

■ Passing as Trans-racial Bonding: Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*

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Abstract

In this paper, I argue that Philip Roth's *The Human Stain* departs from the trajectory of traditional passing narratives for it neither celebrates American individualism nor rearticulates Americans' national identity. Calling attention to Roth's innovative narrative strategy of having Coleman Silk, the protagonist, pass for a Jew rather than for a Caucasian white man, I argue that Roth's passing narrative should be read as a fable about an identity politics that goes beyond both race matters and national concerns. Moreover, in having a Jewish narrator to speak for the black protagonist posing as a Jew and sexually involved with a white woman half his age, Roth addresses a problem that diaspora studies has so far not sufficiently addressed: how two diaspora peoples, Jewish Diaspora and African Diaspora, should get along and work together to extend compassion and hospitality towards each other. What interests me is, on the one hand, in so mimicking Jewishness, Coleman is necessarily to be haunted by "the Jewish Question." On the other hand, given passing necessarily presupposes secrecy as well as its unveiling, that the tale of Coleman's "passing" should "pass" for a tale of sex scandal suggests that Roth's novel is as much about racial relation as it is about sex and passion, a passion that allows an aging black man to understand, rather than to simply feel or to identify with, the suffering experienced by those minorities—Jews and de-classed women—whose identities are, at least partially, constituted by histories of slavery, diaspora, and trauma. In complicating the trope of "passing" so that it is at once racial passing, feigned illiteracy, class pretense, generic errancy, and productive misreading, Roth swerves from the rigidity of an identity politics that pits blacks against whites to the ambivalence of trans-

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racial connection and translation, while tracing the affective contours of the struggles as well as solidarities between ethnicities caught in the turbulence of migration.

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Coleman Silk, the light-skinned black protagonist in Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*, passes for a Jew in order, so he says, to "be free: not black, not even white—just on his own and free" (120).¹ To be the master of his own life, he cuts himself free from all ties to his family, forgoes his racial heritage, and marries a Jewish woman he does not love. Years later, after he has founded a family with four presumably white children and achieved a distinguished career as a college dean, he is accused of racism for using a racial slur to inquire about the whereabouts of students absent from class: "Does anyone know these people? Do they exist or are they spooks?" (6). Given that Coleman's use of the word, "spooks," carries the implication of "self-referential irony," suggestive of Coleman's unease with his black identity, the novel is taken by Eric Sundquist as Roth's "inquiry into the politics of identity" (513). Yet, even if the novel is about identity politics, what identity does Coleman end up rejecting or embracing? Passing has often been viewed as an expression of either racial betrayal or racial defiance. In recent years, more and more critics tend to read passing as a gesture of defiance. Tim Parrish, G. Neelakantan, and Ross Posnock all take Coleman's erasure of his blackness as a painful price he has to pay in order to fulfill his dream to be free.² Passing, understood in the light, as Kathleen Pfeiffer claims, "offers a problematic but potentially legitimate expression of American individualism, one that resists segregation's one-drop logic and thereby undermines America's consciously constructed ideology of racial difference" (2). Mark Maslan, however, is not content with viewing Coleman's passing simply as an expression of American individualism; instead, he sees Coleman's individualism as "a way station to cultural nationalism" (382). Maslan maintains that *The Human Stain* "is only nominally about an individualist's struggle against the group; it is essentially about an *American's struggle to realize his nationality*" (379; emphasis added). That is, Coleman has to forsake his racial heritage and erase his blackness so that he may partake of the great American cultural tradition, while embodying America's national history.

My project, like Maslan's, is also to steer away from the entrenched rhetoric of either racial betrayal or racial defiance, but I want to focus on Roth's narrative strategy of having Coleman pass for a Jew rather than for a Caucasian white man,

¹ Further references to Roth's *The Human Stain* will be made parenthetically in the text.

² Tim Parrish argues that "What makes *The Human Stain* so remarkable and so controversial is that Roth's ostensibly Jewish protagonist, Coleman Silk, is actually born African American" (211). Thus, Roth tells an African American story which is simultaneously a Jewish American story. As such, *The Human Stain* is a story committed to the changeability of American self. G. Neelakantan also reads *The Human Stain* as novel with an ambitious design to engage with "such questions raised by the debates on identity in postmodern discourse." Ross Posnock argues that Roth's ambition in writing *The Human Stain* is to write the great American novel.

and read Coleman's passing as a fable about an identity politics that goes beyond both race matters and national concerns. What interests me is, on the one hand, Coleman's "partial" identification with the Jews, who are almost white but are yet not quite white enough. In so mimicking Jewishness, Coleman is necessarily to be haunted by "the Jewish Question"—both non-Jews' fear and desire of Jews and the Jews' collective suffering throughout western history—and ends up being killed and buried as a Jew. I argue that this narrative of passing, given especially it is written by an American novelist who is also a Jew, is not simply about being black, nor is it about being white. Nor, still, is it a rally for American individualism, or an endorsement and re-articulation of American dream or Americans' national identity. Rather, it is about the relation, the translation, and, more significantly, the difficulty of forming a cross-racial relation or sustaining such a translation, among subjects who are themselves caught in the ontological dilemma posed by a world that encourages the travelling of individuals but frustrates the "passing" of identities, a world in which, in other words, diasporism is in tension with nationalism, a tension that is, as in the case of Coleman, fatal.

On the other hand, if passing necessarily presupposes secrecy as well as its unveiling, the "secret" which Coleman has to hide in order to pass is displaced by other secrets, veiled by its unveiling.³ Roth's novel, as a fictional memoir that narrates the two scandals that Coleman has suffered before he died of a car accident—the Spooks scandal and the Faunia scandal—suggests that Coleman's passing, a secret in itself, has generated so many more secrets that he, in a sense, invites the curious disciplinary gaze of the others, for "Coleman could only conceal because secrecy is his identity," so observes Amy Hungerford (qtd. in Neelakantan: n. pag.). In this sense, we may even say that Coleman's identity is construed on the basis of the others' differential access to his "secrets." On a diegetic level, Coleman's colleagues take Coleman's "racism" and "misogyny" as his unspeakable secrets, given that they not only use the spooks scandal to expose him as a racist, but they also use his affair with Faunia to establish his identity as a misogynist. They thus do not hesitate to hail him as a "racist" and "misogynist." However, on a metadiegetic level, the narrator, Nathan Zuckerman, knows better. He knows that the "secret" that conditions Coleman's life and shapes his identity is neither racism nor sexism but racial passing, given that Zuckerman has access to the knowledge about Coleman that is denied to Coleman's colleagues and children.

³ Debra Shostak argues in *Countertexts, Counterlives* that Roth's *The Human Stain* is framed around the secrets initiated by "passing"—Coleman Silk's passing as a Jew and Faunia Farley's passing as an illiterate woman—secrets that are disclosed to the narrator only belatedly after their deaths (257-58). Shostak suspects that Roth intimates that the formation of identity is premised upon the production less of identification than of secrets, or, in Shostak's own vocabulary, "errors."

