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**Identity Crisis and Female Representation:
The Reading of Main Characters in Philip Roth's
*The Human Stain***

身份危机和女性表征:

解读菲利普·罗斯《人性的污秽》中的主要人物

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Abstract

Philip Roth (1933-), since his debut *Goodbye, Columbus* in 1959, has published twenty-eight pieces of works up to now and gotten almost all of the prizes for literature save the Nobel Prize for Literature and thus established himself as a big name in the landscape of contemporary American literary circle. Therefore he is regarded as “America’s greatest living novelist” and one of the most prominent writers in contemporary American literature, and so on. However, Roth is also considered as one of the most controversial writers in contemporary American literature. The content of some of his works, for instance, concerned with “sexual perversity”, and his harsh satiric portraits of Jewish life have inspired considerable critical debate. While some commentators laud Roth’s skill at rendering dialect, his exuberance and inventiveness, and his sense of humor, other critics view his works as anti-Semitic, sexually perverse, or self-indulgent.

In general, Roth draws much upon his Jewish-American upbringing to explore such concerns as the search for self-identity, conflicts between traditional and contemporary moral values, and the relationship between fiction and reality. However, Philip Roth is “THAT LITERARY RARITY—AN AMERICAN NOVELIST WHO gets better with age”. Roth sets out in his later years to explore new territory, to make each novel an experimental, challenging, even outrageous effort, which can be manifested in his later “thematic trilogy” that encompasses *American Pastoral* (1997), *I Married a Communist* (1998) and *The Human Stain* (2000). This thematic trilogy has been well received by the critics and the academia. The last one of it *The Human Stain* is the study case in this thesis.

In *The Human Stain*, Roth depicts the life of an African American named Coleman Silk, passing himself as a Jew, the life through his adolescence to adulthood to downfall and death. Through and centering on this Silk, Roth, by presenting before the reader the various realities of contemporary American society, satirizes “the persecuting spirit” behind the former American president Bill Clinton’s sexual scandal, condemns the frenetic enthusiasm of “political correctness” for its destruction to the innocent, reproaches the Vietnam War for its trauma on the

individual and the society, and, more importantly, reveals the identity crisis existing not only in the African Americans but also in the white, and eventually suggests that all of these result from the dominating white discourse and are all the stains of American society and human being.

This thesis **“Identity Crisis and Female Representation: The Reading of Main Characters in Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*”**, aims at studying this great but controversial writer's acceptance and reputation in English-speaking countries and in China, the critical views about *The Human Stain*, his own style represented in this novel, the male characters' identity crisis, the female characters' female representation or femininity, and other interpretations of the novel. This study briefs the acceptance of Roth in English-speaking countries and in our country, scrutinizes some of the critical views about *The Human Stain* and also analyzes Roth's boundary crossing and his own style in this novel. The critical approach is to explore Roth's main characters from the perspectives of identity crisis and female representation, in virtue of some critical views about identity put forward mainly by Geoffrey Madell and of the classification of the images of women in literature by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. The purpose of this thesis is to study the main characters of this novel in order to analyze how Roth depicts his male characters in light of identity crisis and his female characters through their female representation and/or male gaze. This thesis consists of introduction, three chapters and conclusion.

The **“Introduction”** introduces Philip Roth's high reputation in English-speaking countries and lower acceptance in our country, his artistic achievements in his old age, a brief explanation about the story in *The Human Stain*, and a general view of this thesis.

“Chapter One Literary Reflection: Critical Views about *The Human Stain*” presents a brief view about Roth's boundary crossing in his writing of this novel, scrutinizes a number of critical views in English and in Chinese about this novel, and explicates how Roth's own writing style is demonstrated in it. The boundary crossing in this novel renders Roth a much more successful writer than before, which is manifested in the critical views about Roth and this novel. These critical views study his novel from the perspectives of its subject matter and theme, its characterization, its social setting, its style, language and narrative techniques,

with a view to praising Roth the master and this remarkable novel. The later part of this chapter holds that Roth completes *The Human Stain* by way of “Sheer Playfulness and Deadly Seriousness” and expounds how it is represented in the novel from the angles of its social setting and several main characters, aiming in the meantime at introducing the social background and the general knowledge of the main characters to the reader.

