

The Ethical Reconfiguration of the Body in Philip Roth's *Exit Ghost*

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Abstract

Nathan Zuckerman is the distinct narrator-protagonist in Philip Roth's Zuckerman novels, starting from *The Ghost Writer* (1979). Different from the previous eight novels, *Exit Ghost* (2007) portrays Zuckerman as an author, ill and senile, coming back to New York, his former writing home. After an 11-year rural seclusion, Zuckerman finds he no longer fits in the technologically-wrapped urban milieu and no longer follows contemporary literary taste. He suffers all the more acutely because, while his desire and will to life are ignited by urban encounters, he no longer possesses *the body* to enact his passion or intention. The "no-longer" of the body gives rise to a re-configuration of ethical relation in love, in friendship and in writing.

Suffering from impotence and incontinence, Zuckerman goes through ethical difficulties marked by the frail body, the inevitable helplessness of old age and sickness. Corresponding to Emmanuel Levinas's idea of the radical passivity in the face of the other and the embodied ethical subject, the ethical relation in *Exit Ghost* is worth exploring as it implies a predicament when one finds inescapable corporeal frailty and disability, which present a different ethical edge or possibility. That is, responding to others is one thing, but preserving the sense of selfhood and *embodying* ethical responsibility is a confrontation with *an-other*. The reading of Roth's *Exit Ghost* is like an extension of the loop of Levinas's ethics, in which the self's passivity and vulnerability are marked by the body that precedes to the responsibility for others.

Keywords: body, Levinas, exit ghost, illness, senility

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Introduction

Exit Ghost (2007), claimed to be the last of Philip Roth's Zuckerman novels, portrays Nathan Zuckerman in his senility and serious illness coming back to New York for medical treatment. However, what first appears intriguing about the novel is its title, which bears ostensible association with the first Zuckerman story, *The Ghost Writer* (1979). Readers cannot help but wonder how the obviously health-concerned story corresponds to the title. Furthermore, what does such a title express about the essential messages of the Zuckerman novels?

The repetition of "ghost" seems to indicate a message that deserves further exploration. What does "ghost" designate and how does it connect the Zuckerman stories, particularly when the title makes a weak and distant connection with the content? Does it refer to Zuckerman's father, the writing idol, literary heritage, ethnic background, changing environment, the new generation, one's own desire, or even himself? What are their relationships among these connotations and how do they contribute to a more sophisticated reading of Zuckerman stories, especially *Exit Ghost*? There is no easy clue to the repetitive "ghost."

"Ghost" designates "an apparition of a dead person which is believed to appear or become manifest to the living, typically as a nebulous image" (Oxford on-line Dictionary). That is, a "ghost" is the invisible but perceivable illusion or force haunting and even overwhelming the lived. To Roth, it is the haunting influence on his writing, as he remarks about *The Ghost Writer*, "(t)he difficulties of telling a Jewish story—How should it be told? In what tone? To whom should it be told? To what end? Should it be told at all?—was finally to become The Ghost Writer's theme" (Lee 183). In terms of Zuckerman's writing career, the meaning of "ghost" partially originates from his obsession with his ethnic background loaded with great ethnic suffering and pain from ineradicable historical traumas. As a writer, he seemingly cannot help but shoulder an ethnic responsibility, which has been the focus of much dispute concerning how Roth represents Jewishness, and what it means to be a Jewish writer.

Roth's dilemma is understandable since historical suffering runs counter to his actual life experience in America. As he is doomed to shoulder the ethnic trauma and responsibility, he perceives the irony and jeers at his own situation, saying that "(b)eing a Jew in New Jersey was comical just because it was somehow bound up with these ghastly events" (Finkelkraut 128). Hence, Roth's struggle in writing is obvious and fierce in bearing the ethnic scar and striving for distinctiveness. Among some critics who have discussed the ethnic-haunting of Roth's work, Benjamin Schreier comments on Roth's struggle as a gateway to renewed Jewish identity in American Jewish literature.

It is not that Roth's characters do not want to be Jews; it is that they do not know how to describe themselves as Jews. And it is not that Roth's books are not texts of Jewish identity or identification; it is that they are just as forcefully countertexts of Jewish identity or identification—countertexts that displace categorical Jewishness from the presumably secure site where we expect to recognize it. (107)

As Roth usually creates Jewish characterization counter to commonly-recognized ones, Schreier maintains that it is not that Roth's Jewish characters are no longer appropriate but that "his texts address the problematic nature of postwar Jewish identity" (109). However, while Schreier emphasizes Roth's working on new possibilities for Jewish characters, Victoria Aarons in *The Cambridge Companion to Philip Roth* maintains that Roth's portrayal of the post-war Jewish identity is a burlesque (10).¹ Whether burlesques or new possibilities, the Zuckerman books show Roth's striving to find his distinctive niche as a Jewish writer. By espousing his ethnic responsibility with the irresistible physical state in which everyone has his own singularities and immediacy, Roth aims to interpret one's ethical relation with others and even himself in *Exit Ghost*.² That is, even as Roth ostensibly presents his struggle to be a Jewish writer, more urgent is the necessity of re-grounding the distinctiveness of the identities of a Jew and of an American writer.