As such, I would argue that, taken into account the disparity of the diegetic and extradiegetic interpretations of Coleman's secrets, "passing" functions both on a thematic level, with a black passing for a white, and on a structural level, with a narrative of passing misread as a narrative of racism and sexism, and a passer mistaken as a racist and misogynist. That Coleman's passing narrative should "pass" for a tale of sex scandal suggests that Roth's novel is as much about racial relation as it is about sex and passion, a passion that allows an aging black man to understand, rather than to simply feel or to identify with,⁴ the suffering experienced by those minorities—Jews and de-classed women—whose identities are, at least partially, constituted by histories of slavery, diaspora, trauma, and even assimilation.

In a way, in complicating the trope of "passing" so that it is at once racial passing, feigned illiteracy, class pretense, generic errancy, and productive misreading, Roth seems to swerve from identity politics to trans-racial connection and translation, as the narrator Zuckerman continues to probe into the question of whether it is possible to get to know the other. Moreover, given that this tale of cross-racial translation is paralleled with the tale of the sex scandal between Coleman and Faunia Farley, Roth conjoins race with sex to examine the vital issue of how one is to live one's life beyond the categorical imperative of race, gender, class, nationalism, and morality. It is almost as if Roth, in writing this novel, is posing the question: to what degree is passion for the presumably "wrong" man or woman, and compassion for the unlikely others a constitutive factor in shaping the kind of life one wants to live? The racial passing staged by Coleman, I would like to suggest, is not a gesture that endorses whiteness, nor is it an act that celebrates American multi-culturalism. Rather, it is a novel that explores the tenacity of human beings' stubborn desire for passion, compassion, physical contacts, and psychic affinity. Whereas a white man may take this desire as a "natural" expression of his humanity, for others—blacks, Jews, and women—this desire can only be articulated with strenuous efforts and paid with costly prices. That Coleman and Faunia both die for it comments, rather tellingly, on how tenuous their claims to human rights are.

⁴ In Kathleen Woodward's "Calculating Compassion," she engages with the different theories about the political effectiveness of the narratives that solicit empathy. According to Woodward, both Lynn Henderson and Martha Nussbaum consider compassion as a basic social emotion and both argue for the importance "not just of feeling pain, but of understanding the experience of suffering" (68). Yet, Woodward also hastens to caution the readers, through an engagement with Lauren Berlant's so-called "radical sentimentalism," that neither empathy nor understanding will ever be complete and seamless. Rather, a cognitive mapping of the scenes of suffering is indispensable before balance between emotions and judgment may be maintained.

Specifically in having the light-skinned black protagonist passing for a Jew, and having a Jewish narrator to speak for the black posing as a Jew and sexually involved with a white woman half his age, Roth addresses a problem that diaspora studies has so far not yet addressed: how two diaspora peoples, Jewish Diaspora and African Diaspora, should get along and work together to extend compassion and hospitality towards each other? How do they explain their collective suffering to one another and how do they understand the suffering of the others? How may they deploy a politics of mutual recognition, on the basis of their shared destiny of persecution, marginality, and dislocation, not only to resist the “psycho-sexual racial logic”⁵ of hegemonic identity politics, but also to articulate and embody an “affiliative solidarity,” to borrow a phrase from Homi Bhabha,⁶ as they find themselves becoming minor and experiencing diaspora and dislocation, figuratively speaking, as Woman. In what ways does the formation of trans-diasporic identification require both to suffer a marginalization or feminization that is simultaneously delimiting and empowering, and, furthermore, to what degree is this tale of knowledge as ignorance and ignorance as a “fall” into knowledge, necessarily have to be mediated through the body of woman, before a poetics of cross-racial and trans-class compassion be comprehended and articulated? In *The Human Stain*, Roth extends the thematic possibilities of “passing,” so that it signifies not only an act of self performance but also an interpretive trope that he uses to trace the curious intimacies among the Jewish Diaspora and the African Diaspora, intimacies that, I would like to suggest, are mediated and structured, productively, by the changing structure of the male “traffic in woman.”⁷

⁵ In *The Location of Culture*, while summarizing Cornell West’s discursive attempt to articulate a “genealogical materialism,” Homi Bhabha suggests that West’s attempt to map out the psychic ambivalence the minorities encounter in living in the midst of different and conflictual ideologies carries a deconstructive potential that helps to upset and undercut the “psycho-sexual racial logic” of the dominant culture. Please refer to Bhabha’s “How Newness Enters the World,” in *The Location of Culture* for further details.

⁶ Bhabha uses the term “affiliative solidarity” to describe, first of all, the contacts, conflicts, and solidarities among different minority groups, and, secondly, the association, connection, and cooperation between ethnicities. For further elaboration, see Bhabha’s “How Newness Enters the World,” in *The Location of Culture*, especially pages 229-30.

⁷ Here I am, of course, referring to Gayle Rubin’s use of this term to criticize the patriarchal kinship structure which uses the body of woman to perpetuate male domination and reinforce patriarchal hegemony. However, Roth’s use of the “traffic in woman” paradigm does not read “woman” as the gift to be exchanged but as simultaneously the giver of gift and the gift itself. That is to say, only with Faunia’s appearance in his life is Coleman finally able to rid himself of the fantasy of the false freedom accorded to him by the strategy of passing and achieves an alternative understanding of freedom as well as how freedom is to be performed on the bodily and everyday level.

Passing as Faking, Faking as Translation

As previously mentioned, Coleman's passing for a Jew can be taken either as a betrayal of his racial root or as an endorsement of American individualism. Both interpretations are, in a way, correct. On the one hand, Coleman is guilty of racial betrayal. His devastated mother, upon hearing that Coleman has decided to repudiate his past and disown his family, disapprovingly reprimands Coleman that "You think like a prisoner. You do, Coleman Brutus. You're white as snow and you think like a slave" (139). His own brother, Walter, issues the threatening warning, "Don't you dare ever show your lily-white face around that house again" (145), and, thereby, excommunicates him precisely because he finds Coleman a traitor and coward. On the other hand, Coleman, it goes without saying, disagrees with Walter and claims instead that he is pursuing his dream as an individual. Both interpretations—passing as betrayal and passing as American individualism—fail to see that passing is simultaneously betrayal and fidelity, departure and arrival. Whereas passing does allow Coleman to assume a new identity and begin a new life, it also demands him to leave behind an old identity and abandon all ties to the past, thereby condemning himself to live a life of self-imposed exile. This does not mean that Coleman has suffered a splitting of his subjectivities, and is thereby caught in between appearance and performance, guilt and ambition. For four decades, Coleman lives a life of complacency and seems to have achieved all that he sets out to accomplish. Yet, at the apex of his success, the spooks scandal brings him to realize, rather painfully, how "un-free" he still is, even though he is now seen by his friends and family as white. Having "negated" his past, he is now determined to sever himself from the present, which he finds to be a repetition of his past. It is curious that having spent four decades to forget his racial past, he should come to the realization at this point of his life that racism is still the inescapable reality of his life.

