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## Abjection in Fiction: A Critical Study of Roth's Nemesis

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This article aims to explore how humans react to the concept of mortality and the disgust they feel toward the decaying bodies of polio-stricken people in *Nemesis* (2010) by Philip Roth.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** This paper delves into the breakdown of Bucky Cantor's life by the advent of polio in Newark, in Roth's (1933-2018) *Nemesis* (2010), with the theoretical underpinning of Julia Kristeva's (b. 1941) abjection and by using qualitative method of research.

**Findings:** Abjection is portrayed in *Nemesis* through Bucky's deep sense of helplessness and disgust in the time of the unremitting polio epidemic, adding to his deep fear of contamination and loss of control of the environment and even his own body. Throughout the novel, the author has emphasized the long-suffering effects of polio on the human body and mind, causing disgust, and trauma. **Implications/Originality/Value:** The article fills the gap by accentuating the long-term repercussions of polio and how it can leave victims both physically and emotionally crippled which has not been researched before with the framework of abjection.

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## 1. Introduction

Polio, a devastating disease that plagued communities around the world for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, left a profound impact on innumerable lives. It provides an intense context for examining the theory of abjection because of the paralyzing effects of polio and the dread it generated in populations. The theme of polio and deprivation are expertly woven together in Roth's *Nemesis* (2010) which explores the depths of human vulnerability and unsettling effects of life.

Polio is an immensely transmissible viral disease that affects largely the children. It targets the nervous system, which roots the paralysis and chiefly promotes death. This disease stretched to the uttermost in the United States, leaving numerous children and adults paralyzed or iron lungs, harassed to breathe. Before the invention of the vaccine, over 364000 cases emerged in the United States from 1944-1954 (Silver, 2007 p.19). This epidemic became an influential source of terror, disrupting societies and compelling individuals to confront their vulnerability to an imperceptible and cruel rival. This context builds the underpinning of abjection in Roth's *Nemesis* (2010).

Roth (1933 –2018) was one of the prominent American authors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and he was recognized for his masterful storytelling and exploration of intricate human sentiments. Roth grew up in the town of Newark, the setting portrayed in his fictional work *Nemesis* (2010). He witnessed the epidemic of polio and wrote about this lethal disease and its crippling effects on the world. He says writing *Nemesis* (2010) helped him heal his childhood trauma of the polio pandemic and World War II. In an interview heard on Fresh Air, NPR, Roth said:

*“The war years, as a boy, are very vivid and sharp in my memory, Roth says. A child is alive between the ages of 8 and 12, and we had this big thing to be alive to—the war. The battles didn’t take place in the U.S., but we had everything else. So, I do know that period very well, and I didn’t have to think too much about the neighborhood because I went to that playground and remembered it all”* (NPR, 2010).

Roth's *Nemesis* (2010) is a fictional novel that explores the depths of human vulnerability and reconnoiters the unsettling aspects of existence through the lens of abjection by Kristeva (b. 1941). It illustrates the idea of abjection and how it develops and transforms itself into disgust and fear. Moreover, it further hovers on the borders of the self. Furthermore, the novel unfolds the events of disease, its traumatic effects, and how it reminds us of our mortality. As stated in the novel, *“People are frightened, says Mr. Cantor, and they are scared to death, so they worry about everything”* (Roth, 2010, p.38).

The novel is set in 1940s Newark, about the devastating disease of the polio epidemic. The narrative unfolds the story of Bucky Cantor, the protagonist, and the young playground director. As the epidemic ravages the community, Bucky grapples with guilt and a sense of hopelessness in the face of disease. Moreover, Roth expertly knits the themes of abjection into the narrative, thought-provoking the societal norms and prompting readers to confront their fears and susceptibilities. Bucky also embodies the agony and chaos experienced by the polio-affected people. He finds himself in the epicenter of the epidemic and directly witnesses the desolation caused by disease.

This novel further delves into the psychological and emotional ramifications of the polio epidemic on humans' lives through the lens of abjection. It is conceptualized by Kristina, in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982) and explores the unsettling and repulsive aspects of human existence, challenging societal norms and confronting individuals with their deepest fears and vulnerabilities. By intertwining the themes of polio and abjection, Roth crafts a narrative that engages readers on multiple levels. Through vivid descriptions and compelling storytelling, he transports us into the world of *Nemesis* (2010), allowing us to witness the physical and emotional turmoil faced by the characters.