“**Chapter Two Identity Crisis in *The Human Stain***” provides a generally theoretical view about identity and expounds the identity problems occurring to three male characters Coleman Silk, Lester Farley and Nathan Zuckerman, with the intention of pointing out that identity crisis is crucial for the understanding of these characters and Roth’s writing.

First, this chapter explores some theoretical underpinnings about identity, including its definition, the factors that can determine a person’s identity in general and put forward by Geoffrey Madell, its relation with responsibility and freedom, and finally the relationship between group identity and individual identity.

Second, this chapter investigates into the hero Coleman Silk’s identity passing and his tragic destiny, by way of firstly making a brief introduction about identity passing, or racial passing, enumerating some passing narratives in American literature written by African Americans and the white writers as well, aiming at providing a historical and literary frame of reference for this novel, explicating then in a great detail why and how Coleman in his adulthood passes himself as a white, disclosing what Coleman has achieved after passing as a white and analyzing his dramatic correlation with Faunia Farley, Delphine Roux, Lester Farley and Nathan Zuckerman, and finally explaining in what way his identity passing accounts for his tragic destiny.

Third, this chapter discusses war trauma and Lester Farley’s identity crisis so that identity issue in war literature is briefly demonstrated, with a view to pointing out that the war can change a person’s identity, thus eliciting the discussion of Lester’s identity destroyed by the Vietnam War. How Lester’s mentality or identity and his life are ruined by the war and what has been done to rescue him and his life are detailed. Roth’s criticism on the Vietnam War is also referred to in the end.

Finally, this chapter expounds in what way the narrator Nathan Zuckerman

experiences some transformation as far as his male identity is concerned. In light of his contact with Coleman and his interest in Coleman's sex life, Nathan, a recluse, re-entangles with life and experiences vicariously, due to his physiological problems, what Coleman experiences in his involvement in Faunia.

“Chapter Three Female Representation in *The Human Stain*” studies the female representation or femininity of three female characters in the novel according to Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's analysis of images of women in literature as the angel and the monster. First, this chapter probes into Faunia Farley's female representation, arguing that she is an Other under male gaze, explicating in what way she is not only an angel-like woman but a monster woman as well, elaborating on her relation with Coleman Silk and her complicated role as a female in the drama of Roth's writing, her identity crisis also being analyzed in the meantime. Secondly, this chapter elaborates on why and how Delphine Roux's female identity and sexuality is in crisis and in what aspects that she is a complicated figure bearing some features of a monster woman, in virtue of demonstrating her relation with Coleman Silk and her past experience in her home country France and her rebellion against her mother, of depicting her frenetic mood and her out-of-control behavior towards Coleman. In the end, this chapter illuminates the female representation of Mrs. Silk, Coleman's mother, a tough and strong black woman by means of depicting briefly her conduct as a wife, a mother and a nurse, her intelligence and ability, and of adumbrating vividly what she endures in her son's identity passing, aiming at pointing out that she is an angel woman, different from Faunia's and Delphine's complicated female characteristics.

In **Conclusion** part, I restate the main ideas of this thesis after an overall comment on Philip Roth's achievement in his later years and present more interpretations of this novel from the perspectives of the Cultural Studies, genre study, the narrative techniques employed in the novel, and of the “anxiety of influence”. The profundity and readability of Roth is thus made clear, although there is a certain foible in Roth's narrative, that is, too much Roth himself in his writing. Roth's own purpose in writing this novel and the thematic significance of this novel are also briefed near the end in this part.

Philip Roth is a great writer in the landscape of contemporary American

literature, and his *The Human Stain* is a remarkable novel, which is worth studying, due to its content with richness, its theme with profundity and its narrative techniques with tact. Identity crisis in male characters and female representation in female characters, having made a great impression on the reader, play a crucial role in the understanding of this novel and will stimulate much greater study interest of more readers in Philip Roth and his novels.