If Zuckerman considers Coleman's affair with Faunia "his [Coleman's] own rebirth" (27), passing is thus both birth and death; as such, it throws the passer into a liminal position where he can neither celebrate his gain nor mourn for his loss. If passing is a birth, it is a birth marked also by trauma and melancholia. What is even more, in following his desire beyond the law of racial differences, not only does Coleman experience the ironic reversal that is the fate of all racial passers (in pursuing whiteness, the passer experiences the darkness at the heart of whiteness), but he also comes to a traumatic awareness that at the heart of whiteness is less plenitude than vacuity. Emotionally, he is unmoored; he is lonely, especially so after the spooks scandal. So, is it true that passing is but a circuitous attempt, doomed to failure, for, as Coleman's heart-broken mother

warns Coleman, "I could tell you that there is no escape, that all your attempts to escape will only lead you back to where you began" (140)? Has Coleman ended up changing nothing? Has he been led by the whimsical vicissitudes of life back to where he began; that is, back to racism? What can possibly be *passed on* by Coleman's passing for a Jew, if not Coleman's—or Zuckerman's "traumatic awakening" to the ethics of passing, both passing for and passion on? In a way, Coleman realizes, rather belatedly, as a performative act, passing for a Jew is not a mimetic act that demands the mechanic reproduction of the host of semiotic codes that constitutes the hegemony of whiteness; passing for a Jew, he realizes, is a reiteration of, with differences, the "stain" of whiteness. Passing for a Jew introduces into the myth of whiteness the supplementary logic of its impossibility. Thus, as an act, passing is less an enactment than a translation of a difficult racial knowledge, a performative translation of a traumatic awakening that almost always introduces the otherness of whiteness to its plot.

Moreover, having successfully passed as a white and spent four decades "[b]eing a dean, being a father, being a husband, being a scholar, a teacher," he realizes, after the spooks scandal, that he has, in passing, not only forgotten his racial past, but also repressed "the natural thing that is the brute" within him (33). Repression, as a critical cliché goes, generates a repetition of the repressed, whose furious effect is to get him, at an advanced age of seventy one, to be in touch with "the remnants of the natural thing," while falling desperately and hopelessly in love with Faunia (33). Before he can clear his good name of this charge of racism, he meets Faunia Farley, an illiterate white female janitor half his age, and falls passionately in love with her. This passionate love affair makes him a misogynist in the eyes of the world, while accelerating his fall and eventually plunging him to his ignoble death with Faunia in a car accident. To his friends and colleagues, Coleman has fallen, like all other moral trespassers, even though Coleman claims that he is actually gaining another life and regaining his vitality from this illicit affair. Yet, if we see Coleman's affair with Faunia as his "fall" into disgrace, then it can be said that Coleman has fallen not once, but three times. The first time is when he consciously makes the decision to pass for a white man so as to be free. For this decision, he suffers a painful consequence and is estranged from his own family. Then, years later, when he is charged of racism in the spooks scandal, he experiences another fall, with a hidden part of his identity being exposed (Coleman is indeed a racist for his is a self-reflective racism). Finally, then, when he has an affair with Faunia, he experiences another fall, with yet another hidden part of his identity disclosed (He has indeed trafficked through woman to satisfy his masculinist desire, though it is Iris, his Jewish wife, rather than Faunia, of whom he has taken advantage). The story of Coleman's rise and fall is, on the one hand,

a fable to demonstrate the tenacity of racism which has the force to compel a strong-willed black man to undergo three symbolic deaths, rather than one. On the other, it also allows the reader to witness the tragic shape of Coleman's desire, as he clings stubbornly, even in the midst of all three crises, to the fantasy that he has always exercised his own free will and pursued freedom in his own terms. Freedom, as Coleman realizes later in his life, "is very dangerous"; it is as complicated a notion as the problematic of knowledge or identity, for freedom is purchased with estrangement from his mother, siblings, wife and even children.⁸

In a way, it is not surprising that critics tend to see Roth's *The Human Stain* as a novel that explores the interwoven complexity of the pursuit of freedom, the production of knowledge, and the constitution of identity. Yet, Roth's investigation of these issues brings him to take a detour. Having depicted Coleman, Zuckerman, and Faunia as three misfits who voluntarily exile themselves from their communities, Roth proceeds to bring together Coleman, Faunia, and Nathan to suggest the possibility, if not the necessity, of the formation of solidarity and community along the line of such affects as shame, melancholia, and abjection. Zuckerman, for example, sees Coleman, in passing for a white, to be "do[ing] what I was doing" which is writing itself, for, so Zuckerman speculates, Coleman "[ha]d written the book—the book was your life. . . . Your book was your life—and your art? Once you set the thing in motion, your art was being a white man. . . . That was your singular art of invention" (345). So, Zuckerman and Coleman are bonded together by an artistic desire that passes for/on multiple bodies, as if seeking to articulate the affective contours of a community formed on the basis of neither nationalism nor familialism, neither class nor race.

As a writer, Zuckerman writes to expose and conceal; he writes what Mark Maslan calls a "fictional memoir" of his friend, Coleman. With the use of this fictional memoir, Zuckerman positions himself as both Coleman's "biographer" and his "witness, narrating his life with a familiarity that could come only from within" (Maslan 383). Nowhere in his narrative does Zuckerman claim to know everything about Coleman; rather, he repetitively emphasizes how he does not know and could not have known Coleman's story: "I can't know. Now that they're

⁸ His strong will, as well as his "obstinate autonomy," alienates his wife, "resulted in the unending friction of their lives" (13). Meanwhile, his constant awareness that "there was a lie at the foundation of his relationship to his children, a terrible lie" (321) strains his relationship with his children. To name but one example, Mark Silk, Coleman's youngest son, so Zuckerman observes, seems to have "imagined that he was going to have his father around to hate forever" (314).

dead, nobody can know. For better or worse, I can only do what everyone does who thinks that they know. I imagine. I am forced to imagine. It happens to be what I do for a living. It is my job. It's now all I do" (213). Yet, as Maslan perceptively notes, "Zuckerman's lack of factual knowledge gives rise to a subjective bond with his dead friend that enables him not only to reconstruct Coleman's life and death but also to do so from the inside—that is, to bear witness to them." In this way, Maslan continues, "Roth transforms historical discontinuity into a source of shared historical experience" (368). With his empathetic understanding of Coleman's past—Coleman's irrepressible desire to live otherwise, Zuckerman gains imaginative access to experiences which he has not himself had, while imaginatively reconstructing dialogues and episodes in which he does not participate. In so doing, Zuckerman's fictional memoir of Coleman's life may have violated the law of verisimilitude and the demands for authenticity; yet his ignorance of Coleman's past may have gained him a historical consciousness that allows him to understand, rather than simply to empathize with the others whose experiences he has not had, as if he were moved and inspired by "the touch of the past," to borrow a phrase from Roger I. Simon, so as to imaginatively construct an intersubjective, affiliative, and pedagogical experience out of the others' past. If to "remember otherwise," as Simon reminds us, is to pose the overriding questions of "what it might mean to take the memories of others (memories formed in other times and spaces) into our lives and so live as though the lives of others mattered" (9), then Zuckerman, by practicing this imaginative art of "remembering otherwise," not only becomes connected with the others whose memories and histories are "formed in other times and spaces," but also activates "a new cosmo-political form in which one is open to 'translating' cultures and histories in ways that make it possible to reassess and revise the stories that are most familiar to us" (9).

