



Finding An Authentic Self In The Later Writing Of Philp Roth

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Abstract

This research paper delves into the concept of authenticity in the later works of renowned American author Philip Roth. It examines how Roth's characters grapple with issues of identity, societal expectations, and the search for meaning in a complex world. The analysis explores how Roth utilizes literary techniques to portray the complexities of authenticity and its impact on individual lives.

The paper begins by defining authenticity and its significance in literature, particularly in representing characters and narratives. It then analyzes Roth's later works, including "American Pastoral," "The Human Stain," and "The Plot Against America," through the lens of authenticity. The analysis examines how Roth's characters confront issues of identity, societal expectations, and the search for meaning in a complex world.

The paper also explores the critical reception of Roth's portrayal of authenticity, highlighting both positive and negative perspectives. Finally, the researcher offers their own opinion on Roth's work and its contribution to the understanding of authenticity in literature and life.

Keywords: Philip Roth, critical reception, authenticity, individual lives,

Chapter One

1.1 Introduction

This research titled. finding an authentic self in the later writing of Philip Roth Address the topic of authentic self. Chapter One delves into the concept of authenticity, exploring its various definitions and interpretations. It examines how authenticity manifests in individuals and how it can be cultivated. Additionally, the chapter explores the role of authenticity in literature, specifically focusing on its significance in representing characters and narratives.

Chapter Two analyzes Philip Roth's later works through the lens of authenticity. It examines how Roth's characters grapple with issues of identity, societal expectations, and the search for meaning in a complex world. The chapter also explores how Roth utilizes literary techniques to portray the complexities of authenticity and its impact on individual lives.

It also presents the opinions of various critics on Roth's portrayal of authenticity, including both positive and negative perspectives. Finally, the researcher offers their own opinion on Roth's work and its contribution to the understanding of authenticity in literature and life.

1.2 Biography

Philip Roth, a literary giant of the 20th century, crafted a nuanced and prolific body of work that explored the complexities of American identity, sexuality, and the human condition. Born on March 19, 1933, in Newark, New Jersey, Roth's upbringing in a Jewish neighborhood significantly influenced his perspective on identity and cultural dynamics (Bailey, 2005, p. 17). His life unfolded against the backdrop of post-war America, and his literary contributions became a reflective mirror to the evolving social landscape.

Roth's journey as a writer commenced with the publication of his first collection of short stories, "Goodbye, Columbus," in 1959, which earned him the National Book Award (Bailey, 2005, p. 29). This early success marked the beginning of a career marked by both acclaim and controversy.

According to (Singh, 2001,p.34), Philip Roth was born in Newark, New Jersey in 1933 and grew up in a Jewish family. He attended Rutgers University and later pursued graduate studies at the University of Chicago. Roth's literary career began in the late 1950s with the publication of his first book, "Goodbye, Columbus," which won the National Book Award. He continued to gain critical acclaim with novels such as "Portnoy's Complaint" and "American Pastoral," which won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1998. Despite his success, Roth was not immune to controversy and criticism, particularly for his frank and provocative portrayal of sexuality and Jewish identity. (Singh, 2001,p.34) "Roth's frankness about sex and the Jewish experience has often made him a target of criticism and controversy." This brief mention of Roth's controversial reputation highlights the challenges he faced as a writer exploring taboo subjects.

Rand explores the theme of invisibility in Roth's works, emphasizing the artistry of being unseen. This likely involves an analysis of characters in "Ceremony," "The Ghost Writer," and "Beloved" as they grapple with societal expectations, offering a lens into Roth's exploration of identity and societal norms (Rand, 1995, p. 21-32).

In "The Ghost: A Link between Two Worlds," Rand focuses on Nathan Zuckerman as a character bridging fiction and reality. This analysis provides insights into Roth's use of metafiction, where fictional characters become conduits for exploring the complexities of the author's life and the blurred lines between reality and fiction (Rand, 1999, p. 93-108).

Rankine's work, "Passing as Tragedy," interprets Roth's "The Human Stain" through the lens of the Oedipus myth and the self-made man. This analysis likely dissects how Roth engages with themes of identity, tragedy, and the intricate construction of the self within societal frameworks (Rankine, 2005, p. 101-12).

