Roth's Humorous Art of Ghost Writing

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Abstract

In her article "Roth's Humorous Art of Ghost Writing" Paule Lévy analyses Philip Roth's Exit Ghost, the last novel featuring Nathan Zuckerman, in which Roth reassesses his favorite alter ego's itinerary while exploring the troubled relation between writing and aging. Lévy considers Exit Ghost as an ironic sequel to The Ghost Writer and posits that in the light of Derrida's theories of writing and "hauntology" the central motifs of ghosts and "spectrality" in the novel are a means for Roth to reflect anew on the ambiguous relation between autobiography and fiction. Lévy asks whether Exit Ghost should be read as an expression of Roth's pessimism, as a "ghost novel" predicting its own disappearance as a cultural artifact, or whether it should be read as an assertion of Roth's indefatigable vitality and faith in the priceless value of art. Lévy's study is a textual analysis and a close examination of the dialogic links between the storyline and its haunting multifarious intertext—in particular Joseph Conrad's partly autobiographical novel The Shadow Line, a central reference in Exit Ghost.

Recommended Citation


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When Roth published The Ghost Writer in 1979, he would've been between the ages and stages of Nathan Zuckerman, his recurring protagonist who appears in this novel, and E. L. Lonoff, the elder statesman author who has invited Nathan to spend an evening in his countryside home. The evening visit and the morning after comprise the entire novel. Roth's work is a fascinating human and artistic study. He wrote for most of his life, without stopping, about every stage of life as a writer, a man, and a Jew in the postwar decades. If one goal of art is, simplistically, to express oneself — to move the self out of the pneuma of thought into tangible form — then Roth has exorcised himself onto pages with a dedication that is rare. The Zuckerman saga accommodates Roth's theory about writing, having Zuckerman as a normative voice. Synthetically (and not only), Nathan Zuckerman is highly accomplished and attentively developed. Roth created Zuckerman as fictional character for particular persuasive purposes of the rhetorical context offered by literature, knowing very well that this speaking "I" is a role negotiated in this context between him and his audience. "An Old Form Revitalized: Philip Roth's Ghost Writer and the Bildungsroman." Studies in the Novel, 16 (1984).