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Dedications

In loving memory of Erwin Smith,

we have dedicated our hearts until the end.

*His unwavering pursuit of the truth and freedom, even in the face of death,
reminds us that progress is born from the courage to question and the will to
act.*

*This work stands with those who challenge the silence, lead despite doubt,
and march toward the unknown.*

In memory of Eren Jaeger,

who shattered walls, defied gods, and bore the weight of freedom.

*His relentless pursuit of freedom, no matter the cost, inspired this exploration
of resistance against the constraints of society.*

This work is for those who dare to question the world they inherit.

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Abstract:

The following research paper is a psychoanalytical comparative study of Phillip Roth's Portnoy's Complaint (1969) and Mustapha Benfodil's Archéologie du chaos (amoureux) (2007). The study relies on Lacanian psychoanalysis and draws on some of its significant concepts such as the Unconscious and how it is affected by the 'Other', 'Jouissance' and the 'Drive'. The current dissertation emphasizes on the psychoanalytical study of some of the main characters' psychological disorders. To conduct this study, we divided it into two main chapters; in the first chapter, we have analyzed the concept of the 'Other' and the process of identity formation for both, Alexander Portnoy and Yacine Naboulci. We have explained how society and its cultural values had a significant influence on the characters' identity and the behaviors they showed as a response to the oppression they were subjugated to. In the second chapter, we have discussed the notion of sexuality and how Alexander Portnoy and Marwan Kanafani had exploited their sexual desires as a means for rebellion. We analysed the pattern of rebellion both characters have set in order to break free from the constraints that hinder their quest for freedom. The comparative study of the two novels has provided us with a better understanding of the similarities between the two novels, despite their different cultural backgrounds. Both authors illustrate how Jewish and Algerian youth endure intersecting forms of societal repression, which ultimately motivate their attempts at resistance and protest. To sum up, one can say that, to some extent, literature is the outcome of the moral, cultural and political upheavals of the moments of its writing.

Keywords: *The Unconscious, Identity, Social Constraints, Sexuality, Rebellion, Jacques Lacan, Phillip Roth, Mustapha Befodil, Alexander Portnoy, Marwan Kanafani, Yacine Nabolci*

I. General Introduction:

Within its broad definition, literature is regarded as a body of written works possessing lasting artistic, cultural, and intellectual value. One of the earliest known literary texts, The Epic of Gilgamesh, exploring human life and the quest for immortality, originated in the southern Mesopotamian region of Sumer around 5,000 years ago. From there, literature spread to Egypt, then to Greece, and eventually to Rome and the rest of Europe. Over time, it has transcended historical eras and remains a vital part of modern education and cultural discourse. Literature serves as a powerful medium for self-expression and allows readers to journey into the past, gaining insights into the lives and thoughts of those who came before us. More importantly, for the purposes of our study, literature can function as a tool for challenging and critiquing established systems. Countless literary works reflect the realities of their societies, offering resistance, commentary, and deeper understanding of the human condition across different periods in history.¹

Literary texts reflect both the virtues and flaws of society. By portraying its darker aspects, literature offers a glimpse into the more troubling facets of human nature, confronting us with their consequences and equipping us with imaginative tools to reflect, rectify, and seek change, by also highlighting society's core values, literature invites us to contemplate the possibility of moral rehabilitation and inspires us to emulate these ideals in the hope of achieving a better

¹ The Archaeologist, "The Epic of Gilgamesh: The World's Oldest Known Literature," The Archaeologist, September 28, 2021.

<https://www.thearchaeologist.org/blog/the-epic-of-gilgamesh-the-worlds-oldest-known-literature>.

future. Such is the case with multiple literary works that paint the upheaval, experienced in the U.S. during difficult periods considered as turning points in American history, namely the 1930s and 1960s, which were both characterized by a turmoil caused by war and its repercussions on society.

On the one hand, the 1930s was a period characterized by an immense sense of helplessness, people were greatly impacted by the Great Depression. Millions lived in poverty and had very little to eat, schools were overpopulated and underfunded, transportation was also a serious issue. Racism was so prevalent that segregation was more or less normalized, and many children took jobs to support their families. Many writers tried to describe the anguish, loathing and anger felt by the people through some literary works that have become important vessels of history such as John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). "I'm trying to write history while it is happening, and I don't want it to be wrong," Steinbeck wrote of the novel; And later famously adds: "I want to put a tag of shame on the greedy bastards who are responsible for this."² This, of course, being the Great Depression, which he described as a period that should anger the population, especially the farmers.³

On the other hand, the 1960s was another period of social and political unrest in the states. It was a decade when hundreds of thousands of ordinary Americans gave new life to the nation's democratic ideal. African Americans staged sit-ins, freedom rides and protest marches to fight

² John Steinbeck, quoted in Milisuthando Bongela, "Steinbeck Speaks to a New Generation," *Mail & Guardian*, February 8, 2013, <https://mg.co.za/article/2013-02-08-steinbeck-speaks-to-a-new-generation/>.

³ Emily Temple. 2018. "A Century of Reading: The 10 Books That Defined the 1930s." *Literary Hub*, (October). <http://lithub.com/a-century-of-reading-the-10-books-that-defined-the-1930s/>.

segregation, poverty and unemployment. Feminists also demanded equal job opportunities and called for the end to sexual discrimination. Mexican Americans protested discrimination in voting, education, and employment, and Native Americans pressed for control over their lands and resources, the preservation of native cultures, and sovereign tribal nations. However, the variety of political reformations were not enough to withstand the political unrest caused by the Vietnam War (1955-1975), ghetto rioting, the rise of a militant anti-war movement, and the counterculture movement.

Authors tried to capture the turmoil of that period through many books that marked the occurring changes and reformations. Betty Friedan's, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) for instance was said to have “ignited the contemporary women’s movement in 1963 and as a result permanently transformed the social fabric of the United States and countries around the world.”⁴ It made a monumental difference in American society, and established Friedan as one of the chief architects of the women’s liberation and second-wave feminist movement.⁵ Another work that successfully represented the tumultuous period would be Kurt Vonnegut’s, *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969). Its publication had landed right in the middle of the Vietnam War, the anti-war movement, and the civil rights movement. The novel, wrote the critic Jerome Klinlowitz, “so

⁴ National Women’s History Museum, “The Feminine Mystique,” accessed May 22, 2025. <https://www.womenshistory.org/resources/general/feminine-mystique>.

⁵ Emily Temple. 2018. “A Century of Reading: The 10 Books That Defined the 1960s.” Literary Hub, (October). <http://lithub.com/a-century-of-reading-the-10-books-that-defined-the-1960s/>

perfectly caught America's transformative mood that its story and structure became best-selling metaphors for the new age".⁶

The 1960s was not a period of change specific to the U.S., it was also marked by the achievements of the Algerian War of Independence, which put an end to more than a decade of colonization. On March 18, 1962, France and the leaders of the Front de Liberation Nationale signed a peace agreement to end the seven-years Algerian War, signaling the end of 130 years of colonial French rule in Algeria. Literature was a decisive part of the Algerian uprising against the colonizer. Since the mid-twentieth century, a new literature has grown up, exploring Algeria's struggle for independence and the subsequent attempts to establish a new national identity. Algerian writers tried to shed light on the experiences of their people mostly denouncing the immoral war crimes perpetuated on them, trying to capture the rebellious spirit of the nation that refused to stay chained by a foreign rule. Most writers were affected by the revolution itself. Mouloud Feraoun for example, a Kabyle novelist who published several books in the late 1950s and early 1960s. He wrote about indigenous life in Kabylie under the French rule with the aim of educating a mainland French audience about these contradictions and tensions. Kateb Yacine is another revolutionary author who has associated his writing with the Algerian Revolution. His *Nedjma* (1956) is an outstanding and representative piece of Algerian literature. Other writers, however, turned to the construction of a new Algerian identity in a state now separated from France. One of the most prominent writers in this post-independence

⁶ Ibid.

movement is Rachid Boudjedra; In his novel *La Répudiation* (1969), he exposes the difficulties faced by his kinsmen and the social expectations they have to meet all while being restricted by religion and convention. Assia Djébar, whose novels *Les Enfants du nouveau monde* (1962), and *Les Alouettes naïves* (1967) discuss the actions and experiences of women during the war. These writings have established her as another important figure in both the feminist and postcolonial movements, which aimed at fueling political discord in the hopes of encouraging action against corruption and giving a voice to the oppressed.

In fact, similarities between American and Algerian literatures can be observed in the endeavors undertaken by both to paint a picture of their social and political issues. It is the case with Phillip Roth in *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969), and Mustapha Benfodil in *Archéologie du chaos (amoureux)* (2007). In a comparative study of both novels, our aim is to try and uncover the affinities existing between the two novels, which we think share many similarities that we can study by relying on psychoanalytical theory.

Review of the Literature:

Philip Roth like many other writers of his time was the target of critics from the early stages of his literary career. As he started to achieve fame with his three debut novels, he has received backlash from critics and the public and was accused of anti-Semitism. His daring and raw writing with unusual characters led him to be famous in the literary world. His fourth novel *Portnoy's Complaint* was the turning point in his career as it breaks new records and makes Roth a celebrity.

First, in an article entitled, “*Portnoy’s Complaint Review: Exploring America’s Sex-Geography*” (1969), Christopher Wordsworth states that the book was hilarious in the way it tackles the subject of sex; he even compares it to the great works of Henry Miller. He observes that, “It is the most scabrous and disgraceful piece of living tissue since Henry Miller, and just possibly the most outrageously funny book about sex yet written. Also and curiously, far from being offensive.”⁷ Wordsworth goes on to defend the novel, arguing that it cannot be considered offensive. He praises Roth's characterization, particularly in how the characters align with the book's provocative genre. He also commends Roth's exploration of themes such as the conservative Jewish mother, the narrow-minded father, Alexander's obsessive masturbation, recurring feelings of guilt and shame, and his rebellion against Jewish cultural expectations in pursuit of freedom. According to Wordsworth, Roth's unflinching portrayal of America's sexual landscape is the novel's most essential contribution.

Conversely, in another article, Irving Howe offers a more critical perspective. He claims that reading the novel twice would be “the cruelest thing someone can do,” and characterizes the book as “an assemblage of gags strung onto the outcry of an analytic patient.” He continues, “The book thrives best on casual responses; it demands little more from the reader than a nightclub performer demands.”⁸ To Howe, *Portnoy’s Complaint* lacks the depth attributed to it by many critics, he compares the book's themes to the performance of a nightclub dancer.

⁷ Christopher Wordsworth. 2018. “Portnoy’s Complaint review: exploring America’s sex-geography-archive, 1969.” The Archive Blog, (May). <https://www.theguardian.com/books/from-the-archive-blog/2018/may/23/portnoys-complaint-review-phillip-roth-1969>.

⁸ Irvin Howe. 2021. “The Dirtiest Book Ever Published? On Phillip Roth’s Portnoy’s Complaint.” *Book Marks*, (January). <https://bookmarks.reviews/the-dirtiest-book-ever-published-on-philip-roths-portnoys-complaint/>.

Nonetheless, he acknowledges Roth's intent to liberate both himself and, perhaps, the broader Jewish community. He ultimately defends the novel against accusations of anti-Semitism, arguing that such claims overlook its satirical and introspective dimensions.⁹

Mustapha Benfodil's *Archéologie du chaos (amoureux)* was also faced with its share of criticism. Its unusual composition that implements a variety of formats and multiple narrators, in addition to the amount of taboos that the author has disclosed in the novel made it the target of few critics who had diverse opinions about it.