Zucherman is, in this sense, touched by the past, though it is not his past that touches him but Coleman's. In one of the pivotal scenes in the novel where Coleman and Zuckerman, after a comfortable dinner and after the two of them have casually chatted about their separate pasts, nostalgically dance to the swing of the forties, Coleman, as if loosened by the mood of camaraderie, discloses to Zuckerman his secretive affair with Faunia. As Coleman is wrapping up his story, Zuckerman, surprised by his "thoughtless delight" in dancing with Coleman, wonders to himself, "Is he astonished to be telling me all this?" and "Why is he telling me?" (32, 33). Ruminating on his own "reclusive existence," Zuckerman "completely lost my equilibrium" as well as "all the comforting delusions about the serenity achieved through enlightened resignation" (36, 37). This dance with Coleman, as well as the story Coleman tells Zuckerman about his affair with

Faunia, so concludes Zuckerman, “was how Coleman became my friend and how I came out from under the stalwartness of living alone in my secluded house and dealing with the cancer blows. *Coleman Silk danced me right back into life*. . . . Indeed, the dance that sealed our friendship was alone what made his disaster my subject. And made his disguise my subject. And made the proper presentation of his secret my problem to solve. That was how I ceased being able to live apart from the turbulence and intensity that I had fled” (45; emphasis added). In other words, despite the fact that Zuckerman does not know everything that has happened to Coleman, he is moved by Coleman so that he feels compelled to understand what kind of person Coleman is so as to give an account of Coleman. Theirs, one can even say, is a dance that implicates Zuckerman into “the erotics of knowing and telling,” to borrow a phrase from Debra Shostak (263). Moreover, Zuckerman is moved by Coleman’s audacity to re-embrace the entanglements of life. His connection with Coleman, in this sense, is not a transient affect of sentimentality; rather, it occurs, “as a totally unpredicable *tuche*, a miraculous event which shatters our lives” (Žižek 376). It is the kind of connection that is itself a pedagogical lesson, bringing him out of his self-indulgent narcissism and out of his self-imposed reclusive existence. More importantly, it brings him to translate memories (Coleman’s, Faunia’s, Ernestine’s) into a history, both personal and collective, which is a history that subjects racism, sexism, and even nationalism to critique, as he rewrites passion into compassion, segregation into connection.

In the same veins, whereas at the heart of Coleman and Zuckerman’s friendship is an “empathetic disidentification,”⁹ Coleman and Faunia, who are diametrically opposed to each other in terms of class, are bonded together both by their shared fate of persecution, by their joint sense of secrecy, and by their brutal passion for life, a passion that approximates that of the Greek gods whose mythologies Coleman, as a classics professor, has loved and taught for many years. In a significant scene in the novel, Faunia pays a visit to the pet shop to feed her favorite crow, which she names Prince. Faunia’s perspective is focalized by Zuckerman, the sympathetic narrator, through whose voice Faunia’s interiority is unveiled. As Faunia looks at Prince perching inside its cage, she delivers

⁹ I have here borrowed and modified the term “empathetic disidentification” from “empathetic unsettlement” which is proposed and developed by Dominick LaCapra in his attempt to describe such emotional responses to trauma that, though empathetic in nature, nevertheless both invite and deny full identification with the victim’s position. Instead, empathy, LaCapra argues, is not to be “conflated with identification or fusion with the other”; rather, it suggests “affective relation, rapport, or bond with the other recognized and respected as other” (212-13).

an interior monologue, fraught with rich philosophical connotations, on the “human stain”:

We leave a stain, we leave a trail, we leave our imprint. Impurity, cruelty, abuse, error, excrement, semen—there’s no other way to be here. Nothing to do with disobedience. Nothing to do with grace or salvation or redemption. It’s in everyone. Indwelling. Inherent. Defining. The stain that is there before its mark. Without the sign it is there. The stain so intrinsic it doesn’t require a mark. (242)

Having reported Faunia’s interior monologue, Zuckerman the narrator then proceeds to claim that “*That*, naturally, would be Faunia’s take on it” (242; emphasis added). Yet, what is “that” which, according to Zuckerman, must have been Faunia’s perspective, even though by the time he writes this novel, Faunia is already dead and Zuckerman would have no access to her diary, and, therefore, no access to her view on anything at all? Zuckerman, however, does not hesitate to identify with Faunia; actually, he is more than willing to speak as/for Faunia, thereby blending his perspective with hers. For Zuckerman, what bonds Coleman with Faunia is that

She’s like the Greeks, like Coleman’s Greeks. Like their gods. . . . There is never enough flesh for the king of the gods or enough perversity. All the craziness desire brings. The dissoluteness. The depravity. The crudest pleasures. . . . Instead the Greek Zeus, entangled in adventure, vividly expressive, capricious, sensual, exuberantly wedded to his own rich existence, anything but alone and anything but hidden. Instead the *divine* stain. A great reality-reflecting religion for Faunia Farley if, through Coleman, she’d known anything about it. (242-43).

Stamped as they both are by the human stains—Coleman hunted and trapped by racism and Faunia abused and damaged by sexism, they are nevertheless driven by the human hubris to lead the life of Greek gods, a life imprinted with the divine stain rather than the *human* stain. Once Coleman tempts fate by doing what Zeus would do—to satisfy his sensual desire, “*not merely in his own form but, even more excitingly, as himself made manifest as beast*” (242; emphasis added), he is guilty of passing given class and racial boundaries and trespassing into forbidden territories. He is as stubborn as the hand-raised crow in the pet shop, for the crow, hand-raised by human beings and ignorant of “the crow language,” is “A crow who really doesn’t know how to be a crow,” just like Faunia who is a “woman who doesn’t really know how to be a woman” (247). Faunia and Coleman are linked together by their ignorance; yet, as Zuckerman sees it, this ignorance is a productive force which makes them decide, as a happy coincidence, not to compromise their raw, uncivilized, sexually-charged desires. The three of them, Faunia, Coleman, and the crow, make a trio of misfits. Once the analogy between Coleman,

Faunia, and the crow is established, Faunia may then conclude, as she gazes on the crow, that "We're meant for each other. Marry me. You're my destiny, you ridiculous bird" (247).

