

Ethical Choices and Implications of *The Human Stain*

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Abstract: *The Human Stain* completed Philip Roth's "American Trilogy" in which the author showed us the miscellaneous national ethical conditions and predicaments of America by anatomizing the ups and downs of Coleman Silk's failed racial trespassing. This thesis bases on the Ethical Literary Criticism method to reveal the book as a great representation of an ethical tragedy through which Roth conveys his strong and sincere longing for a free, fair, righteous and harmonious society.

Key Words: *The Human Stain*; racial trespassing; ethical tragedy; Ethical Literary Criticism

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标题: 菲利普·罗斯《人性的污秽》中的伦理选择和伦理含义

内容摘要: 《人性的污秽》是美国著名小说家菲利普·罗斯“美国三部曲”中的最后一部，在这部小说中，罗斯通过对主人公科尔曼·希尔克种族僭越悲剧的详尽剖析，向我们展示了20世纪末美国国家的伦理情况以及存在的问题。本文将从文学伦理学批评的角度出发，在文本细读的基础上，揭示小说作为一部伦理悲歌的实质，抒发了罗斯对当代美国普通民众生活的关切，揭示了人性中普遍存在的自私本性，体现了对种族歧视及战争的深刻厌恶，表达了对自由、公平、正义与和谐的社会环境的强烈渴望。

关键词: 《人性的污秽》；种族僭越；伦理悲歌；文学伦理学批评

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At the dawn of the new millennium, Philip Roth published *The Human Stain*, as a completion to his celebrated trilogy concerning post-World War II American life. It drew various attentions from those prominent literary critics such as Harold Bloom, who commented that “They all deal, he explains, with the historical moments in post war American life that have had the greatest impact on my generation: the McCarthy era, the Vietnam War, and 1998, the year of Bill Clinton’s impeachment” (Bloom 239).

In the American Trilogy, Philip Roth depicts three different typical historical moments to present his own understandings about modern living: *American Pastoral* centres on the Vietnam War period, an era that deeply influenced every common American. The heart-broken crush and burn of Seymour Levov shows us a nationwide rampant panic and prevailing predicaments of ordinary citizens; the ups and downs of “Iron Rinn,” Ira Ringold, was brilliantly depicted in *I married a Communist*, which panoramically presents the political craze of the ephemeral McCarthyism; The last part of the trilogy, *The Human Stain*, centred more on a sex scandal, on the bitter downfall of Coleman Silk, for whom life seemed more like an ethical farce, a rather woeful one, which terminated his own life. *The Human Stain*, should and ought to be labelled as an ethical tragedy concerning the doomed fate of Coleman Silk, as he chose to pass for a Jew, something that goes against his ethical origin. The seemingly reasonable solution, passing for a Jew, as in the case, led to an even crueller impasse. Mark Shechner compared *The Human Stain* with Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, the book, therefore, is “a moral romance, *The Scarlet Letter* of race, class and gender” (Parrish 152). We agree with Mark Shechner when he argues that “The book makes scant sense unless Coleman Silk’s self-demolition is undertaken with gusto” (154). The tragedy was caused by a bunch of different factors, with race, ethics, gender involved, but first and foremost, it was a rekindling of ethical consciousness and a reselection under ethical predicaments. This paper, with its primary reference to the textual analysis of the book and an anatomy of major concepts of Nie Zhenzhao’s Ethical Literary Criticism, aims (1) to anatomize the existed ethical predicaments and their correlations; (2) to elucidate Coleman Silk’s ethical selections and results thereafter; (3) to unveil *The Human Stain* as an ethical tragedy and Roth’s ethical ideas in the book.