Benfodil was highly praised for his endeavor to establish new standards for Algerian writers. In an article featured on the *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, Alexandra Gueydan-Turek has reviewed some of the artist's works, focusing on *Archéologie du chaos (ammoureux)* (2007), for the most part. Mustapha Benfodil's work has been described to have attempted to defy the limits of conventional artistic forms. As he endeavors to break from convention and strive for artistic novelty, he is reported to have acknowledged a sort of "artistic debt" to an array of countercultural movements. These movements have helped shape his defiant style of writing in the same way they have defied the limits of convention, such as the CoBra Movement (1948) and the Aouchem Group (1967), respectively from Northern Europe and from Algeria. Alexandra argues that, "*Archéologie* moves beyond its violent deconstruction of the narrative-driven realist novel, and aims to 'déconstruire l'ordre narratif national' / deconstruct the national narrative order, as if the referential reality was to be directly

⁹ Ibid.

affected by his [Benfodil's] aesthetic choices.”¹⁰ The suggestion is that his aim was to be involving himself and other Algerian writers in the design of a solely Algerian literature, as opposed to the Paris-published Algerian novels that were supposedly the only available literature to his post-civil war generation.

On the other hand, Benfodil's stylistic devices were highly regarded in comparison to his fellow Algerian writers' mostly retrained writing styles. In his Ph.D. Dissertation which is entitled “*Aesthetics and Aftermath: Algeria 1962-2012.*”, Corbin McKenzie Treacy writes:

Benfodil deploys a range of genres (mythology, citation, aphorism, the fable, the epic, the *journal intime*) [...] His writing is deeply influenced by modernist literary aesthetics and at the same time, engaged in a revived nationalism that rejects state-based models of jingoistic flag waving in favor of collective action that more closely resembles its anticolonial antecedents.¹¹

Benfodil's use of diverse stylistic devices in *Archéologie du chaos (amoureux)* (2007), is immensely praised. He is reported to have employed a range of genres including epics, mythology, personal diaries, economic and political agendas expressing the kind of concerns and literary artistry “valued by critics of testimonial literature”¹² for its ability to merge narrative with social and political critique. As George Yúdice argues, culture increasingly functions as a resource to address issues of social cohesion and political expression, an expedient function that Benfodil's work exemplifies through its formal hybridity and activist undercurrents.

¹⁰ Alexandra Gueydan-Turek. 2016. “Figure of an Anartist: Keeping Local Francophone Literature Engaged with Mustapha Benfodil's Literature-action.” *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 20, no. 1 (March): 50, accessed June 11, 2022. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17409292.2016.1120551>.

¹¹ Corbin McKenzie Treacy. 2014. “Aesthetics and Aftermath: Algeria 1962-2012.” PhD diss., Minnesota University, accessed June 27, 2022. <https://hdl.handle.net/11299/181678>.

¹² *Ibid*,08.

Additionally, Khaoula Temhachet's study of Mustapha Benfodil's *Archéologie du chaos (amoureux)* offers an important perspective on the novel's engagement with difficult themes such as violence and trauma. She explores how the text deals with the idea of evil and the challenge of expressing what is often considered unrepresentable. According to Temhachet, Benfodil uses a mix of artistic expression and fragmented narrative to give form to what she calls "le non-représentable" ("the unrepresentable"), showing how literature can help make sense of painful and complex social realities.¹³ This approach supports the idea that Benfodil's work is not only creative but also critical, using literature as a way to respond to social and political crises. His writing shares many of the same goals as testimonial literature, especially in its effort to speak out about collective trauma. This idea also connects with George Yúdice's argument that culture today is often used as a resource to solve social problems. Yúdice writes, "culture has become a resource for economic growth, social cohesion, and political recognition."¹⁴ Benfodil's novel reflects this function, using literature to raise awareness and give voice to experiences that are often silenced. Together, these perspectives help place Benfodil's work within a broader tradition of literature that combines artistic experimentation with a strong social and ethical message.

Issue and Working Hypotheses:

We have noticed that Phillip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint (1969)* and Mustapha Benfodil's *Archéologie du Chaos (amoureux)* (2007) have both been the subject of scholarly attention due to their iconoclastic and often controversial content. However, Roth's novel has received significantly more critical engagement, particularly within American literary studies,

¹³ Temhachet, Khaoula. "Mal et représentation dans *Archéologie du chaos (amoureux)*, *Body Writing* de Mustapha Benfodil et *Anima, Visage Retrouvé* de Wajdi Mouawad." PhD diss., Université Mohamed Boudiaf de M'sila, 2025. <https://dspace.ummo.dz/items/f9ad6250-2b13-4ac4-8300-fca98589a17a>

¹⁴ Yúdice, George. *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era*. Durham : Duke University Press, 2003.

whereas Benfodil's work remains comparatively understudied, especially in global or comparative literary contexts. There are a few theses and papers on *Archéologie du chaos (amoureux)*, but they remain limited in number, mostly regionally produced, and not yet widely cited. To our knowledge, no comparative study of these two literary works has been conducted. Our aim is mainly to analyze the two novels from a psychological perspective, focusing on the Lacanian theory of psychoanalysis.

This study is based on the conjecture that, although both novels are substantially distinct, they also share some consequential similarities which allow an analysis from the same perspective. The novels were written by different authors, from different countries and cultures. The two writers resided in different continents and wrote these works at different periods of times. However, both works may be examined comparatively, as their similarities and differences invite critical analysis within a shared framework. In fact, we intend to study the two authors on the basis of their shared experiences with conservative social standards, which were prominent in both works with much focus on the psychological outcomes of such constrictions.

Ergo, we intend to apply some theoretical concepts from Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytical framework. The concepts that would best serve our research are his *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, namely his contribution to studies on the Unconscious, the field of the Other, and his opposition of Desire to Jouissance. These concepts will help us approach both novels from a psychoanalytical perspective, to attempt to provide an understanding of the two main characters' 'identity' and 'rebellion' issues.

Methodological Outline:

To give our work a methodological orientation, we opted for the IMRAD method and divided our dissertation into three sections. The first one includes the ‘Introduction’ where our research topic and its aim have been presented with a general introduction of relevance to the historical background of both case studies. This is in addition to the ‘Issue and Working Hypothesis’ which explains the problematic of the chosen topic. The second section will serve to elaborate on the Methods and Materials employed. For the ‘Methods’ section we will provide a brief summary of Philip Roth’s *Portnoy’s Complaint* (1969) and Mustapha Benfodil’s *Archéologie du chaos (amoureux)* (2007), in addition to a concise biography of both authors. In the ‘Materials’ section, we intend to provide an overview of Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytical theory, more precisely his *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1964). A ‘Results’ section is included to highlight the overall findings of our research. The ‘Discussion’, which constitutes the third and most important section, consists of two chapters: the first chapter will deal with the way ‘identity formation’, which is related to the unconscious, is affected by the ‘symbolic order’. It is divided into two parts: The first one examines the Castration Complex and Alex Portnoy’s obsessive desire, while the second turns to the ‘Oedipus Complex’ and Yacine Nabolci’s inclination toward ‘perversion’. The second chapter, however, will explore the theme of ‘sexuality’ and the issue of ‘rebellion’. It is also divided into two parts: both parts will deal with the drive and desire behind each character’s will to rebel. The overall conclusion of our dissertation will then restate the key points of the results we have drawn from our research.

II. Methods and Materials

1. Methods:

Psychoanalytical studies usually refer to Freudian psychoanalysis, which was considered as a groundbreaking discovery that has forever revolutionized the scope of psychology. The studies Freud conducted on Hysteria, Paranoia and Narcissism allowed a broader understanding of the complexity of psychological disorders traditionally regarded by the general public as madness, yet conceptualized by the scientific community as psychopathology. Freud significantly advanced the understanding of mental disorders, particularly through his development of psychoanalytical concepts like the unconscious, defense mechanisms, and the importance of early childhood experiences. These ideas challenged existing views on psychopathology and laid the groundwork for modern psychological treatment and diagnosis. Nevertheless, in the upcoming years namely the 1930s Freudian concepts were criticized and rebutted as allegedly obsolete, or poorly adapted to the needs of modern society. Thinkers such as Herbert Marcuse, who has been credited with offering a convincing critique of neo-Freudianism, for instance, has argued that:

Some of the basic assumptions of Freudian theory both in their orthodox as well as revisionist development have become obsolescent to the degree to which their object, namely, the ‘individual’ as the embodiment of id, ego, and superego has become obsolescent in the social reality. The evolution of contemporary society has replaced the Freudian model by a social atom whose mental structure no longer exhibits the qualities attributed by Freud to the psychoanalytic object.¹⁵

Others, however, refused to “modernize” psychoanalysis by means of updating medical treatment or relying on chemical drugs or even using a simplified therapy such as “Suggestive Therapy”: a form, often associated with hypnosis, which was used during that time and focused

¹⁵ Herbert Marcuse, *Five Lectures. Psychoanalysis, Politics, and Utopia*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro and Shierry M. Weber (Great Britain: Compton Printing Ltd London & Aylesbury, 1970),44.

on directly suggesting changes in thought or behavior to the patient. Most prominently, Jacques Lacan, who firmly posited post-Freudian psychoanalysis as a therapy by redefining several core concepts of Freud's theories, and introducing a distinctive approach to therapy that emphasized language, structure, and the symbolic dimensions of the human psyche. The French psychiatrist aimed to break from Freudian tradition, as he explains, psychoanalysis should belong to the "liberal arts" and avoid reductive scientism or medical normalization.¹⁶ By which he suggests that psychoanalysis should be understood as an intellectual and philosophical discipline, akin to the humanities, rather than as a strictly medical or scientific field.

Therefore, Lacanian psychoanalysis has attempted to rediscover Freudian concepts and reevaluate the discoveries made in the field, reexamining much of what was established by his predecessor 'the father of psychoanalysis'. As a forefront figure in the psychological domain, Jacques Lacan was deeply enmeshed in philosophy, contemporary psychoanalysis, and literary criticism. His work on psychoanalytical theory has earned him a reputation as the most profound psychoanalytic thinker since Freud, and as a deeply influential figure in many fields. Accordingly, the objective of the current research is to use some of Lacan's concepts of psychoanalysis to analyze a couple of literary works from a psychoanalytical perspective. This section serves, then, to introduce some of the concepts we shall use to conduct our analysis.

1.1. Jacques Lacan's Concept of the 'Unconscious':

Lacan argues that the concept of the Unconscious developed by Freud was misunderstood, and reduced to merely portray instincts. Thus, he suggests a new back-to-Freudianism with a novel emphasis on the unconscious. This concept became the central pillar of Lacan's psychoanalytical theory, with a renewed focus on its linguistic implications rather than instinctual ones. In his *Écrits* (1977), Lacan insists that the unconscious cannot simply be

¹⁶ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock Publications, 1977).

equated with ‘that which is repressed’, but is rather primarily linguistic; he maintains that: “the unconscious is neither primordial nor instinctual”¹⁷

Lacan argues that the two dream work mechanisms identified by Freud; Condensation and Displacement correspond to the basic poles of language identified by the Linguist Roman Jakobson in his 1956 essay, *The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles*. On the one hand, in metonymy one thing represents another by means of the part standing for the whole, which seems highly similar to how Freudian dream interpretation introduces elements that might stand for something else by displacement. On the other hand, in condensation, several things might be compressed into one symbol, just like a metaphor condenses onto a single item two different images. Consequently, the use of these linguistic means of self-expression by the unconscious is part of Lacan’s assertion of his claim that the unconscious is structured like a language. This Lacanian formula was discussed in a study by Juan-David Nasio, an Argentine-French psychoanalyst, published by the State University of New York press, which asserts that:

In light of our reflections we can reconsider Lacan's saying and now propose: "the unconscious is a *knowledge* structured like a language," or even more simply, "a structured knowledge." When Lacan proposed this formula for the first time he conceived of the unconscious chain of sayings according to the linguistic categories of metaphor and metonymy.¹⁸

Lacan also describes the unconscious as a discourse; ‘the discourse of the Other’, this formula is one of his most famous dictums. However, it became subject of many interpretations among which the unconscious is described as the effects of the ‘signifier’ on the subject, in the sense that the signifier is what is repressed and what returns in the formations of the unconscious (symptoms, jokes, dreams, etc.).

