

Roth response



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Human Stain: A Novel The Human Stain is the final novel of the trilogy written by Phillip Roth about the post World War II American life. The series began with American Pastoral in 1997 followed by the I Married a Communist novel in 1998. The trilogy is seen as some form of fictional chronicle of American history in the past half-century, covering World War II, the McCarthy era, Vietnam, the Civil Rights movement, Watergate and the impeachment of Bill Clinton.

The novel, The Human Stain, is narrated by Nathan Zuckerman who was a neighbor to Coleman Silk, the protagonist in the story. It was explained that Zuckerman's interest in Coleman's life is triggered by the latter's death when he discovered that his friend is actually African-American while all the while his identity has always been that of a white man.

Silk was a professor of classics in a community college in New England when the story took place. His life harbors one secret - that of his black ancestry - as his stature in the community was carefully cultivated. The world thinks that Coleman Silk is Jewish and even his family - his wife and children - didn't know that he was African-American. This choice was influenced by a rejection he experienced when he was young.

The story revolved around the lives of Silk, his coworkers in the college, his love affair with Faunia - a woman half his age and a utility worker to boot - and the issues that they have to deal with such as racism, gender, relationship and contemporary American life as a whole.

The Human Stain tackled two different kinds of passing. First is the one that concerns crossing the race line and second is that of the class line. The story effectively captured the scenarios that illustrated the arguments in answering the question: Which is more difficult of these two? Forgetting your

past involves cruelty, cowardice and the anguish that come with betraying yourself and your roots. In crossing the class lines, people have to contend with the absence of common references, education, social background, manners, tastes, behaviors and attitudes including what the society has to say about the discrepancies.

The Human Stain is a philosophical novel that gives us valuable insights about the contemporary American life. It highlighted, for instance, the fact that today most of us find it difficult to deal in depth with someone from another class than someone from another race. It was different about a hundred years ago. The Human Stain in Roth's opus referred not exactly to the human color or race per se. Through Silk, Roth pointed out that what is being referred to was racism itself - the imputation to an individual of stereotypes codified by the "one-drop" rule of racial identity. For instance, Silk foresaw the challenges that he had to face in being taken seriously as a classics scholar. If he was to be a black scholar, he would be that Negro classics scholar and nothing else. More so, if he had acknowledged his ancestry and become a pride of his race and a role model, it would fall to him the responsibility of endorsing the Black cause and if he refused that role, he would be branded as a racial traitor. In the end, Silk's death is Roth's way of saying that race can be hidden but not removed. Using Zuckerman in Roth's version of poetic justice, it was figuratively revealed that Silk did not die a white man by force of circumstance and by the mark of disgrace and his death.

Bibliography

Roth, Phillip. Human Stain. Thorndike Press, 2000.