It is thus possible to see that what bonds Coleman, Zuckerman, and Faunia together is their recognition of how much they have tried, in vain, to cleanse themselves of the stains of racism and sexism and how their desire for passing—self-invention and self-translation—draws them into forming affective identification with and sympathy for one another. That is to say, what binds them together is, in the final analysis, the aporetic knowledge of their "fall" from the stain of racism and sexism *into* a difficult understanding of the "real" of the human stain, which, unsymbolizable and unrepresentable, continues to haunt them in its repetition. Without the "fall" into disgrace and impotence, no knowledge, difficult or not, would be possible, given that the "real" eludes both representation and comprehension. In another erotic scene in the novel that involves dancing, Coleman asks Faunia to dance for him. While Faunia is dancing, Coleman is

seeing her, every particle, he's seeing her and she knows that he's seeing her. They're connected. She knows he wants her to claim something. He wants me to stand here and move, she thinks, and to claim what is mine. Which is? Him. Him. He's offering me him. . . . And so, giving him her downturned look with the subtlety in it, she moves, she moves, and the formal transfer of power begins. (227)

They are connected because, in dancing for Coleman, Faunia can then prove to Coleman that she, because of her experience and knowledge of suffering, "can make him calm like this," just as "he can make me calm like this" (228). Faunia's dance joins her with Coleman, calming both down, relieving both of the pain of the injustice they have suffered.

This knowledge, which Coleman and Faunia find difficult to articulate for they are the very embodiment of the stain of racism and sexism, is transferred to Zuckerman, becoming his memories and his story to tell and translate. Once he knows everything about Coleman, he begins to raise a series of thought-provoking questions: "How did such a man as Coleman come to exist? What is it that he was?" and "Can such things even be known?" (333). At one point, Zuckerman even asks himself "Was he merely being another American and, in the great frontier tradition, accepting the democratic invitation to throw your origins overboard if to do so contributes to the pursuit of happiness? *Or was it more than that? Or was it less?*" (334; emphasis added). The idea that it is the American Dream or American individualism that motivates Coleman to pass for a white is briefly entertained, but it is also immediately dismissed as one of the many possible explanations to account for Coleman's harshly ironic fate. Yet, what is pertinent to my discussion is the possibility that he is motivated by something

that is both more than and less than the American Dream, nationalism, upward mobility, or racism. After all, as Zuckerman comes to realize while talking to Coleman's sister, Ernestine, whatever motivates Coleman to pass for white will remain forever incomprehensible to most people, Ernestine included.

But the concept of life as something whose purpose is concealed, of custom as something that may not allow for thought, of society as dedicated to a picture of itself that may be badly flawed, of an individual as real apart and beyond the social determinants defining him, which may indeed be what to him seem most unreal—in short, every perplexity pumping the human imagination seemed to lie somewhat outside [Ernestine's] own unswerving allegiance to a canon of time-honored rules. (333)

Ernestine's "unswerving allegiance to a canon of time-honored rules" includes, it goes without saying, American cultural nationalism. As a sensible and intelligent African American woman, dedicated to education, Ernestine would never be able to understand Coleman's attempt to become "an individual as real apart and beyond the social determinants defining him." Yet, Zuckerman, being befriended by Coleman and moved by his refusal to give up his "entanglement with life" (44), knows better. He knows that, even though he may not be able to know everything about Coleman's life, Coleman is motivated not by his "allegiance to a canon of time-honored rules" to live his life. As a consequence, even though Coleman's life is tragic as well as ironic, it is nevertheless unpredictable, dramatic, and exciting, leading to unforeseeable destinations and an unknowable future. His is a life that inspires Zuckerman to think, feel, and live otherwise. As Coleman dances Zuckerman back to life, Zuckerman is then going to "conclud[e] the story that the other began" (Parrish 457).

Passing as Knowledge as Ignorance

What does Zuckerman see in Coleman's vital and energetic "entanglement with life" that he not only decides to make Coleman's disaster and disguise his subject but is also determined to "ceased [sic] being able to live apart from the turbulence and intensity that I had fled" (45)? For Zuckerman, Coleman is a "vital, potent participant in the frenzy" of a life that includes rather than excludes "the contaminant of sex, the redeeming corruption that de-idealizes the species and keeps us everlastingly mindful of the matter we are" (37). Coleman's "thrill" with life may have earned him Zuckerman's respect, but, in pursuing his self and freedom beyond the confines of written and unwritten law, Coleman also sees his own life go through a tragic but ironic reversal. Inasmuch as the success he gains in passing demands him to jettison his own family, that is, who he was, he finds

himself, in the spooks episode, experiencing rejection by the community he helps to make, and thereby suffering another loss of his identity. Yet, Coleman Silk's life story is not one with a moral lesson that condemns passing as morally and politically incorrect. It is a story with an open ending that invites multiple interpretations. Coleman has tried, failed, risen and fallen. He has known that, in denying his racial root, he will suffer the consequence of his decision. What he does not anticipate is what consequence life has installed for him. Yet, despite the risks thus involved, he nevertheless chooses not to succumb to the social pressures, be they from his mother, brother, or children, and stands firm to his desire not to compromise under the pressures of everyday moral rules. He would not allow himself or others to judge him apropos of external rules of morality on the ethical values of his behaviors.

Coleman's refusal not to be politically correct, together with his refusal to use any standard codes of behavior to make moral judgments prior to the event itself, makes him a quintessential outsider, a self-imposed exile who chooses to estrange himself first from his family, then from the academic family that he builds up single-handedly, and finally from the conservative middle-class community to which he once claims membership. No wonder Roth should choose to cast Coleman as a black posing for a Jew, for Coleman's situation is analogous to that of a displaced being who is caught in an existential dilemma imposed from without: it's a dilemma about to be or not to be, to surrender or to revolt, to leave or to stay, and, in Coleman's case, to join them or to stay with us. A displaced being such as a Jew or an African American is caught in a difficult position where he is doomed to experience firsthand the traumatic consequences of cross-cultural translation as failure and the racial logic of exclusion as violence. Displacement allows one to be keenly aware of the border, both its force of inhibition and the fatal attraction the border thereby invites in crossing and transgressing it. This "border-crossing" desire constitutes the displaced being's psychic trajectory, bringing him into a psychic affinity with another fallen soul, Faunia Farley. The story of their psychic and sexual affinity, furthermore, connects them with Zuckerman whose memoir of Coleman's life then connects the readers with "a past that is not ours by imbuing us with other people's memories" (Maslan 384). In making himself a Jew, Coleman "makes himself into a person whose meaning requires, in Nathan's description, a tortuous prose commensurate with his elegant, oxymoronic name" (Sundquist 514). What Coleman also exposes, both in his life as a Jew and in his death as a Jew, is how "the fates of black and Jew remain bound together as tightly, as fatally, as ever" (Sundquist 522).

