



## The Human Stain

*Philip Roth*

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## **The Human Stain** Philip Roth

It is 1998, the year in which America is whipped into a frenzy of prurience by the impeachment of a president, and in a small New England town an aging Classics professor, Coleman Silk, is forced to retire when his colleagues decree that he is a racist. The charge is a lie, but the real truth about Silk would astonish even his most virulent accuser.

Coleman Silk has a secret, one which has been kept for fifty years from his wife, his four children, his colleagues, and his friends, including the writer Nathan Zuckerman. It is Zuckerman who stumbles upon Silk's secret and sets out to reconstruct the unknown biography of this eminent, upright man, esteemed as an educator for nearly all his life, and to understand how this ingeniously contrived life came unraveled. And to understand also how Silk's astonishing private history is, in the words of the Wall Street Journal, "magnificently" interwoven with "the larger public history of modern America."

## **The Human Stain Details**

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Author : Philip Roth

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## From Reader Review The Human Stain for online ebook

### Ilenia Zodiaco says

Ho da pochi minuti terminato la lettura de “La macchia umana” di Philip Roth.

Ci sono quei libri che si insinuano all’interno del tuo consolidato nido di credenze, idee, saperi, pregiudizi, convinzioni - che hai fortificato con fatica e scrupolosa dedizione in vent’anni di scuola, vita familiare, cadute e ripartenze sentimentali - e sai già che non c’è più nulla da fare. Arrivano per scombussolare tutto, tocca ricostruire il castello di carta della tua identità da capo.

Sono libri alteri, sdegnosi. Non smetterai mai di consigliarli, di parlarne, di instaurare confronti e soprattutto li rileggerai. Probabilmente subito dopo averli terminati, li ricomincerai. Questo è il destino fortunato di libri come “La macchia umana”.

Il mio primo Roth. Considerato uno dei più grandi scrittori viventi, vittima felice del totoNobel praticamente ogni anno, scatenato, chiacchieratissimo Roth. Ho sempre nutrito un timore reverenziale (vi rassicuro: non c’è ragione) verso queste figure della letteratura. Acquistano un’aria familiare, il loro nome - dappertutto letto, dappertutto udito - diventa quasi una sagoma. Roth, in particolare, con le sue consonanti finali, due arroganti fricative dentali, me lo immagino sempre con una giacca di lana cotta, modello coloniale, con le sopracciglia aggrottate, propenso verso di me come un grosso rapace ma dallo sguardo ironico.

Si dia il caso che l’autore Roth sembri (e badate, sembrare è un verbo spietato) rassomigliare straordinariamente ai personaggi che raffigura. Vi avverto, prima di scrivere non ho cercato informazioni biografiche, né recensioni né alcun tipo di materiale a supporto di questa tesi. Semplicemente sembra così. Da lettrice, vedo che Coleman Silk è simile al suo artefice e l’autore si limita, come dire, a quest’opera di svelamento e occultamento continuo dello specchio. è così vicino, così vicino all’essenza del personaggio che dev’essere lui. Sappiamo che lo scrittore deve essere un abilissimo fingitore ma siccome io non credo ad un’abilità portentosa nel dissimulare che sia completamente disinteressata, devo pensare che il demone a cui risponde il signor Roth sia di natura personale. Non esiste che si vada così a fondo ad un personaggio senza che ci sia qualcosa di tuo. E tutta quella storia sulla necessità del testimone - perché il resoconto della faccenda qui ci viene fornito dallo scrittore Nathan Zuckerman - è una grossa panzana e qui si sta parlando di un meraviglioso alter ego. Anzi di due: Nathan Zuckerman, narratore degli eventi, e il coetaneo Coleman Silk, nella parte del povero viveur. La testimone unica è la scrittura. L’autore per proteggersi deve inventarsi delle maschere ma sappiamo tutti che razza di narcisi egocentrici siano, con noi non attacca.

D’altra parte, non credo che lavorando di fantasia il signor Roth sarebbe stato in grado di arrivare a tali vette di autenticità. Il protagonista dunque è una personalità formidabile e così il suo creatore. Ora possiamo addentrarci nel fitto della foresta nera.

Continua qui <http://conamoreesquallore.blogspot.it...>

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### David Schaafsma says

I read Roth’s Goodbye, Columbus and Portnoy’s Complaint in college, and loved them. They were funny, especially in depicting the lusts and lives of young men, with literary flair. But I didn’t read him again for no particular reason until relatively recently. I read the non-fiction Patrimony, about his relationship with his father, and The Plot Against America, a dark fantasy about a possible past where we choose a fascist dictator in the thirties instead of FDR.

And now having completed his Nathan Zuckerman trilogy, beginning with the much-acknowledged

masterpiece, *American Pastoral*, which I loved, and *I Married a Communist*, which I also came to like very much, I see the greatness of this trilogy, like *The Plot*, has to do with its attention to the sweep of twentieth century American history, with some central social issues of that period examined in the context of often deeply flawed characters. It's also about Roth's use of language, at once visceral and muscular and startlingly honest in places, and more often than not lyrical at the same time. And talk. All the characters talk (or think like they're talking) in grand, sometimes manic, fashion. Epic verbal sparring and reflection.

*The Human Stain* took its time for me to warm up to, but ended with me shouting hurrah as it concluded. It's the story of three interlocking tragic stories: New England Athena College Classics professor and Dean Coleman Silk, who is forced out of his job at age 69 for supposed racist comments about two students; his 34 year old girlfriend Faunia Farley whom he takes up with after his wife dies of complications from a stroke, and her ex, a PTSD-riddled Vietnam vet, each of them finally at least somewhat understandable if not completely sympathetic, but morally culpable and doomed by their own terrible mistakes. It's primarily the story of Silk, and his secrets and lies, but especially of one central secret which led to terrible mistakes he made in the context of America's racial past (and present). The legacies of racism and war are at the heart of this book, how you can never really get free of them. You do some bad things and you pay and pay for them, no matter what good you may do.

