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A Jewish Writer's Rebellion and Return:
On Philip Roth's *Zuckerman Bound* Trilogy

从菲利普·罗斯《被缚的朱克曼》三部曲看
犹太作家的反叛和回归

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Abstract

This M.A. thesis is a study of Philip Roth's *Zuckerman Bound* trilogy. As one of the most prominent and controversial Jewish American novelists, Philip Roth always draws heavily upon his Jewish upbringing and his life as a successful writer to explore conflicts that occur to Jewish people, especially Jewish American writers in the modern era, of which the *Zuckerman Bound* trilogy is an ideal example. Beneath the unexpected episodes and the seemingly loose construction, his works actually form a compact organic unity. This thesis aims to discuss, on the basis of textual analysis, through the process the psychological "self" attains the cultural "identity", the complicated journey of a Jewish writer Nathan Zuckerman's rebellion and return in the *Zuckerman Bound* trilogy.

The thesis is composed of six parts including an introduction and a conclusion. In the introduction, a literary overview of Philip Roth's writing and his works is presented, especially that of the *Zuckerman Bound* series. And the key terms and the basic referential frame are explicated for the following analysis.

The first chapter provides a detailed introduction to the story of the *Zuckerman Bound* series, which actually displays a circular structure from the perspectives of narrative mode, time arrangement, identity overlapping, and plot settlement.

The second chapter gives an in-depth analysis of Nathan Zuckerman's split selves based on the conceptions of selfhood in psychoanalysis, raised respectively by William James, Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. Through the exploration of Zuckerman's counterpart relationships with several main characters—male or female—throughout the series, we are able to perceive Zuckerman's self conflict as a Jewish descendant and as a conscious writer, in fact and in fiction, and thereupon perceive his rebellious attitude towards the outside pressure.

The third chapter interprets Zuckerman's eager need for a measured self from the perspective of sociology, therefore probes into the analysis of the core themes of the trilogy—self-redemption and identity reconstruction. Nathan Zuckerman is trying to regain his Jewish identity by searching for a surrogate father, and the ironic misunderstanding across the trilogy announces that he has to carry on his journey for a complete balanced self. Self split and identity reconstruction are two major clues

that run through the plots of the trilogy, which mark the protagonist's development from rebellion to return.

The last chapter extends the discussion to the identity dilemma of major Jewish American writers and their different solutions, which goes to the major theme of the trilogy—a Jewish writer's rebellion and return. If the theme of rebellion is fully presented in the previous three parts of the trilogy, in the epilogue the hidden appeal for return is thoroughly expressed. *The Prague Orgy* is a plot conclusion as well as an artistic sublimation. It is an end to the protagonist's previous unyielding fight against the outside pressure and his unremitting search for his measured self. By returning to father's land and rescuing father's literary heritage, Zuckerman gradually redeems his split self and regains his lost identity.

The thesis comes to the conclusion that the trilogy actually abides by a circular structure in form, content, and theme, all of which unmistakably point at the direction from rebellion to return. Nathan's growth, as well as his narration, goes from confusion to stability, from split to integration, and eventually ends in balance. From *The Ghost Writer* to the epilogue, the writer-protagonist finally settles with his multiple sub-selves and comes to terms with his struggling consciousness. In other words, in the *Zuckerman Bound* trilogy, Philip Roth, under the name of Nathan Zuckerman, walks step by step towards the direction of return in a most rebellious gesture.

Key Words: *Zuckerman Bound* trilogy; rebellion; return

摘要

本文应用精神分析理论和社会学理论分析犹太作家菲利普·罗斯的早期作品《被缚的朱克曼》三部曲，旨在解析主人公奈森·朱克曼从反叛到回归的成长历程。这部评论界莫衷一是的作品事实上是罗斯个人特色的鲜明体现，貌似松散的结构和出人意料的情节背后，是主人公朱克曼对一个完整的“自我”及“身份”的不懈追寻和探究。

本文由六部分组成。绪论部分对菲利普·罗斯在当代美国文坛的地位，个人特色及写作风格做了初步介绍，并简述了朱克曼三部曲的研究现状。

第一章分析朱克曼三部曲（包括中篇《布拉格狂欢》）的环形结构，从叙述视角、时间安排、身份重叠、情节设置四个方面揭示这四个故事在形式上形成了一个回归的叙述循环。

第二章引入詹姆斯·弗洛伊德及拉康的精神分析理论，从心理学的概念出发分析三部曲的中心情节，即主人公朱克曼的冲突自我，揭示出小说中的几个重要角色都和朱克曼本人有着千丝万缕的对应关系，是他不同层面不同意义上的分裂自我。这种分裂反映出朱克曼犹太后裔与作家身份之间的冲突，在现实与虚构之间的矛盾，以及他应对外界压力所采取的反叛姿态。