The novel has the haunting presence of the polio epidemic and serves as a poignant manifestation of abjection, aligning with Kristeva's, exploration of societal perceptions surrounding bodily decay and the repulsive aspects of human existence. She demonstrates abjection as a moment, where the thin boundary between self and others gets blurred. Female bodies, bodily waste, death, decay, cannibalism, murder, and religious detestation are considered aspects of abjection (Pentony, 1996). She further identifies that human initially face abjection at the time of separation from their mother. Thus, as an adult when one confronts abject, in the form of separation, one simultaneously feels fear and trauma.

Moreover, Bucky, the central character of the novel embodies the struggles and existential turmoil associated with abjection. Marked by the loss of his mother at birth and confronted with physically impaired bodies due to the polio epidemic, Bucky confronts the fragility and limitations of human existence, blurring the boundaries between the self and the other. This confrontation with mortality and physical decay propels Bucky into a realm of abjection, where the repulsive aspects of human existence force him to grapple with his vulnerability and the unsettling nature of the world around him.

Furthermore, abjection entails disgust, disgust brings fear as it blurs the boundary between self and other, which perpetually involves fear. Bucky is both drawn to and repelled by the abjection. His fear of becoming a figure of abjection after contracting the disease of polio acknowledges the presence of fear. He recognized these feelings at the time of separation from his mother.

*“The corpse, Kristeva argues, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object” (Kristeva, (1982).*

The disease of polio in the novel brings with it unrepairable trauma. It becomes a collective ordeal for the people of Newark and left some people with the trauma of being crippled and others with the agony of separation from their loved ones. Throughout the novel, Bucky faces the emasculating trauma between life and death. Towards the end, he collapsed from the trauma of separation and the suffering of being a dead soul in a partially alive body.

Roth masterfully incorporates the concept of abjection through his vivid picturization of a polio-stricken world. The devastating impact of the disease is exemplified through the portrayal of crippled bodies, which not only evoke a sense of physical decay but also bring about a profound breakdown of meaning. These polio-affected individuals, trapped in their afflicted states, challenge societal norms and blur the boundaries that traditionally separate life and death. Roth's exploration of abjection goes beyond mere physical suffering, delving into the deeper existential struggles faced by the characters. By symbolizing the destruction of the distinction between life and death, Roth forces us to confront the unsettling aspects of human existence, prompting introspection and a reevaluation of our fears, vulnerabilities, and the fragility of life itself. Through his poignant portrayal of abjection, he captivates readers and invites them to embark on a profound and introspective journey throughout the pages of *Nemesis* (2010).

### **1.1 Research Objectives**

- To examine the physical and psychological consequences of abjection in individuals affected by polio in Roth's *Nemesis*.
- To explore the role of abjection as a source of trauma in the narrative of *Nemesis*.

### **1.2 Research Questions**

1. How does abjection affect individuals both physically and psychologically in *Nemesis* (2010)?
2. In what ways does abjection give rise to traumatic experiences in *Nemesis* (2010)?

## **2. Literature Review**

In contemporary times, the word "polio" resonates with people, evoking awareness of its profound impact on the human body. However, the exploration of its psychological dimensions, such as enduring trauma, the haunting fear of contagion, and the profound disgust associated with physical impairment, remains relatively unexplored in literature. In an illuminating interview, Roth shares his revelation, stating,

*“When I came to polio, it was a great revelation to me. I never thought of it before as a subject. And then I remembered how frightening it was and how deadly it was and I thought, 'OK, try to*

*write a book about polio*" (Roth, 2010).

The novel has been viewed from different perspectives. Franklin sees *Nemesis* as a guide for today's life during the Covid pandemic. He elaborates that the collective fear experienced by the people of Newark brought several cautionary measures:

"Children were forbidden from using the public swimming pool, going to the air-conditioned movie theaters, borrowing books from the library, going to the baseball stadium, sharing a soda with a friend, and buying food from street vendors. Those who could afford to send their children out of the city to camps or the Jersey Shore. Mailmen do not want to deliver mail and truck drivers do not want to deliver supplies. Bus drivers were refused to enter the Weequahic unless they had protective masks on" (Franklin, 2020).

All these measures taken by the people of Weequahic for protection can also be used to minimize the spread of COVID-19 and polio in today's world as well. Moreover, Jardine viewed *Nemesis* (2010) in the light traumatic journey of polio. This polio-stricken trauma leads to other traumatic legacies like the Holocaust and anti-Semitism. He argues for the understanding of the disease and uses it as a metaphor for the Holocaust. He further sheds light on various factors contributing to the trauma of polio. He also critically analyzed the character of Bucky, who has been criticized by the critics for not living a fruitful life after contracting the disease. He should show a hopeful attitude in the novel for the people who have contracted polio. Jardine argues that his character can be portrayed more positively to bring the light of hope for polio victims (2021).