¹⁷ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits : A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (London: Tavistock Publications, 1977).

¹⁸ Juan-David Nasio, *Five Lessons on the Psychoanalytic Theory of Jacques Lacan*, ed. Henry Sussman, trans. David Pettigrew and François Raffoul, (United States of America: State University of New York Press, 1998),25.

1.2. Lacan's Concept of 'Desire':

For Lacan 'desire' has little to do with physical sexual expression, it is rather intertwined with social structures and strictures, with the fantasy version of reality that forever dominates our lives. Through his definition of the unconscious as the discourse of the Other, Lacan insinuates that even our unconscious desires are organized by the linguistic system he terms 'the symbolic order' or 'the big other'. In a sense, then, our desires are never properly our own, but are created through fantasies that are caught up in cultural ideologies rather than bodily sexuality. The term 'lack' is always related to Lacan's teachings of Desire, it describes the need to fill a void in our lives, and a 'lack of being', we desire 'being' itself. He explains that, desire is the connection between a person and what they feel they are missing. This feeling of lack isn't about missing a specific thing, but about a deeper sense of something essential that makes us who we are.¹⁹

At the symbolic stage, the child enters the language system concerned with lack and separation, since language names what is not present and substitutes a linguistic sign for it. For Lacan it is 'a lack that causes desire to arise', he later argues that desire is the metonymy of the lack of being; he affirms that, the transformative power of analysis lies in the subject's ability to acknowledge and articulate their desire, not as a pre-existing truth waiting to be uncovered, but as something that is brought into being through the very act of naming it.²⁰

1.3. Lacan's Concept of 'Jouissance':

Initially, the concept of 'Jouissance' is reduced by Lacan to mean no more than the enjoyable sensation that accompanies the satisfaction of a biological need such as hunger. In the course of his teaching however, Lacan comes to designate seven versions of jouissance: of

¹⁹ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955*, (United States of America: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1978), 223.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 228-29.

the Thing, of Being, of the Other, of the body image, of the phallic image, sexual jouissance and the jouissance of life. Things are quite different for Freud, who instead described in works such as *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), different situations potentially referring to jouissance and including joy, ecstasy, sexual pleasure related to sexual satisfaction, and preliminary sexual excitement. The different versions of jouissance identified by Lacan advocate for the difference Lacan designates between jouissance and pleasure. In his lecture on Psychoanalysis and Medicine Lacan announces, “pleasure is what necessarily stops us at a certain point, at a respectful distance from *jouissance*.”²¹ In the same lecture, Lacan adds, “jouissance is always of the order of tension, of forcing, of expenditure, even of exploit. Jouissance is undoubtedly there at the point where pain begins to appear.”²²

Therefore, Lacan introduces the concept of Jouissance as being ‘beyond the pleasure principle’, desire is defined as a limit after which pleasure becomes pain. Lacan’s paradox of pleasurable pain, where satisfaction of a drive entails suffering, reveals that every drive is, at its core, a manifestation of the death drive. In this way, jouissance is displaced from the exclusive realm of the living. Thus, Lacan links the concepts of Jouissance and the Drive, in the sense that the opposition between *jouissance* and the pleasure principle takes the place of the opposition between death drive and pleasure principle. Bruno Vincent’s study on this Lacanian paradox states that:

The extension of the field of *jouissance*, which does not seem to stop, does not allow for a conceptual grasp of the notion. The variations in Lacan’s position on the notion of death instinct or death drive seem to somewhat blur the distinction he makes between instinct and drive. Rather than a lack of definitional or conceptual rigor, Lacan’s path testifies to a clinical position that constantly widens the field of *jouissance*. This extension makes it a paradoxical notion, which can be posed by Lacan as equivalent to the death drive, as well as accounting for the symptom, the sexual, the discourse and language.²³

²¹ Jacques Lacan, “The Place of Psychoanalysis in Medicine”, (Lecture Notes, Collège de Médecine, 1966).

²² Ibid.

²³ Bruno Vincent. 2019. “Jouissance and Death Drive in Lacan’s Teaching.” *Ágora: Estudos em Teoria Psicanalítica* v.XXIII, no.1 (April): 55.

Within a literary framework, this paradoxical elasticity renders *jouissance* a particularly generative concept, capable of accounting for the excesses, ruptures, and libidinal undercurrents that traverse narrative structures and textual forms.

2. Materials:

2.1 Biography of Phillip Roth:

Born in Newark, New Jersey, in March 1933, Philip Milton Roth was an American author, and the eldest child of first generation American Jewish parents, he earned a master's degree in English literature from the University of Chicago, where he began working as a tutor in the university's writing program. During his stay in Chicago he met the author Saul Bellow who served as his mentor for a little while, and Margret Martinson who became his first wife. Though the two split and later Martinson died in a car wreck, Roth's troubled marriage to her had a significant impact on his writing output. She specifically served as a model for several of his female characters. His debut book *Goodbye, Columbus* was well-received by critics and won The National Book award of 1960. He then published *Letting Go* his first novel (1960), and followed it with *She Was Good* (1967). With the publication of *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969), Roth rose to fame again as a writer. In the 1970s, Roth presented works that covered diverse genres to his audience. Starting with the political satire *Our Gang* (1971), to the Kafkaesque *The Breast* (1972). Roth then developed his alter persona Nathan Zuckerman by the decade's end, who between 1979 and 1986 appeared as the main character or an interpreter in Roth's autobiographical works.

The works Roth published in the 1990 were the most well-known and most awarded. *Operation Shylock* (1993), received the PEN/Faulkner Award for fiction, *Sabbath's Theatre* (1995), obtained The National Book Award, and *American Pastoral* (1997), garnered the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. Though his admirers expected him to win a Nobel prize with the many

notable works he published later, Philip Roth was and still celebrated for his bravery, formal daring and creative brilliance as well as his capacity to recreate himself in unexpected ways.

2.2. Summary of Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*:

Portnoy's Complaint (1969) is a novel written by Phillip Roth, it took place in New Jersey, from the 1940s to the 1960s. The story was mainly a prolonged monologue by the protagonist and narrator Alexander Portnoy to his silent psychoanalyst Dr. Spielvogel. With the flow of the story through detailing experiences from each phase of his life, every memory has some connection with his primary problem.

Alexander, an American Jew afflicted with severe neurosis, narrates his life beginning in childhood, focusing primarily on his upbringing within a conservative Jewish household. Central to this early environment are his parents: Sophie, a domineering and overbearing mother, and Jack, an emotionally repressed father. The rigid religiosity and moral strictures of his family generate a series of internal conflicts that manifest in profound shame and self-loathing during his formative years. As he enters adolescence, these tensions culminate in compulsive sexual behavior, particularly frequent masturbation, and later in a defiant rejection of his religious upbringing through the declaration of atheism. Through a series of candid and often provocative anecdotes, Portnoy exposes the complexities of the mother-son dynamic, the fraught experience of Jewish identity in mid-20th century America, and the psychological burden of communal and familial expectations.

2.3. Biography of Mustapha Benfodil:

Mustapha Benfodil was born in 1968 in Relizane, in Western Algeria. In addition to being a novelist and playwright, he works as a reporter for the daily newspaper *El Watan*. Born after the transition to independence, he belongs to what the Franco-Algerian historian Malika Rahal

has termed ‘la génération ’88’, a cohort she defines in her 2014 article *Fille d’Octobre. Générations, engagement et histoire*, as those who came of age during the October 1988 uprisings and whose political and cultural consciousness was shaped by that pivotal moment. He is perhaps one of the most prominent figures to have emerged from the 1990s Civil War.²⁴ As a way of thinking outside the local frames of the present, Benfodil masters precisely the kind of literary artistry and sophistication so valued by critics of testimonial literature, but in a writing heavily freighted with material, economic, and political concerns.

Renowned for both his fiction and journalism, Mustapha Benfodil has published several notable works, including *Zarta* (2000), *Les Bavardages du Seul* (2003), and *Archéologie du Chaos (amoureux)* (2007). He is also the author of five plays including *Clandestinopolis* (2005; staged at the Avant-scène théâtre, Paris, 2008), *De mon hublot utérin je te salue humanité et te dis blablabla* (2009). *Les Borgnes* (2011), and *End/Ignés* his most recent piece. The Arabophone newspaper El-Khabar awarded him the International Omar Ouartilane Prize for Press Freedom in 2008, and his second novel *Les Bavardages du Seul* (2003), has received the prize for the Best Algerian Novel in 2004, The book went out of print within a year, and was subsequently circulated in photocopied versions by students.

2.4. Summary of Mustapha Benfodil’s *Archéologie du Chaos (amoureux)*:

Archéologie du Chaos (amoureux) (2007), is an outlandish narrative, a carefully crafted yet seemingly chaotic assemblage of distinct forms of media. A notebook, a fragmented novel, an email, a police investigation, and a manifesto collectively guide the reader through the process of writing a book, only to be abruptly interrupted by the death of its author. Taking place in the 1990s Algeria, the novel evokes a pessimism about the legacy of the war of Independence and the stagnation that has ensued in its aftermath. Set against a backdrop of

²⁴ Malika Rahal, “Fille d’Octobre. Générations, engagement et histoire,” *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’histoire*, no. 122 (2014) : 101–113.

societal and political upheaval, the central *mise en abîme* of the work revolves around Yacine Nabolci, an intellectually astute yet arrogant and misogynistic protagonist. His stated objective is to destabilize the regime by impregnating the daughters of the political and economic elite. This manuscript is written by Marwan Kanafani, a drug-addicted, misanthropic antihero who grapples with what is often referred to as 'blank page syndrome', a mental block where the overwhelming pressure to create paralyzes the writer, preventing them from even starting. Kanafani, fully aware of this struggle, recognizes that his attempt to write will ultimately cost him his life. When it eventually does, Marwan's abrupt, unexplained death leaves behind the unfinished manuscript alongside a curious political manifesto. The book continues with an investigation of the author's death by an inspector, who performs a sort of literary autopsy of both the novel and its writer's life.

The novel combines a diverse range of languages (French, Tamazight, Modern Standard Arabic, Algerian Arabic) and registers (at times high-style lyricism, at others, vulgar slang). To transcend the confines of Algerian history, the author incorporates global references such as continental philosophy, the occupation of Palestine, 9/11, and the war on terror. Within the layers of counterpoints and mirrors, the protagonists mirror each other: Marwan is as unattractive as Yacine is appealing; Marwan is isolated, while Yacine is desired by many. Ultimately, the distinction between the two narratives becomes unclear, as the roles of author and protagonist blur. The characters and their stories intertwine, making it difficult to determine which narrative influences the other, or which figure, author or protagonist, is more compelling.