第三章从社会学角度解读朱克曼渴望治愈的心理诉求，朱克曼迫切渴求寻回其丢失的身份，他不断寻求“替代父亲”，试图通过充当他人之子，重新找回自己的犹太身份，确立自己的完整自我，而横亘三部曲的身份误解注定他的自我寻求旅程要一直延续。分裂自我和身份重建是贯穿三部曲的核心情节的两条主线，事实上代表着三部曲在内容上的反叛和回归。

第四章将主题延伸至犹太作家的普遍身份困境以及他们的应对策略，进而引出三部曲的主题：犹太作家的反叛和回归。如果说前三本书中充分表达了反叛的主题和隐藏的回归诉求，尾声无论从形式还是内容都凸显了回归的主题。布拉格之旅既是对前面三部作品的收尾也是升华，是朱克曼找回自我的救赎之旅。朱克曼在文学创作中踏上反叛之路，却在拯救父辈手稿的过程中弥合分裂的自我，逐步走向回归。

通过重新界定三部曲的情节设置和中心思想，可以得出结论：无论从形式、内容、还是主题，《被缚的朱克曼》三部曲都遵循着一个隐藏的环形结构，其间暗含着主人公朱克曼从反叛到回归这一历程的脉络。事实上罗斯借朱克曼之名，从颠覆历史到拯救文化，从沦陷自我到找回身份，以一种反叛姿态一步步走向回归。

关键词：朱克曼三部曲 反叛 回归

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Introduction

There is no doubt that Jewish American writers have formed a spectacular scene in the English world of letters. The constellation includes Saul Bellow, I.B. Singer, Bernard Malamud, and the name Philip Roth always rises as one of the most controversial and is almost deemed to be “misleadingly grouped” (Halio, 1992: 1) with the formerly mentioned names by the Roth experts. It is not that Philip Roth is not qualified enough for the title of a “leading Jewish American writer”. This one-time Pulitzer Prize winner, two-time National Book Award and National Book Critics Circle Award receiver, and three-time PEN/Faulkner Award owner has defended his position as one of the most honored authors of his generation time and time again in his prolific writing career which crosses half a century. Ever since the first book *Goodbye, Columbus* published in 1959, Roth has begun to show his brilliant gift in depicting Jewish life in post-war America with his unique wit, irony, and humor. However, unlike his predecessors who are mostly preoccupied with the traditional Jewish themes and values such as historical retrospect or immigrant struggling, Philip Roth tends to deal with the real modern living and mental situation of the American Jewish people. Just because of his explicit exploration of the “dark side” of the Jewish culture in his fictions, many times does he excite the anger of the Jewish readers and is accused as a betrayer of Jewish culture in order to gain “American” acceptance.

In fact, although being the son of the first generation Jewish immigrants, Philip Roth regards himself as an American writer above all. The book *The Fiction of Philip Roth* records his words as follows: “I am not a Jewish writer; I am a writer who is a Jew. The biggest concern and passion in my life is to write fiction, not to be a Jew.” (McDaniel, 1974: 243) Under such a candid acknowledgement, no wonder his name is forever combined with sharply controversial remarks. He is known to be adept at describing the “extremes and absurdities” of the Jewish world, and he calls

“sheer playfulness and deadly seriousness” his “closest friends” (Searles, 1992: 98). Yet no serious critic would dispute his place as one of the best authors and story-tellers in the contemporary American literary field.

Philip Roth is not the first who takes the American-Jewish culture conflicts as the main theme, yet before him no one has ever caused so much controversy. He is neither the first who chooses writing as the occupation for his protagonist, yet before him no one has ever made such a dense fog between the author and the hero, that even the author’s own claim cannot ease readers’ doubt. A series of twisted vocabularies are introduced to interpret his work, among which we can see paradoxes like “written and unwritten world” or “autobiographical fiction and fictional autobiography” that only authoritative critics may give an authentic explanation.

And such is the way Philip Roth gets along with his readers and critics. Although he shows at times in different interviews or his own works of literary criticism to discuss the themes of his novel, he is under no control in the creation process. Being known as an “unusually economic writer” (O’Donnell, 1983: 367), Philip Roth apparently knows well about the techniques he needs to create an artistic effect as complicated as it could be even within the most limited space. His tone of writing is either cold or fervent, and his protagonist might be pious or regicidal. Sometimes the hero could be immersed in meditation, plunge into whimsicality, or gang up with insane people, and sometimes the plots in one book could be totally and dramatically overturned in another (see *Counterlife*). For one thing, it could be attributed to the typical feature of the postmodern writers to have an “unreliable narrator”; for another, the fact that Philip Roth is a mastered writer with profound subjects allows us to reread his work, and we may reach the conclusion that beneath the abstract subtitles and the seemingly loose construction, his works actually form a compact organic unity. On this point, the *Zuckerman Bound* trilogy, a writing that is not given due attention since its publication, is an ideal example.