Indeed, *Nemesis* (2010) can be viewed as a traumatic tale and the misery of Bucky's life adds to the trauma. Apart from that, Percec (2020) viewed *Nemesis* (2010) as a mystery. She says the novel is built on the fundamentals of mystery. The deadly disease claims the lives of children and its spreading agents roam around the city of Newark to haunt and hunt more people. He also portrayed the anger of the Jewish neighborhood adding to the elements of drama and making the protagonist Bucky a tragic hero. He further elaborates that the plot of the novel highly resembles the plot of detective novels, which adds to the mystery and thus it can be viewed as a mystery novel. Bucky is also considered a modern incarnation of the tragic heroes Oedipus and Job. The grand heroic status of the protagonist Bucky, and the framework add to the element of tragedy, which eventually portrays Bucky as Job and Oedipus (Stangherlin, 2016).

In a nutshell, this discussion has shed light on the reflective themes addressed in Roth's *Nemesis* (2010), which functions as a distressing guide for navigating the challenges of today's COVID-19 pandemic. The novel explores the concept of Holocaust trauma and the devastating impact it can have on individuals, using the character of Bucky Cantor as a modern picture of anti-Semitism. Moreover, it is also considered a mystery novel and deeply delves into the character of Bucky, which can be portrayed more positively. Furthermore, Bucky is also considered a modern depiction of Oedipus and Job. Lastly, the physical impairments suffered by the characters ultimately give rise to deep psychological trauma, obscuring the meaning of life itself.

The present work exclusively explores the fear and disgust experienced by the people of Newark due to the chronic presence of the disease. However, within the confines of this literary masterpiece, a game of abjection unfolds, revealing a fascinating aspect of the fiction in *Nemesis* (2010). The characters' experiences of physical impairment and their subsequent psychological uproar highlight the intrinsic abjection that pervades their lives. This revelation adds a layer of complexity to the narrative, emphasizing the profound impact of fear, guilt, and disease on the human psyche.

In essence, *Nemesis* serves as a powerful exploration of the human condition, particularly during times of crisis. Through its masterful storytelling, Roth's novel exposes the deep-rooted fears and qualms that arise in the face of a shattering pandemic. By interlinking themes of collective fear, guilt, and abjection, *Nemesis* (2010) forces readers to confront the harsh realities of life and the ambiguous nature of existence itself. The novel has been viewed from different perspectives highlighting various themes however, this specific exploration of abjection in the novel has not been done yet therefore, this research aims to fill this gap.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

Kristeva's theory of abjection (1982), argues that repulsion is an integral part of the human experience. According to Kristeva, the process of abjection involves experiencing a sense of intense aversion and apprehension that occurs when humans encounter something that is considered to be outside the realm of accepted norms and values. She notes that this experience is a crucial part of the development of identity, as it helps to create a clear boundary between the self and the other, and helps to define the boundaries of the self about the world (1982). This boundary-setting is an important part of the process of growing up, as it helps to create a clearly defined sense of self and identity. Furthermore, Arya (2017) notes that abjection is the repulsion caused in humans by bodily experiences. The process of abjection is similar to the phenomenon of disgust.

Kristeva defines the concept of abjection as "the expulsion of something which is a part of ourselves and yet is felt to be too much, too strong" and as "the horror of the other which is part of ourselves" (1982). This abject horror is strongly linked to the emotions of fear and disgust; it is a state of intense emotional, physical, and mental revulsion. According to Kristeva, "this revulsion may be triggered by physical objects, experiences, and situations, all of which may be experienced in the form of a "free-floating anxiety" (1982). This anxiety may be triggered by a variety of things, such as death, disease, and suffering. It may also be triggered by physical objects or experiences that are considered to be socially taboo.

According to Kristeva's theory of abjection, disgust toward disease can lead to trauma when it is seen as an external threat to the individual's sense of self. This disgust carries the threat of symbolic death, which produces "a reaction of horror, and even abject terror" in the individual. Through this process, the individual is forced to confront the fragility of their own identity and the possibility of death (1982). Bucky Cantor serves as an example of abjection in literature. Kristeva defines abjection as the experience of being outside of the symbolic order, of being excluded and ostracized because of one's difference. Bucky Cantor is considered an outsider in his community because of his youth, his occupation, and his Jewish ethnicity. His experience of disease in *Nemesis*, as put forth by Kristeva's theory, is one of disgust and trauma. Cantor's disease is seen as a physical manifestation of an emotional state and functions as a reminder of his mortality. Moreover, it serves as a reminder of the potential for death and suffering that lies within all of us, suggesting a connection between our physical and mental states. He experiences the fear of being the outsider and the fear of death, both of which are themes of abjection. It is this connection that leads to a sense of disgust and trauma, as Cantor is forced to confront his mortality and the fragility of his own life.