III. Results:

The current research has provided us with an understanding of psychoanalytic theory and its application to literary works, with a primary focus on Lacanian concepts. The main objective of this investigation is to uncover some of the psychological catalysts that cause certain mental disorders, and the psychological processes that influence rebellious tendencies in individuals. To realize the objectives of this study, we have conducted a psychoanalytic study focusing on the protagonists from two distinct novels. Alexander Portnoy in Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969), and Marwan Kanafani/Yacine Nabolci in Mustapha Benfodil's *Archéologie du chaos (amoureux)* (2007) serve as our central figures. The analysis relied on several fundamental concepts of Lacanian psychoanalysis, namely Lacan's concepts of the *Unconscious*, *Desire*, *Jouissance*, and the *Drive*. This research has revealed notable similarities in the behavior of the two protagonists, which appear to stem from the social constraints imposed upon them.

The results indicate that, despite clear distinctions between the two novels, including differences in time period, geographical setting, and language, they share a notable set of similarities. Nonetheless, we have exposed some of the shared cultural restrictions that have played a significant role in shaping their characters' psychological development. It has been established that elements from their respective childhoods, have been predominant catalysts for the majority of the psychological disorders they have developed. We have also noticed that both authors have succeeded in using literature as a means to admonish the influence of severe social restrictions and childhood trauma on the moulding of the individual's personality. Moreover, our findings have uncovered a link between rebellious tendencies and psychological trauma, which could explain violent and abnormal behaviour and trace its origins back to a young age. We came to the conclusion that the two protagonists, who appear to suffer from the repercussions of repressed memories, share similar adult characteristics. These include frantic,

obsessive behaviors marked by compulsive actions and persistent, irrational thoughts. These traits seem to be linked to their aspiration to regain the control they once lost over their lives and surroundings.

IV. Discussion

Chapter One:

Identity Formation and the Constraints of Society as a Hindering Other:

This chapter intends to discuss Lacan's concept of the Other, in Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969) and Mustapha Benfodil's *Archéologie du Chaos (amoureux)* (2007). It also aims to analyze the effects of the concept of the Other and the process of identity formation for both Alexander Portnoy and Marwan Kanafani. In Lacanian theory, the Big Other (A, as in *Autre*), in contrast to the "little other" (a, as in *autre*), designates otherness or alterity. The "little other" refers to individuals or external figures we encounter in everyday life. The Big Other, on the other hand, is the symbolic order that mediates our relationship with those figures.²⁵

Through literature, the Other can be qualified as the whole of society in retrospect to the undeniable effects it induces on the individual, but also as a prominent figure in the individual's life such as the matriarch or the patriarch. The main focus of this dissertation is to identify such figures and analyze not only the probable psychological effects of these external elements on the characters' personality traits but also any behavioral issues that may have resulted from their interference. For Lacan, identity is not something one has, but something one develops in one's relation to the other, thus its construction may be affected or altered by aforementioned obtrusions.²⁶

Lacan conceptualizes the unconscious as the "kernel of our being," challenging the Cartesian dictum "I think, therefore I am" by proposing instead, "I am where I think not." He positions the unconscious as a structure akin to language, an order that renders it both objectifiable and deeply impressionable. This perspective frames the unconscious as central to the formation of subjectivity. Drawing on this framework, the current research considers the

²⁵ Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2006), 136.

²⁶ Bailly, Lionel. *A Lacanian Perspective on Identity*, (The International Journal of Psychoanalysis, vol. 104, no. 5, 2023), 855–859.

unconscious an essential component in achieving the study's objective, particularly as the unconscious of the targeted characters appears to shape their identity formation through the internalization of the Other. As Lacan explains, "Nature provides... signifiers, and these signifiers organize human relations in a creative way, providing them with structures and shaping them."²⁷ Building on this theoretical foundation, the present study seeks to explore how these unconscious structures manifest in literary characters, and how their psychological development reflects the tension between internal desires and external social constraints.

a/Alexander Portnoy's Fear of Socially Induced Castration:

In Philip Roth's novel, Alexander Portnoy is presented to us during a session with Dr. Spielvogel, his silent and passive psychoanalyst. The novel takes the form of a monologue, in which Portnoy lays bare the torments of his psyche through a frenetic stream of consciousness. A Jewish-American man in his early thirties, Portnoy is plagued by guilt, sexual frustration, and compulsive behaviors, conflicts that largely stem from his childhood and his domineering parents, particularly his overbearing mother. His narrative shifts between humor and anguish, providing a revealing portrait of a man at war with his desires, cultural expectations, and family legacy. His psychological complexity is gradually revealed through the session, exposing the fragmented and tormented aspects of his psyche, an in-depth account of his parents' influence on his upbringing was depicted through his relentless, slightly obsessive stream of consciousness narration. One of the central aims of the present research is to attempt to explain the extent of that influence and the way in which it takes part in nurturing Alexander's eccentric and predominantly neurotic behavior as an adult. His fluctuating relationship with his mother is one of the main catalysts for his obsessive almost compulsive neuroses. Even though he

²⁷ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (United States of America: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1978),20.

appeared to be a good Jewish man who was prospering in life, his mother, who at first seems to be a loving and proud parent, begins to punish him for unknown reasons and even threatens to stab him on multiple occasions. The recurrence of such life threatening events, with his mother as the perpetrator, sends him spiraling into a state of shame and self-doubt. He doubts the affection he received from his mother, as it is constantly shifting, which provokes in him feelings of inadequacy and insecurity.

Alexander has to cope with the pressure he is faced with, so he adopts a set of coping mechanisms that would help him relieve some of the burden he has to deal with, and masturbation was one of the adaptive behaviors he utilizes in his adolescent years. These mechanisms of relief become his sole escape from the oppression he was subjected to as a result of the guilt and shame his family projects onto him. He does, however, occasionally feel horrible about it and considers quitting, but it provides him with an opportunity to challenge the limitations imposed on him by his Jewish identity and to rebel against them.

According to Lacanian theory, a child develops a castration complex when he fears the removal of his penis. This is the time at which the Oedipus complex reaches its climax, and it is this fear of castration that forms the basis of all psychopathological structures. Because of the sustained amount of mental or physical abuse in early childhood, the fear experienced by the subject is embedded deep into their psyche and affect their identity acquisition, and socialization processes. Castration is one of Lacan's three categories for "lack of object," along with frustration and privation. Castration is defined by Lacan as a symbolic lack of an imaginary object; it has nothing to do with the phallus as a real organ, but rather with the imaginary phallus.²⁸ The notion of lack as defined by Lacan is related to 'Being', insofar as the absence of the imaginary phallus would cause a void in the subject's psychosexual development which can

²⁸ Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2006),23

ultimately lead to the deficiency of their psychological assimilation instigating the assumption of a variety of mental disorders.

The introductory lines of *Portnoy's Complaint* give a glimpse into Alexander's childhood, he describes his mother's intense presence in his life as he says; "she was so deeply imbedded in my consciousness that for the first year of school I seem to have believed that each of my teachers was my mother in disguise."²⁹ This indicates how he was so attached to her, and how she was constantly present in his mind. He assumed that every teacher he had was his mother in disguise, his perception of her as a child shows the type of bond he had with his mother compared to his relationship with his father, to whom he does not show the same amount of affection in his references of him. This brings forth the presumption that Alexander has struggles with attachment issues. The fact that his mother is the subject of his earliest memories leads us to believe that he fears her desertion or that he longs to return to the time when she was the only person he thought about. Getting all of her attention and being closer to her, relishing the moments she was his loving mother and adopting denial as a coping mechanism, refusing to believe her violent and threatening demeanor towards him was anything other than his own fault. In his later years as an adult, he becomes anxious and troubled, those small moments of idealized happiness he shared with his mother served as a source of comfort for him, even though it was during that same period that he sustained a considerable extent of psychological trauma, which deeply impacted his subsequent behavior.

After experiencing his sexual awakening, a lump appears on his genitalia leaving him in a state of panic. He started to believe that it was him who caused his own illness, he acknowledged that; "All that pulling and tugging at my own flesh, all that friction, had given me an incurable disease."³⁰ The lump made him think of the probability of death at a young age,

²⁹ Philip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint*, First Vintage International Edition, (New York, 1969), 5

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

and he almost sounded regretful for the malicious acts he engaged in. When he realized the severity of his situation he wished someone would spare his life and save him from this fatal disease, he hoped for another opportunity to dive back into his world built on a set of unfulfilled fantasies. He assumed that excessive masturbation was the cause of this illness, which has led him to become a vulnerable man waiting for his death in his teen years. The fear of being castrated is about to become a reality which would mean losing his freedom and even his own life. This implanted a great amount of shame within him; however, he goes back to his routine and decides not to miss the opportunity to emancipate himself even if it is going to be for the last time. During a visit to the doctor's office, he tries to justify his guilt by providing him with different pretexts. He argued his condition saying; "Doctor, do you understand what I was up against? My wang was all I really had that I could call my own."³¹

Alexander's tone in the previous passage suggests that the only aspect of him that was not under another person's control was his penis. Considering that his mother and Judaism violated every part of him, none of those parts truly represented him or gave him a sense of being seen. However, his reproductive organ is the only part of him that had not been violated or owned by anyone else but himself. As a result, it gave him freedom and allowed him to mock his family and their religion and assert his superiority over them. Having stated that his castration anxiety arose from the possibility of losing his penis has led to the conclusion that the reproductive organ serves a higher function than simply the satisfaction of sexual desire as it liberates Alexander's mind from being dominated by the constraints put on him. His compulsive behavior becomes a sexual outlet that allows him the freedom to express himself, and embrace his own desires with no regard to the restrictions imposed on him by his family, his religion and the whole society.

³¹ Philip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint*, First Vintage International Edition, (New York, 1969), 23.

But then came nights of terror, when I searched in vain, searched all the way up to my rib cage [...] In school we chanted, along with our teacher, I am the Captain of my fate, I am the Master of my soul, and meanwhile, within my own body, an anarchic insurrection had been launched by one of my privates- which I was helpless to put down!³²

From the preceding quotation, one might infer that Alexander's castration anxiety, once merely a psychological fear, has begun to take on tangible form. What was initially symbolic threatens to become literal, as the prospect of actual surgical castration arises. However, rather than a fear of literal surgical castration, as in Freudian psychoanalysis, Lacanian castration anxiety emerges here as the subject's painful awareness of lack, of being decentered, and of no longer occupying a position of mastery. What was initially symbolic, the desire to maintain control, reveals itself as structurally impossible. The body's rebellion becomes a sign of the subject's submission to the Symbolic order, in which desire is always mediated by the Other and the phallus functions not as an organ but as a signifier of absence. In this sense, Alexander's anxiety is not about losing something tangible, but about confronting a truth that was always already there: that he was never the true "master" of his soul.³³ The psychological conflict intensifies when Alexander is abruptly challenged with the discovery, that one of his testicles disappeared. He became aware of the enormity of the issue, but still, that did not stop him from engaging in sexual self-gratification. Even though the act drowns him in feelings of guilt, shame and self-pity, he remains unable to break free from his compulsive auto-erotic behavior. His flawed phallus becomes not only a source of physical insecurity but also a symbolic site of psychic instability, as he loses control over the repressed resentment and fury that had long simmered beneath the surface, as well as the paralyzing fear instilled by his mother's earlier threats. Thus, Alexander is not only exposed to shame, but also to a broader crisis of identity, vulnerability, and loss of agency, both physical and emotional. His internal conflicts risk

³² Ibid.,39.