The inciting impulse for the novel, set in 1998, (but only part of its motivation, finally) is the Clinton Impeachment trial, and on one level the book is an examination of all that sexual sanctimony through the lens of secrets and lies and the rest of us speculating about all public scandals as most of us typically do: Are they really "doing it"? What positions do they use?! Who's using whom?

"It was the summer in America when the nausea returned, when the joking didn't stop, when the speculation and the theorizing and the hyperbole didn't stop."—Roth on the Clinton impeachment trial, which became of national interest, but also Silk's affair with Faunia, which becomes a small town scandal that same summer.

This book can make you uncomfortable. When Zuckerman and Silk joke crudely about the Clinton-Lewinsky affair, it's funny, but there are no filters here. No filters, either, when the damaged and abusive Farley threatens to explode about the "draft dodger" "slick Willie" getting off free when so many Vets died in the jungle so he could get what he got from more than just Monica Lewinsky. These are all deeply flawed, screwed-up people, but they are never uninteresting. The two men are driven by rage, by hatred, for what has happened to them (Silk is pushed out of his position on the faculty because of something he said that people mistakenly assume is racist, and during this period his wife has a stroke and dies, so he is enraged about all that; Fawley is angry and bitter about his experiences in Nam):

"The danger with hatred is, once you start in on it, you get a hundred times more than you bargained for. Once you start, you can't stop."--Roth

This book is not just about "gossip" about who's doing whom, sexually, though. It's also about racial secrets. Does that white guy look a little bit black? Could he be "passing" for white? If so, what are we going to do about that?!! Because we need these classifications for some reason, it seems. And what if you were "technically black," but looked white; would you choose to say you were black to be true to that legacy or would you say you were white so you could more easily achieve "the American Dream"?

When I was done I thought that Zuckerman was to Silk as Nick Carraway is to *Gatsby*, albeit a cruder, more visceral Nick/*Gatsby* combo. Here Zuckerman speaks of what he imagines to be Silk's goal: "To become a new being. To bifurcate. The drama that underlies America's story, the high drama that is upping and leaving-and the energy and cruelty that rapturous drive demands." Sounds a little like *Gatsby*, right?

The stories we read of Silk and Faunia and Fawley are stories told by writer Zuckerman, so we (meta-fictionally) see in this story and reflect on the way any novelist's imagination can work its magic. But Zuckerman makes it clear that neither the novelist nor any of his readers, when we are done with this story, will have any really deep insights into human nature beyond this:

"There is truth and then again there is truth. For all that the world is full of people who go around believing they've got you or your neighbor figured out, there really is no bottom to what is not known. The truth about us is endless. As are the lies."—Roth

Zuckerman and Roth as novelists are not preachers, they are not social scientists; they only have their imaginations, and hunches; they can describe these fascinating, screwed-up people, and they can hypothesize, but they make it clear we're all unknowable at some deep level. Even when he finds out all he can know to inform his telling of Silk's story, the novel he writes, *The Human Stain*, Zuckerman says:

"Now that I know everything, it was though I knew nothing."—Roth

I highly recommend this book. You don't need to need the first two to read this one, but the whole trilogy is great if you want to put it on your tbr list!

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## **Cosimo says**

### **Spettri!**

"Noi lasciamo una macchia, lasciamo una traccia, lasciamo la nostra impronta. Impurità, crudeltà, abuso, errore, escremento, seme: non c'è altro mezzo per essere qui".

La vita è costruita su una segreta bugia. Così di una trama di finzione noi vediamo una macchia, un'impronta, un'impurità; e tutto è errore, crudeltà, inganno, scommessa, fascino, decisione, ultimo canto. Sdegno e rispetto nascondono spirito ostile e vendicativo, tra le braccia delle antiche tradizioni e di legami convenzionali e materiali. Ipocrisia e violenza coprono di indifferenza e insensatezza le persone che pensano di non temerne la potenza distruttrice. Il protagonista di Roth adora donne diverse e disordinate, sensuali nella loro colpa, emozionanti in quanto irregolari. Roth cerca un disegno nello squilibrio, e percorre sentieri inaspettati e inconciliabili: così l'istinto alla purezza si realizza solo nella difformità, l'inconsistenza di ogni convinzione è messa costantemente alla prova dei fatti, dei corpi, della natura. Coleman e Faunia si illudono di essere irripetibili, ma il contesto sociale intorno impone loro una volontà rituale e implacabile. La passione evolve in complicità animalesca e volontà disorganica, in onde di sentimenti morbosi, in atteggiamenti delittuosi, trasformando un passato tormentato in un destino disperato. Ma il pregiudizio è una forma di conoscenza che spinge la moralità ad approfittarsi di ogni debolezza, fragilità e contraddizione. Così la dimensione tragica si rivela in tutta la sua profondità, portando il lettore a rinnegare se stesso e la più intima identità, senza essersi accorto di aver attraversato numerosi confini e di aver ritrovato dentro le pagine un impulso incredulo e ancestrale. Quello alla felicità.

"È in ognuno di noi. Inerente. Qualificante. La macchia che esiste prima del segno. Che esiste senza il segno. La macchia così intrinseca non richiede un segno. La macchia che precede la disobbedienza, che comprende la disobbedienza e frusta ogni spiegazione e ogni comprensione".

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## Fabian says

See, I was an enormous fan of the Tony Hopkins/ Nicky Kidman film already. But incredibly, that adaptation was just the tip of an iceberg so rich, complex & incredible that is Philip Roth's masterpiece "The Human Stain." The film fails oh-so miserably to fulfill at least 40% of the emotional clout (which is significant and HEAVVVY) famously attributed to this, a gargantuan beauty of a book.

It seems that this late in the year, the magic wand waved by Literature is (constantly and repeatedly) still dabbing this dreary moment of living history with its good work: I've read at least four sure MASTERPIECES this year. 2010: not so bad after all.