The theoretical lens of this essay hinges on an ambiguous concept of “ethical

literary criticism” emblemized by a major intellectual shift in western academia from New Left political radicalism to a conventional contemplation over ethical dilemmas in the age of global war against terrorism. While some are still catching up with the after effects of those French theorists, there is now a proliferation of discourses concerning “the ethical turn,” whose penetrating effects are felt through debates over the talks of “after theory,” in our (re)conception of literary studies, in the incertitude of the very disciplinary boundary of the literary, and in a (re) definition — so far as definition is possible at all — of the limits and purposes of what literature can do in the Post-911 intelligentsia paralyzed by numerous ethical dilemmas caused by the war against terrorism. The 1990s triumphant declamation of “the end of history” is supplemented by globalization that brings about unforeseeable dangers produced by a global unrest, regional trifles, and civil wars, all of which encroaches upon the very possibility of morality undergirded by liberal democracy. Prominent literary critics, from Terry Eagleton to Jacques Derrida, have produced a milieu of literature concerning the theorization of ethical literary criticism and its methodological appropriateness. Moreover, recent scholarship tends to treat this turn as an independent literary and theoretical attempt to disarticulate itself from the political and Marxian focus of contemporary critical theory. It seeks to redefine the very foundations of literary studies by focusing on the textuality of literature as well as the ethical considerations evolving from the close reading of the text itself. In this essay, I will perform a thorough textual analysis of the novel in order to reveal its ethical dilemmas. Meanwhile, I seek to develop a creative dialogue between Roth’s texts and the theoretical conceptualization of “ethical literary criticism” mapped out above.

“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.” (Roth 41) It is fair to say, as the title of the novel suggests, people all bear their own “stain.” For Coleman Silk, due to the colour of his complexion, life was hard to face even from the very beginning.

Born in a black family in the town of East Orange, a town “where everyone was white, fewer were Jews and even fewer were Negroes” (Roth 41). Coleman tasted how hard it was to be a menial black when he was little: His father was a college graduate and an outstanding optician who used to own a store; his mother, “there was no finer nurse on the hospital staff, no nurse more intelligent, knowledgeable, reliable, or capable” (40). However, due to the colour of their skin, they led a very miserable life: His father sold the store and spent his declining years as a humble train waiter, serving other people; his mother, though brilliant, never

had a chance to be promoted. They faced this inequality calmly; they accepted that just like things, people also have different classifications. “Growing up, they never said: “See the bow-bow.” They didn’t even say, “See the doggie.” They said, “See the Doberman. See the beagle. See the terrier.” They learned things had classifications. They learned the power of naming precisely” (46). In their opinion, their classifications made it natural for them to be discriminated. They are coloured, which accounts for why they are supposed to be inferior. Though being severely discriminated, they felt nothing but sheer proud of their origin by choosing to accept this unchangeable fact and worked even harder to get recognized; Coleman was very smart and he knew his parents’ encounters since he was very young, besides, He faced racial inequality himself: When he was in high school, he had a great chance to be graduated from school as class valedictorian, a Jewish named Bertram, was his biggest rival. Bertram’s father went to the Silk’s, hoping that, instead of getting an A, Coleman could get a B to make his son, the Jew, Bertram, class valedictorian, thus enhance his chance to get in a good university. By doing so, Coleman would lose almost nothing since his aim was Howard, a black-oriented college. “The chances were negligible of his suffering the slightest hardship with a ranking like that”(25). Coleman felt furious and refused to do so, but he knew perfectly that life was formidable for blacks. Once a white runner in the track team was severely injured in a car accident and needed blood for transfusions, all the team members, Coleman included, went to offer blood but his “humble black” blood was politely rejected by the white man’s parents. This incident finally made Coleman realize that deep inside, though light-skinned, though being “Silky Silk,” he was just as inferior and menial as other blacks. According to *American Ethnicity*, “After the Civil War, African Americans were believed to be biologically inferior and must be segregated” (Adalberto & Turner 56). Black people at that special period took it for granted that they are not as good as their white peers. This hard yet true fact made him meditate his “good intentions” when growing up, “All he’d ever wanted, from earliest childhood on, was to be free, not black, not even white — just on his own and free” (52). The post-World War II America was such a place, where whites are the salt of the earth, presidents are white, governors are white, nurses are white and opticians are white. Coleman’s parents did nothing wrong except bearing the wrong complexion. They were the castaways, along with other minorities of that time. During that special period, the prevailing ethical context was a total compliance. Most blacks chose to submit to their fates, just like Coleman’s father, they didn’t try to fight back; they even didn’t try to complain. Coleman, at the first place, chose to do the same as his parents. He didn’t want to

fight all the inequalities, he followed his boxing teacher, Doc. Chizner's advice, "If nothing comes up, you don't bring it up" With his light, non-black skin colour, nobody would consider him a black. He attended Howard University, only to find he was discriminated even more there. After the sudden death of his father and the dropout of college, He chose to join the air force, not as an African American, but as a Jew.