The paper hence will start by exploring Roth's taking the body as the essential site of the literary and of reconfiguration of the ethical relation. Zuckerman, in search of better medical cure, cannot help but involve himself in various struggles marked by his physical condition. The encounter with an inquisitive journalist relentlessly informs him that he is no longer under the spotlight of or bears any influence on the literary circle. Meeting his old lover, Amy, leaves him uncertain about the helpless and irretrievable past and embarrassed about the barely resumable

¹ Aarons in "American-Jewish Identity in Roth's Short Fiction" remarks that "Roth's satiric commentary is framed in terms of those Jews who want to redefine themselves as imagined gentiles, those, in other words, who want to pretend that they are not Jews, or rather, not the kind of Jew who stands out as Jew, such as the Jewish refugee from Europe" (13). Roth portrays the impasse of most post-war Jewish Americans who had a hard time searching for a sense of belonging. Neither trying to be the other by taking on a gentile identity nor resorting to a new one with self-invention gets them "home." Instead, a more precarious position is found in the hyphen of the Jewish-American identity. Aarons found that Roth's characters oscillate between these two categories, perpetually "out of place."

² Ethics here does not designate the self-other relation based on the moral standards telling right from wrong, or high and low. Instead, it refers to the relation with the other for which one is obliged to make responsibility prior to positing the self. However, what features the ethical relationship is the confrontation with the other featuring in his irreducibility and incomprehensibility. This concept of ethics will mainly draw on that of Emmanuel Levinas, who is influenced by Husserl, Merleau Monty and Heidegger; namely, one marked by the irreducible and pre-originary other and the vulnerable and passive self. Such an ethical stance presupposes the asymmetry of the ethical relation and the perpetual alterity of the other, while the self is obliged to make responsibility for the other.

relationship in the future. Above all, his deteriorating physical condition makes it difficult time dealing with himself and others. In these encounters, the physical plays an essential role since being a “no-longer” designates one’s incapability and helplessness to *be* oneself or even *confront* others.

Though the Zuckerman novels record Roth’s exploration of racial, political and sexual issues, Roth’s concern with the physical is not something new, starting with early writings like *The Breast*,³ in which the identity problem concerns much-disputed oppositions—“human versus nonhuman, masculine versus feminine, subject versus object, inside versus outside” (Shostak 317). The Zuckerman books demonstrate Roth’s constant concern with the physical, as demonstrated by his delineation of Zuckerman’s cancer and his dying father. It becomes a forceful determinant in his insightful perspective on post-war Jewish American literature. The ghost, as inevitable interlocutor, seems to straddle the two dimensions of ethnic history and physical deterioration.

Hence, the ghostly shadow of being a Jewish writer has been intertwined with that of being a man in pain and illness. As the physical state turns unignorable and is particularly elaborated in *Exit Ghost*, the meaning of the “ghost” is diverted to the irresistible and unknowable aspect of the body. That is, if ethnic background or the father figure act as “ghosts” to Zuckerman the writer, the body itself turns into an-*other* force which makes difficult the possibility of self-assertion. If being a Jew is a writing identity that Zuckerman cannot shun, the body is definitely an-*other*. However, there is a paradoxical reversion when the concern is placed on the body. If the ghost originally means the bodiless haunting entity, then what does it mean in the case of Zuckerman, who is body-obsessed and nearly ends up as a “no-longer”? Does ghostliness embodies the moment that he gets rid of the haunting ghost of ethnic identity or writing, or does it describe the process of becoming a ghost in face of his coming death?

To grasp the idea of “ghost” in *Exit Ghost*, as well as its relation with other Zuckerman novels, the following analysis takes the body as the axis to examine its possible designations. The examination of the body, which is based on its influence on one’s ethical relation with others will be divided into two parts: the sensuous and the corporeal. The former designates one’s perception and interaction

³ *The Breast* is a novella published in 1972. It is a story about David Kepesh, who wakes up to find that he has been transformed into a six-foot mammary gland. Though people associate it with Kafka’s depiction of a man turning into a giant insect, this initiating event focuses conspicuously on the identity problem in which the self becomes the hostage of the physical. That means, Kepesh has to rethink who he is in terms of his body, something *other* than his recognition. The split in his identification is owing to the fact that “Kepesh feels an extremity of dislocation because his body is in catastrophe, and yet his consciousness remains surprisingly constant” (Shostak 318).

with others, as well as the environment. The latter refers to one's relation with one's own body, which varies with the change of the physical state, ranging from the manipulatable and functional to the inevitable and overwhelming. However, to work on how the sensuous and the corporeal influence one's relation with others, the analysis will first draw on Levinas's ideas of ethics to unravel how the body, especially in a painful or senile state, re-asserts one's relation with oneself that precedes to one's relation with others, even to writing.