³³ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 2001), 287–89.

becoming publicly visible, which would result in his mental collapse and take him back to his periods of uncertainty and worry. In addition to that, he was unable to find another method to express those suppressed feelings, so jerking off despite the damage to his male genitals was a plea for it to keep functioning, Alexander says:

“Well, how's my lover? Her lover she calls me, while her husband is listening on the other extension! And it never occurs to her, if I'm her lover, who is he, the schmegeggy she lives with? No, you don't have to go digging where these people are concerned-they wear the old unconscious on their sleeves!”³⁴

In this passage, Alexander's sarcastic tone and bitter humor underscore a critical moment of disillusionment with his mother. Her calling him "her lover" in the presence of her husband not only distorts traditional familial roles but also exposes the chaotic symbolic structure within their household. From a Lacanian perspective, Alexander realizes he no longer needs to embody the phallus for his mother's benefit, because he despises the way she addresses and treats him. Given the fact that the father is there to claim the phallus, it is clear that the mother has been castrated in the Lacanian sense of the concept; she no longer feels or depicts signs of penis envy. Her attempts to fill that void with Alexander's presence even though it is the father who should assume that role restrained him, and denied him the identification to his father that would help his psychological development. To be more clear, Alexander does not desire his mother because he is aware of her lack; his father is present and can be listening to the conversation between Alexander and Sophie, which reminded him that his mother is no more the object of his desire. Furthermore, Alexander mentioned that his parents have "old unconscious", which refers to being somewhat illiterate about a number of things, like his quest to identify himself in the midst of all the laws they force him to abide by from a young age and his fear of being bound by them. Considering the previous statement one can conclude that Alexander does not want to maintain any bond with his parents at this age.

³⁴ Ibid.,19.

Alexander's outburst captures the overwhelming psychological burden placed on him by his mother:

BECAUSE WE CAN'T TAKE ANY MORE! BECAUSE YOU FUCKING JEWISH MOTHERS ARE JUST TOO FUCKING MUCH TO BEAR!

[...] this big smothering bird beating frantic wings about my face and mouth so that I cannot even get my breath.

[...] And forgive us our trespasses—which aren't even trespasses to begin with.³⁵

In this statement, Alexander rants about his mother's treatment of him, which drove him to rage. At this point, he experiences a castration related to his mother and rejects being the phallus since he can no longer stand the abuse he is subjected to. For Lacan, “repression is the fundamental operation which distinguishes neurosis from other clinical structures. [...] only neurotics repress”³⁶. In the case of Alexander Portnoy, it is clear that he was repressing fear and shame until it became no longer bearable to do so, which is the reason for him to become neurotic during his adulthood. However, this repression was caused by other signifiers from the same source which is his mother.

So my mother sits down in a chair beside me with a long bread knife in her hand. It is made of stainless steel, and has little sawlike teeth. Which do I want to be, weak or strong, a man or a mouse? [...] What can she be possibly thinking in her brain? [...] Why a knife, why the threat of murder, why is such total and annihilating victory necessary—
[...] And why doesn't my father stop her?³⁷

In this quotation, Alexander has received his first death threat from his mother, even though he is not aware of the offense that would deserve him such punishment. This menace left him frightened because his life was coming to an end for an obscure reason. Given that his mother has always loved him, this had a negative impact on him and left him in a circle of unanswered questions. Whether or not he deserved such punishment, despite presenting himself as nothing

³⁵Philip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint*, First Vintage International Edition, (New York,1969),120

³⁶Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2006),168

³⁷ Philip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint*, First Vintage International Edition, (New York,1969),13

more than a respectful Jewish boy, he even longed for his father's intervention to protect him from his mother's abuse. This leads us to assume that it is the point where Alexander gave up on being the phallus and rejected the object of desire. This threat might end his manhood and make him weak; he would no longer receive the same love and attention he used to get from people around him, especially his mother. However, he still craves his mother's love and affection, a fact which makes him dependent on her, and causes his fear of abandonment. Even though he grew up and matured, he still needed his mother to care for him, he still fears the notion of abandonment.

Alexander has begun medical treatment for his missing testicle; instead of surgery, he received shots; he expresses a sense of relief in his statement: "The shots work. I am spared the knife. (Once again!)"³⁸ He makes it clear that he is relieved to know that he won't be approached by a knife again, which is indicative of the trauma his mother inflicted on him while he was growing up. In addition, he does not seem to have moved on from that time in his life, he is experiencing a response to the traumatic events as a result of his repressed fear. This idea resonates with Lacan's assertion that, "the essential object which isn't an object any longer, but this something faced with which all words cease and all categories fail, the object of anxiety *par excellence*"³⁹

Alexander is brought back to his childhood in a form of a trauma response, he experiences a moment of traumatic regression, in which the boundaries between past and present collapse: "At which point the phone rings. The Puerto Rican is shouting at me in Spanish, my mother is waving a knife at me back in my childhood, and my secretary announces that Miss Reed would like to speak to me on the telephone."⁴⁰ Even though there is no physical threat directed to him,

³⁸Ibid.,27.

³⁹ Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2006),28

⁴⁰ Philip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint*, First Vintage International Edition, (New York,1969),.206

he is in a state of anxiety. Coincidentally, the tone of the Puerto Rican couple mirrors that of Alexander's mother during his childhood, particularly in the moment when she threatened him with a knife as punishment. The act was intimidating and it made him feel powerless, as Lacan asserts: anxiety and trauma is always there even though the usual cause of it is not there, the subject will feel threatened despite his age or situation.⁴¹

As a consequence, Alexander was reliving those moments since they evoked in him the same emotions of terror and anger as before. His behavior was immensely affected by the trauma he was afflicted with in his childhood, he was rejected and came to crave his mother's attention; his object of desire. As he grew up, the traumatic experiences he lived as part of his castration complex caused him to adopt neurotic obsessive behaviors to cope with oppression.

b/Yacine Nabolci's 'Perverse' Reaction to Social Constriction:

In his novel *Archéologie du Chaos (amoureux)* (2007), Mustapha Benfodil introduces a main character, whom by the norm of Algerian social standards can be considered as debauched and/or perverse. However, in Lacanian psychoanalysis, perversion is not to be viewed as a stigma but rather as a structural category. Lacan argues that, "perversion involves the attempt to prop up the law so that limits can be set to jouissance".⁴² The definition of perversion usually becomes subjective, as most people would associate it with any unconventional behavior linked to sexuality. Bruce Fink also argues that the majority of human behavior could be viewed as perverse, for him "perversion lies at the very core of human sexuality."⁴³ He proceeds to explain the perverse nature of sexuality and states that:

⁴¹ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X: Anxiety*, trans. A.R. Price, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 152

⁴² Bruce Fink, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis Theory and Technique*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: Harvard University Press, 1997),165.

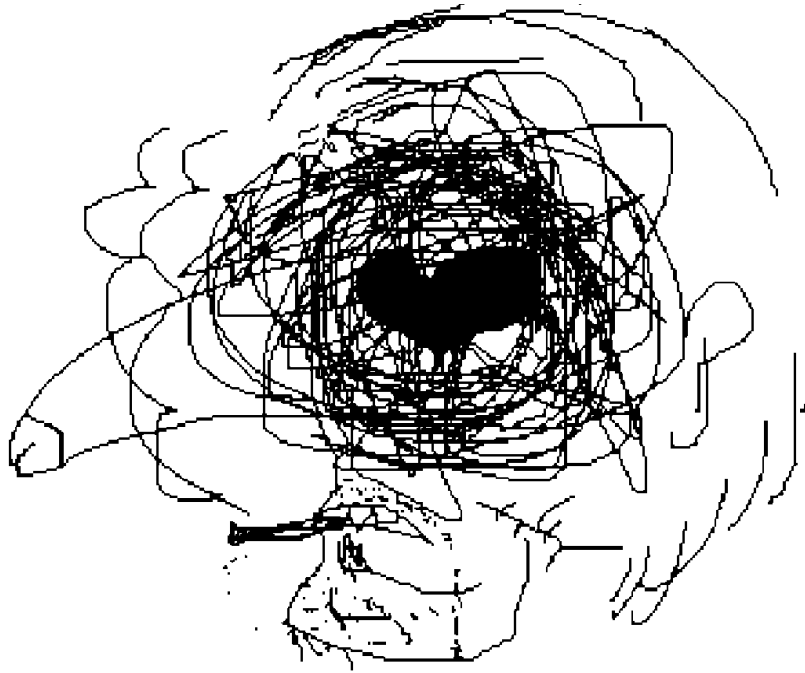
⁴³ *Ibid.*,166.

If we begin with the notion that "normal" sexual activity is directed toward a "total person," a partner who is desired for him- or her-"self," not for any particular attribute he or she may have or embody, then we once again must accept the fact that the vast majority of human sexual behavior is perverse. [...] Lacanian psychoanalysts view the perverse nature of sexuality as a given, as something to be taken for granted—in other words, as 'normal'.⁴⁴

The same definition cannot be applied in a standard Algerian setting, as the character's behavior is largely shunned upon and disregarded as an abnormality which causes him to feel a sense of discontent towards social convention.

Marwan Kanafani can be considered as the protagonist of *Archéologie du Chaos (amoureux)*; nonetheless, the character we chose to discuss is Yacine Nabolci. This character exists purely as a figment of imagination within the fictional world itself, constructed as a surrogate to embody and enact Marwan's unrestrained fantasies. Moreover, one cannot deny the number of similarities Marwan shares with his fictional character, it would be understandable to assume that he has created him as a sort of other persona that would be able to achieve everything he couldn't in his own life. Hypothetically it can be argued that Kanafani has created for himself a kind of alter-ego, to whom he delegated the role of achieving a higher self he wouldn't be able to attain due to his obsessive self-deprecation. Marwan has a negative image of himself, he thinks that his scrawny appearance is disgusting. Moreover, he loathes the amount of hatred he carries inside of him. His hatred does not only involve his own 'ugly black soul' but also the ugliness of the world. As a result, he created a character that is an idealized version of himself. While Marwan is Ugly, Yacine is extremely good looking, and where he is undesirable, Yacine is awfully popular. Marwan is alone in life, whereas Yacine is coveted by many. In this way, the character functions as an extension of Marwan's desires, navigating a narrative shaped entirely by Marwan's unconscious projections.

⁴⁴ Ibid.



[Self-Portrait of Marwan Kanafani] ⁴⁵

The preceding image is a self-portrait constructed by Marwan, an image that shows what he believes he projects to the world. A face in shambles, with male genitalia in the place of a nose, his hair is ‘all over the place’ with a cigarette that seems attached to his lips. None of which are more expressive than the black hovering orbits that seem to be his running thoughts, and the black heart that looks to be a dark hole sinking into his brain. The intensity of darkness he perceives within himself, equals the extent of the darkness he perceives in the world around him; for him achieving his desires in life is unattainable. Consequently, Kanafani endows the fictional persona he created with all the qualities he believed he lacked in himself in order to fulfill his desires. For this reason, we have chosen to interpret Yacine Nabolci as an alternative personality or projected alter ego of the main character. Therefore, this primary investigation focuses on the assumption that Yacine Nabolci was created to be an idealized version of

⁴⁵ Mustapha Benfodil, *Archéologie du chaos (amoureux)*, (Ed. Barzakh, 2007),79.

Kanafani, a manufactured identity. Studying the relation dynamics held by Yacine can help explain Marwan's personality traits, most of which are shared between the two especially their sense of disdain towards society, and their extreme misanthropy and misogyny.

Although Freud first formulated the Oedipus Complex in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) as a key moment in psychosexual development, Lacan redefined it in his 1938 essay *Les complexes familiaux* as a foundational structure shaping the subject's entry into the symbolic order, linking familial dynamics to the formation of identity and neurosis. For him complexes are byproducts of cultural interference rather than being natural instincts. However, they later on prove to be essential for the development of the 'subject'. In this case, the 'Oedipus Complex' is no less than a passage rite from the 'Imaginary order' to the 'Symbolic order', marking the beginning of socialization with its prohibitions and restraints. Therefore, the complex is "a whole constellation of interacting images; it is the internalization of the subject's earliest social structure".⁴⁶ Subsequently it could be assumed that perversion among other psychological issues can result, if something is essentially incomplete in the Oedipus complex. Such is the case with Yacine's feelings towards his mother's disappearance, his emotions seem to vary between an insurmountable amount of guilt due to the role he played in her death, and a considerable degree of hatred because she chose to die instead of facing her issues.