In the Ethical Literary Criticism theory, "an ethical dilemma is used to describe a situation when men encounter a dilemma: the selection of one choice, although seemingly reasonable in ethical sense for an individual, would make the other immoral and unethical" (Nie 214). Coleman Silk faced such an ethical dilemma by the time he joined the army: On one hand, Coleman had always stuck to the same purpose of life, he wanted to live freely, he wanted to have equal opportunities and pursue the same goals as his white peers, he wanted to find something meaningful in his own life, he wanted to pursue a life "on his own and free." These all seem to be reasonable, a man should and must have such goals to live, regardless of his ethnic origin, social status, etc. But as a humble African American, life became narrow, he couldn't even have the slightest chance to complete all these: he couldn't go to a decent university except the black-exclusive Howard, he couldn't fight in the boxing ring just as a black, he even couldn't enjoy consummate love with Steena Paulson, his college sweetheart, a Scandinavian descendant who broke up with him simply because he was a negro. To live as a Silk or to live as a free man, or to put it in another way, to live as a black or to live as something else, are the two possible choices for him.

At first, Coleman chose to live with an attitude told by Doc. Chizner, "If nothing comes up, you don't bring it up." His little secret was not exposed by his meticulous behaviours. Even after he was crazily in love with Steena, his secret hasn't been discovered. However, sadly, life was never so simple because everyone has more than one identity. According to the principles of Ethical Literary Criticism, ethical identity is something that belongs to an individual as an existent label, a kind of responsibility and obligation one has to undertake. Anybody, no matter whom, has two entirely different identities, one that comes innately, by blood; the other one comes postnatal, by social relations (Nie 196). Coleman found it challenging to have those two identities, the "double life," he actually enjoyed it quite a lot. He was the son of an upright Negro family. Though light-skinned, or being called "Silky Silk," he was a black, someone inferior, someone who would be discriminated. This was an unchangeable fact that Coleman could never accept. He wanted to do something to change it. So goes the predicament.

The premise for an ethical dilemma is that one has to choose between two respectively correct options. When Coleman's father was dead and his brother, Walter, was sent overseas, Coleman tried, for the first time, to make choices for his own. The first and foremost one was what kind of man he chose to be. "Mr. Silk had it all figured out: Coleman was going to Howard to become a doctor, to meet a light-skinned girl there from a good Negro family, to marry and settle down and have children who would in turn go to Howard." This was his father's blueprint. This was the way that Coleman's father had chosen for him. Coleman should graduate from Howard, marry a light-skinned black. But what Coleman wanted was something absolutely different — a free man, "free on whatever he wants, free to pursue the hugest aim, to be the particular 'I.'" As a matter of fact, Coleman thought about passing for a Jew for a long time, the first time he did it reluctantly when he was told by Doc. Chizner. "You look like you look, you're with me, and so he's going to think that you're one of Doc's boys. He's going to think that you're Jewish." This sentence might just be a joke by Doc. Chizner, he said it to cheer Coleman up, to help him not being frustrated by the fact that he was a negro. What seemed to be a random jest kindled Coleman's wildest imaginations. Passing for a Jew, has been sealed in his heart since that day. With his urbane air and light skin colour, no one would label him as a "disgusting negro." Therefore it is not so hard for us to comprehend that when he decided to join the army and wrote down "Jew" on racial background, he wrote it voluntarily. "It occurred first to his heart, which began banging away like the heart of someone on the brink of committing his first great crime" (Roth 56). He made a selection to become nothing like his family. He understood perfectly, that even though he passed for a Jew for his own purposes, he didn't intend to do anything horrible; but chose to live as a Jew meant an ethical betrayal to his origin, and also, to his family. He fell in love with a white girl after his retirement from the army. At that time, he didn't mention anything about his family to his girlfriend, but in order to marry her, he decided to take her back home to visit his mother, which turned out to be the beginning of a new choice. Steena found out his secret and broke up with him. This love affair made Coleman realize that being a black, he even did not have the equal chance to love or marry someone who was not a black, whether they were truly in love or not. Selected to be a Jew would be the only way out for him to pursue happiness, to become the free "I" which he yearned so much.