The Body in Levinas's Ethics

Esousing Roth's presentation of one's senility and sickness in *Exit Ghost* to Levinas's ethics⁴ is appropriate, as Levinas's sense of the Other⁵ has a close relationship with one's sensibility, which is body-related. Roth's preoccupation with the body can be traced through the Zuckerman books, as the protagonist suffers from cancer in *The Anatomy Lesson* (1983) and painfully faces the death of his father in *Patrimony* (1991). Roth's concern with the body has been revealed in interviews. When asked about the relationship between his writing and the places he stayed, Roth surprisingly replied that "Now it seems to me that what I've had instead of Newark or Chicago or Mississippi or Philadelphia has been the human body. There's my terrain—and in more books than this one. When I was writing *The Anatomy Lesson* I made a list of novels about illness and disease" (Finkelkraut 140). To Roth, the body takes on more significance than the environment to the selfhood. Roth is a writer particularly concerned about one's sensuous perception, the experience both empirical and corporeal, rather than the spatial restriction or imposition on the self. Similar concern is shown in another Zuckerman book, *The Human Stain* (2000), in which Colin is in an ironic dilemma. On one hand, he spends his whole life getting rid of the stigma of being black in consanguinity, despite looking white; on the other, he is accused of committing racial prejudice

⁴ Since more than one book written by Emmanuel Levinas will be cited in the following part of the paper, the short titles will be applied in the following quotations: OTB stands for *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, TI is for *Totality and Infinity* and HO refers to *Humanism of the Other*.

⁵ The Other and the other(s) have been alternatively used by Levinas and could seem pretty confusing to the reader. The other(s) mean people that we communicate or interact with in life while the Other convey the concept of alterity or otherness which is perceived in sensibility and is the property that we encounter in face of the other(s). But, it is not the equivalent of the other(s), as Levinas remarks that the Other "arises behind all collection of being, as the one to whom I express what I express. . . . He is neither a cultural signification nor a simple given. He is primordial, sense because he lends it to expression itself, because only through him can a phenomenon such as signification introduce itself, of itself, into being" (HO 30). Another prominent message here is that the Other is closely related to the body which are composed of different senses.

by calling two absent black students “spooky” in class. Roth’s focus on the body is not only ethnically but ontologically related. Roth’s writing on the body is resumed in his later works. However, along with his portrayal of the inevitable corporeal suffering, an ethical angle that evolves around the body seems to emerge. That is, by giving the body its due in being and writing, Roth demonstrates an intention to probe into people’s inevitable relation with it, a responsibility that people cannot evade or ignore.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas explores the relation between the body and ethics:

Life is a body, not only lived body (*corps propre*), where its self-sufficiency emerges, but a cross-roads of physical forces, body-effect. In its deep-seated fear life attests this ever possible inversion of the body-master into body-slave, of health into sickness. *To be a body* is on the one hand to stand on the earth, to be in the other, and thus to be encumbered by one’s body. (164)

As one ages, it is understandable that the body cannot be perpetually or naively taken as a tool to our thoughts or consciousness. According to Levinas, different forces traverse the body and the interaction is sedimented as body-effect, in which the sensibility shows how the body perceives surrounding stimulus. However, the situation becomes all the more conspicuous in one’s senility and illness. The only difference is the body now acts less as a transparent channel than a filter, and even distorter, between the self and the world. As Levinas indicates, the body acts as the Other to the self and *to be a body* means to be in a relation with *the other*, one will be inevitably influenced and restricted by the body not merely sensuously but also corporeally. This fact is illustrated both by the sensual perception while interacting with others and by the inevitable deterioration in senility and illness. Two prominent aspects are conducive to revealing how the body fosters an ethical relation, the relation with the Other. First, the body is the everlasting opening in which we are undergoing an incessant process of perceiving and reacting to the events, the people and the world around us. Second, the otherness of the body appears rather unavoidable and immediate, especially when the physical situation is out of one’s control.

Another important implication is that the relation goes prior to our consciousness, or more precisely, the sense of ourselves, since Levinas maintains that

(c)onsciousness does not fall into a body—is not incarnated; it is disincarnation—or, more exactly, a postponing of the corporeity of the body. . . . To be conscious is precisely to have time . . . to have a distance with regard to the present itself, to be related to the element in which one is settled as to what is not yet there (TI 165-66).

