perform the great swindle which he succeeds in.

But their art fails or had failed them at some point in their life. Sabbath's transgressive art costs him a bad reputation. Everyman faces the suicide of Millicent Kramer with an overdose of her sleeping pills. Her suicide – exactly at the time that Everyman is getting interested in her – reminds him of the overwhelming shadow of death from which he has been trying hard to run away. And Édouard uses his art or better to say abuses his art and talent to get what he wants. In the same manner, his art that would bring him a lot of money had failed him in the first place. His art – being transgressive, obscene and unacceptable in his father's eyes – deprives him of the warm embrace of a house where he had belonged and his father implicitly gives him one choice: going to war.

V. Concluding Remarks

While Sabbath, Everyman and Édouard try to overcome the overwhelming thoughts of death and the instability and transience of life they lead, they simultaneously have to fight the trauma they have experienced. The investigation of the characters' reactions reveals that these people depict a kind of resistance against forgetting what has happened to them, which in turn gives them a sense of pleasure in which they cling to the suffering that plagues them and their tarrying with the negative shows the excitation they derive from it. In addition, they are conscious of the degraded image of themselves caused by their physical condition and this image brings them a sense of shame. They are also at times disgusted by their infirmities and vulnerabilities even if they do not explicitly express it. The narratives of these novels show the characters' struggle with shame and at times their reactions reveal that their shame manifests itself as anger and humiliation. It has been the goal of this study to investigate other forms of shame manifestations in these characters and the way they express these forms of behaviour.

I would like to finish my conclusion by drawing the attention to the potential recurrence of these feelings to everyone and as the name of the novel *Everyman* suggests, this can be the situation for every one of us in life. The inevitable aging process and the consequent death thoughts which wander around us every now and then can turn into an obsession, one we should find a way to resolve—or at least, to reconcile ourselves to.

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