

# Argumentative essay on hillary rietcheck

[Sociology](#), [Identity](#)



Derek Parker Royal's article "Plotting the Frames of Subjectivity: Identity, Death, and Narrative" review of Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*, focuses on the book's protagonist, first person narrator, Nathan Zuckerman.

Zuckerman's identity as a writer of published works, *American Pastoral* and *I Married a Communist* is the site of inquiry in Royal's commentary on Roth's character development, by way of Zuckerman's artistic process and textual production.

Royal's review looks at how Roth's portrayal of Zuckerman also captures the complexity and oft compelling confusion of the protagonist as he attempts to introduce difference amid self-invention. Royal argues that "Zuckerman's position within these texts, at least on the surface, is that of observer of and commentator on other lives, not his own," (Royal 114).

Perhaps a much better term for Zuckerman than protagonist, suggests Royal, is progenitor. Roth's development of Zuckerman's creative storytelling talent as a somewhat contradictory process, implicated in the interpretation of dialogue as mechanism for individuation of character identity is illustrative of "a postmodern reading of identities [. . .] and the ways such identities are constructed" (Royal 116).

Unlike constructivist texts of the High Modern period that define author as constructivist, Zuckerman's identity(s) are laid open for interpretation.

Development of the storyline interfaces character identity with dialectic. The substance of post-modern reflexivity within the narrative reveals identity to be that of disaggregation rather than static subject position.

Zuckerman exhibits how temporality is nothing more than existential deconstruction rather than a unified constitution of being. Lives, as

Zuckerman narrates, are unfinished works deemed not by Onan but by way of discursive dynamism and the fatality of reason in the universal sacred moment, death. A composition of thought, his works, *American Pastoral* and *The Human Stain* are incomplete, imaginaries of human existence.

At first glance, the disunion of writer and text is not entirely evident. Has Zuckerman merely mapped his Self as pantheon throughout the narrative? Royal argues that the age old inquiry into writer as fictional storyteller, writer as autobiographer, is placed at the center of the discussion. The process of re-envision is at work. Here the lives of others are developed through a kaleidoscope of difference. If the basis to fictional writing is that of complete distance of the Self from that of the Subject, discursive tendencies and partial truths about “ assumed” identity are at play.

In *I Married a Communist*, the possibility of an eternal bond between Zuckerman and his characters is realized in the innate knowledge of an actual subject, a true character in the story. Royal responds to commentaries about Roth’s work, “ while acknowledging Nathan Zuckerman as a significant presence, these critics work from the assumption that the story of Coleman Silk, as presented by Zuckerman, is more or less true,” (Royal 117).

Royal argues that critics of Roth’s work assume Zuckerman is not re-imagining the lives of others, but that he is a “ historian . . . and compiler of facts, and that his narrative efforts correspond to the actual events,” (Royal 117). Royal dismisses this, finding proof in *The Human Stain* where Zuckerman talks about a certain event, “ as I reconstruct it” (Roth).

On first reflection Royal’s argument is seductive. In a metafictional moment, Zuckerman and Roth make reference to the activity of textual production.

Pointed attention to the writer's role addresses art as the profound truth in place of a world with no limits. Issues of mortality come to the fore again and again, argues Royal, and “ in the face of this void, this awareness becomes a textual exercise in delineating the very limits of subjective representation” (Royal 132).

Zuckerman's preoccupation with death is expiated in nullification of the persistence of being in fatalistic speculation of a netherworld already present, yet uncannily simple in material phenomena. Yet, says Royal, “ for Zuckerman, art is the natural rejoinder to death” and its effectiveness transitory at best (Royal 135). The presence of “ an indeterminate " X", Derridean signifier whose referent is never fixed but always deferred” confirms the deconstructivist logic of Zuckerman's obsession with nihilism.

The proposition that identity and self-invention contribute to a public scandal, leading to the destruction of an individual's future sheds light on the dual tropes of time and retribution involved in intergenerational relations. In a series of discontinuities, Roth's narrative turns what was once a certain world of middle class realities, into the persistence of difference, irretrievable from rebellion, and without return to the site of childhood.

I would argue that Zuckerman re-constructs the lives of others after what he observes. His stories are completely fictionalized and are told through the lens of his own interpretation. Nevertheless, Roth's contribution is of a specifically American genre of trilogy; a body of work that bespeaks of ingenuity and difference as the source of a collective thought. The semiotics of race position Zuckerman's identity juxtaposed to the autobiographical

redundancies alleged by critics.

The constellation of character attributes and social meaning in the text proliferate difference, even while death, the shared end to all existence synthesizes agreement and a common destiny. The storyline reiterates this folly, and restates the true commonality of all fiction writing at the source of its intent. The post-modern project stands at the abyss as structural elements overrule Derrida's promise of 'play' as the great equalizer of all linear narrative.

Were one to attempt to establish Self as the sole contents of all fictional character identity, the distinctions between gender, ethnicity and age might be erased and replaced with merely a single impression of the world and its relations. Roth's portrayal of Zuckerman's inhibition and license as an artist reflects perhaps the single most important value in American fiction. All others fall aside, as the Self imposes form, letting the content of the narrative emerge between the interstices of logic, dialogue and redress.

## **Bibliography**

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