A présent, même sa haine est partie.
Même son désamour me manque.
La salope, la garce, la traîtresse !
Comme toutes les femmes, du reste...
Ma mère abandonneuse pour enfant abandonnique.⁴⁷

The previous quotation invokes Yacine's feelings of loss, with a hint of discontent with his mother after she chose to end her own life instead of nurturing him as she was supposed to

⁴⁶ Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2006),28.

⁴⁷ Mustapha Benfodil, *Archéologie du chaos (amoureux)*, (Ed. Barzakh, 2007),16.

do, even though her suicide was mostly his fault. He had suffocated his baby sister causing his mother to spiral into a state of continuous state of depression which ultimately led her to an untimely death. His internalised dissatisfaction with his mother caused him to have a consistent disregard for the other sex, and an innate misogynous behaviour that he carried all the way till his adulthood.

This was prominent in most of Nabolci's interactions with women throughout his life, interactions which he mostly judged fruitless and inconvenient. His interest in women was solely confined to biological curiosity, which escalated to sexual assault when he was faced with a challenging character. Sonia Rostom, was one of the few girls Yacine interacted with in college; however, he came to find her interest in him distasteful. As a result of poor judgement and due to his childhood trauma and the internalised hatred he held towards women, he ended up assaulting her. He raped Sonia and felt no moral inhibitions during the act, but rather a sense of self-accomplishment for he did not see Sonia but Kheïra the 'evil' woman who awakened his libidinal urges, but who also was his step-mother. While recounting his proclaimed conquest, he elaborates on the details:

Et Sonia [...] était exsangue, au bord de la syncope, sur le point de perdre connaissance, Kheïra. Mais où penses-tu t'en aller comme ça Kheïra ?
Car moi je ne voyais que Kheïra, ma très belle belle-mère.
Ma terrible Pandore.
[...] J'ai violé Sonia, j'ai violé Kheïra.⁴⁸

Having said that, Yacine Nabolci's behavioural disorders could be partly faulted on his mother's disappearance from the early stages of his childhood. A period during which a child experiences the Oedipal trauma, a concept which describes feelings of desire for their opposite-sex parent; and jealousy and anger towards their same-sex parent. It was first introduced by Sigmund Freud in his theory about psychosexual development, the pre-oedipal phase is amid the first stages,

⁴⁸ Ibid.,116.

during this phase the mother is the exclusive love object of the child and the father is not yet considered a rival. Lacan identifies this phase as the first ‘time’ of the Oedipus complex, from which stems the term “*pre-oedipal triangle*”; the period of psychosexual development prior to the formation of the Oedipus complex. Before this phase was usually represented as a dual relation between the mother and the child, though, for Lacan the child is never completely alone with the mother. Hence, when Lacan speaks of a pre-oedipal phase, he presents it not as a dual relation but as a triangle. Moreover, his interest in this phase does not only lie in its function in paving the way for the Oedipus complex, but also in the fact that all perversions have their origin in this phase. This may be reason to explain Yacine’s extreme reaction to sexual stimuli, both his repressed desire for sexual intercourse with his step mother, who has figuratively filled his mother’s role as the object of desire. In addition to his re-enactment of this desire on an unwilling party were catalysts for a farther association; his feelings of abandonment towards his mother

Kheïra était décidée à pousser le bouchon de la tentation jusqu’au stérilet !
[...] La tigresse me réclamait de tout son Eros incandescent délaissé par
une sexualité inopérante, celle de mon père [...] ⁴⁹

The prior quotation implies that Yacine’s father is impotent, which leads us to assume a dysfunction in what Lacan calls the third ‘time’ of the Oedipus complex. The latter is marked by the intervention of the real father, who by demonstrating that he has the phallus he castrates the child; eliminating any unwanted desires towards the mother. Competing with the real father becomes useless because he always wins. Thus, the subject is freed from the impossible and anxiety-provoking task of having to assume the role of the phallus by realizing that the father has it. This allows the subject to identify with the father, in this ‘symbolic’ identification he

⁴⁹ Ibid.,21.

transcends the aggressivity inherent in primary ‘imaginary’ identification.⁵⁰ The inadequacy of Yacine’s father and his failure to come forth and assume his role as the phallus in this stage opens room to argue that the identification with the father has failed. This failure may have also played a paramount role in the establishment of his perverse and violent penchants towards women and his scorn for conventional relationships. This leads us to adopt the perspective argued by Judith Feher-Gurewich whom argues that:

[...] Lacan’s return to Freud has allowed the structure of perversion to emerge not as a form of sexual aberration – because, as Freud has amply demonstrated, all sexuality is aberrant – but as a form of psychic functioning that can be traced back to vicissitudes of the Oedipus complex. For Lacan, therefore, perversion is not a symptomatology like voyeurism, sadism, exhibitionism, bondage, and the like, but rather a specific mode of desiring and making sense of the world.⁵¹

This quote redefines perversion as a psychic structure, not a set of deviant acts. It aligns with Freud’s view that all sexuality resists conventional boundaries. Lacan sees perversion as a response to the Oedipus complex and the symbolic order. The perverse subject stages or upholds the law rather than submitting to it. Moreover, perversion can be considered as a way of thinking or desiring, of attempting to stay psychically alive; which in the case of Nabolci can be attributed to a sense of self-realization through perversion. What perverts are mostly interested in is to discover a law, beyond the mask of the social order, that can bring solace to their torment. Here again, his rebellion against the established order by trying to impregnate the daughters of the ruling elite may be analyzed as an act of perversion. Taking into account that, the process of identification with the masculine and feminine traits of the parent is responsible for the provision of answers that would define the child’s place in the social fabric. Gender and its

⁵⁰ Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2006),132.

⁵¹ Judith Feher-Gurewich, *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, ed. Jean-Michel Rabaté, (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2003),192.

cultural obligations, and rituals are therefore among the outcomes of Oedipal dynamics. For Yacine, however, the previously established failure of such identification may have caused his almost pathological disregard for normative human interrelationality. He justifies his fabrication of a rebellion through sex as an acceptable plan to instate a new order, however in his conservative society such ideas would probably be considered perverse, and would produce feelings of horror, fear, and dismay in those who witness their mode of operation.

[...] J'ai commis un infanticide.
Cela laisse forcément des séquelles.
Et un matricide malgré moi.
[...] Cela laisse forcément des séquelles.
Mon père me battait comme il respirait.
Cela laisse forcément des séquelles.
Ma marâtre Kheïra me martyrisait par
ses coquetteries démentielles.
Cela laisse forcément des séquelles.⁵²

Even though, Yacine Nabolci came to the realization that his actions have consequences at an early stage of his plan. The first time their plan had worked, he had to assist an abortion when one of the girls they targeted got pregnant, which brought back feelings of guilt he had forgotten from his childhood. This failed to deter him from proceeding with his fabrications which ultimately escalated into violence, fueled by his accumulated repressed feelings and sexual desires. His sexual assault on Sonia Rostom represented an initial outburst of the destructive patterns that would define his later actions. In the aftermath he descended into a life of vagabondage. So far, we have observed a pattern of dysfunctionality in the subject's relations with the other resulting in the formation of a confused persona. An identity thriving on the need to enact scenarios that would help to create laws that represent an order which has the potential

⁵² Mustapha Benfodil, *Archéologie du chaos (amoureux)*, (Ed. Barzakh, 2007),83.

to overthrow the commonly accepted by conventional standards. Laws that would justify his actions as purposeful and necessary, rather than detrimental and abnormal.

In conclusion, this comparative psychoanalytic study of Lacan's concept of the Other in Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* and Mustapha Benfodil's *Archéologie du Chaos (amoureux)* offers profound insights into the complexities of identity formation under the constraints of societal norms. Lacan's theory distinguishes between the "little other" (a) and the "Big Other" (A), where the former pertains to individuals we encounter in daily life, and the latter represents the symbolic order that mediates our relationship with those figures. In both narratives, the protagonists, Alexander Portnoy and Yacine Nabolci, grapple with the expectations and judgments imposed by the Big Other, leading to complex interactions between desire, repression, and self-perception. Portnoy's incessant search for validation and Nabolci's perverse enactments illustrate Lacan's assertion that the subject is constituted through the Other's desire. These narratives underscore the enduring relevance of Lacanian theory in understanding the dynamics of identity and the pervasive influence of societal structures on the individual's psyche. By examining these characters through a Lacanian lens, we gain insight into the profound impact of the symbolic order on personal development and the complexities of human behavior.

Chapter Two:

Sexuality as a Form of Rebellion against Social Constraints:

In this second chapter we aim to analyze the different drives that fuel the gender dynamics in both Phillip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969), and Mustapha Benfodil's *Archéologie du chaos (amoureux)* (2007). In addition to the characters' penchant for rebellion, mainly we have shown the psychoanalytical catalysts behind their behavioral irregularities. It was established earlier in our dissertation, that both main characters are immensely unsatisfied with themselves and their surroundings. The dissatisfaction they held onto throughout their lives, and that has affected their identity acquisition may have been their catalyst to rebel. A rebellion that they have perpetuated through means of sexual humiliation or abuse of the other sex, which inadvertently caused a ridge in the dynamics conventionally experienced in gender relations.

For Feminists, psychoanalysis used to be a reviled theory⁵³, however, this stance has been re-evaluated over the last twenty years mainly due to the revolutionary radical rupture in feminist attitudes marked by the publication of Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974). This text was viewed to have been highly influenced by Lacan's reading of Freud, with its emphasis on social and signifying forms of explanation, rather than instinctual and hereditary ones. Through its content, Juliet Mitchell "claims that psychoanalysis is essential to the understanding of the ways in which patriarchal ideology is internalized and lived by men and women."⁵⁴ She goes on to argue that:

The Freud the feminists have inherited is often a long way off-centre. In violently rejecting a Freud who is not Freud, I would argue that the only important possibilities of understanding the psychology of women that we have to date have been lost and that in misconceiving and repudiating psychoanalysis a crucial science for understanding ideological and psychological aspects of oppression has been thrown away.⁵⁵

⁵³ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 3–20.

⁵⁴ Elizabeth Grosz, Jacques Lacan A Feminist Introduction, (London and New York, Routledge, 1990),20.

⁵⁵ Juliet Mitchell, Sangay K. Mishra, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism – A Radical Reassessment of Freudian Psychoanalysis*, (Basic Books, New York, 1975),301-2.

The previous quote explains how the internalized trauma caused by the characters' upbringing, and the constraints society inflicts on them deeply affects their view on sexuality. Their sexual release becomes an unhealthy process, and a means to rebel against the different standards and limits society puts on their desires. Consequently, women become objects to satisfy these desires, or accessories that would help them to accomplish their fantasies. In addition, to them being used as tools that would help the characters' rebellion against the stifling constraints that seem to be hindering their freedom. Accordingly, a rebellion would suggest an outbreak against authority, it implies an open resistance that is often unsuccessful. It seems that, both Alexander and Marwan fit this pattern of failure, even though the prospect of probable failure was not dissuasive enough for them. Lacan explains that; "The very prohibition creates the desire to transgress it, and jouissance is therefore fundamentally transgressive."⁵⁶

a/ Jouissance and Alexander Portnoy's 'Life Drive':

This section aims to explore how Alexander Portnoy gradually attempts to escape the religious and cultural system he was born into by transgressing its laws in pursuit of his perceived authentic self. His neurotic tendencies manifest in hypersexual behavior, where his primary concern becomes prolonging his involvement with non-Jewish women solely to achieve sexual gratification. Women, therefore, become instruments of this pursuit, which ultimately results in emotional detachment and failed relationships, as he is unable to commit seriously. His systematic rebellion against Jewish law culminates in a hedonistic worldview centered on personal pleasure.