Roth meshes history with modern tragedy; parallels that\* with the goings on of a disgraced college professor; the torrid love affair is placed in the backdrop; the national consciousness is the Theme, as is the sadness in people living (or pretending to live) in modern times. I fell in LOVE with this book (difficult, academic, and witty) for its dimension and its crisp flavor. All characters are worthy of at least a few tears for Roth has so faithfully captured how the country fucks people over (and over, & over) and how the price of freedom means the loss of something perhaps as equally important.

If the film is above average, then the novel, a modern Bovary-esque tale with so much personality and imbedded tragedy in it to make it worthy of a faithful readership for the decades that are to come, (so modern and CLASSIC it is!) is quite simply (no joke) FLAW-LESS.

\* The Clinton/Lewinski scandal--all but forgotten (and perhaps its important to notice, too, that that disgrace, though not quite so far long ago, has been already buried under so many others...)

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## Perry says

### Shaming Censors of Academic Speech: A Pox on the PC Police

My favorite Roth novel. I will miss the lusty old tale-hound.

*"I'm very depressed how in this country you can be told 'That's offensive' as though those two words constitute an argument."* Christopher Hitchens

Coleman Silk, a professor of classics at a local esteemed college, has been accused of racism by two African American students in one of his classes, after he notices upon calling roll that these two enrolled students never attend his class, and mumbles : "Do they exist or are they spooks?"

Roth brilliantly uses the most ambiguous of words due to its several legitimate meanings compared to the one meaning racially derogatory to African Americans. Wikipedia's most comprehensive definition indicates the term's many meanings, a few of which fit the context of the professor's statement, only one of which is the racially offensive, pejorative use. The primary other use which appears to fit the context unless some evidence of a racial animus could be shown is of an apparition who is present but cannot be seen. This latter meaning is in fact its primary English meaning since its etymology revolves around various references to "ghost" or "apparition": cognate Dutch *spook* ("ghost"), Middle Dutch *spoooc* ("spook, ghost"); liken German *Spuk* ("ghost, apparition"), Middle Low German *spok* ("spook"), and Norwegian *spjok* ("ghost, specter").

Silk says he used the word "spook" to sarcastically imply the "possibility" that the students might be attending as ghosts or spirits. That, since they did not attend class and he didn't know who they were, he could not even know their race.

I won't get too sidetracked on "political correctness" run amok in this country, particularly in academia, and misused as a tool amounting to censorship, but I'll footnote excellent, reasoned quotes from a nonfiction book about the cultural revolution changing this country since the 1960s as well as two late iconoclastic hyper-intellectuals: David Foster Wallace and Christopher Hitchens.\*\*

The narrator is Roth's alter ego Nathan Zuckerman. Roth based the novel on an incident involving his friend, a professor at Princeton University. Silk resigns his post in anger and raises the stakes (and ire of campus feminists) when he starts dating an illiterate, but intelligent, female custodian who's about 30 years younger than he is (she's 34). She has a former lover who has serious "issues" arising from his stint in Vietnam.

The piercing irony is in Silk's disclosure that he is an African American who's been "passing" as Jewish and white since he served in the Navy. He married a white woman and had 4 children with her. His wife recently died and he never told her or the children of his/their ancestry. Silk decided to "take the future into his own hands rather than to leave it to an unenlightened society to determine his fate." Zuckerman frames novel and retells the back story in flashbacks as conveyed to him by Silk.

Against a present backdrop of the 1998 *Oval Office Orgasm* Scandal of former President Bill Clinton, Roth develops what I believe is his best novel, one raising trusty old questions of identity and self-invention, i.e., questions of whether one can change the past (*Gatsby*) or whether the past is ever even past (*Faulkner in Requiem for a Nun*). Two passages on these issues that I considered especially poignant were:

“There is truth and then again there is truth. For all that the world is full of people who go around believing they've got you or your neighbor figured out, there really is no bottom to what is not known. The truth about us is endless. As are the lies.”

“I couldn't imagine anything that could have made Coleman more of a mystery to me than this unmasking. Now that I knew everything, it was as though I knew nothing.”

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\*\*Footnote on Political Correctness

From Roger Kimball, *The Long March: How the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s Changed America*:

“As with most revolutions, the counterculture's call for total freedom quickly turned into a demand for total control. The phenomenon of 'political correctness', with its speech codes and other efforts to enforce ideological conformity, was one predictable result of this transformation. What began at the University of California at Berkeley with the Free Speech Movement (called by some the 'Filthy Speech Movement') soon degenerated into an effort to abridge freedom by dictating what could and could not be said about any number of politically sensitive issues.”

From David Foster Wallace, *Consider the Lobster and Other Essays*:

“There's a grosser irony about Politically Correct English. This is that PCE purports to be the dialect of

progressive reform but is in fact--in its Orwellian substitution of the euphemisms of social equality for social equality itself--of vast [ ] ... help to conservatives and the US status quo.... Were I, for instance, a political conservative who opposed using taxation as a means of redistributing national wealth, I would be delighted to watch PC progressives spend their time and energy arguing over whether a poor person should be described as "low-income" or "economically disadvantaged" or "pre-prosperous" rather than constructing effective public arguments for redistributive legislation or higher marginal tax rates. [...] In other words, PCE acts as a form of censorship, and censorship always serves the status quo."

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## Darwin8u says

*"The danger with hatred is, once you start in on it, you get a hundred times more than you bargained for. Once you start, you can't stop."*  
? Philip Roth, *The Human Stain*

Reading Roth is almost a spooky, sexual experience. I say that knowing this will sound absurd, trite and probably hyperbolic. But with Roth, his words are imbued with an almost carnal power, a spectral courage, energy and life. IT is like watching an absurdly talented musician do things with an instrument/with sound that bends the edge of possible. Reading Roth, I can understand how the audience in Paganini's time wanted to burn the man for witchcraft, feared the man for his deal with the Devil. I'm not sure who Roth sold his soul to, but Roth's run of Novels: *Operation Shylock* (1993) *Sabbath's Theater* (1995) >> *American Pastoral* (1997) >> *I Married a Communist* (1998) >> *The Human Stain* (2000) can only be thought of as the greatest run of novels produced by ANY writer at anytime. Maybe Shakespeare had a better run. Maybe Proust. Maybe. For me, these five novels, ending with *The Human Stain* are the apex of 20th Century writing. Spooky.