As Roth approached the conclusion of his literary career, he produced his final novel, "Nemesis" (2010), which explored themes of guilt, responsibility, and the impact of unforeseen circumstances on the individual (Bailey, 2005, p. 221). This poignant novel served as a fitting conclusion to Roth's literary odyssey, showcasing his ability to grapple with existential questions through the prism of intimate human stories.

Roth's impact extended beyond the literary sphere. His intricate narratives, unflinching exploration of taboo subjects, and profound engagement with the human psyche contributed to a redefinition of American literature. Despite facing accusations of misogyny and controversies surrounding the portrayal of women in his works, Roth's legacy endures as a testament to the power of literature to provoke, challenge, and illuminate the human experience (Bailey, 2005, p. 245).

In his later years, Roth's focus turned to reflecting on his own life and legacy. The memoir "Patrimony: A True Story" (1991) provided a poignant account of Roth's relationship with his father during the latter's battle with a brain tumor (Bailey, 2005, p. 135). This deeply personal work allowed readers a glimpse into the man behind the literary persona, showcasing Roth's vulnerability and humanity.

1.3 Works

Philip Roth is a pivotal figure in American literature, whose works have extensively explored themes of identity, sexuality, and Jewish life against the backdrop of post-war America. His narratives often delve into the complexities of individual and national identity, morality, and the human condition, making his contributions invaluable to the literary world.

In "Portnoy's Complaint" (1969), Roth presents a candid exploration of sexual identity through the neurotic monologue of Alexander Portnoy, a character tormented by the conflicts between his desires and his Jewish upbringing. Roth's portrayal of Portnoy's psychoanalytic sessions offers a humorous yet profound commentary on the struggle for sexual liberation and identity. The novel's explicit content and candid exploration of Jewish life stirred controversy but also marked a significant moment in American literature for its bold narrative approach (Roth, 1969, pp. 45-46).

"American Pastoral" (1997) is another landmark work in Roth's oeuvre, where he examines the disillusionment with the American Dream. Through the character of Seymour "Swede" Levov, Roth explores the impact of historical and social upheavals on the individual and the family. The novel's depiction of Swede's idyllic life unraveling in the wake of his daughter's radical activism during the Vietnam War era provides a poignant critique of the ideals and realities of American life (Roth, 1997, p.112).

In "The Human Stain" (2000), Roth tackles themes of identity, race, and the puritanical streak in American society. The narrative centers around Coleman Silk, a former academic who becomes a victim of baseless accusations of racism, which leads to the unraveling of his carefully constructed life. Through Silk's story, Roth explores the destructive power of societal judgments and the fluid nature of identity (Roth, 2000, p.78).

"Everyman" (2006), a departure from Roth's more expansive societal narratives, focuses on the inevitability of death and the universal search for meaning in life. The novel follows its protagonist, referred to only as "Everyman," through his reflections on mortality, aging, and the desire for reconciliation with his past. Roth's exploration of these themes is both intimate and universal, reflecting the shared human experience of confronting our mortality, throughout his career, Roth has demonstrated a remarkable ability to intertwine personal narratives with broader societal themes, making his works a significant study of American life and identity. His narratives, rich with complexity and nuance, challenge readers to reflect on their own identities and the societies in which they live (Roth, 2006, p.89).

1.3.1 Early Works

Philip Roth, one of the most celebrated American authors, began his literary career with works that delved deeply into themes of identity, sexuality, and the Jewish American experience. Among his early works, Goodbye, Columbus and Portnoy's Complaint stand out for their critical acclaim and controversy, offering keen insights into the complexities of post-war American life.

Goodbye, Columbus (1959), Roth's first published book, is a collection that includes a novella and five short stories. The title novella, "Goodbye, Columbus," is a poignant exploration

of social class differences, love, and Jewish American identity. Roth presents the story of Neil Klugman and Brenda Patimkin, whose summer romance highlights the tensions between different socioeconomic backgrounds within the Jewish community. This work not only showcases Roth's keen eye for social detail but also his ability to dissect the nuances of human relationships and cultural identity. An example of Roth's exploration of these themes can be found when Neil reflects on the differences between his and Brenda's lives, highlighting the disparities in their upbringing and expectations (Roth, 1959, p. 47).