According to Lacan the drives differ fundamentally from biological needs because they can never be truly satiated, and do not aim at an object but rather circle perpetually around it.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (London and New York, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1992)

⁵⁷ Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, (Taylor Francis e-library, 2006),.47.

That is to say, the subject follows a certain pattern not to achieve the goal of satisfaction but to circle around it like repeating that pattern over and over. In other words, the subject follows a repeated trajectory, not to attain satisfaction, but to reenact the pursuit itself. This framework applies to Alexander Portnoy who does not remain with one woman or engage in a single act of rebellion. Instead, he moves cyclically from one transgression to another, not to achieve ultimate liberation, but to orbit the unattainable object of complete freedom from the constraints imposed upon him

Now, maybe the lobster is what did it. That taboo so easily and simply broken, confidence may have been given to the whole slimy, suicidal Dionysian side of my nature; the lesson may have been learned that to break the law, all you have to do is just go ahead and break it! All you have to do is stop trembling and quaking and finding it unimaginable and beyond you: all you have to do, is do it!⁵⁸

In this moment, Alexander recalls his first transgression: eating lobster, a food strictly forbidden by Jewish dietary law. For him, this act is a conscious rebellion, an assertion that the religious rule he had once feared could be easily broken without consequence. Interpreted through Lacan's theory of the drive, this event marks the onset of a repetitive behavioral pattern: he circles around the object of liberation through a series of taboo-breaking actions. As he discovers the fragility of these once-sacred laws, he becomes increasingly emboldened to violate them in the name of personal freedom. The guilt and moral anxiety that once accompanied religious obedience begin to dissolve.

Alexander continues by pointing out that these rules seem to be made up just to give birth to repressed obedient Jewish children. His reflections on the numerous prohibitive dietary rules

⁵⁸ Philip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint*, First Vintage International Edition, (New York, 1969), 52.

imposed during his upbringing serve as a poignant critique of the societal structures that shape individual identity. He observes:

What else, I ask you, were all those prohibitive dietary rules and regulations all about to begin with, what else but to give us little Jewish children practice in being repressed? [...] to remind us three times a day that life is boundaries and restrictions if it's anything, hundreds of thousands of little rules laid down by none other than None Other, rules which either you obey without question regardless of how idiotic they may appear[...]or you transgress.⁵⁹

In this passage, Alexander comes to the realization that freedom, particularly for those raised within conservative religious frameworks, can only be achieved through transgression. His statement suggests that even if rebellion involves immoral or socially condemned acts, it is preferable to passive conformity to rules he views as arbitrary and oppressive. Transgression in his case and the case of many other Jewish kids is the only way to achieve satisfaction. For Portnoy, rebellion, particularly through sexual expression, becomes a vital means of achieving personal satisfaction and asserting autonomy. This act of defiance is not merely about fulfilling biological urges but also about liberating himself from the constraints imposed by societal expectations. In his view, such transgressions are essential for living authentically and with respect to one's own desires. This pursuit of satisfaction is not simply the fulfillment of a biological need but aligns with Lacan's notion of the 'drive', a deeper compulsion toward symbolic or psychic fulfillment.

In Roth's novel there is one particularly formative experience for Alexander, which is the suicide of Ronald Nimkin. Later in life, he recalls the incident and is struck not only by the tragedy itself but by the way Nimkin's parents responded. Rather than mourning the loss of their son, they lament the perceived waste of the sacrifices and resources they had invested in him. This response enrages Alexander, who envisions a similar fate for himself: should he die, he fears his parents would grieve not for him, but for the unreciprocated effort and devotion

⁵⁹ Ibid.

they feel entitled to. This realization further solidifies his resentment toward the rigid, guilt-based structure of his upbringing and the emotional detachment it breeds.

Mrs. Nimkin, weeping over kitchen: why? why? why did he do this to us? Hear? Not what we have done to him, oh no, never that—why did he do this to us? To us! Who would have given our arms and legs to make him happy and a famous concert pianist into the bargain!
[...] YOUR FUCKING SELFISHNESS AND STUPIDITY!
[...] Maybe she means well, surely she must—at a time of grief, what can I expect of these simple people?⁶⁰

This passage reveals the emotional aftermath of Ronald Nimkin's suicide and the psychological impact it has on Alexander. His tone reflects deep-seated anger and unresolved trauma, as he projects blame onto Ronald's mother. Alexander sees in Ronald's life a mirror of his own—a life shaped by oppressive parental expectations. He interprets Ronald's suicide not as an act of personal weakness, but as a tragic consequence of the burdens imposed by a strict and emotionally manipulative Jewish upbringing. Witnessing the fatal result of Ronald's obedience compels Alexander to reject the very rules and expectations that led to such despair. For him, rebellion becomes a necessity for survival.

These Jewish parents, what, that they were able to make little Jewish boys believe ourselves to be princes[...] geniuses and brilliant like nobody has ever been brilliant and beautiful before in the history of childhood—saviors and sheer perfection on the one hand, and such bumbling, incompetent, thoughtless, helpless, selfish, evil little shit, little ingrates, on the other!⁶¹

Here, Alexander condemns the emotional inconsistency of Jewish parental figures. Children are exalted as perfect yet simultaneously condemned as failures, creating a psychologically unstable environment. This emotional whiplash leaves children unsure of their worth and love, inevitably leading to rebellion. The very rules meant to protect and guide them

⁶⁰ Ibid.,62

⁶¹ Philip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint*, First Vintage International Edition, (New York,1969),75

become sources of alienation. For Alexander, this imbalance fuels his resentment and leads to his early rejection of familial and religious authority. He recognizes this confusion in others like Ronald and sees himself as part of a collective generation of Jewish boys driven to rebellion by the same psychological torment. As he states: “What do we want, me Ronald and Leonardo? To be left alone! if only for half an hour at a time! Stop already hocking us to be good! Hocking us to be nice! Just leave us alone, God damn it.”⁶² Alexander addresses the Jewish parents in general, that is to say he is aware that every Jewish kid is also a victim like himself, he does not want to act as a good boy anymore, he is no longer subject to their rules.

Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory helps illuminate Alexander’s rebellion. Lacan posits that “the subject constantly attempts to transgress the prohibitions imposed on his enjoyment to go beyond the pleasure principle.” In Alexander’s case, the religious and familial restrictions become the barriers preventing him from accessing freedom and authentic desire. To reach that ‘jouissance’, a state beyond conventional pleasure, Alexander must break the rules. This is why he abandons obedience to his mother and begins engaging in acts of rebellion that intensify in adulthood, particularly through his sexual relationships with gentile women.

I have affairs that last as long as a year, a year and a half, months and months of love, both tender and voluptuous, but in the end-it is as inevitable as death-time marches on and lust peters out. In the end, I just cannot take that step into marriage. But why should I? Why? Is there a law saying Alex Portnoy has to be somebody’s husband and father?⁶³

This passage shows Alexander’s use of sexual freedom as a means of escaping the obligations and constraints imposed on him since childhood. He engages in repeated patterns of affairs, fulfilling what Lacan would describe as the compulsion to repeat. His refusal to marry reveals both a fear of commitment and an aversion to returning to a structure resembling the oppressive

⁶² Ibid.,77

⁶³ Philip Roth, *Portnoy’s Complaint*, First Vintage International Edition, (New York,1969),.66

domesticity of his upbringing. Lacan's theory of drive as inherently repetitive and death-oriented is applicable here, Alexander repeats the same relationships without seeking resolution, using them as acts of resistance rather than connection.

Alexander acknowledges his persistent desire for gentile women, identifying it as a common longing among Jewish men, he declares: "it's the Eddie Fisher in me coming out, that's all, the longing in all us swarthy Jewboys for those bland blond exotics called shikse."⁶⁴ His attraction to *shikses* serves both as an act of defiance and a desperate attempt at liberation. These women represent everything his own culture forbids: sensuality, freedom, and the exotic. Yet, his desire also betrays a lingering tie to his Jewish identity, his rebellion still revolves around it. In chasing *shikses*, he is not erasing his Jewishness but rather acting against it from within.

In this crass celebration of conquest: "look what I'm sticking my dicky into-look who I'm fucking: a fifty-foot fashion model! I get free what other pay upwards of three hundred dollars for! Oh boy, ain't that a human triumph, hub?"⁶⁵ Alexander exhibits the ultimate form of rebellion: transforming sex into a performance of superiority. By engaging in relationships with unattainable women, he feels like a victor not only over other men but over the cultural and moral codes that once restrained him. His Jouissance here is not only sexual but symbolic, an assertion of freedom and power.

Despite his repeated transgressions, Alexander later attempts a symbolic return to Judaism through a pilgrimage to Israel. However, this effort fails to reintegrate him into the religious and cultural world he left behind, as he states: "Running away! In flight, escaping again- and

⁶⁴ Philip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint*, First Vintage International Edition, (New York, 1969), 94

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 130

from what? From someone else who would have me saint! Which I ain't! and do not want or intend to be! Any guilt of my part is comical!"⁶⁶ Alexander's visit to Israel becomes yet another cycle in the repetition of drive. His return to Judaism feels alien, even absurd. He cannot re-enter a world structured around guilt, rules, and sanctity, it takes him back to the time he was filled with guilt and burdened with prohibitions and laws. In Lacanian terms, this attempt to return to the symbolic order fails because the object he chases, freedom through rebellion, is incompatible with submission to moral law. His identity is now built upon transgression, not obedience. Just as he rejected his family's version of virtue, he now rejects a spiritual redemption that demands he renounce the freedom he has fought for.

b/ Jouissance and Marwan Kanafani's 'Death Drive':

Benfodil's *Archéologie*, is a fragmented work of literature written in different forms, though the parts that interest us most are the ones in the form of a diary, which are entitled [Carnet De Bord...]. Its contents are attributed to Marwan Kanafani, who is writing a novel. However, his source of enjoyment soon becomes a source of suffering, and his numerous addictions have eventually ended his life. Throughout the novel, every time Marwan writes in his diary he seems intoxicated, and his consumption of the substances seems to increase and cause him physical harm. His health deteriorates rapidly while he tries to race time and complete his novel, though the deterioration seems to be self-inflicted.