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## Ahmed says

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### Jeffrey Keeten says

**”All he’d ever wanted, from earliest childhood on, as to be free: not black, not even white--just on his own and free. He meant no insult to no one by his choice, nor was he trying to irritate anyone whom he took to be his superior, nor was he staging some sort of protest against his race or hers. He recognized that to conventional people for whom everything was ready-made and rigidly unalterable what he was doing would never look correct. But to dare to be nothing more than correct had never been his aim. The objective was for his fate to be determined not by the ignorant, hate-filled intentions of a hostile world but, to whatever degree humanly possible, by his own resolve. Why accept a life on any other terms?”**

Coleman Silk went into the Navy as a Caucasian because his pigment allowed him to do so. After a perceptive whore (they are bona fide experts on the male anatomy) in a brothel noticed something about his physique that gave him away as black he was hurled from the establishment. His girlfriend in college who thought he was white met his parents only to learn differently. She, after a moment of hysterics, dumped him. It wasn’t hard to understand that life provided more opportunities if the world perceived him as white. The timely death of his father, who would have put a kibosh on the whole thing, gave him the freedom to choose. His mother, his brother, and his sister were simply people that had to be carefully cut out of his life.

**”You don’t have to murder your father. The world will do that for you. There are plenty of forces out to get your father. The world will take care of him, as it had indeed taken care of Mr. Silk.”**

Silk married and landed a job at Athena College. He advanced to the position of Dean of Faculty. He was respected, but as happens with most successful people he made enemies. He also along the way had four kids which is four times that he was sitting in a waiting room offering up prayers to whatever deity would hear them with his fingers, toes, and everything else crossed hoping the baby would be...white.

He dodged every bullet, but as some wise man said there is always a bullet with your name on it. Maybe it was just that he was old and didn't move as fast as he used to, but the bullet that caught him and cost him his job was bordering on ridiculous. Where was the man that intimidated his kids with words?

*"The father who never lost his temper. The father who had another way to beating you down. With words. With speech. With what he called 'the language of Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Dickens.' With the English language that no one could ever take away from you and that Mr. Silk richly sounded, always with great fullness and clarity and bravado, as though even in ordinary conversation he were reciting Marc Antony's speech over the body of Caesar."*

I don't think he took it seriously. How could anyone? He was calling roll call for a class and noticed that two people were gone again and had been gone since the beginning of the quarter. *"Does anyone know these people? Do they exist or are they spooks?"*

They were both black students.

Silk is charged with racism and dismissed.

I've never really understood the derogatory connotations of using the word Spook in regard to a black person. Wouldn't it make more sense for black people to call white people spooks? I believe the term came into usage as a way to scare white children (a ghost that would get them) who had never seen a black person. Regardless, it does exist and any reasonable well educated person knows the word as a derogatory term when referring to people of color. The problem with this charge of racism is intent. If Silk had known the students were black would he have used the term? To me it was just a moment of levity out of frustration about students that weren't attending class.

The problem is when your life is words you must select them carefully.

The irony of course is that he can't reveal his most important secret even for the defense of his career. Although that does beg the question can't a black person make a racist comment against another black person? It can get rather confusing about who is capable of being guilty of what especially when race is indeterminate.

Silk's wife dies and he believes the scandal killed her. He goes off the rails, accusing practically everyone he knows as being part of a grand conspiracy against him. I sympathize because most of the time I feel the same way, but I know they will slap a strait jacket on me and throw me into the nearest rubber room if I give them proper opportunity.

He actually finds a much more fun way to put the final nail in the coffin of his reputation. He (seventy-two) starts having sex with a thirty-four year old, illiterate janitor, and part time milk maid at the local dairy. He requires the help of the "miracle drug of the 20th century".

*"Thanks to Viagra I've come to understand Zeus's amorous transformations. That's what they should have called Viagra. They should have called it Zeus."*

Silk is falling in love with Faunia, but she sets him straight.

*"He'd said to her, 'This is more than sex,' and flatly she replied, 'no, it's not. You just forgot what sex is. This is sex. All by itself. Don't fuck it up by pretending it's something else.'"*

All is going well, well that's not true. His kids are not speaking to him and he is receiving rebuking letters from his former colleagues, most by the way who he had hired as Dean of Faculty.

His biggest problem is Fauna's ex-husband, Les Farley, a Vietnam vet who is as stable as nitroglycerin. He is less than thrilled that his ex-wife is blowing a seventy-two year old man. The war warped him in a way that can never be planed straight. After the government trained him to be a killer and allowed him to embrace all his worst impulses by giving him the authority to shoot anything that moves with a machine gun from a helicopter, they gave him two hundred dollars and a pat on the back for his service to his country. See ya Les. Good luck back in the real world.

Back in the real world he can't eat at a Chinese restaurant without wanting to kill the waiter.

This story is set against the backdrop of the Clinton impeachment and Roth is able to worm into the text the opinions of various people about Slick Willie and Monica Lewinsky. Silk's own perceived indiscretion becomes magnified for the community already reeling from a President who nearly went down because the **Essence of Bill** was discovered on a navy blue dress. At thirty-four Fauna had been around the block a few times. For anyone to think that Silk was taking advantage of her was ludicrous. At what age does someone pass over the barrier of being able to be taken advantage of by someone older than themselves? Aren't people close in age as capable of taking advantage (whatever that entails) as someone twenty, thirty, forty years older? There are so many great discussion points in this book. You might even find the needle has moved on something you think of as a core belief. I'm always questioning why I believe something and books like this put hockey puck ideas in my mind that bounce, carom, and sometimes hit the net proving that nothing is as firm a belief as I think it is.