When the novel begins, Coleman has barely survived the "spooks" scandal and made acquaintance of Nathan Zuckerman, the narrator. Coleman seeks

Zuckerman's assistance to ghost write his memoir. Zuckerman, who has initially refused to comply with Coleman's request, becomes totally "hypnotized by the other couple" (37), by their disparity and audacity. Coleman, for example, told Zuckerman how when he met Faunia, he was besieged with the desire to "yield, to let this simple craving be his guide. Beyond their accusation. Beyond their indictment. Beyond their judgment" (64). Despite the fact that Coleman and Faunia had nothing in common, they are drawn towards each other as if bound by what the narrator calls "the pact between them" (326). Not only does this "pact" bring them to experience mutual recognition that goes beyond class differences, but it also enables them to "feel the thrill of leading a double life," so maintains Zuckerman (47). Theirs is a life of doubleness, and, in extension, a life of duplicity, because each has structured his or her life on a series of lies. At the same time, they are bonded together not only because they have both passed for what they are not, but also because of "the pact between them." What is the pact that ties Coleman and Faunia together? Zuckerman so explains, after his meeting with Ernestine at the cemetery, that "I meant their mutual recognition that there was no clean way out" (326). Both of them feel trapped, for, even though they have both tried to master their own fates, invent their identities, and write their own biographies, life seems to be a repetition of the structure of loss. Confronted with the repetition of their trauma, Coleman and Faunia can only remain true to their desires, despite their awareness that all their efforts may prove futile and in vain. Theirs, in this sense, repeats the structure of desire that conditions and affects the fate of those tragic heroes in the Greek tragedies that Coleman loves to read. Coleman's tragic and ironic heroism can thus be taken as a political act that carries an ethical possibility, for it, like the true political act that Slavoj Žižek describes, "unleashes the force of negativity that shatters the very foundations of our being" (409). Given that this force of negativity demands Coleman to negate his past, while trapping him to a return of that which he tries so desperately to negate, it may appear that his life has followed the structure of repetition that characterizes all narratives of trauma. If Roth has written *The Human Stain* in such a way that it ends, rather than begins, with the spooks scandal, it is then possible to read it as yet another novel that exposes the futility of passing and the absurdity of an overreacher's ambition to "act as God." Nevertheless, by introducing into his novel a second plot, the Faunia scandal, and by paralleling the spooks scandal with the Faunia scandal, Roth conducts a contrapuntal reading of two political acts, racial passing on the one hand and class and sexual trespassing on the other hand. Whereas in passing for white, Coleman seeks to rearticulate his freedom, what to him is a basic human right, only to be devastated by the discovery, at the age of sixty eight, that he is still not free, and the symbolic,

political, or economic return he has expected is still unreachable. Yet, in his affair with Faunia, when Coleman lets his guard down and expects no return, Coleman ironically achieves his freedom.

In another pivotal scene in the novel, as Zuckerman gazes at Coleman gazing at Faunia milking the cows at the barn where she works part time, “as if nothing more stirring had ever before happened to him,” Zuckerman describes how he is fascinated with

their extensive disparity as human types, with the nonuniformity, the variability, the teeming irregularity of sexual arrangements—and with the injunction upon us . . . not merely to endure but to live, to go on taking, giving, feeding, milking, acknowledging wholeheartedly, as the enigma that it is, the pointless meaningfulness of living—all was recorded as real by tens of thousands of minute impressions. The sensory fullness, the copiousness, the abundant—superabundant—details of life, which is the rhapsody. And Coleman and Faunia, who are now dead, deep in the flow of the unexpected, day by day, minute by minute, themselves details in that superabundance. (52)

There exists, in other words, between Coleman and Faunia an affective flow that goes unchecked and ignorant of the “canon of time-honored rules.” Theirs is a life that Zuckerman is invited to take an active part in and to bear witness to. In a way, Nathan Zuckerman also leads a double life, for, as a writer, he writes to expose everything, as if writing is analogous to claiming thus to know everything, without the risk of exposing himself. Whereas Zuckerman writes to expose everything, when he actually does not know everything but has to rely on his imagination to “pass” as an omniscient author, Coleman Silk has led a life of racial passing, masquerading as a Jew when he should be legally classified as a black. Faunia, in her turn, has claimed she is illiterate, even though she can both read and write. At the end of the novel, the narrator, having learned of Faunia’s feigned illiteracy, wonders to himself:

The illiteracy had been an act, something she decided her situation demanded. But why? A source of power? Her one and only source of power? But a power purchased at what price? Think about it. Afflicts herself with illiteracy too. Takes it on voluntarily. Not to infantilize herself, however, not to present herself as a dependent kid, but just the opposite: *to spotlight the barbaric self befitting the world*. Not rejecting learning as a stifling form or propriety but trumping learning by a knowledge that is stronger and prior. She has nothing against reading per se—it’s that pretending not to be able to feels right to her. (297; emphasis added)

Faunia’s illiteracy, as a performative act, is adopted, so the narrator claims, to “spotlight the barbaric self befitting the world.” Whose “barbaric self” is the narrator referring to? On the one hand, the narrator seems to suggest that Faunia adopts the role of the “barbaric” self so that she may take full advantage of the freedom available to an uneducated self. On the other hand, it is also possible

that the narrator considers the world itself to be so barbaric that only by performing barbaric illiteracy can Faunia survive in it. If Faunia feels “the thrill of leading a double life,” she is nevertheless not born a woman seeking the dubious excitement of deception. To consciously lead a double life is a tough decision made only after she has experienced a series of blows in her difficult life—sexual harassment by her stepfather, domestic abuse at the hands of her ex-husband traumatized by Vietnam War, death of her two beloved children by a fire probably set by her ex-husband. Loss and trauma teaches her that life is manageable only when she takes a detour through a deliberate act of passing.

Faunia’s “passing” throws her into a cycle of downward mobility for she has persuaded herself that she is “The woman who doesn’t want to own everything. The woman who doesn’t want to own *anything*” (232). Yet, is she really a woman who doesn’t want to own anything? Or, is she a woman who, having lost her beloved children in a tragic fire, has discovered that ownership, for a de-classed woman, only breeds melancholia? So, to protect herself from loss and the trauma of loss, she finds it wise to forego ownership altogether. Passing, in this sense, is but a symptom of her trauma; it allows her to survive her personal trauma. Perhaps she pretends ignorance because she believes ignorance to be a different form of knowledge, one that does not presume that she can ever know everything, including her own self. It is in this sense that she claims to be a woman “who doesn’t really know how to be a woman” (247). Ignorance is then the stain that we human beings carry with us; it is the human hubris—our presumption to claim to know everything and to expose everything—which is the final joke. Faunia, as such, is “[r]econciled to the horrible, elemental imperfection of human beings.” She is dispensed with the appalling “fantasy of purity,” for, to get down to the bottom of it, human beings “leave a stain, we leave a trail, we leave our imprint. Impurity, cruelty, abuse, error, excrement, semen—there’s no other way to be here.”