### **4. Research Methodology**

The study embraces a textual interpretation of Roth's *Nemesis* as a primary text. The theoretical framework implemented in the critical study is Kristeva's theory of abjection (1982). In addition, scholarly articles about the primary text, its author, and the applied theoretical framework are the secondary sources for the study. Moreover, Kristeva's work is validated to ratify the statistics gathered from various print and electronic media origins. Textual analysis is employed to examine the pandemic situation to historicize its effect on physical and mental health.

The study exercises qualitative methodology as it imparts an elaborative and extensive analysis of a literary work. This method focuses on the close textual reading of the novel, especially the themes interconnected with the concept of abjection. The significance of the study lies in the pestilent literature as a means to not let one escape from the horrific shackles of the realistic consequences. It explores how we form ideas about ourselves and our place in

society by rejecting certain ideas and identities that are deemed to be outside of our self-perception. Abjection is seen as a way to define the boundaries of identity, while simultaneously creating a sense of fear, revulsion, and taboo that ultimately serves to reinforce that identity. The approach to choose qualitative method is justified as it permits a profound understanding of the text, unfolding the elements of abjection in the novel.

## **5. Analysis**

Roth restores the true meaning of 'Nemesis' in his novel *Nemesis* (2010), as a cosmic balance and deity of vengeance. Therefore, the novel is about mortality itself, against which human nature strives. It can also be considered as the condition of filth connected with the disease (Budick, 2014). It is a blend of fiction and facts, based on a close-knit community living in Newark. The narrative begins with a central figure of the novel, Bucky Cantor who embraces firm religious convictions. The town of Newark is bound by its rigid adherence to strict moral codes and traditional values. However, as the narrative unfolds, an enigmatic epidemic engulfs the community and leaves a deteriorating impact on their lives. Bucky, who is tormented by the disease, finds himself not only struggling with his declining physical condition but also with a crisis of faith.

In Roth's last four novels, the protagonist is confronted with death, *Nemesis* (2010) is one of them. When reality hits Rothian characters, it creates a sense of responsibility in them. But when they reject the truth of their bodies, it leads them to social isolation and existential despair (Trepanier, 2023). Bucky's increasing sense of fear and disgust due to the rapid growth of polio leads to his increased alienation from others. As he perceives his surroundings and even his own body contaminated with polio, this state of abjection drives him more into isolation, detaching him from society and aggravating his internal turmoil.

Throughout the novel, Bucky tries to save the people around him, but when fatal cells of polio attack him, he feels like an 'abject' and isolates himself in a cage of memories. He does not want the people around him to get infected or get disgusted by his crippled and decayed body so he creates a shell of his own. As the sickness takes its toll on Bucky's health, his unwavering faith in the religious teachings of his society starts to wane. The collapse of his physical agility reflects the fragmentation of the religious order that was once the source of stability and meaning of life. Bucky becomes an emblem of the abject, as his failing body and wavering faith disrupt the conventional religious system, identity, and order of the community. The juxtaposition of Bucky's physical decay and the crumbling religious belief within the novel highlights the interconnectedness of the abject and the disruption of established structures.

*"Abject is a power which both unsettles the social order and activates a necessary psychological safeguard, abjection... settles the subject within a socially justified delusion, and it is a safety blanket" (Kristeva, 1982).*

As Bucky's body becomes gradually abject, his very existence challenges the religious boundaries, positions, and rules that were once considered sacred. The narrative digs into the complex psychological and emotional struggles faced by Bucky as he navigates the blurred boundaries of his own identity and tackles the dissolution of his religious beliefs. Moreover, abject, according to Kristeva draws us towards a point where the meaning collapses. The abject has to do with "What disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (1982). Religious abhorrence is also considered abject. In *Nemesis* (2010) Bucky experiences a parallel between his physical mobility and the crumbling of religious belief multiple times.