Key Words: Identity Crisis; Female Representation; Philip Roth; *The Human Stain*

摘 要

菲利普·罗斯（1933- ），自从于 1959 年发表他的成名作《再见了，哥伦布》以来，到目前为止已经发表了 28 部作品，获得了除诺贝尔文学奖以外的几乎所有文学奖项，并以此确立了自己在当代美国文学界的伟大作家的地位。因此，他被人称为“在世的最伟大的美国作家”，当代美国文学界最杰出的作家之一，等等。然而，罗斯也被认为是当代美国文学界最具有争议性的作家之一。他的一些作品中譬如有关“性反常（错乱）”的内容和他对犹太人生活的尖锐而讽刺性的刻画激起了评论界巨大的争议。当有评论家在称赞罗斯运用语言的艺术，他旺盛的创作力和独创性以及他的幽默感的时候，也有评论家认为罗斯的作品具有反犹、性反常和自我放纵的倾向。

一般认为，罗斯较多地利用他的犹太裔美国人的出身来探究一些譬如追寻自我身份、传统道德价值观与当代道德价值观之间的冲突以及小说与虚构之间的关系等的问题。然而，菲利普·罗斯是“这样一种文学少有现象——随着年龄的增长，其创作更为完善的一位美国小说家”。罗斯在他的晚年开始去探索一些新的领域，使他的每一本小说都体现出试验性，挑战性，甚至出现一些不同凡响的努力尝试。这些都可以在他晚年的“主题三部曲”中得到体现。这一三部曲是由《美国田园诗》（1997），《我嫁了一个共产党员》（1998）和《人性的污秽》（2000）组成的。它们已经得到了评论家和学术界的高度评价。三部曲中的最后一本《人性的污秽》即是本文的研究对象。

在《人性的污秽》一书中，罗斯描写了一个把自己伪装成犹太人的非裔美国人科尔曼·西尔克的一生，即从他的青少年到成年再到他的垮台以及死亡的一生。通过以及围绕着西尔克的一生，罗斯给读者呈现了当代美国社会的现实图景，讽刺了隐藏在美国前总统比尔·克林顿性丑闻背后的“迫害精神”，谴责了“政治正确性”给无辜者以毁灭的狂热激情，批判了越南战争给个人和社会造成的伤害，更为重要的是，罗斯还揭示了存在于非裔美国人以及其他白人身上的身份危机，并最后指出所有这些都是占主导地位的白人话语导致的，它们

都是美国社会及人类的污秽。

本文《身份危机和女性表征：解读菲利普·罗斯〈人性的污秽〉中的主要人物》，旨在研究这位伟大但有争议的作家在英语国家以及在中国的声誉和接受情况，有关《人性的污秽》这本小说的评论，体现在这本小说中的罗斯本人的风格，小说中男性人物的身份危机，女性人物的女性表征或女性特质，以及对这本小说的其他解读。论文简单地介绍了罗斯在英语国家和在中国的接受情况，详细地论述了有关《人性的污秽》的一些评论，同时也简单介绍了罗斯在这本小说中的跨越界限的写作并分析了他独特的个人风格。论文借用主要由杰弗雷·马德尔提出的有关身份的一些理论观点和由桑德拉·M·吉尔伯特和苏珊·古芭对文学中的女性形象的分类，从身份危机和女性表征的角度来分析小说中的主要人物。其目的在于通过研究小说中的这些主要人物，以分析罗斯是如何通过身份危机来描写他的男性人物以及如何通过女性表征或通过男性人物的凝视来刻画这些女性人物形象的。本文是由引言、三章和结论组成。

“引言”部分介绍了菲利普·罗斯在英语国家的极高声誉和在中国的较低的接受情况，罗斯晚年的艺术成就，《人性的污秽》的故事情节和有关论文的总的概述。

“第一章 文学思考：关于《人性的污秽》的评论”简单地论述了罗斯在这本小说中的跨越界限的写作，仔细地分析了许多关于这本小说的英文和中文的评论，并解释了罗斯自己的写作风格是如何在这本小说中得到体现的。跨越界限的写作使罗斯成为一个比以前更为成功的作家，这可以在关于罗斯和这本小说的评论中看出。这些批评观点从主题、人物刻画、社会背景、文体、语言和叙事技巧等方面来研究罗斯的小说，旨在称赞大师罗斯和这本非凡的小说。这一章的后半部分认为罗斯是以“纯粹的游戏和极度的严肃”的方式写就《人性的污秽》这本小说的，并结合小说的社会背景和几个主要人物来解释它是如何在小说中得到体现的，同时旨在向读者介绍小说的社会背景和几个主要人物的相关情况。

“第二章 《人性的污秽》中的身份危机”提出了关于身份问题的一些总的理论观点，解释了发生在三个主要人物科尔曼·西尔克，莱斯特·法利和纳森·祖克曼身上的身份问题，其目的在于指出身份危机对理解这些人物和罗斯