Faunia’s passing is thus not only a symptom of her trauma; it also endows her with an ironic knowledge that is available to none other than Coleman, another passer. It is a shared knowledge for the two of them who have suffered the twists of fate and come to understand “how easily life can be one thing rather than another” (125). Yet, Coleman arrives at this negative knowledge of the inherent imperfection of human beings via a route that is markedly different from Faunia’s. Though he also leads a double life, for him, however, passing is simultaneously seductive and dangerous, threatening as well as empowering. Racial passing promises Coleman, to borrow a concept from Judith Butler, the possibility of “changeability” and the dream of “metamorphosis,” both of which signify the kind of “freedom” that is afforded only by whiteness. It is, therefore, “freedom” which

gives passing this fatal attraction. At the same time, even though passing does promise “freedom,” it also excites anxiety on both sides of the racial binary. As such, for Coleman at least, passing is both freedom and anxiety; mobility and diaspora. Coleman, as the subject who passes, is caught in the freedom and anxiety of unfinished becoming. “Passing,” so said, is a site of translation and re-settlement, entangled desires that bind the black with the Jew, anti-black racism with anti-Semitism, racism with misogyny.

In choosing to pass for a Jew, Coleman has chosen, so argues Eric Sundquist, an identity that “allows (or requires) him not to pass completely,” thereby leaving him “the target of a man in whom anti-Semitism registers as strongly as anti-black racism” (522). That is to say, although, with passing as a strategy, Coleman takes on the privileges of whiteness, he also has to assume the racial burden that comes along with being a Jew, given that the Jew has historically been excluded from the racial category of “whiteness.”¹⁰ If Jewishness is thus considered to be the “stain” of whiteness, it is then unsurprising that Coleman is not only “killed as a Jew” by Faunia’s anti-Semitic ex-husband, Les Farley, but also “buried as a Jew.” Coleman’s death, Sundquist maintains, “exposes the illusion that Jews are safe, white enough to escape the rage of nativist racists” (522). It also becomes a cause of obsession for Zuckerman, who has previously declined Coleman’s request that Zuckerman should write the book *Spooks* for him. When he learns of Coleman’s story from Ernestine, Coleman’s younger sister, he “was completely seized by his story, by its end and by its beginning, and, then and there, I began this book” (337). The irony of Coleman’s death binds Zuckerman to him, brings him to wonder whether, given Coleman’s audacity to jettison his mother and his family, Coleman “doesn’t just want to be white. He wants to be able to do that. It has to do with more than just being blissfully free. It’s the savagery in *The Iliad*, Coleman’s favorite book about the ravening spirit of man” (335). As Zuckerman speculates, Coleman may not simply want to be a white man; what he wants is being *a man*, a man “with ravening spirit” who demands to be taken as a human being. It is probably a rather modest request. Yet, the very impossibility for a man to live a life with freedom and justice comments critically on the collective paranoia and hysteria of a society eager to enact “the rite of purifications,” as suggested by the epigram from Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King*, “By banishing a man, or expiation of blood by blood.” Despite Coleman’s brilliant success “at altering his personal lot,” Zuckerman realizes that

¹⁰ For an interesting discussion of Jews’ uneasy relationship to whiteness, please see Eric Goldstein’s *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity*. See especially chapter 6 for Goldstein’s analysis of the whitening of the Jews in the [19]50s and [19]60s.

Coleman is nevertheless “ensnared by the history he didn’t quite counted on,” and still bound to the “we that is inescapable: the present moment, the common lot, the current mood, the mind of one’s country, the stranglehold of history that is one’s own time. Blindsided by the terrifying provisional nature of everything” (335-36).

For a black man such as Coleman Silk to pass as a white/Jew is to entangle a black man’s desire with that of the other, be it a white or a Jew; for a Jewish writer to write about the passing of a black man as a Jewish man is to further highlight and complicate the entanglement of the black’s desire with that of the Jews, the diaspora of the Black Atlantic with that of the Jewish Atlantic. This entanglement of the Black Diaspora with the Jewish Diaspora is grounded in their parallel histories of trauma and dispersion, for such experiences constitute possibility of mutual recognition and identification. Yet, this entanglement, in racial passing, of one’s desire with that of the other, as well as the recognition of the embeddedness of one’s identity in that of the other, opens up a vista of a future yet to come, in which family, or community, will be formed not on the basis of a knowable past and a shared identity, but on the basis of a future yet to be envisioned and a staged identity.

If, like all displaced beings such as blacks and Jews, Coleman may have once indulged in the fantasy that he may change his own fate with the force of his will, he is later, upon his meeting with Faunia, to confront and realize the arrogance of his presumption that he may act like God. His chance encounter with Faunia, in this sense, proves to be a redemptive experience. In contrast to Coleman, Lester Farley, Faunia’s ex-husband, is so portrayed in the novel as a traumatized Vietnam veteran who suffers from post-traumatic syndrome. Other than blaming the government for the war, he also holds those “Jew bastard” such as Coleman Silk responsible for America’s defeat in Vietnam (70). Farley tries to make sense of his experience in Vietnam, but the more he remembers it, the more his memories are fetishized and muddled. All that he knows is that “I died already. Because I died already in Vietnam” (73). Not even a trip to the Vietnam Memorial Hall, arranged especially for him by his comrades, Louie, Swift, and Chet, can help him work through his trauma. Louie, who plans the trip, intends to reconnect Lester with his past by getting him to see and touch the name of his dead comrade, Kenny, on the memorial wall. Louie expects Lester to repeat what has happened to Louie when he visits the Memorial the first time: Louie is relieved of his guilt of surviving the war when he claims to have heard his dead comrade assuring him “that it was okay,” as if the dead man permits the living to “get on with my life” (248). Yet, once Lester sees Kenny’s name on the wall, he “doesn’t feel anything, doesn’t hear anything, doesn’t even

remember anything" (252). He cannot hear the dead talking to him, cannot therefore make sense of his traumatic past, for he has always determined what Kenny wants him to do is to "get them"; that is, Faunia and Coleman. The trip only reinforces his existing anxiety that he cannot talk to Kenny because "it wasn't okay with Kenny. That there was more to be done. Didn't know what it was. But he wouldn't have just left me like that. That's why there was no message for me. Because I still had more to do for Kenny" (259). Once he is sure that he needs to go on a suicide mission to get "The Jew. The Jew Professor" (257), he then feels he has appeased Kenny's restless spirit. Stubbornly clinging to the notion that he needs to kill the Jew so as to avenge the dead, he proves himself one of those who claim to know everything and believe they have the right to determine the fate of others. As a Vietnam veteran diagnosed to have suffered from PTSD, he embodies a version of American cultural nationalism that, rather than connecting with others on the basis of passion and compassion, connects with the others with an avenging and accusatory spirit that treats the others as if the others were the very embodiment of evil.