Levinas maintains that consciousness is disincarnated and not immediate, something that is not actualized in the body and distanced from the present. So, what

is incarnation—to have a body? That is an empirical immediacy before any concept can accommodate what is happening, before one is able to reflect on the event. In *Humanism of the Other*, Levinas remarks that “(t)he body is a sensing sensed. . . . Sensed, it nevertheless remains on this side, the side of the subject; but sensing, it is already on that side, the side of objects . . .” (16). With the body, the self cannot help being cast in a relation with surrounding objects, bridging the gap between the subject and the object. Yet, what marks the body as the sensing sensed, the plane for the subject-object interaction, is the sensibility of the body, with which we construe or recognize the selfhood. The sensibility means an opening, “the stripping of the skin exposed to wound and outrage. Opening is the vulnerability of a skin offered in wound and outrage beyond all that can show itself, beyond all that of essence of being can expose itself to understanding and celebration” (63). With the comparison of the stripping of the skin and exposure to the stimulus in the environment, Levinas stresses the vulnerability and passivity of the self in face of the Other via the body, or with the body. Moreover, the passivity and vulnerability of the self indicate an asymmetrical relation in which the self is obliged to take responsibility.

In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas further elaborates on the significance of the body on the ethical relation with the idea of sensibility. He notes that the significance of sensibility, the sensing sensed, could better explicate the immediacy of the relation with others.

The immediacy of the sensible which is not reducible to the gnoseological role assumed by sensation is the exposure to wounding and to enjoyment, an exposure to wounding in enjoyment, which enables the wound to reach the subjectivity of the subject complacent in itself and positing itself for itself. (64)

Sensibility refers to the preliminary ethical relation with others, which is marked by its irreducibility to any idea and the self's vulnerability. Levinas adds, “sensibility is sense; it is by the other and for the other, for another” (64). The statement refers to the dissymmetrical ethical relation between the self and the other. However, if sensibility designates an ethical relation centered on the body, the body actually has a pivotal position or relation with others, especially when the immediacy of wounding and enjoyment as well as the vulnerability of the self makes manifest the body, which ceases to be a transparent or neutral medium for messages to circulate from the other to the self, or otherwise. Instead, the body is constantly affected in daily encounters, making acute the ethical relation. One cannot avoid the corporeal and be ethical, no matter for the other or the self.

While Levinas draws on the notion of the body, in terms of sensibility, to explicate ethical relation with the Other, Roth elaborates the passivity and vulnerability of the self in two aspects. One is the sensuous and the other is the corporeal.

The former refers to the pre-original sensuous response to the other, while the latter demonstrates the importance of the body of the self, which foregrounds the otherness of the corporeal. The body, to Roth, is not just something that one cannot do without; moreover, it conveys messages that are beyond our comprehension and even override the self. That is, the body is not only the plane in which the unavoidable ethical relation with the Other itself occurs. With aging and illness, Roth unravels that not only one's sensibility but also the suffering and incontinence of the body demonstrate the agonizing confrontation with the Other, which calls into question the certainty of the self as Elaine Scarry maintains in *The Body in Pain*, "[i]t is the intense pain that destroys a person's self and world, a destruction experienced spatially as either the contraction of the universe down to the immediate vicinity of the body or as the body swelling to fill the entire universe" (35). The aging body in pain claims the autonomy or self-sufficiency of the self and, moreover, diminishes the self as one's recognition and consciousness of the world and the selfhood dwindle. Nonetheless, that means the body becomes something that challenges and confronts the self. The following discussion of the body in *Exit Ghost* focuses on the ethical re-configuration of the body by examining how the body acts as the Other in terms of the sensuous and the corporeal.

Here and Now with Others—the Sensuous

Exit Ghost resumes Roth's concern with illness and death, featuring the sensuous perception and the corporeal condition. The story begins when Nathan Zuckerman is obliged to move back to New York in search of medical help. With sections of the novel respectively titled "The Present Moment," "Under the Spell," "Amy's Brain," "My Brain," and "Rash Moments," Roth makes clear how the relation with others in a sense compels one to focus on the present and the body. Obvious is the emphasis laid on one's physical condition and immediate sensuous reactions. Upon his return to New York, Zuckerman perceives that challenge and laments that "I had ceased to inhabit not just the great world but the present moment" (1). He is compelled to re-orient himself to the city. "All the city would add was everything I'd determined I no longer had used for: Here and Now. Here and Now. Then and Now. The Beginning and the End of Now" (41). Yet, constrained by his physical situation, he is unable to seclude himself and has to resituate himself in the "Here and Now." However, this process does not merely involve the very place and the very moment but intriguingly entangles the memory, old friends, strangers and the desire circulating among them. The present mo-

ment is more than a temporal concept or spatial immediacy. It also consists of on-going events and people who confront him and make inevitable the ethical relation with the other. The ethical embedded in the "Here and Now" obliges him to take responsibility for the other in situations that he has difficulty positioning himself in, such as Amy Bellette's helpless and lonely life, Richard Kliman's annoying inquiry of E. I. Lonoff's scandalous and infamous past, and Zuckerman's own irresistible desire for Jamie Logan. These encounters, beyond his anticipation and imagination, overwhelm him, undermining his selfhood. He comments on his re-exposure to different forces in the surroundings:

As a onetime creature of intense responsiveness who'd over the preceding decade tautened himself into a low-keyed solitary, I'd got out of the habit of giving in to every impulse that crossed my nerve endings, and yet, in just my few days back, I had arrived at what might turn out to be the most thoughtless snap decision I'd ever made. (43-44)

In his solitary life, Zuckerman has been suspended from responding to the constantly changing society. Now, in New York, the sensibility is so furtively ignited that he is nearly despite himself, losing self-control. He is "no longer" able to tackle occurrences and encounters. Rather vulnerable and passive, Zuckerman feels like "opening [him]self to the irritants, stimulants, temptations, and dangers of the present moment" (53). He is at once obliged to respond and feels rather disoriented.

Moreover, the ethical relation with "Here and Now" actually involves different levels of ethical difficulties and entanglement, implicating the possible ethical complexities in empirical encounters. The ethical problem of "Here and Now" is not merely provoking and overwhelming but elusive and contradictory. The encounter with Kliman reveals an ethical dilemma, one that involves the Levinasian idea that the other precedes the self who is supposed to be ethically responsible. The journalist Kliman is eager to inquire about Lonoff's sexual scandal. When asked why he is so interested in Lonoff's secret, Kliman answers, "I'm just trying to be responsible" and the word "responsible" galls Zuckerman (50). Thus Zuckerman rebuts Kliman for his intention, saying "(s)o you're going to redeem Lonoff's reputation as a writer by ruining it as a man. Replace the genius of the genius with the secret of the genius. Rehabilitation by disgrace" (101). In terms of the ethical, Zuckerman and Kliman are responsible for the other, Lonoff, from different perspectives. While Kliman starts from the perspective of Lonoff's literary status, Zuckerman thinks of Lonoff's right of privacy and dignity. The ethical problem is whether people have the right to decide what to tell about the dead. Kliman claims that he does it for the sake of vindicating Lonoff and restoring his rightful place in twentieth-century literature, since it

would help explain the significance of his short stories and “what happened to his writing when he left Hope (his wife) and went off with Amy Bellette (his lover)” (48). The ethical divergence indicates an intricate question—at what angle should the self be responsible for the other? The restoration of Lonoff’s literary significance, or Lonoff’s right to keep a secret? In Levinasian ethics, it is imperative to respond to the other but Roth presents an ethical dilemma in the face of “Here and Now”—from which perspective should the self approach or react to the other? To Zuckerman, it is impossible to ignore Kliman’s attempt to invade Lonoff’s privacy because, as an old friend and admirer, he cannot help but be responsible for Lonoff. However, Kliman means to restore Lonoff’s literary status as a prominent American writer at the cost of his personal reputation. That is an ethical dilemma to which Kliman must respond. Either of them would cause certain kind of regret or harm to Lonoff, as Lonoff is passive, vulnerable, and despite himself, not knowing how to react.

The ethical impasse of the “Here and Now” is further revealed in the physical encounter of the suffering of the self. The encounter with “Here and Now” inevitably gives rise to the pain of the present when Kliman meets Amy and Jamie. The former is Lonoff’s lover, whom he had great admiration for, while the latter is the lady with whom he is going to swap houses. The ethical challenge comes from his not-knowing what to do while finding Amy as old and sick as he is. The encounter makes him wonder how much he is still familiar with “Amy,” since it is a long time since they parted. Is Amy the same as she was? Being ill and senile, Amy is certainly not the one he adored. But, if not, then how to interact with the *no-longer* Amy? That makes a tremendous challenge in his ethical relation with her. More specifically, the body of the other makes up the ethical relation with the self, so that Zuckerman is involved in the temporal lapse implied in physical decline.

On the other, he is revitalized by Jamie’s overwhelming charm and his helplessness to “love” this woman. Nonetheless, the ethical problem does not lie in her marital state but in his keen awareness of his physical incompetence to match his desire for her. The ethical relation implicates an essential variable—the body that plays an essential role in Zuckerman’s interaction with others. The body of the self—before that of the other.

The ethical encounter with Here and Now marks the multiplicity and complexity in approaching the others that makes up the ethical collision. However, being in the present involves not only the sensuous but also the corporeal, another significant aspect of the ethical relation. That is, though the ethical relation starts with the perception and recognition of the body of the other, the response cannot disregard the body of the self, especially when one is physically deteriorating.

Before the Body of the Other—the Corporeal

Levinas maintains that the first body in ethics is the body of the other, as demonstrated in desire and death. Both demonstrate that the immediate temporal and spatial setting is necessary for ethical relation, since the “first” body refers to the precedence of the other who spatially *confronts* the self. However, what Roth presents in the novel is another ethical dimension, one concerned with the body of the self, the corporeal. That is, Roth incorporates the inevitability of the corporeality in the ethical—a relation with the Other, particularly marked by one’s desire.