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>  
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

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## **Paula says**

The author sums it up perfectly on page 81

"You area a verbal master of extroadinary loquatusness[P. Roth]. So Perspicatios. So fluent. A vocal master of the endless, ostentatious overelaborate sentence."

Yup.

This book is the Jackson Pollock of our literary time. Just spatter everything all over the page and call it art. Roth goes on and on by using every single adjective he ever learned in his SAT class, in a row, then completely counters every argument he just made, so he can use all the opposite words he knows. ITs OBNOXIOUS. I've read reviews about how each word seems painstakingly chosen. Its painful alright, for the reader. I don't think the author made any choices. TO choose the implies you would select one word or phrase to the exclusion of another. He uses ALL OF THEM.

This guy is the master of the tripple negative (You are not so unshrewed as not to know it.. p195) but not quite as good at it as he is at using ellipses, dashes and commas to create an entire page of run on sentence that is, none the less, gramatically correct, and here the real skill- its also pointless. He makes Melville seem to the point and full of rich cololism and contemporary dialect.

he goes on for a full page to discuss a scene he has already earlier described about milking cows, he uses every verb and adjective that can even be remotely related to a cow, then proceeds to contradict himself (as he does often) just to put in more words, negate the meaning of the word immediately preceding it then relate it to sex and subjugation.

".. the human and bovine, the highly differentiated and the all but undifferentiated, to live, not merely to endure, but to live, to go on taking, feeding, milking, acknowledging wholeheartedly, 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-detail of life which is the rhapsody"

BULLSHIT. Pointless meaningfulness? Full, copious, abundant, and then we needed superabundant- as if his point is unclear? Well his point is unclear. This is the rhapsody? What rhapsody? I don't know if he's trying to show off, or insult me, like I don't know what the first three mean, or maybe I have to read it three, oh, wait, no 4 times to get the point. What is this? a 9th grad vocab test? You're kidding, right?

how about this crap:

"Stunned by how little he'd gotten over her and she'd gotten over him, he walked away understanding, as outside his reading in classical Greek drama he'd never had to understand before, how easily a life can be one thing rather than another and how accidentally a destiny is made... on the other hand, how accidental fate may seem when things can never turn out other than they do. That is, he walked away understanding nothing, knowing he could understand nothing, though with the illusion that he WOULD have metaphysically understood something of enormous importance about the stubborn determination of his to become his own man... if only such things were understandable."

I'm pretty sure in this case the author meant to convey the character's confusion- but I'm too confused to say for sure.

The author is so obnoxious, he regularly references characters from Euripides by name only - do you know anyone familiar with the characters of Euripides ancient greek plays? How about Aschenback and Tadzio? Herodotus? How about some general concepts. Most people know ethos, pathos, logos, but how about "The difference between diegesis and mimesis?" He seems to be trying to satorize his characters in the book, to make them seem obnoxious, overeducated and socially inept, secretly insecure which requires they blather on dropping names and fancy words. It works, except that its not just one or two characters. He does it constantly himself- in the authors own narration- as if his point wasn't already so obfuscated you have to go back through 2 pages, six dashes, a dozen commas, a handful of ellipses to find where the sentence begins and remember what he was talking about.

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°°°.°..°-°. \_ . ????? Ροζουλ? Εωσφ?ρος . \_ . °-°.° . :°°° ★. ^ . : ★ ?????? ???????  
?????? Ταμετο?ρο Αμ says

"Αυτ? παθα?νεις ?μα μεγαλ?νεις με ανθρ?πους. Το ανθρ?πινο στ?γμα...?τσι ε?ναι. Αφ?νουμε ?να στ?γμα, το αποτ?πωμ? μας. Ακαθαρσ?α, σκληρ?τητα, κακοπο?ηση, σφ?λμα, περιττ?ματα, σπ?ρμα- δεν ?χουμε ?λλον τρ?πο να δηλ?σουμε την παρουσ?α μας. Και αυτ? το στ?γμα δεν ?χει σχ?ση με ανυπακο?, καμ? σχ?ση με σωτηρ?α και λ?τρωση. Το ?χουμε ?λοι μας. Ε?ναι μ?σα μας. ?μφυτο. Μας καθορ?ζει. Το στ?γμα ενυπ?ρχει μ?σα μας πριν αφ?σει την κηλ?δα του. Υπ?ρχει χωρ?ς το σημ?δι του. Ε?ναι τ?σο ?μφυτο ?στε να μην απαιτε?ται κηλ?δα....οποιοσδ?ποτε λ?γος περ?

κ?θαρσης ε?ναι φ?ρσα. Και πολ? β?ρβαρη μ?λιστα. Η φαντασ?ωση της καθαρ?τητας ε?ναι τρομαχτικ?. Παρ?λογη.

Τι ε?ναι η επιδ?ωξη της καθαρ?τητας αν ?χι κι ?λλη ρυπαρ?τητα;....το στ?γμα ε?ναι αναπ?φευκτο..."

Μ?σα απο την ιστορ?α της Αμερικ?ς γεννι?ται το σ?γχρονο μοντ?λο ζω?ς.

Το "στ?γμα",η κοινοτοπ?α του κακο?, υπ?ρχει πριν την ?παρξη της ανθρ?πινης υπ?στασης και διαιωη?ζεται μ?σα απο αυτ?.

?να εξαιρετικ? βιβλ?ο,θα ?λεγα το καλ?τερο της Αμερικανικ?ς τριλογ?ας.

ΤΡΑΓΙΚΗ ΕΙΡΩΝΙΑ σε ?λο της το μεγαλε?ο.

Προσπ?θεια κ?θαρσης και πλ?ρους αυτομ?λησης με τρομερ?ς συνεπε?ες. Ο απ?νθρωπος που προσπαθε? να αλλ?ξει το πεπρωμ?νο του χωρ?ς να μπορε? να υπολογ?σει το αναπ?δραστο της ιστορ?ας του κ?σμου που εξελ?σσεται.