Kristeva's theory of abjection in particularly phenomenological terms, connects the abject with all that is fascinating and repulsive about the human body, specifically those aspects of bodily experiences that disturb bodily integrity. This notion is reflected in *Nemesis* (2010), through the reaction of Bucky to the polio epidemic. His deep fear of physical deterioration evokes a sense of disgust and horror, which disturbs his sense of self and others.

*“Fluids, orifices, death, decay, sex, defecation, vomiting, illness, menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth. Indeed, Kristeva primarily understands experiences of abjection in terms of bodily effect, moments of physical revulsion and disgust that result in a discharge, a convulsion, a crying out” (Kristeva, 1982, p.1).*

In *Nemesis*, the physical decay of polio-stricken bodies and the sight of crippled bodies struggling for their lives also create an image of abjectness for the people of Newark. “All around you there seemed to be something glaring, garish, rattling, and the noises and glares hit upon the little cell called your life, and shook it and scorched it” (Hardy, 2000). The crippled bodies in the novel symbolize the decay of physical integrity, forcing Bucky to face the frailty of his own body and the unsettling possibility of contamination.

In this exploration of the abject, the novel scrutinizes the unsettling effects of physical and spiritual deterioration, intertwining them with themes of belief, identity, and societal order. Through Bucky's journey, the narrative digs into the disintegration of established structures and the profound impact it has on individual lives. The theory of abjection, as elucidated by Kristeva, provides a thought-provoking lens through which to view the disconcerting and transformative experiences of the characters in *Nemesis*. The protagonist of Roth's *Nemesis* gets ill in a polio epidemic during the time of World War II and the disease condemns him to a lifetime in leg braces. When one young student, Alan Michaels dies from polio, Bucky is particularly affected. At Alan's funeral, when Mourner's Kaddish is recited, Bucky finds himself rebelling against the faith he was raised in. Bucky's anger mounts as he listens to the rabbi “praising God's almightiness, praising extravagantly, unstintingly, the very God who allowed everything, including children, to be destroyed by death” (Roth, 2010, p.47).

Kaddish's text, "praising God's almightiness", serves as the unlikely springboard for a sinister reconfiguring of divinity by Roth's protagonist. In itself, Kaddish is simply a short, formulaic prayer said at the end of a service— a sort of “Hallelujah”, similar to the Catholic Sanctus "Holy, holy, holy, lord God of the host". Historically, Mourner's Kaddish, recited in Hebrew by a minyan of ten Jewish men, took on significance as a way to speak on behalf of the deceased last Hallelujah of which he or she was no longer capable. The prayer, as translated, begins:

*“Glorified and sanctified be God's great name throughout the world which He has created according to His will. May He establish His kingdom in your lifetime and during your days, and within the life of the entire House of Israel, speedily and soon; and say, Amen. May His great name be blessed forever and to all eternity. Blessed and praised, glorified and exalted, extolled and honored, adored and lauded be the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, beyond all the blessings and hymns, praises and consolations that are ever spoken in the world; and say, Amen...” (Roth, 2010, p.36).*

The lines are brief and straightforward, but what stirs Bucky's ire is the invocation of God's power, the praise of his creation of the universe, and of his continuing role in all that happens in it. If everything is according to God's will, then God must be responsible for the death of innocent Alan Michaels. Why praise him? Why submit to him this way? In an inner monologue, Bucky convinces himself that even pagan sun worship would be preferable to honoring the God of the Torah, the God who brought polio to Newark:

*“How could there be forgiveness – let alone hallelujahs – in the face of such lunatic cruelty? ... [B]etter to sanctify and placate the refracted rays of Great Father Sun than to submit to a supreme being for whatever atrocious crime it pleases Him to perpetrate, ... to swallow the official lie that God is good and truckle before a cold-blooded murderer of children” (Roth, 2010, 37).*

Furthermore, Bucky's religious detestation symbolizes religious abjection. He blames the creator of the world for all the sufferings that the people of Newark encountered, without any warning. They became the sight of abject for the rest of the world. They were isolated and banished from the outside world, as people downcast them because the people outside their community of Newark were afraid of their morality. As explained by Kristeva,

*“Abject denotes the human reaction (horror, vomit) to a susceptible breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction between subject and object or between self and other. The prime example of what causes such a reaction is the corpse which traumatically reminds us of our morality” (1982).*

Additionally, as Roth's narrator writes of Bucky later in the novel, “His anger [was] provoked not against the Italians or the houseflies, or the mail or the milk ..., but against the source, the creator – against God, who made the virus”(Roth, 2010, p.38). The narrator reflects Bucky's emotional state, remarking that his anger was not directed towards the Italians, houseflies, or even the mundane aspects of life such as the mail or the milk. Instead, Bucky's fury was aimed squarely at the source, the very creator - God Himself - who had brought forth the devastating virus.