Levinas’s idea of desire plays a significant role in the ethical relation with the other. He contends, “Desire, which traces sense in being, will be clarified by an analysis of the otherness toward which Desire tends” (HO 30). It is a feeling accompanying our sensibility and presenting our inclination towards or connection with others. Second, “the Desire for exteriority has appeared to us to move not in objective cognition but in Discourse, which in turn has presented itself as justice, in the uprightness of the welcome made to the face” (TI 82). That is, the inclination toward alterity cannot be subsumed under one’s conception or cognition but designates the discourse, a written or spoken communication with the other. The discourse then is characterized by the sense of justice, meaning that no imposition of any idea or concept on the other is allowed or possible. Instead, it is an opening of the self, the welcome presented in face of the other, as Zuckerman reflects and confesses that Jamie Logan “had a huge pull on me, a huge gravitational pull on the ghost of my desire. This woman was in me before she even appeared” (66). Passive and vulnerable remains Zuckerman in encounters with her; however, one occasion that makes distinct his ethical responsibility is his uncontrollable desire for Jamie Logan, ever since he met the couple of Billy Davidoff and Jamie Logan. However, on account of his physical incompetence and incontinence, his feelings and desire can only be virtually expressed in the imaginary dialogues of a play written by Zuckerman, enacting the possible communication and interactions.⁶ In the dialogues, he appears brave and even voluptuous in conveying how he feels, a kind of verbal courtship, consciously knowing that he is both physically restrained and sexually incapable but still

⁶ Elaine Scarry contends that “in the very old and sick people, the world would exist only in a circle two feet out from themselves . . . the voice becomes a final source of self-extension; so long as one is speaking, the self extends out beyond the boundaries of a body. It occupies a space much larger than the body” (32-33). Voice can help extend what the old and the sick are incapable, and so is writing which is a means to express oneself and traverses the restraints of the body.

emotionally expressive about his desire. It reveals the power embedded in the sensuous that is beyond his control, despite the great gap between them, both spiritually and physically. He cannot help indulging himself in the swirl of the passion by inquiring into the personal background of this couple and writing dialogues between “He” and “She,” “a play of desire and temptation and flirtation and agony—agony all the time—an improvisation best aborted and left to die” (146). Encountering Jamie is the sensuous experience that implicates the awareness of the ethically reconfiguring power of the body, marked by pain and incompetence.

The sensuous again illustrates the vulnerability of the self. Though ethically passive in face of the other, Zuckerman is active in making responses. Zuckerman’s fervent desire for Jamie, though crippling his selfhood, paradoxically animates him, “however sexually disabled, however sexually unpracticed I was after eleven years away, the drive excited by meeting Jamie had madly reasserted itself as the animating force. As though in the presence of this young woman there was hope . . . and I experienced the bitter helplessness of a taunted old man dying to be whole again. . . ” (67). In Zuckerman’s enchantment for Jamie, the ethical relation bases itself on the sensibility but is marked by the combination of the passive and active. Though these two elements have an intriguing entanglement, the latter has been demonstrated by Zuckerman’s perception of hope and eagerness to be healthy and capable again. Zuckerman is torn between his sensuous desire for Jamie and his incapable physical situation. He is entangled in a vulnerable and helpless relation with the body and, simultaneously, regains a certain sense of self in such an ethical relation. That is, the vulnerable and passive position does not reduce the self to mere passive or dormant entities. Instead, the self is activated to assert more awareness of the self, as well as to take *concrete* responsibility for the other. The body serves as more than the channel to transmit the sensuous reaction towards the other and its environment. It acts as an ethical Other that the self cannot help but respond to. It is more than an access to the other, but part of the face⁷ of the Other. The ethical reveals that the first body of

⁷ The face of the Other in Levinas’s ethics is something that is marked by its immediacy and “breaks through all kinds of meditations, be it laws, rules, codes, rituals, social roles or any kind of order” (Waldenfels 63). In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas maintains that the face of the Other is an expression which is irreducible to certain meaning or information. It goes beyond phenomenon (the visible and tactile) and resist definite signification as he further elaborates, “[t]o manifest oneself as a face is to *impose oneself* above and beyond the manifested and purely phenomenal form, to present oneself in a mode irreducible to manifestation, the very straightforwardness of the face to face, without the immediacy of any image, in one’s study, that is, in one’s destitution and hunger” (200). Hence, the absolute, irreducible, and immediate difference is what marks the face of the Other which presents an expression that obliges the self to make response to but resists any possession or meaning-designation.

the ethical lies in the other perceived in sensibility but the body of the self is challenging and decisive in the subsequent responsibility for the other.