Coleman Silk, the light-skinned African American who passed as a Jew, began his life of sad and bitter downfall simply by a small choice. "Coleman tried to transcend history, but the history continues to shadow him even after he would

imagine that he has escaped its hold over him” After the ill-fated love affair with Steena, Coleman decided to entirely betray his family and pass for a Jew for good. He involved in a very serious relationship with a Jewish girl named Iris Gittelman. To Coleman, this was a rather cunning and foxy move, because 1) Iris was open-minded and wouldn't bother on things like race or religious beliefs; 2) “Iris gives more. She raises everything to another pinch” It was more than natural for a Jew to marry a Jew. By Marrying a Jew, it would be far more sensible to demonstrate that he was a white, with Iris' help, Coleman would gain success easier in the future. However, this seemingly “perfect touch” also would lead to another ethical dilemma: on one hand, Coleman, in order to pursue his own happiness, it was valid for him to marry anyone, let alone open-minded Iris; on the other hand, he told a rank lie to Iris about his ethnicity, “He told Iris was that he was Jewish, Silk being an Ellis Island attenuation of Silberzweig.” He chose his wife over his family, or to put it in another way, he chose his own interest over anyone else's. In order to live with that Jew, he had to cut off all the contact with his family. He knew that in order to keep a lie, one has to fabricate more lies to support it. He made up a lie, telling her that his parents were already dead and there was no one left. “There is no Ernestine. There is no Walt.” For Coleman, all the family members: the late father, the benevolent mother, the supportive brother and the caring sister, had all become insurmountable guards, defending him from getting near to his own selfish “paradise.” He went to see his mother before the wedding, telling her the truth that he was about to marry a Jewish and all the family members were not invited, simply because they were not even existed in Iris' version of Coleman. He also entirely cut off the chains with his family by telling her mom, “Ma, you come to the railroad station in New York, and you sit down on the bench in the waiting room, and at eleven-five A.M., I'll walk by with my kids in their Sunday best.” He savagely deprived his mother of all the opportunities to be close to her grandchildren. Coleman denied the fact that he was once a black, he chose to live as someone else, therefore, all the people in the “previous life,” must be discarded.

In order to keep the secret, he also had to conceal those secret to his own offspring. Marrying a Jew and denying the Silks, Coleman made the first step as being a Jew. But after the marriage, Coleman had to face another question of whether having kids or not. Ernestine Silk, Coleman's sister, had a comment on this matter after Coleman's death, “If Coleman was intent on keeping his race his secret, then the price he should have paid was not to have children.” Here, Coleman met another quandary, choosing to avoid having kids is a safe way to continue the racial lie, as kids may turn to be more dark-skinned than their father. Once a black child

was born, the secret would be crystal clear. Coleman was conflicting inside. As a liar, he kept the little secret, so meticulously and carefully, from being exposed; as a husband, he protected the family, despite the fact that the marriage was based on the lie. He ended up having more than one kid, every time he welcomed a new member to the little “Jewish family”; he faced a moment of truth whether a timely confession to his wife was in order. Luckily, all his children had the same lucky light complexion as him; he had managed to keep the secret. Nevertheless this secret kept on as a bomb that might explode any time. Ernestine said: “That was the extraordinary thing about him from the time he was a boy — that he stuck to a plan completely. There was a dogged commitment he could make to his every decision.” It is said that character decides destiny. This stubbornness, this stick-to-the-truthness had been a great merit as well as a tremendous fault to him, especially when he met another dilemma during the “Spooks Incident.”