“J'écris frénétiquement depuis deux bonnes heures d'affilée [...] Ma frénésie littéraire n'a d'égale que mon appétit à fumer. Je fume comme une locomotive. Le cendrier est plein. Mais je dois continuer. Ha, ha, ha, ha...”⁶⁷

This excerpt portrays Marwan's intense immersion in writing, likening it to a compulsive frenzy. The comparison to smoking like a locomotive and the overflowing ashtray underscores

⁶⁶ Philip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint*, First Vintage International Edition, (New York, 1969), 145

⁶⁷ Mustapha Benfodil, *Archéologie du chaos (amoureux)*, (Ed. Barzakh, 2007), 32.

his obsessive engagement with both his craft and his smoking habit. The repeated laughter ("Ha, ha, ha, ha...") suggests a sense of madness or delirium, possibly indicating a loss of control or a deep dive into the creative process

Lacan calls *jouissance* 'painful pleasure', he explains that there is only a certain amount of pleasure that the subject can bear; beyond this limit pleasure becomes pain. The term 'jouissance' thus expresses the paradoxical satisfaction that the subject derives from his 'symptom', or rather the suffering that he derives from his own satisfaction; Lacan explains that: "Jouissance is suffering"⁶⁸ In the seminar "The Ethics of Psychoanalysis", Lacan's elaboration on the notion of *jouissance* is connected to that of drive; the *jouissance* is the satisfaction not of the needs but of the drive. For him, any drive is both a sexual drive and a death drive, each drive is both a life drive and a death drive, and *jouissance* -as satisfaction of the drive-, may be sexual *jouissance* and destruction *jouissance*. Hence, the *jouissance* as conceived by Lacan is linked to the idea of drive satisfaction, but it is also a notion which he links to the idea of destruction:

Man's rebellion is involved here, the rebellion of Jederman, of everyman, insofar as he aspires to happiness. The truth that man seeks happiness remains true. The resistance to the commandment 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself' and the resistance that is exercised to prevent his access to *jouissance* are one and the same⁶⁹

In this quote Lacan shows how the pursuit of happiness can be attained only through rebellion, which can be seen as a sustained resistance against restrictions that may hinder this pursuit. Thus, it can be suggested that Marwan's own pursuit of happiness has been restricted by society; and to rebel he decided to resist his ascribed status. He wrote a novel in which he expressed scenarios of his denied fantasies, one of which was humiliating the woman who is having an

⁶⁸ Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (London and New York, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1992),184.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*,194.

affair with his father, Kheïra. He makes use of her as a character in his novel and created the wildest of fantasies with her being a source of abhorrence and desire. In his novel she was the one pursuing him, a pursuit which he admonished and refused with an arrogant air of superiority. In his book, he became everything he could never attain in real life, and thus, his choices were unbound by any limitations.

Marwan presents his protagonist, Yacine, with the opportunity to indulge his sexual fantasies, yet Yacine chooses restraint: “ [...] à son grand désespoir, je n’en fis rien, [...] je ... refermai ses cuisses pécheresse comme on referme le Livre de Désir sur la première page avant de l’avoir parcouru.”⁷⁰ This passage illustrates how he constructs a scenario to enact his dominant fantasies, only to halt himself, reflecting a complex interplay between desire and self-control. It also presents an opportunity for him to experience his domineering sexual fantasies, which appear to stem from a perceived disdain for women, possibly due to their lack of interest in him in real life. Marwan rebelled against the government with a group of his friends, all of whom, shared the belief that they were tortured artists and literary minds that have been denied the opportunity and the ability to fulfil their potential. However, the insurgence they have planned was not the typical revolt or uprising of the people against the government, but a rather subtle, long-term plan that would plant the seeds of freedom for all future generations. This plan consists of inseminating the daughters of government officials, and make them actually carry the seed of rebellion in their wombs.

“Tout le monde connaît faites l’amour, pas la guerre !
Moi je dis : faites les deux !
Ma foi, mais c’est la recette miracle ! La synthèse magique.
Idéale. Idyllique. Fomentez une révolution avec de l’amour !
[...] constituer un commando de tombeurs qui ferait tomber le régime en
faisant tomber enceintes les fiancées du régime.”⁷¹

⁷⁰ Mustapha Benfodil, *Archéologie du chaos (amoureux)*, (Ed. Barzakh, 2007), 28.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 75.

Even though, the methods he came up with to fulfil his insurgence might seem strongly questionable, we believe them to be his way to achieve the best of both worlds: expressing his discontent with the system by weaponizing women. His contempt for women was consistent throughout his novel and in actual life. His disdain was accentuated by the way he used women for his plan with little regard to them as other human beings, but rather objects that would satisfy a need. He demonstrated an extreme sexist behaviour, and a misogynistic attitude that has been embedded deep within him. His own hatred of the opposite gender which is caused by their disinterest in him, played a major role in fuelling his erratic behaviour. Yet, it can be assumed that the deeply rooted patriarchy in Algerian society was an encouragement for him to enforce the gender roles of the dominant male and the dominated female.

Lacan posits that the writer is often unaware of what they are doing when writing, as writing is influenced by the unconscious. This paradox suggests that a text cannot be understood in a reductive manner, as its meaning is shaped by unconscious processes beyond the writer's conscious control.⁷² This may probably be the case with Marwan as his repressed afflictions came rushing to the surface through his writing, more so as he had eventually executed the same plan in real life while documenting and sharing proof online. This made his actions less of a subconscious expression of unfulfilled desire and more of a deliberate act towards the satisfaction of the drive. Lacan presents 'desire' as an interdiction to overstep a certain limit in *jouissance*; the fantasy seems to be the place and the scene where this limit operates. As such, we were led to believe that Marwan succeeds in overstepping these limits through his fantasies. Thus, he acquired his *jouissance* as an enjoyment beyond 'the pleasure principle'. Lacan distinguishes '*jouissance*' as a paradoxical drive toward enjoyment that can also bring suffering. This is not mere pleasure, but a disturbing, often self-destructive kind of satisfaction. In *Seminar XVII*, Lacan offers a vivid metaphor: "jouissance begins with a tickle and ends with a

⁷² Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock Publications, 1977), 312.

blaze of petrol,”⁷³ illustrating how something seemingly pleasurable can escalate into something overwhelming or even catastrophic. This captures the compulsive and uncontrollable nature of ‘jouissance’.

Lacan further emphasizes that people can transgress limits not out of ignorance, but because ‘jouissance’ pushes them beyond rational understanding. His claim: “We would be quite wrong to think that, in the name of the self-restraint the fascinations of the imaginary impose on our weakness, men are incapable in certain situations of transgressing given limits without knowing what they are doing.”⁷⁴ suggests that individuals are often aware they are exceeding boundaries, yet still compelled to do so, driven by unconscious forces. Together, these ideas underscore how ‘jouissance’ resists containment by rational or moral frameworks. It is central to understanding human behavior that appears self-defeating, excessive, or irrational.

Furthermore, Lacan distinguishes ‘jouissance’ from ‘desire’ and ‘love’. As it has been already established, it is presented as something beyond the pleasure principle. ‘Jouissance’ shows itself as displeasure, but it is also a notion that Lacan links to the idea of ‘destruction’, as the subject seeks the ‘forbidden’, or the ‘transgressive’ to fulfil his enjoyment. Marwan is no stranger to this notion as his pleasurable addiction for writing and the use of illicit substances to keep himself awake becomes too much for his body. His physical, emotional and psychological state seems to disintegrate the more he progresses with his novel. In the diary entries he wrote in the days leading to his death, Marwan describes the physical state he has been in as desolate, weak and unnerving. He suffers from a chronic splitting headache, and a constant nausea caused by the lack of sleep, and the constantly increasing amount of weed he smoked. His mind though was in shambles; on the one hand his emotional state was precarious,

⁷³ Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 72.

⁷⁴ Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (London and New York, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1992), 199.

he closed off his friends as a way to avoid pain but ended up causing himself more suffering. The momentary pleasure he sought through self-medication, which meant self-harm, was no longer enough to satisfy him. On the other hand, his psychological distress was apparent in the language he used to express himself as it was broken down and fragmented in some areas.

[CARNET DE BORD...]

23h. Coup de barre. Très grande fatigue. La terre tourne autour de moi...Le sol se dérobe sous moi...Le parquet m'aspire...Mon trou noir intérieur me tire de toutes ses forces tourbillonnantes vers l'épicentre de mon abîme... Vertiges...vertiges...Mal à la tête...Terriblement mal à la tête...J'ai des serpents dans la tête...Mon cœur va s'arrêter...Je le sens...Je dois chuter...chuter vite...me parachuter...je sens la mort approcher...je la sens me héler avec sa faux...je la sens...je la vois...j'ai des nausées...d'affreuses nausées...j'ai des serpents dans la tête...Dieu comme j'ai mal...Mon Dieu...Maman...J'ai mal partout...
[...] j'ai des serpents dans la tête... terrible migraine...terrible, terreur...
[...] J'arrête tout.⁷⁵

The previous quote demonstrates the awful state Marwan is experiencing during his final days, a state so terrible that death becomes a desirable solution for him. He eventually fulfils this desire by ending his own life; thus putting an end to his suffering with a final act of pleasurable pain, the pain that would serve to set him free and relieve his suffering.

To conclude, this chapter explores how Alexander Portnoy and Marwan Kanafani embody Lacan's concepts of *jouissance*, drive, and rebellion. Alexander's compulsive transgressions against his Jewish upbringing, especially through sexual relationships, reveal a repetitive pursuit of liberation from oppressive cultural and familial restrictions, a drive that never reaches satisfaction but continually orbits around forbidden freedom. His rebellion is fueled by emotional trauma and a desire to escape guilt and control, exemplifying Lacan's idea of *jouissance* as a painful, destructive pleasure linked to both life and death drives. Similarly,

⁷⁵ Mustapha Benfodil, *Archéologie du chaos (amoureux)*, (Ed. Barzakh, 2007),162.

Marwan's self-destructive writing and substance abuse illustrate jouissance's paradox of pleasure intertwined with suffering, where his artistic rebellion and denied desires manifest as both creative expression and physical decay. Together, their stories illuminate how jouissance and drive propel individuals to rebel against prohibitions, seeking autonomy even at great personal cost.

V. General Conclusion:

Throughout this dissertation, we have identified significant parallels between *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969) by Philip Roth and *Archéologie du chaos (amoureux)* (2007) by Mustapha Benfodil. Both novels, as works of modernist literature, critically engage with the social constraints imposed by religion and politics within American Jewish and Algerian communities. Our analysis has demonstrated that these constraints play a crucial role in shaping individual identity and influencing sexual drive.

By applying key concepts from Lacanian psychoanalysis, we have illuminated various struggles faced by the protagonists, Alexander Portnoy and Marwan Kanafani/Yacine Nabolci. In the first chapter, Lacan's notion of the Unconscious and its formation through the Other helped us conclude that societal pressures, especially those from parents, can inflict deep, repressed trauma on children, trauma that profoundly impacts their lifelong psychological well-being. Childhood experiences thus fundamentally shape identity, with social restrictions and parental influence being central to this process.

In the second chapter, using Lacan's concepts of Jouissance and Drive, we argued that true enjoyment or fulfillment emerges only through breaking the constraints imposed on the individual. Both Alexander and Marwan suffer under oppressive social expectations and respond by rebelling against them. While social norms are generally accepted due to the fear of alienation, our study highlights the detrimental effects of conformity. Although social restrictions serve to maintain order, they can become suffocating for certain individuals who then seek freedom by challenging these rules. Sexuality, as one of the most heavily regulated taboos, becomes a primary domain for such rebellion, where the protagonists' pursuit of sexual desire represents their attempt to reclaim autonomy.

Our comparative analysis reveals that, despite their distinct cultural contexts, both novels portray strikingly similar themes. The American-Jewish and Algerian societies depicted share

religious conservatism, Judaism and Islam being notably traditional, as well as entrenched patriarchal structures, which profoundly shape the representation of women in both works.

In conclusion, the Lacanian theoretical framework proves well-suited to understanding the psychological complexities of Roth and Benfodil's characters. Identity formation is deeply affected by both psychological trauma and external social factors, and individuals' responses to these influences may lead them toward either conformity or a quest for liberation.

Future studies could explore these novels through a postcolonial or intersectional feminist lens, highlighting how gender, power, and colonial legacies shape identity. Analyzing the representation of women and national trauma could offer new insights. Alternatively, trauma theory or masculinity studies could further enrich the psychological dimension. Such approaches would broaden the cultural and theoretical scope of this comparative analysis.

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