Bucky's anger, directed towards the divine, highlights the betrayal and his scuffle to reunite his religious beliefs with the suffering he experiences. The virus becomes a symbol of the abject, an embodiment of the collapse of order and meaning, and Bucky's resentment towards God reflects his profound disturbance at the disintegration of his own identity and the crumbling of his religious convictions. As the narrative unfolds, Bucky's anger becomes an upsetting expression of his search for meaning in the face of the abject, ultimately leading him on a profound journey of self-discovery and questioning the nature of faith itself. The novel's end finds Bucky living out a dreary life in Newark as a lonely bachelor strapped in leg braces. His anger at God never ceases. His suffering is so great, so systematic, that he believes only an all-powerful creator God could have caused it.

*“Somebody had to make this place. God, for him, is an omnipotent being who was a union not of three persons in one Godhead, as in Christianity, but of two a sick fuck and an evil genius” (Roth, 2010, p.39).*

Roth's crippled hero develops a more extreme understanding. Bucky Cantor's God exists but he's a criminal. The disgust and fear of being trapped in the web of polio is a communal trauma for the people of Newark but for Bucky, it was a continuous tussle of saving people around him. He was more concerned about his students, his neighbors, and his loved ones. He was haunted by the loss that he had in the past and blamed himself for all the misfortunes of his life. In the novel, he is characterized as an "unhappy child" because he has a life full of traumas. His mother died while giving him birth. His father spent his life in jail and was under his grandfather's care.

The loss of his mother at the very beginning of his life made him more sensitive toward the people around him. His childhood is linked with the trauma of loss; the loss of his first object petit a, his mother. And his life goes parallel with trauma, at an early age of his life, his eyesight got weak and his dream to be in the army was scattered. His life became an embodiment of distress and disappointments.

*“His grandmother, with whom he still lived while commuting to Panzer, heard him weeping in his bedroom the night his buddies Dave and Jake went off to Fort Dix to begin basic training without him. He was ashamed to be seen in civilian clothes” (Roth, 2010, p. 21).*

The loss of his every desire makes him more vulnerable to the people around him. The fear of being the victim or the carrier made him restless and resentful. He left Newark to escape the horror inside his soul but fear chased him



towards the Indian Hills. "Bucky only had a continuous thought: He's not carrying polio" (Roth, 2010, p. 82). He took a new start in Indian Hills but he somehow knew that the darkness of his life would bring something horrible here too. "From the moment he'd agreed to the Indian Hill job, he was sure he'd come down with polio and lose everything" (Roth, 2010, p. 87).

Towards the end when polio struck him, His life became a clear picture of abjection. He was neither dead nor alive. He caged himself from the outside world. Mercia, the only good thing that happened in his life, detached himself from her as well. His body was crippled along with her deadly soul. He does not want to be the symbol of disgust or horror for others and not to be the carrier of the disease for anyone so he kept himself in a shell of his own. "Stop, I beg you! You think it's your body that's deformed, but what's truly deformed is your mind!" (Roth, 2010, p. 150). Polio affects his mind and his soul more than his body. He was deformed inside out. He was partially dead and partially alive. His life starts with the loss of his mother and takes him towards the loss of distinction between self and other and between life and death.

## 6. Conclusion

In a nutshell, Roth's *Nemesis* (2010) can serve as a true depiction of human sufferings, decayed bodies, fate and disgust, and the search for meaning amidst uncontrollable circumstances. The novel is viewed through the lens of the theoretical underpinning of Kristeva's abjection. Bucky throughout the novel tried to save people from the disease polio, which is the bringer of crippled bodies, fragmented memories, and a collective trauma to the people of Newark. But the fat has a tragic end for the protagonist of the novel, he becomes the abject for others while saving them, he contracted the disease which leads them to guilt and isolation as he was disgusted by his own crippled body. He became the sight of abjection for the people around him.

He blamed God multiple times, as he considered God to be the sole reason to bring the deadly disease of polio to the world of Newark. He has been the victim of religious abjection as well. Furthermore, Roth skillfully portrays the physical and psychological turmoil faced by Bucky Cantor, due to the devastating polio epidemic. Roth's narrative not only highlights the fragility of human existence but also challenges the readers to confront the uneasy realities of mortality and vulnerability, ultimately illuminating the profound impact of abjection on the human body and psychology.

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