的小说都至关重要。

首先，本章探讨了关于身份的一些理论观点，包括它的定义，总体上影响一个人的身份的因素以及由杰弗雷·马德尔提出来的一些影响因素，它与责任和自由的关系，最后还探讨了集体身份与个人身份之间的关系。

其次，本章还深入探讨了主人公科尔曼·西尔克的身份伪装和他的悲剧命运。通过简单介绍关于（种族）身份伪装的定义，列举美国文学中由非裔美国作家和白人作家创作的伪装叙事，给小说提供了一种历史的和文学的框架，然后再详细地解释了科尔曼为什么以及如何在他的成年时期伪装成一个白人，揭示了科尔曼在伪装成白人之后所取得的成就，分析了他与福妮雅·法利，德芬妮·鲁克斯，莱斯特·法利和纳森·祖克曼之间的戏剧性联系，并最后说明他的身份伪装如何导致了他的悲剧命运。

再次，本章也讨论了战争带来的创伤和莱斯特·法利的身份危机。战争文学中的身份问题得到了简单概述，以指出战争可以改变一个人的身份，从而引出关于莱斯特被越南战争毁坏了的身份的讨论。莱斯特的才智和身份以及他的生活是如何被战争摧毁的，又采取了什么措施去拯救他和他的生活也得到了论述。罗斯对越南战争的批判也有提及。

最后，本章也详细地论述了叙述者纳森·祖克曼以何种方式体验了发生在他的男性身份上的转变。借助于他与科尔曼的交往和他对科尔曼性生活的兴趣，纳森，一个隐居者，重新开始了与生活的纠缠，并以一种替人感受的方式（由他的生理问题导致的）体验着科尔曼在他与福妮雅的情爱纠葛中所体验到的激情。

“第三章 《人性的污秽》中的女性表征” 根据桑德拉·M·吉尔伯特和苏珊·古芭对文学中的女性形象的分析并归纳为天使与魔鬼两种类型来研究小说中的三个女性人物的女性表征或女性特质。首先，本章探讨了福妮雅·法利的女性表征，认为她是男性凝视下的他者，解释了她如何既是一个天使般的女性同时又是一个魔鬼型的女性，详细论述了她与科尔曼·西尔克的关系和她作为一个女性在罗斯的写作中所呈现出的复杂性，与此同时，本章也分析了她的身份危机。其次，本章通过论述德芬妮·鲁克斯与科尔曼·西尔克的关系，她在她的祖国法国的过去经历，她对母亲的反叛，并通过描写她的疯狂的心境和她

对待科尔曼的无法控制的行为，解释了为什么德芬妮的女性身份和性特征会处于危机之中以及如何表现出来的，并说明了德芬妮为何是一个带有魔鬼型特征的复杂女性人物。最后，本章通过简单地刻画西尔克夫人作为妻子、母亲和一位护士的品行，她的聪明才干，并生动地描绘了她在儿子科尔曼的身份伪装中所经受的痛苦折磨，以指出她是一个不同于福妮雅和德芬妮这两个复杂女性的一个天使般的女性，从而清楚地阐明西尔克夫人，科尔曼的母亲，一个坚强的黑人妇女的女性表征。

“结论”部分在总的评价了菲利普·罗斯在他晚年所取得的文学成就之后重申了本文的观点，并介绍了如何从文化研究、体裁研究、叙事技巧以及“影响的焦虑”等角度来解读《人性的污秽》。因此，罗斯的深刻性和可读性可见一斑，尽管在罗斯的叙事中有一个明显的不足之处，即在他的文本中有太多罗斯自己的身影出现。罗斯自己的写作意图和这本小说的主题意义也在这一部分的结尾处得到简略提及。

菲利普·罗斯是当代美国文坛一位伟大的作家。他的《人性的污秽》是一本非同寻常的小说，其内容非常丰富，其主题非常深刻，其叙事技巧的运用非常老练，非常值得研究。体现在男性人物身上的身份危机和女性人物身上女性表征，给读者留下了深刻的印象，是理解小说的关键所在，将会激发起更多的读者对菲利普·罗斯及其小说的更大的研究兴趣。

关键词：身份危机；女性表征；菲利普·罗斯；《人性的污秽》

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