If Lester Farley is one of those foils whose paranoia and hatred closes down his mind and makes him a pervert who takes the law into his own hands, Delphine Roux, a figure often ignored by Roth's critics, frames the novel's critique of the witch hunt wielded in Athena, especially the community's relentless efforts to probe into and to pass moral judgment on Coleman's private life. Delphine's hysterical attempt to monitor Coleman's private life exemplifies the media's label-flinging and rumor-scavenging activities surrounding the Clinton-Lewinsky sex scandal, since the latter is the only political event to which Zuckerman makes frequent reference and to which Coleman's scandalous affair with Faunia seems to hark back. Who is Delphine? As a professor of French at Athena College and an avid practitioner of political correctness, she uses the spooks incident to charge Coleman of racism and then later she also uses Coleman's affair with Faunia to charge Coleman of misogyny. She is portrayed as a woman who has achieved academic success at a young age of 29, and who tries hard to maintain her image as scholarly as well as literature-loving. However, as an intellectual, she is torn by conflicting desires, at once "afraid of being exposed, dying to be seen" (185). Despite her confusion about what she wants, she never has any doubts about what she knows about Coleman, for she is certain that Coleman is a racist and a misogynist. This certainty of hers leads her to conduct a relentless witchhunting, with her secretly sending out the anonymous letter, "Everybody knows," to blackmail Coleman. She does all these, however, with the best of intentions. It is evil, which she sees Coleman embodies, that she wants to exorcise; rather ironically, good intentions can lead to acts of monstrosity.

Delphine is a farcical foil to Coleman because of her refusal to admit that she does not know everything, despite her eagerness to expose everything she knows about others, all in the name of political correctness. In one hysterically funny scene in the novel, Delphine struggles to find the right language to complete a letter to the singles column in the *New York Review of Books*. Once again, she is confused. She is hungry for attention, but she is also afraid of exposure, afraid that she may end up “exposing herself as someone with needs and desires . . . that could be deliberately misconstrued to trivialize her” (263). In the process, she finds out that she really wants to put down the politically incorrect statement, “Whites only need apply” (262). Then, after much labor over the diction and tone of the ad, she comes to realize that her ideal mate is a “Coleman Silk duplicate or facsimile” (277). Panicky over this discovery, she mistakenly sends the email out to all the faculty members of her own department. To cover up for what she did, she then intensifies her persecution of Coleman, falsely charging Coleman of breaking into her office and sending out the email in her name to sabotage her reputation. In a way, Delphine is also a passer. As a self-deceiving hypocrite, she passes for something or someone that she is actually not. Yet, “Whereas Silk’s passing is on its surface racial, Delphine hopes that by repressing her sexuality for intellect she will be able to succeed in the male-dominated, American academic environment” (Rankine 106). She might have thought that she knows everything about Coleman, but she is actually ignorant of who Coleman really is. With her pretension to omniscience, she unwittingly cuts herself from contacts with Coleman, while indirectly sending the man she secretly admires to death. Upon hearing the news of Coleman’s death, she is totally devastated, but, in the midst of her sadness, she still worries about the potential exposure of her secret, her admiration for Coleman: “what would they think if they saw her now, carrying on like the widow herself” (280). Although Delphine is the one person who bears the most semblance to Coleman in terms of her determination to be “the author of [her] own life” (272), by fleeing from her family and her past, Delphine has “unwittingly allowed herself to be ensnared in the nets of alien customs, mores, and habits; if anything, she is not even fully aware of her tragedy” (Neelakantan: n. pag.).

Passing is about the veiling and unveiling of secrets. It is significant that these secrets, or errors, then function to translate knowledge into ignorance, and ignorance into a belated, and aporetic, understanding of “the human stain” of racism and sexism. Passing, the performance of identity in excess of both knowledge and language, necessarily memorializes the desire of the other, but it does so not in the name of self-definition and self-empowerment. Rather, it does so in the interest of the mapping of the uncharted space in between identities, the

indistinct spectrum of colors between black and white, and the unfathomable heat of the bodies caught in between two symbolic deaths. In doing so, Roth seems to grope for a vocabulary that may help to delineate the mobility of and the connection between dislocated people—the diasporas—and to recognize the flow dynamic of diaspora cultures, a dynamic that translates the affective undercurrents of dislocated people into a nervous network of “affiliative solidarity” that connects the racial rage of Coleman, gendered despair of Faunia, intellectual ennuï of Zuckerman into a polyphonic narrative on passing that translates passing into a productive error, an occasion where friendship may be forged and fiction may be invented. *The Human Stain* is, therefore, a novel about the building of connections among the dislocated, those who disown their pasts or are disowned by their pasts; it is also about the imaginative reconstruction of these cross-racial and trans-class connections. Passing is then the basis of this trans-racial connection in this novel, for it is passing which initiates passion and compassion among the dislocated and marginalized subjects.

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身份偽裝與跨族群情誼： 菲利普羅斯的《人性污點》

摘要

菲利普羅斯的《人性污點》挪用了美國非裔文學中頗為常見的「身份偽裝敘事」(passing narrative)，來探討個人與族群的衝突。羅斯的小說刻意偏離傳統「身份偽裝敘事」中黑白二元對立的故事情詳，而凸顯出小說每個角色都靠偽裝得以存活的前提。羅斯巧妙地安排書中主人翁柯曼席爾克於六十年代選擇假冒當時尚屬「弱勢族裔」的猶太身份，並讓身為種族主義受朗者的柯曼，於晚年受盡羞辱之後，先與一位創傷累累的白人婦女產生跨世代與跨族裔之戀情，繼之又與猶裔作家祖客曼發展出相知相惜的友情。一方面，羅斯利用「身份偽裝敘事」中對於「真相」的偏執追求，來凸顯「真／假」白人之間的灰色模糊地帶，無非就是創意性的誤讀，藉此以顯示當前「身份認同」政治對於身份「真相」的追求，也就是一種論述與政治之暴力；另一方面，羅斯也結合「身份偽裝敘事」與「不倫戀情」，讓所謂的「偽裝」與「不倫」，相互呼應，而帶領出「非黑非白」的另類身份想像、「似真猶假」的情慾流轉。在羅斯的筆下，身份偽裝不僅是後現代社會人類生存的敘態，也提供抗拒「政治正確」與想像跨族裔之間進行橫向連結、認同、對話的契機。

關鍵字：身份偽裝，文化翻譯，離散，跨族裔情誼