The *Zuckerman Bound* trilogy—also known as the *Zuckerman Bound* series—is comprised of *The Ghost Writer* (1979), *Zuckerman Unbound* (1981), *The Anatomy*

Lesson (1983), and the novella *The Prague Orgy* (1985). The series traces the development of the protagonist Nathan Zuckerman—or Roth’s alter brain as he calls—from an aspiring young writer to a socially compromised, and psychologically besieged literary celebrity. The story begins from the first book *The Ghost Writer* with a middle-aged man’s recollection of some day twenty years before, when he is a young emulating writer, Nathan Zuckerman, bothered with father-son conflicts for the content of his unpublished story and is trying to seek another kind of paternal approval and spiritual support from a literary maestro E. I. Lonoff, with the intention of building himself not only as a conscientious writer, but more importantly, a responsible Jewish son. The recount shifts quickly from the juvenile flashback to the narrative present in the second book *Zuckerman Unbound*, in which the middle-aged successful Nathan Zuckerman poses as a famous public figure with a notorious reputation within the Jewish society, and is cursed by his own father on death-bed, thus falls into the situation of a homeless, fatherless, and baseless wretch. The suffering develops into a bizarre torturing physical pain in the third part *The Anatomy Lesson*, where Nathan is reduced into both writing block and existence dilemma, while in the epilogue *The Prague Orgy*, Nathan tries to redeem himself through a long-distance salvage of a Jewish father’s literary heritage.

Roth might not have settled a trilogy scheme initially since each book of the series appears to be self-contained when they first come out in print, and even when all the four parts are collected together and given the name *Zuckerman Bound: A Trilogy and an Epilogue* in 1985, there are still not a few Roth experts and critics trying to deny its literary and artistic value as a whole unity. Joseph Epstein suspects that Roth is deliberately fishing for fame in this self-obsessed fiction series about a writer’s life (Epstein, 1984: 62), and Bruce Allen judges it as a book “stays on ground” (Allen, 1988: 358). Among those critics who admit the series’ merit, the interpretation still varies greatly. Jay L. Halio regards the trilogy as a “massive” yet comic *Bildungsroman* (Halio, 1992: 157), in which the writer-protagonist undergoes a struggling journey full of family dispute, social pressure, culture conflict and imagination—a word that Halio would emphasize. Yet in Debra Shostak’s eyes, “the

hero has not been educated into a role that draws him in line with the dominant social and literary ideologies of the dying world”, and in the narration Roth illustrates a “postmodern turn” from “mediated *vrai*” to “material reality” (Shostak, 2004: 204). Donald M. Kartiganer believes that the major concerns of the trilogy—“writing, reading, the cycles of process and possession, and the human suffering that limits utterance”—could all be encapsulated and extended to “the evocation of silence” (Kartiganer, 2007: 35), and James D. Wallace, in his utterly unfeared courage, claims that *Zuckerman Bound* “explores and exploits the tensions of the Oedipal conflict” (Wallace, 1991: 18).

Despite all the different voices, the common understanding of the trilogy agrees that it records the protagonist’s constant search for a balanced self in an identity crisis. Indeed, either critics’ acute charge of the work’s self-centeredness or their great concern about the protagonist’s self-development has proven an undeniable fact that “self” is indisputable the constant and most striking theme throughout the series. While following “the game of self-revelation and self-disguise that Roth has been playing for three decades” (Berryman, 1990: 177), we may find out the protagonist’s many conflicting selves in literary world and in Jewish society, in actuality and in fantasy, and eventually discover his true “self” behind the veil. Nathan Zuckerman is a severely afflicted sufferer of the outside misunderstanding, and those split selves represent all his resistance to the external oppression. Each one records a page of conflict and each one marks a step in the way of rebellion. Meanwhile, Nathan Zuckerman never stops his journey of attaining or rebuilding an ideal “self”. His self crisis stems from his identity dilemma, and throughout the series he is always eager to complete his identity as an American writer and as a Jewish descendant, as an artist and as a son. So lose is to regain, and split is to complete. It is a story about self-splitting as well as identity reconstruction, and the trilogy records the protagonist’s rebellion as well as his return. Nathan Zuckerman, in his unyielding fighting against the outside pressure and his unremitting search for his measured self, is actually seeking for not only a solution for his inner crisis, but also a reconciliation with the outside world. In other words, he walks step by step

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