Φαντ?στηκε πως η φυγ? του αν πετ?χει θα κρατ?σει για π?ντα. Μετ? διαπ?στωσε τραγικ? ρεαλιστικ? πως τα π?ντα ?χουν πρ?σκαιρο χαρακτ?ρα και η ιστορ?α καθ?ς και η μο?ρα των εξελ?ξεων σε αιφνιδι?ζουν ανεξ?λεγκτα.

Ο καθηγητ?ς Κ?λμαν ε?ναι ο ?νθρωπος που π?λεψε με την ιεροτελεστ?α της προσωπικ?ς του κ?θαρσης και νικ?θηκε.

Ο Κ?λμαν ε?ναι ?νας σπουδα?ος καθηγητ?ς κλασικ?ν σπουδ?ν καταφ?ρνει ως κοσμ?τορας σε ?να παρηκμασμ?νο πανεπιστ?μιο να αλλ?ξει ?ρδην την ποι?τητα σπουδ?ν,να βελτι?σει και να εκσυγχρον?σει με την δυναμικ? προσωπικ?τητα του ?λο το ακαδημα?κ? σ?στημα του ιδρ?ματος. Βρ?σκεται στο απ?γειο της καταξ?ωσης του.

?ριστος οικογενει?ρχης. Ευυπ?ληπτος πολ?της. ?ψογος ακαδημα?κ?ς και ?ρωας αρχα?ας τραγωδ?ας.

Μια τραγωδ?α που σκηνοθ?τησε ολομ?ναχος και αφο? δι?πραξε την ?βρη, περιμ?νει την κ?θαρση χωρ?ς ?χνος μεταμ?λειας ? θυσ?ας προς τους θεο?ς της μο?ρας.

Αναπ?φευκτα ακολουθε? η προσωπικ? ν?μεση.

Την ιστορ?α του καθηγητ? την μαθα?νουμε και π?λι απο τον συγγραφ?α Ν?ιθαν Ζο?κερμαν, ο οπο?ος αναπτ?σσει φιλικ? σχ?ση με τον Κ?λμαν και προσπαθε? να κατανο?σει την ιδιοσυγκρασ?α του καθηγητ? και το μυστ?ριο του θαν?του του.

Γνωρ?ζονται π?νω στον παροξυσμ? αγαν?κτησης του καθηγητ? αμ?σως μετ? το θ?νατο της συζ?γου του ?που και εισβ?λει στη ζω? του -παραιτημ?νου απο ?λα-Ζο?κερμαν απαιτ?ντας απο τον συγγραφ?α να γρ?ψει βιβλ?ο στο οπο?ο θα αποκαλ?πτει ποιοι σκ?τωσαν τη σ?ζυγο του ως ηθικο? αυτουργο?.

Ο Κ?λμαν ανατρ?πει την νεκρικ? προβλεψιμ?τητα της ζω?ς του Ζο?κερμαν ?ταν του μιλ?ει για το παρελθ?ν του αλλ? κυρ?ως για το πολ?παθο παρ?ν του.

Ο καθηγητ?ς κατηγορε?ται ως ρατσιστ?ς απο την πανεπιστημιακ? κοιν?τητα ?στερα απο ενα διφορο?μενο γλωσσικ? σχ?λιο που κ?νει μ?σα στην τ?ξη. Αναφ?ρεται σε δυο μον?μως απ?ντες μαθητ?ς που δεν γνωρ?ζει καν πως ε?ναι ν?γροι αφο? δεν τους ?χει δει ποτ?.

Αναγκ?ζεται να παραιτηθε? και χ?νοντας τη σ?ζυγο του χ?νει τα π?ντα. ?τιδηποτε ?χιτιξε χρ?νια π?νω σε ψε?τικες β?σεις στ?ριξης.

Απο εκεί ξεκινάει η κ'τω β'λτα. Αρχίζει ο π'λεμος των εντυπ'σεων και ανατ'μνονται βαθι'ς δομ'ς της Αμερικανικ'ς κοινων'ας που θ'γουν την νε'τερη ιστορ'α.

Ξεπροβ'λλουν απροκ'λυπτα οι φυλετικ'ς διακρ'σεις, τα δικαι'ματα των ν'γρων, ο π'λεμος του Βιετν'μ, ο π'λεμος του Ιρ'κ, το π'ος του Κλ'ντον στο οβ'λ γραφε'ο και η στροφ' στο δ'θεν συντηρητισμ'.

Ο Κ'λμαν εξομολογε'ται στον Ζο'κερμαν 'τι μετ' το στιγματισμ' του και τη δι'λυση της οικογ'νειας του 'χει συν'ψει ερωτικ' σχ'ση με μια αναλφ'βητη καθαρ'στρια που ηλικιακ' θα μπορο'σε να ε'ναι εγγον' του, η οπο'α ε'ναι μια ακ'μη τραγικ' φιγο'ρα σε αυτ' την παρ'σταση της κ'θαρσης.

Το μεγ'λο μυστικ' του 'μωσ δεν το ομολογε'. Αυτ' ε'ναι η λ'τρωση και ο θ'νατος του.

Ο αξι'τιμος καθηγητ'ς Κ'λμαν κατ'γεται απο οικογ'νεια ν'γρων. Ε'ναι 'νας ανοιχτ'χρωμος ν'γρος που μεγαλ'νει βι'νοντας το ρατσισμ' αφο' τον κατατρ'χει ο χαρακτηρισμ'ς του "αρ'πη". Αποφασ'ζει να ξαναγεννηθε' ως Εβρα'ος και να απαρνηθε' για π'ντα μ'να, οικογ'νεια, καταγωγ', φυλ'.

Αρνε'ται τη στιγματισμ'νη του γενι' και την κατ'τερη ν'γρικη κοινων'α των παιδικ'ν του χρ'νων. Κρατ'ει κρυφ' την καταγωγ' του ακ'μη και απο τη σ'ζυγο και τα τ'σσερα παιδι' του.