After marrying Iris and Betraying the Silk family, Coleman finally began his brand new life in the Athena College. He found the meaning of life, which was to revitalize the “antiquated, backwater, Sleepy Hollowish” Athena by “aggressively encouraging the deadwood among the faculty’s old guard to seek early retirement, recruiting ambitious young assistant professors and revolutionizing the curriculum.” He became dean of the faculty and a prestigious literature teacher, a post that would surely make his parents proud. However, this cosy life didn’t last for long, as he was ousted from the college for calling sarcastically two absent African American students “spooks.” During this incident, Coleman faced the biggest ethical dilemma in his entire life: he could have unveiled the secret to the public, telling them that virtually he was a black himself; therefore it would be absurd for him to call the two students names, as he shared the same ethnic origin; He could remain his prestige and high post but might as well lose the company of his wife and the honour of his children. Coleman chose family over career this time, he took all the blame and kept the secret, he didn’t defend for himself and let go all the fame and prestige that he worked so hard to earn all his life, he waived all the things that brought him passing for a Jew at the first place. His life, “undone by a single word. This time it is “spooks” and it ignites a campus scandal that becomes a personal disaster” (Posnock 95).

All his life, Coleman admired Achilles, a great Greek warrior, when encountering a situation that his mistress was taken away by the mighty king, Agamemnon, turned his back on him and refused to fight his life for him any longer. In Coleman’s version, passing for a Jew was his Achilles’ Heels. When he made a choice to put personal career over family, he did all those dumb and absurd

things: he pretended to be a Jew, he built up a family based on a lie, he betrayed those people who loved him the most; When he made another to put family over personal career, he let go all the things that he fought so hard to obtain, even by doing so, he was misunderstood by his sons as the main cause of their mom's death. All the ethical dilemma Coleman faced were not insoluble and severe, he could have made better alternatives, but sheer selfishness and arrogance blurred his mind, he intended to rewrite his own story, he wanted to make a great "white" negro out to transcend the fate of the blacks at that time or in Timothy Parrish's words, "Coleman's story embodies the way in which a period's multiple histories can live and take shape through the identity of a single person, Roth, by the way, suggests that Coleman's life must be compared not by Coleman's choice but by the history that Coleman's choice cannot change" (Royal 213). In order to live better, Coleman made a series of wrong alternatives, he didn't figure out that the ethical context, the ethical environment of the consciousness, ways of thinking, etc. cannot be altered by his own little efforts, he did all the choices so carefully and sophisticatedly, only to find his life lost its initial orientation and landed nowhere.

Coleman's manifold ethical selections and their results may lead us to a glimpse on the possibility of Coleman's tragically end due to the fact that every step he took was a closer step straight to Hell. We are sure to come to the combing of the book as an "avoidable" ethical tragedy and the discovering of Philip Roth's ethical ideas in this book or his other masterpieces.

It's never been easy for us to read Philip Roth, no matter what our ethnical background is. It seems to us that he has possessed a superb gift in representing a big lesson about the complicated and intriguing human nature through a very trivial matter. It was long before the American Trilogy did he already started a wild safari on ethical matters. It's fair to say, the quest in unveiling human nature has never ceased in Roth's novels.

Roth started questioning human nature from his maiden book — *Goodbye Columbus*. The two protagonists in the book, Brenda and Neil, had a dispute over what culture they should stick to, since they were all Jewish, their argument in the book brought about a national discussion among the Jewish people, who might encounter the same situation in their own lives as well. Through Roth's eyes, we can observe an obvious dilemma almost every Jewish would face at that time: On one hand, they were members of a much small minor race in a multi-racial country, people from all over the world came to America, only to witness and experience racial indifferences or even racial discrimination toward themselves; in order to defend themselves, there's only one way for them to step in, they

had to become active to be assimilated into the mainstream American society, during which, they were often frustrated and confined by the harsh requirements of the orthodox Judaism. During the heart-aching process, people developed to have different attitude toward the matter; some radical Jewish people, those who strictly stuck to the doctrines of Judaism, like Irving Howe, who wrote a seriously derogatory article called *Philip Roth Reconsidered* when browsing off *Portnoy's Complaint* might choose to live by their own way, the same way Neil selected from *Goodbye Columbus*; some might choose to in a totally twisted and hysterical way, like the “emperor of masturbation,” notorious Alexander Portnoy from *Portnoy's Complaint*. In *The Dying Animal*, Roth unveiled his opinion about love by telling us people in love should be together, regardless of their age, profession, social status, etc. In the last scene of the book, Prof. Kepesh had a monologue with himself:

Look, there's no time. I must run!

“Don't.”

What?

“Don't go.”

But I Must. Someone has to be with her.

“She'll find someone.”