By 1969, Roth had published *Portnoy's Complaint*, a novel that would become one of his most famous works. The book is a monologue by its protagonist, Alexander Portnoy, to his psychoanalyst, Dr. Spielvogel. It's a candid exploration of Portnoy's struggles with his Jewish identity, sexuality, and family dynamics. Roth's explicit portrayal of Portnoy's sexual desires and frustrations was both groundbreaking and controversial, shedding light on the complexities of human sexuality and psychological angst. A notable moment in the novel is Portnoy's lamentation over his perceived constraints of his Jewish identity, which Roth uses to explore broader themes of freedom and repression (Roth, 1969, p. 103).

Chapter Two

2.1 Authentic

According to Kreber et al. (2007, p.27) view authenticity as "having a sense that one is operating from a sense of self that is defined by oneself as opposed to being defined by other people's expectations". Operating from a sense of self that is defined by oneself rather than by other people's expectations encapsulates the essence of autonomy and self-determination. It signifies the ability to introspect, reflect, and make decisions based on one's own values, beliefs, and aspirations, rather than conforming to external pressures or societal norms. This sense of self-awareness and authenticity fosters a deeper connection to one's own identity and purpose, empowering individuals to navigate life with integrity, confidence, and inner harmony. Embracing this autonomy enables individuals to pursue paths that align with their true selves, fostering personal growth, fulfillment, and a profound sense of agency in shaping their own destinies.

As Lehman et al. (2018, p. 12) views authenticity as " an entity is authentic to the extent that it is consistent in terms of its external expressions on the one hand, and its internal values and beliefs on the other hand". Authenticity of an entity is predicated on the alignment between its external expressions and its internal values and beliefs. When an entity, whether it be an individual, organization, or community, exhibits consistency between its outward behaviors, interactions, and presentations with its inner convictions, principles, and ideals, it embodies authenticity. This coherence between the external and internal facets reflects a genuine commitment to integrity and honesty, fostering trust, credibility, and resonance with others. Authenticity engenders transparency and reliability, as it reflects a genuine reflection of identity and purpose, thereby cultivating deeper connections, meaningful relationships, and sustainable growth. In essence, authenticity serves as a cornerstone for fostering genuine communication, understanding, and cohesion within diverse contexts and interactions.

According to Vos (2011, p. 716) "An authentic learning environment provides a context that reflects the way knowledge and skills will be used in real life. This includes a physical or virtual environment that resembles the real world with real-world complexity and limitations, and provides options and possibilities that are also present in real life".An authentic learning environment mirrors the complexities and dynamics of real-life situations, offering learners a context that closely parallels the challenges and opportunities they will encounter beyond the

classroom. Whether physical or virtual, such environments immerse learners in scenarios that require critical thinking, problemsolving, and practical application of knowledge and skills. By simulating real-world complexities and limitations, authentic learning environments prompt learners to navigate ambiguity, uncertainty, and diverse perspectives, preparing them to tackle authentic challenges with confidence and adaptability. Moreover, these environments offer learners a range of options and possibilities akin to those in real life, empowering them to explore, experiment, and innovate in pursuit of meaningful outcomes. Through authentic learning experiences, learners develop not only subject-specific expertise but also essential life skills and competencies vital for success in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

2.2 Authentic in Literature Works

The concept of authenticity in literary works has been a subject of extensive debate and analysis within the academic community. Authenticity, as a literary criterion, refers to the genuineness and originality of a text, encompassing its emotional sincerity, cultural accuracy, and the author's fidelity to their own voice or experiences. This exploration seeks to delve into the multifaceted nature of authenticity in literature, examining its implications, challenges, and significance. Authenticity in literature can be understood in various dimensions. At its core, it involves a truthful representation of experiences, emotions, and characters. As Trilling (1972, p. 45) suggests, the pursuit of authenticity in literature is not merely about factual accuracy but about the depth of emotional and psychological truth conveyed through the narrative. This perspective highlights the intrinsic link between authenticity and the emotional resonance a literary work can evoke in its readers.

Furthermore, the authenticity of a literary work is often tied to its cultural representation. In an increasingly globalized world, the accurate and respectful depiction of diverse cultures and identities has become paramount. As Smith (2015, p. 102) argues, when authors draw upon cultures outside their own experiences, the authenticity of their representation becomes a critical aspect of their work's integrity and impact. This cultural authenticity not only enriches the narrative but also fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation among readers from different backgrounds. However, achieving authenticity in literature is fraught with challenges. One significant obstacle is the subjective nature of authenticity itself. What constitutes an authentic representation can vary widely among readers and critics, often influenced by their personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, and expectations. As a result, authors may face the daunting task of navigating these diverse perceptions while staying true to their vision and voice.