Και φτ'νει σαρ'ντα χρ'νια μετ' να αποβ'λλεται απο μια αντιρατσιστικ' κοινων'α που υπερασπ'ζεται τα δικ' του δικαι'ματα. Στο τ'ρμα της ζω'ς του, η σ'γχρονη ιστορ'α των 'σων δικαιωμ'των κατηγορε' τον ν'γρο συνταξιο'χο κοσμ'τορα πανεπιστημ'ου για...ρατσιστ'.

"Ποια η ιεροτελεστ'α της κ'θαρσης;  
Πως γ'νεται;

Με εξοστρακισμ' ? ανταποδ'δοντας  
το α'μα με α'μα".

Σοφοκλ'ς, Οιδ'πους τ'ραννος

Καλ' αν'γωση  
'νθρωποι και 'νθρωποι!!

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## Skorofido Skorofido says

Δεν ε'ναι κρυφ' πλ'ον πως δεν τα πηγα'νω και π'ρα πολ' καλ' με τους συγγραφε'ς απ' την 'λλη πλευρ' του Ατλαντικο'. Τα χν'τα μας δεν πολυταιρι'ζουν και συν'θως βγ'ζω σπυρ'κια... 'μωσ επειδ' τ'ρα στα γερ'ματα, β'λθηκα π'ρα απ' την ευρωπα'κ' μου παιδε'α να αποκτ'σω και ολ'γον αμερικανικ' (για να ε'μαι σκορ'φιδον κοσμοπολ'τικον και παντ'ς καιρο'), συνεχ'ζω ακ'θεκτο τις

βουτις μου στα αμερικανικα γραμματα... Και ευτυχως για μ'να... γιατ' ανακαλυψα τον Ροθ και ομολογ' πως οι δυο μας τα βρκαμε μια χαρ?... Τουλ'χιστον εγ' μαζ' του...

Αν και ?ταν τρελα?νομαι με κ'ποιο βιβλ?ο, η υπ'θεση περνει ?χι στη δε?τερη αλλ' σε τρ?τη και τ'ταρτη μο?ρα, ολ?γα λ?για για το story: Ο Κ?λμαν Σ?лк ε?ναι καθηγητ?ς, πρ?ην κοσμι?τορας εν?ς μικρο? αμερικ?νικου πανεπιστημ?ου, ευυπ?ληπτος και αμ?μπτου ηθικ?ς... Σε ?να μ?θημ? του, θα κ?νει το «τραγικ?» λ?θος να κ?νει την ερ?τηση ε?ν δ?ο φοιτητ?ς που δεν ?χουν εμφανιστε? ποτ? στο μ?θημ? του ε?ναι 'spookies' ... Η λ?ξη 'spooky' ?μως στην αγγλικ? γλ?σσα ?χει διπλ? σημασ?α...

«φ?ντασμα» και «μα?ρος»... Ο καθηγητ?ς την ε?πε με την πρ?τη, κ?ποιοι καλοθελητ?ς την π?ραν με τη δε?τερη... Αποτ?λεσμα ο Σιλκ 'δι?κεται' απ? την ?δρα του, του κολλ?ει μια 'ρετσινι?' (ν?το λοιπ?ν ?να απ? τα στ?γματα), το β?ρος μεγ?λο, η γυνα?κα του πεθα?νει... Αφο? περνει δυο χρ?νια μ?σα στη μα?ρη κατ?θλιψη και την πικρ? οργ?, ο καθηγητ?ς μια ωρα?α πρω?α τα αφ?νει ?λα π?σω του, χ?ρη στην αγκαλι? (και ?χι μ?νο...) μιας 34/χρονης αναλφ?βητης καθαρ?στριας (ο ?διος ε?ναι ?δη 71 χρ?νων...) κι αρχ?ζουν κι ?λλα ωρα?α, κατ? π?σο ε?ναι ηθικ? μια τ?τοια σχ?ση... και πολλ? – πολλ? ?λλα...

Την λ?τρεψα τη γραφ? του Ροθ... Με απογε?ωσε... Η ψυχογρ?φηση των ηρ?ων του ε?ναι μοναδικ?... Θ?γει τ?σα πολλ? θ?ματα αριστοτεχνικ?, σου δ?νει τροφ? για σκ?ψη, σε απογει?νει... Η ιστορ?α δεν ?χει πλ?ον καμ?α σημασ?α... σημασ?α ?χει ?λα αυτ? που μπορε? να π?ρει ο αναγ?στης...

Υποκλ?νομαι στην ψυχογρ?φηση του Λες (τ?ως ?ντρα της Φι?να, της καθαρ?στριας), βετερ?νου του πολ?μου του Βιετν?μ... Τον συμπ?νεσα και τον κατ?λαβα, αχ! Τι ψυχοπονηρικο φ?δι που ε?μαι!!! (ασχ?τως αν συμφων? με τις πρ?ξεις του...) Τι Αποκ?λυψη Τ?ρα, τι Platoon και American Full metal jacket... (εντ?ξει καταλ?βατε την ηλικ?α μου...)

Υποκλ?νομαι στην ψυχογρ?φηση της Ντελφ?ν Ρου (της γαλλ?δας προ?δρου του τμ?ματος), αν και μου ?φησε κ?ποια κεν? στο τ?λος...

Εβρα?οι της Αμερικ?ς, φυλετικ?ς διακρ?σεις, σχ?σεις μη αποδεκτ?ς απ? την κοινων?α, δεσμο? α?ματος, τα εσωτερικ? των πανεπιστημ?ων, προσωπικ?ς φιλοδοξ?ες, εσωτερικ?ς συγκρο?σεις και ?λλα πολλ? δ?νουν αρμονικ? σ'αυτ? το βιβλ?ο...

Και ?λα αυτ?... με ?να μυστικ? που βαρ?νει την πλ?τη του Κ?λμαν (του ?ρωα μας) και εν τ?λει ?λη την οικογ?νεια του, την περ?οδο που η Αμερικ? και ?λος ο πλαν?της ?χει π?θει φρεν?τιδα με το σκ?νδαλο Λιου?νσκι και που ακριβ?ς ο Πρ?εδρος Κλ?ντον ?ριξε το πολυπ?θητο σπ?ρμα του...