“She's in terror. I'm going.

Think about it. Think. Because if you go, you're finished. (Roth 156)

Through this excerpt, it's not so hard to anticipate the end of this story. Knowing Consuela was on her last legs, Kepesh, as her love, had the moral obligation to accompany her for the last ride of her life despite the fact that their affair started immorally and what he was interested initially was her young and attractive body. When their role in front of death changed and Consuela became the one greeting it, Kepesh had true love to comfort and assuage her before she passed away. Coleman and Faunia's affair from *The Human Stain* was another case in point. On one hand, Coleman defended her love till the end of his life. He called her “his last love”; he defended her in front of his lawyer, ugly Primus, he even shared the racial secret with her, something that he didn't even mention to her wife or kids. On the other hand, Faunia also considered Coleman as the one to accompany her through the hard times; When their tryst was interrupted by Lester, it was Coleman who stepped forward to fight back, it was also Coleman who promised to bury her late kids' ashes with her when she had no idea how to deal with it. It's valid to say, though they have not married, Faunia considered her as her life partner. That's why when

Faunia had a bicker with Coleman and fled out to see a black crow named Prince, she confessed everything to that crow, her ill-fated relations with her mother, “that bitch,” true feeling toward Coleman, virtually the crow was Coleman, what she said to the crow was intended to Coleman, she wanted to dedicate that speech to Coleman. That surely was not some one-night-stand, that surely was not some flirting, that was life-dependending love. When we talk about the value of a novel, besides its literary significance, we cannot neglect its ethical value, according to Prof. Nie’s *Ethical Literary Criticism*, ethical value represents the warning and didactic value of literature, it is the collective value of both positive and negative morality (Nie 258). With this definition, the ethical ideas in *The Human Stain* can be summarized as follows:

Firstly, Coleman’s “sad and bitter downfall” started with his passing for a Jew. He came from a normal Negro family, he was supposed to attend Howard University, marry a black girl and have the same, routinely Negro life like his father and millions of other blacks. This destiny can be called as his unchangeable ethical identity which cannot be altered. In almost all literary texts, the rise of any ethical problem comes from the perversion of one’s ethical identity. There’re several kinds of ethical identities, for instance, identities based on blood relations, ethical connections, moral principles, etc. When one’s ethical identity goes against one’s ethical standard, an ethical conflict comes out (Nie 264). As a black man in a society where blacks were severely discriminated, Coleman passed for a Jew to duck all the inequalities that might happen on him, but what he didn’t anticipate was that it was basically the same for the Jews to be discriminated. His seemingly clever and manipulative move actually “isolated the basis of his being and his self-tradition, which led to self-denial” (Yuan 106). This self-denial was clearly a denial of his ethical identity; he was ousted from the blacks, in a voluntary way; after saying “spooks,” he violated his ethical identity as a college teacher for discriminating and mistreating black students, in an involuntary way. For those who own something in the society, social identities come equally with ethical identities. Take “Zipper Gate Scandal” for instance. Bill Clinton once had an immoral affair with his White House intern, Monica Lewinsky. He was the then president of the U.S., and it was heinous for him to do such a thing to his own harmonious family. *The Human Stain* was based on the scandal, Athena College was the White House and “Everyone knows you’re sexually exploiting an abused, illiterate woman half your age.” It was the unanimous national response to Clinton’s actions. In real life, Clinton become so humiliated and was almost impeached by the government; in Athena, Coleman was dismissed and murdered as a Jew, in a very sarcastic way.

Secondly, all the good and evil facets of human nature are well-demonstrated in the book. Human nature is the basic property that distinguishes human beings from animals, it is the moral property and the reason why men are men, they are perfected by ethical selections (Nie 271). At the twilight of his life, Coleman experienced a love that finally brought back some of his good attributes. Faunia Farley was the last lover for Coleman. Their love was everything but improper. There was a 37-year gap between them and she was a “Mrs.” That’s exactly why Delphine Roux, Coleman’s secret admirer, wrote such an anonymous note “Everyone knows you’re sexually exploiting an abused, illiterate woman half your age.”; that’s also why Coleman’s personal lawyer Primus “friendly” advised him “Do you use a condom, Coleman? Becoming the mother of a distinguished professor’s child might be an uplifting change after having been the mother of the children of a deranged total failure.” To these people, Coleman’s affair with Faunia was immoral and mendacious. Faunia was merely Coleman’s sex toy. But in actuality, their opinions are far away from being the truth.