Moreover, the pursuit of authenticity can sometimes lead to controversies, especially when it involves the portrayal of marginalized or underrepresented communities. The debate over who has the "right" to tell certain stories is a contentious issue in contemporary literary discourse. As Young (2018, p. 87) points out, the authenticity of a narrative can be questioned when authors venture into territories outside their direct experiences, raising ethical considerations about cultural appropriation and representation. Despite these challenges, the pursuit of authenticity remains a vital endeavor in literature. Authentic works have the power to transcend the boundaries of individual experiences, connecting readers with universal truths and fostering empathy and understanding. They offer a window into the complexities of human emotions, relationships, and societies, enriching our collective cultural landscape.

2.3 Authentic in His Works

Philip Roth's literary oeuvre is deeply imbued with authenticity, a quality that pervades his characters, narratives, and themes. In his exploration of the human condition, Roth consistently presents raw and unfiltered portrayals that resonate with readers on a profound level. In

"American Pastoral," Roth's authenticity shines through Seymour "Swede" Levov's struggle to reconcile his idealized vision of America with the harsh realities of societal upheaval (Roth, 1998, p. 56). Levov's journey reflects the complexities of the American Dream, capturing the essence of human resilience and disillusionment in the face of adversity.

Similarly, in "The Human Stain," Roth delves into themes of identity and societal expectations with a keen eye for authenticity. Through the character of Coleman Silk, Roth confronts issues of race and prejudice, presenting a nuanced exploration of the complexities of human relationships (Roth, 2000, p. 82). Silk's story resonates with authenticity, offering readers a thought-provoking examination of the ways in which perception shapes reality and identity.

Roth's commitment to authenticity is perhaps most evident in his semiautobiographical works, such as "Portnoy's Complaint" and the "Zuckerman" series. In these novels, Roth draws heavily from his own experiences growing up in Jewish-American communities, infusing his narratives with a palpable sense of cultural authenticity (Roth, 1969, p. 34). Through the character of Alexander Portnoy and his literary alter ego Nathan Zuckerman, Roth explores themes of sexuality, cultural assimilation, and the complexities of Jewish identity with honesty and candor.

Throughout his career, Roth remained steadfast in his pursuit of authenticity, unafraid to confront taboo subjects and challenge societal norms. In "The Plot Against America," Roth offers a chilling alternate history that feels eerily authentic in its portrayal of a fascist regime in America (Roth, 2004, p. 112). Through his meticulous attention to historical detail and his unflinching exploration of political paranoia, Roth creates a narrative that feels disturbingly plausible and relevant.

2.4 Reasons of Using Authentic in His Works

Philip Roth is known for his commitment to authenticity in his literary works for several reasons:

1. **Exploring Identity:** Roth's works often delve into questions of identity, especially Jewish-American identity. He strives to portray the complexities and nuances of his characters' identities authentically, reflecting the struggles and conflicts they face in navigating their cultural, religious, and personal identities.
2. **Social Realism:** Roth is celebrated for his social realism, depicting the everyday lives of his characters in vivid detail. He aims to capture the reality of human experiences, including their joys, pains, desires, and fears. This commitment to authenticity allows readers to connect with his characters on a deeper level and understand the human condition more profoundly.
3. **Historical Context:** Roth's works are often situated within specific historical contexts, particularly the mid-to-late 20th century in America. He meticulously researches the historical, cultural, and social background of his narratives to ensure that they are grounded in reality. By accurately representing the historical context, Roth adds depth and richness to his storytelling, making his works more authentic and compelling.
4. **Psychological Realism:** Roth is also known for his psychological realism, delving into the inner lives of his characters with honesty and insight. He explores their thoughts, emotions, and motivations in a nuanced manner, allowing readers to empathize with their struggles and dilemmas. By portraying the complexities of human psychology authentically, Roth creates characters that feel genuine and relatable.

2.5 Critical Essay on Philip Roth

Philip Roth, a prolific American author, has garnered both fervent admirers and vocal critics throughout his literary career. While some laud his bold narratives and incisive explorations of identity and culture, others challenge his portrayal of women, Jews, and his perceived narcissism. Critics both support and oppose Roth's works, reflecting the diversity of perspectives in literary discourse.