The body, on the one hand, succumbs the self under its command in the senile corporeal condition. On the other hand, it makes conspicuous the shattered sense of the self, who is no longer self-sufficient and autonomous with a docile body. Instead, the self, facing the Other (whether the body or the object of desire), is perpetually obliged to make responsibility for not only the other but also the otherness of one's own body. This is an Other before the other, prior to Zuckerman's adoration for Jamie Logan. As Levinas maintains, "the first body is the body of the other, from whom my own embodiment—in its blend of passivity and activity—takes on its significance as moral compassion" (HO xxxiii). Zuckerman's desire for Jamie well demonstrates the ethical loop of the body, which reverses our sensuous to react to our own embodiment. However, what Roth reveals in the novel is that, while the body of the other goes prior to the self, the awareness of the body of the self is prior to one's responsibility for the other. Roth here elaborates the ethical reconfiguration of the body. In sensibility, one recognizes the body of the other and comes to know one's desire. From one's desire, one has to *face* the body of the self before the ethical responsibility. So, the ethical relation founded on sensibility not only reveals one's desire but also raises the awareness of one's own body, something that has its own distinct property, *Other* than the self.

In addition to Zuckerman's desire for Jamie Logan, two more examples will further elaborate the *other* half of the ethical loop. One is Zuckerman's reunion with Amy Bellette, the lady he was enchanted with when he was a novice writer in *Ghost Writer*. The other is the death of George, an ambitious and aggressive journalist who helped him a lot in his literary career. Both draw his attention to the aging and deteriorating body and make sharp contrast in their effect.

In the section titled "Amy's brain," Amy talks about the miserable moments with Lonoff. But what troubles her most is the brain tumor, which seems to steer her life, especially in the interaction with others. When Zuckerman wants to confirm whether she promised to give Kliman the manuscript of Lonoff's novel, she is shocked, "I never would have done that. I couldn't have" (180). When Zuckerman reminds her that her tumor might have done that, she cries "Oh, Nathan, I had that damn tumor. And now I made mistakes in judgment. I made mistakes with him that were unforgivable even *with* the tumor" (196). Her life is helplessly dominated by her physical condition. The sensibility relates more than her relation with others, arousing her awareness to the way the body diminishes her selfhood and relentlessly exposing her drastic vulnerability in the face of the Other. Taking into consideration the body of the self, we cannot but wonder

who and what she is. At such moments, the body talks louder than any intention or ideas. But, how to face the overwhelming power of the body? In the self-diminishing situation, is there still any possibility to communicate *herself*? Or, what does it mean when the corporeal seems to radicalize the ethical relation with the Other (the body) or the others?

Such an ethical relation is further exemplified by the death of George Plimpton, a writer who oriented Zuckerman into the literary circle of New York, though they had not met for decades. His death means his losing the literary anchor. For that, he keeps asking himself, "How could George be dead? . . . How could that happen to *him*? And how did what happened happen to me for these past eleven years? . . . I defined my life around that accident or that person or that ridiculously minor event?" (252) He still remembers what George told him, "It's our time. . . . It's our humanity. We have to be a part of it too" (253) but George's death has shattered the last stroke of Zuckerman's hope to be a writer, especially when the news is passed on to him by his rival, Richard Kliman. Zuckerman lapses into the state that was earlier lamented by Lonoff, "Reading/writing people, we are finished, we are ghosts witnessing the end of the literary era" (186). Furthermore, the generational clash and ethical collision strengthen his helplessness, "I felt myself—despite myself—growing progressively smaller the more flamboyant the display of Kliman's self-delight" (256). But, while his contemporaries are "no-longers,' losing faculties, losing control, shamefully dispossessed from themselves, marked by deprivation and experiencing the organic rebellion staged by the body against the elderly; they are 'not-yets,' with no idea how quickly things turn out another way" (256-57). The lament is not merely for the physical capacity but for the ethical anchor used to define themselves.

So, from the body of the other, one gets closer to death. Zuckerman is actually clear about how the body deprives him of his ability to enact his desire or even keep intact his sense of self. His vulnerability in face of the physical condition not only reveals his helplessness but also his failure to regain dominance as a man or a writer. It is an irreversible relation with the body as the Other—a powerful and dominating counterpart that the self cannot resist or evade as Zuckerman recalls the eroded memory and incontinent misspeaking as

something diabolical residing in my brain but with a mind of its own—the imp of amnesia, the demon of forgetfulness, against whose powers of destruction I could bring to effective counterforce—were prompting me to suffer these lapses solely for the fun of watching me degenerate, the ultimate gleeful goal to turn someone whose acuity as a writer was sustained by memory and verbal precision into a pointless man. (158-59)