When Coleman met Faunia, he was, like his all-time hero, Achilles, facing the wrath of a life time. At the edge of being thrown out of Athena, he was all helpless and angry about his racial secret from being revealed. After dating Faunia, he knew what he experienced was not as even close to those of Faunia’s. He sympathized with her and cared about her. When he got the information that Faunia kept the ashes of her deceased children in a canister under her bed, she didn’t know how to deal with it. Coleman stepped up and assured her, “Let them go. I’ll go do it with you. We’ll do it together.” This sentence sounds more like “I do” to us when Coleman took the responsibility of taking care of her, in front of Nathan, Primus or even Lesley. “If he acknowledged it to anyone,” I said, “maybe it was to the woman he died with. To Faunia Farley.” He confessed his secret to Faunia, the “abused mistress.” Their love made them show the positive sides of their nature. Their companionship was mutual true love that brought to each other the best of themselves.

Thirdly, by telling the story, Roth reflected a sincere hope of harmony in the book, yearn for harmony is ubiquitous from these several aspects: 1) Vietnam War was the devil. Lester Farley, the murderer in the book, changed from a healthy and sane man into a hysterical psycho. What he witnessed and saw in the battlefield changed him completely. Long after he returned from Vietnam, he was still tortured by the war and got a physiological syndrome called “post-traumatic stress disorder,” or PTSD. He was devastated by this disease entirely. It’s fair to say Lester was responsible for the death of Coleman and Faunia, but it

was the brutal and ruthless Vietnam War that should be blamed for this heinous crime; Wars take away the sanity of an individual, leaving nothing but cruelty and aggressiveness; wars turn civilized citizens into sanguinary killing-machines; wars tear felicitous families apart. Wars are the things we should try our best to avoid and never step into. 2) Peaceful minds are crucial. When Faunia was together with Coleman, she told him that she didn't know how to read or write that she was illiterate. "The ability to read seems to have perished right along with the childhood when she learned how." She didn't know how to learn and she was reluctant to learn. "Don't you try to teach me? Do anything you want with me. Anything, but don't pull that shit." Nevertheless, after her death, a clandestine diary of hers was founded, indicating that she was not illiterate; she held back the fact to "spotlight the barbaric self befitting the world." To her, the civilized world seemed more cruel than the rude: When she was little, she was harassed by her stepfather, a man who was supposed to be rich and educated; when she was having an affair with Smoky Hollenback, another educated intellect, she was treated as nothing but a sex slave; when her affair with Coleman was perceived by Delphine Roux, a female intellectual in Athena, she was framed by her. Therefore, in her eyes, it's better to live as a hillbilly, a woman who knows nothing and cares about nothing. By narrating the story, Roth surely wanted to convey the readers his strong yearn for us to have peaceful minds, which seem to be essential for everyone in the modern life.

In conclusion, we can clearly observe that *The Human Stain*, with tangling scenarios and complicated fates involved a sad ethical cothurns. The life trail of any individual can be altered by even the slightest change of choices. For instance, if Coleman didn't choose to become a Jewish, life would become hard but in a calm way, or if Faunia didn't choose to leave Lester, Lester would avoid becoming a complete lunatic. Anyhow, all these twists of fate are attributed to the change of ethical order, which should be considered crucial for any of us. In order to live happily, one should stick to his own ethical order from being vandalized. Meanwhile, the methodology of close reading performed in this essay seeks to return to the Kantian "text in itself" as a gesture of disarticulating from a heavy reliance upon critical theories shaped by political concerns. This gesture is not so much about a compliance towards the so-called "ethical turn" as about a critical intervention into the conditions as well as possibilities of the very definition of "ethical" in modern living. Moreover, this essay tries to bring out a set of principles in ethical literary criticism, by analyzing character's ethical identities, the breaking of ethical order, and the aftermath brought by respective ethical choices. Last but not least, the evaluation of morality in the novel is an attempt to reveal some of the

moral and ethical implications for the contemporary society.

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