ΥΠΟΚΛΙΝΟΜΑΙ λοιπ?ν στον μεγαλ?τερο εν ζω? Αμερικαν? συγγραφ?α (τουλ'χιστον ?τσι τον αποκαλο?ν οι γν?στες...) που ?χει π?ρει ?λα τα βραβε?α, εκτ?ς απ? το Ν?μπελ... (?χει καιρ? ακ?μα... you never know!)

Εντ?ξει, ?ξυπνοι ε?σαστε... καταλ?βατε τι βαθμ? θα β?λω...

10/10 (ασυζητητ?...)

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## Katie Lynch says

Hey Roth, I know you have a great vocabulary....Just tell me a damn story.

Let me explain: I just read a very positive review of this book stating that Roth has such an expansive vocabulary, and every word seems painstakingly chosen, etc. That is exactly what I hate about this book! A narrative is supposed to flow, not make you resolve to study the dictionary more fastidiously.

For the record, I have a pretty good vocabulary and I thoroughly enjoy creative uses of the English language. But I despise the use of overly academic, deliberately "highbrow" language when something

simple would tell the story better. The problem is NOT that I didn't understand this book, it is that the plot just does not flow at all. I really dislike this book.

It looks as though this is a pretty unpopular opinion, but oh well.

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### **Alex says**

Here's what I know: if a book features some old dude fucking some younger lady, check the author's age. 100% of the time, he's the same age as the old dude.

The younger woman will be vulnerable. She will be attracted to the older man's security and wisdom. There is a power imbalance, and it's basically the same thing as when Tarzan saves Jane from the lion. It's embarrassing, immature wish-fulfillment. And even when it's written very well, it's boring.

This book is occasionally written very well, but it also has the young lady dancing naked for like 20 pages while she babbles about free love. "Oh, I see you, Coleman. I could give you away my whole life and still have you. Just by dancing." Good luck getting through that bullshit. It suuuucks.

And you've heard this story before. Old guys complain that no one wants to read old guy authors. It's not because we're "politically correct." It's because old men can't shut up about their penises, and it's *boring*. The entire canon, as it was agreed on at some point by a bunch of old guys and their penises, is full of stories like this.

Coleman Silk, the protagonist of *The Human Stain*, is one of those old guys. He's the worst kind of college professor: the kind who tells you how to read a book. "Fossilized pedagogy," as a character we're not supposed to agree with calls it. Fuck you, it's my fucking book, I'll decide how to read it. If I decide to take "a feminist perspective on Euripides," then that's what happens. Euripides can take care of himself.

Silk is also of African-American descent; he's been "passing" as white his entire life. Ironically, he's disgraced by an unfortunately timed use of the word "spook." This is the one-sentence plot of the book: guy accused of racism is secretly black. It sounds interesting, but the problem is that Philip Roth thinks it's a metaphor.

He thinks it's a metaphor because he keeps getting accused of being an asshole. All his life, people have called Philip Roth all sorts of names. Misogynist, even anti-Semite. (Roth is Jewish.) He keeps getting accused of believing what his characters say. It's not me, he complains. "The thought of the novelist lies not in the remarks of his characters or even in their introspection," he insists, "but in the plight he has invented for his characters."

Well, quite. The plight he has invented here is a young lady's vagina. Of course Philip Roth isn't Coleman Silk. He's his pimp.

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### **Michael Finocchiaro says**

A masterfully architected tale about race, shame, violence, and remembrance, *The Human Stain* is definitely



one of Roth's masterpieces. From its first pages, the reader is drawn into the mystery of Coleman "Silky" Silk né Silkzweig and his tragic downfall. The characters here are vibrant and real, the descriptions terrifying at times but always captivating, I found it hard putting this book down as I was relentlessly driven to want to know what happened - the mark of truly great writing. If you have never read Roth, you can safely start with this one or American Pastoral and you will definitely want more.

I just watched the movie from 2003 starring Anthony Hopkins as Coleman, Nicole Kidman as Faunia, Gary Sinise as Zuckerman and Ed Harris as Les. It is a wonderful and accurate rendition of the book for the silver screen. It can be watched before or after reading the book, but I would suggest reading the book first.

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## **Paul Bryant says**

So I watched the movie, and I really shouldn't have. To quote Pope Pius VII, it sometimes makes you wonder if you're on the right planet. Anthony Hopkins plays an extremely white black man! And the ever-crushingly beautiful Nicole Kidman plays an illiterate woman who's a janitor! Yes! And we're supposed to take this seriously! And the actor who plays the young Anthony Hopkins looks absolutely nothing like him! It's so insane. I believe they take a lot of drugs in Hollywood, and this movie appears to prove it. Some of the loonyness belongs to Philip Roth of course. Because the story has the crashingly beautiful even though desperately dressing down Nicole take a shine to the 70-if-he's-a-day Anthony and wants to shag him a lot! And this is the same wish fulfillment fantasy that Philip Roth keeps on writing about in all his late books! Over and over again! This would be funny if it weren't for the many rothophiles running about telling us that he's the greatest living writer of prose and will soon be the greatest dead one too. Ugh.

Okay, I admit, the book MUST must must must be better than this wretched loony movie but I will never find out. I got Rothed to death years ago.\* This Human Stain movie, it was just a one time thing. It meant nothing. I swear I'll never see it again.

Hey, maybe when I'm real old and creepy I'll turn into this giant Rothfan and reread all this stuff and be yelling "yeah, stick it to her one more time, substitute-Rothman, you know she's gagging for your 70 year old flesh". Ew.

TO RECAP :

this is a black man

this is a cleaning lady

I understand the team who made The Human Stain will be producing a biopic on Philip Roth shortly and that the challenging role of Philip Roth, which requires the actor to age from 20 to 70 has gone to

[image error]

\* er... not quite - I did subsequently read Nemesis and since it wasn't anything to do with shagging it was really pretty good, in a Larry David way : "pretty...pretty...pretty good".

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