Physical degeneration becomes a relentless and uncontrollable part to him, but not of him. Such a body demands his full responsibility and claims both his

ability to love and live, similarly portrayed in *The Anatomy Lesson*, in which Roth focuses not just on the body, but also on the order of the “body when it blocks out all that is not body: the body in pain, when art, cultures high and low, language itself give way before the onslaught of physical suffering” (Kartiganer 44). He cannot help but take responsibility for the body that barely functions in daily encounters. For instance, he has to move to the city in search of better medical treatment of his physical condition. Moreover, he has to confine his love to writing, and only in writing can he confess his admiration for Jamie. Sadly speaking, this writing presents neither his distinct observation and insights on life nor the aesthetic ideas as an amazing journey with language. Instead, his writing becomes an outlet for uncontrollable and insatiable desire, while the body is no longer able to catch up. Hence, at the end of the novel, he is pessimistically conscious of reaching the end of his effectiveness, and feels that “(a)ll I left were instincts: to want, to crave, to have. And the stupid strengthening of my determination to act. At last, to act!” (276). Yet, no matter how strong his instincts and his determination are, he still cannot overcome the constraints set by the body. Another implication is that, however he suffers from the body, sensibility dominantly works and the ethical relation with the Otherness of the body means to accrue its power and last till the final moment of his life.

Conclusion

The image of a door is employed at the end of the novel to illustrate the irresistible dilemma of his ethical relation. “A door between clarity and confusion, a door between Amy and Jamie, a door to George Plimpton’s death, a door swinging open and shut just inches from my face. . . . All I know is the door” (269). The ethical relation with his aging and incontinent body leaves him at a threshold of yes and no, life and death, self and other. It is a state in which it is impossible to deny the existence of his eagerness for love or to evade his responsibility to defend Lonoff’s privacy against Kliman’s inquiry. What is important is that all these intentions and desire can only be possible after one’s response to the body. As Levinas stresses “(i)ncarnation is an extreme passivity; to be exposed to sickness, suffering, death, is to be exposed to compassion, and, as a self, to the gifts that costs” (TI 195). For this reason, Zuckerman has to flee from the scene even after he successfully persuaded Jamie to come to his place for a talk. The title “Exit Ghost” may well explain that in illness and suffering, one is vulnerable, passive and deprived of the ability to take initiative in one’s relation with others. That is the state of ghostly existence in which one can not decide how one should behave

and react. Moreover, the ethical relation with the ghostly existence is presented in Zuckerman's writing, in which he can resume his interaction with others. The examination of *Exit Ghost* not only reveals the ethical reconfiguration of the body but also indicates a different perspective on the notion of the ghost that Roth intends to imply. The ethical reconfiguration of the body reveals that the sensuous and the corporeal play a vital role in one's interaction with others. More specifically, while the first body in ethics is the body of the other, the Otherness of the corporeal goes prior to the self's responsibility for the other. As Zuckerman and Amy in their sickness and senility appear ineludible in ethical relations, their visibility and influence are eroded as ghosts in the contemporary era. Hence, *Exit Ghost* indicates that the development and transition of the idea of the ghost may convey Roth's idea of Jewish writing in the 21st century, one in which the body more than history and ethnic heritage provides the ethical impetus to be a man and a writer.

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身體的倫理重塑： 菲利普·羅斯《幽靈出局》之探討

摘要

自 1979 年的《幽靈作家》(*The Ghost Writer*) 以來，拉森蘇克曼 (Nathan Zuckerman) 一直是菲利普·羅斯 (Philip Roth) 在一系列蘇克曼小說中最受矚目的角色。不同於之前八本蘇克曼小說，在《幽靈出局》(*Exit Ghost*) 中，蘇克曼在十一年的鄉間退隱後，因醫療需要再度回到紐約，但已年邁病重。他發現他的「不再」——不再能適應科技包裹的都會環境；不再跟得上當代文學的品味，甚至無法維持他原有的樣貌。更讓他痛苦的是，當都會生活再度燃起他的慾望和生命意志時，他不再擁有那個身體去展現他的熱情和意圖。特別的是，這「不再」的身體重新形塑的倫理關係，不只在愛情和友誼上，也呈現於書寫策略。

受限於身體上的無能，甚至失禁，蘇克曼親身經歷深刻的倫理困境。呼應列維納斯 (Emmanuel Levinas) 談論的絕對的被動性 (radical passivity)，《幽靈出局》中的倫理關係值得深入探討，尤其當他者凸顯自我身體上的脆弱和無能時，所隱含不同的倫理可能性。也就是，羅斯在小說中所呈現的倫理關係，一方面要回應他者，但另一方面要保有自我，來體現這樣的倫理責任。閱讀羅斯的《幽靈出局》就如列維納斯倫理概念的延伸，因為在回應他者之前，小說中的身體概念強烈顯示自我的被動性和脆弱性，同時也是倫理關係重塑的重要關鍵。

關鍵字：身體，列維納斯，《幽靈出局》，疾病，衰老