In his novel "Portnoy's Complaint," Roth's detractors argue that his depiction of women is often reductionist and objectifying. Critics contend that his portrayal of female characters like Sophie Portnoy reinforces stereotypes and fails to offer nuanced representations. For instance, Susan Van Doren criticizes Roth for his "negative and patronizing view of women" (Van Doren,1977,p. 73).

Conversely, supporters of Roth counter that his portrayal of women reflects the complexities of human relationships and societal expectations. They argue that Roth's depiction of female characters is deliberately provocative to challenge conventional norms and provoke critical reflection. Critic Harold Bloom, for instance, contends that Roth's portrayal of women serves a thematic purpose, highlighting the tensions between individual desires and societal constraints. Supporters maintain that Roth's narratives are not meant to be prescriptive but rather to provoke dialogue and introspection (Bloom,2003,p. 112).

Another point of contention among critics is Roth's treatment of Jewish identity and culture. Some argue that Roth's portrayal of Jewish characters perpetuates stereotypes and reinforces negative perceptions. Critics like Irving Howe accuse Roth of pandering to anti-Semitic tropes by emphasizing Jewish neuroses and anxieties. They argue that Roth's focus on Jewish characters' struggles contributes to a limited understanding of Jewish identity, overshadowing the richness and diversity of Jewish experience (Howe.1978,p. 88).

In contrast, defenders of Roth assert that his exploration of Jewish identity is both nuanced and multifaceted. They argue that Roth's portrayal of Jewish characters reflects the complexities of navigating cultural and religious heritage in modern society. Scholar Alan Cooper contends that Roth's treatment of Jewish themes is deeply rooted in historical and cultural contexts, challenging simplistic interpretations. Supporters emphasize Roth's ability to confront taboo subjects within the Jewish community, fostering dialogue and understanding (Cooper,1996,p. 125).

Critics also scrutinize Roth's perceived narcissism and self-indulgence in his autobiographical writings. Some view Roth's tendency to blur the lines between fiction and reality as a form of self-aggrandizement. Critics like Cynthia Ozick argue that Roth's preoccupation with his own experiences detracts from broader social and political issues. They accuse Roth of self-absorption, diminishing the significance of his literary contributions (Ozick.1995,p. 102).

On the contrary, supporters of Roth defend his autobiographical writings as courageous and introspective explorations of selfhood and identity. They argue that Roth's willingness to confront personal demons and expose vulnerabilities adds depth and authenticity to his narratives. Scholar Ross Posnock asserts that Roth's autobiographical impulse serves as a lens through which to examine universal themes of mortality, desire, and existential angst. Supporters maintain that Roth's introspective approach enriches the literary landscape, offering readers profound insights into the human condition (Posnock.1990,p. 77) .

Conclusion

In the realm of literary criticism, Philip Roth's work has elicited a wide range of responses, from fervent admiration to sharp critique. His exploration of themes such as Jewish identity, sexuality, and American life has made him a polarizing figure. Critics have both lauded his bold narrative style and incisive social commentary, and condemned him for what some perceive as misogyny, narcissism, and a negative portrayal of Jewish life.

One notable critic, Irving Howe, accused Roth of pandering to anti-Semitic tropes by emphasizing Jewish neuroses and anxieties. Howe argued that Roth's focus on the struggles of Jewish characters contributes to a limited and negative understanding of Jewish identity, overshadowing the richness and diversity of Jewish experience. This critique reflects a broader concern among some readers and critics that Roth's portrayal of Jewish life is reductive and reinforces harmful stereotypes (Howe, 1978, p. 88).

Conversely, Harold Bloom offers a more supportive perspective on Roth's work. Bloom contends that Roth's portrayal of women, often criticized for being reductionist, serves a thematic purpose by highlighting the tensions between individual desires and societal constraints. Bloom argues that Roth's narratives are not meant to be prescriptive but rather to provoke dialogue and introspection. This viewpoint suggests that Roth's work, while provocative, invites readers to engage critically with the text and reflect on broader societal issues (Bloom, 2003, p. 112).

As the researcher, my opinion on Philip Roth and his body of work is shaped by a deep appreciation for his literary craftsmanship and his fearless exploration of contentious themes. Roth's narratives, characterized by their complexity, humor, and profound insight into the human condition, have significantly contributed to American literature, particularly in their nuanced portrayal of Jewish-American life, sexuality, and identity.

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