

# From Free Will to Ethical Responsibility: Interpretation of Philip Roth's View on Ethical Choice in *The Ghost Writer*

**Qiao Chuandai**

**Abstract:** Employing the theory of Ethical Literary Criticism conceptualized by Nie Zhenzhao, this paper explores the ethical dilemma and selection process of three main characters, Nathan Zuckerman, Lonoff and Amy in Philip Roth's *The Ghost Writer* while wandering between rational will and free will, and the factors influencing their selection as well as. Their transformation from free will to rational will implies the growth of the author. Through this autobiographical novel, Roth presents his views on ethics of literature: human ethical identity and responsibility are not restrictions on freedom. but mean mutual understanding, compassion, and tolerance. Therefore, the transformation and growth of the writer's ethical consciousness help him make the right ethical choice. Nathan embodies the self-conflicting of Roth himself, acting as his agent.

**Keywords:** ethical literary criticism; *The Ghost Writer*; free will; ethical choice; ethical responsibility

**Author:** Qiao Chuandai is Associate Professor at the College of Foreign Studies, Hubei University of Automotive Technology (Shiyan 442002, China). His academic research focuses on Jewish-American literature and ethical literary criticism (Email: 20050013@huat.edu.cn). This paper is part of the result of research program the author hosts (Ministry of Education Humanities and Social Sciences Project).

**标题:** 从自由意志到道德责任: 解读菲利普·罗斯在《鬼作家》中的文学伦理观

**内容摘要:** 本文运用聂珍钊教授的文学伦理学批评理论, 探究菲利普罗斯《鬼作家》中三位主人公内森祖克曼、洛诺夫、艾米在理性意志和自由意志之间的伦理困境和选择的过程, 以及影响他们伦理选择的因素。犹太作家内森和他的精神导师洛诺夫从自由意志到理性意志的转变代表了作家的成长。通过这部自传体小说罗斯也向读者展现自己的文学伦理观: 人类的伦理认同和责任并不是对自由的限制。相反, 还意味着相互理解、同情和包容。因此, 作家伦理意识的转变与成长有助于他做出正确的伦理选择。

**关键词：**文学伦理学批评；《鬼作家》；自由意志；伦理选择；伦理责任

**作者简介：**乔传代，湖北汽车工业学院外国语学院副教授，主要研究方向为美国犹太文学和文学伦理学批评。本文为教育部人文社科项目“从欲望叙事到伦理救赎——菲利普罗斯小说的文学伦理学批评”【项目批号：20YJC752012】阶段性成果。

### Introduction

*The Ghost Writer* is the first novel in Philip Roth's "Zuckerman series" and is deemed as the turning point of his writing style from realism to postmodernism. Combining a variety of artistic techniques, such as narration, flashbacks, memories, fantasies, inner soliloquies, subtext and so on, this novel covers almost all the traditional themes in American Jewish literature, like the assimilation and special identity confusion of Jews in American society, persecution and discrimination against Jews, the ethics of Jewish family, Jewish sacred family issues, the assimilation of marriage, personal struggle, and success, etc. In a way, this novel can be regarded as a typical immortal work in contemporary American Jewish literature. Since the publication of *The Ghost Writer*, many scholars have endeavored to interpret it from different perspectives. Due to Roth's Jewish identity and his works concerning the living state of survivors after the Holocaust, researchers mainly focus their attention on Roth's national concern, Jewish identity, interracial marriage, and Bildungsroman theme, and so on. In Roth's "Zuckerman series", his autobiographical writing is obvious, and *The Ghost Writer* is not the exception. Roth's autobiographical writing, with distinctive personality and unique aesthetic value, is "his writing strategy of self-defense when trapped in Jewish ethical conflict, reflecting his contemplation of American multicultural context as a Jewish American writer" (Su Xin 117). In this novel, Zuckerman's "impersonation" of Anne Frank and Amy Bellette marks the first appearance of the Holocaust in *Zuckerman Bound*. Ambivalence suffuses Zuckerman's personal artistic predicament—the Jewish writer is caught "between loyalty to the father and loyalty to art, between the capacity of the artist for self-sacrificing dedication and the capacity for self-promoting unscrupulousness, between the artist as beholden to his Jewish heritage and the artist as the independent being" (Elaine 615). By exploring how the protagonist conquers his self-motivated will with rational will when getting into ethical dilemma, Philip Roth solves the modern Sphinx riddle for readers, namely, how to become a real rational writer and a rational man.

After making the first biological choice, human beings are faced with the

second one, namely ethical selection—Eva and Adam's tasting forbidden fruit and cracking the mystery of Sphinx. It is the second ethical selection that made mankind truly get rid of the beast factor and become advanced animals with ethics different from wild animals:

Ethically human body itself contains human factor and animal factor. Animal factors are generally connected with self-motivated will (also known as natural will), embodying various desire of human beings, such as sexual desire, appetite, and so forth that demonstrate the basic physiological requirements and psychological dynamics of mankind. Human factors are the embodiment of human's rational will and ethical consciousness. (Nie Zhenzhao 7-8)

In many literary works, based on a certain ethical environment, human self-motivated will and rational will often constitute two opposing forces, thus affecting human ethical behavior.

#### **Nathan's Ethical Dilemma: To be an Impartial Writer or A Jewish Defender**

In *The Ghost Writer*, Philip Roth mainly revolves around how the protagonist Zuckerman "I" changed from adhering to a writer's ethics to making choices with ethical responsibility by conquering free will with rational will when trapped in the conflict between "my" moral ethics as a pure writer and social moral ethics as a Jewish writer. At the beginning, Nathan pursued the absolute freedom as a true moral writer, but later he realized the moral ethical responsibility for collective identity and revised his choice by considering his Jewish identity. Here Roth realizes that writers should also have an ethical responsibility when communicating his life experience and historical ideas to others. A young Jewish writer who came to the forefront in the literary world, Nathan felt that "I was still my family's Jewish offspring." (22)<sup>1</sup> "I" (Nathan) have already been on the journey to Lonoff, a Jewish writer who lived in seclusion and stayed far away from the crowd but had still been well-renowned for years in literary world to "submit myself for candidacy as nothing less than E. I. Lonoff's spiritual son, to petition for his moral sponsorship and to win, if I could, the magical protection of his advocacy and his love" (17). And this is all because of the quarrel and divergence between Nathan and his family members.

The problem between my father and "I" stemmed from one of my most

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1 See Philip Roth, *The Ghost Writer*, New York Vintage, 1995. All references are to this edition will be cited hereafter in parentheses.

ambitious novels, *Higher Education*. In this novel, Nathan involved the scandal of his family and exposed the greed and ugliness of the Jews, which aroused the anger and panic of the whole family, including his father, who came out to persuade and intervene to protect the honor of the family. In his father's opinion, Jewish people have been persecuted, discriminated against, and abused in the long course of history; therefore, as a Jewish writer, Nathan should rationally defend the interests of the Jewish people and describe the positive values of the Jews. For instance, his son should sing high praise for Jewish people, who were endowed with the noble spirit of self-sacrifice. And this is morally consistent with ethical norms. In the face of this national power silencing the voice of writers, Nathan must make a choice: to obey the rational will, take the ethical responsibility for Jews and defend the Jewish religious, or to obey his free choice, and take responsibility as a serious writer. Wandering around the ethical responsibility and his free will, Nathan firstly followed the latter, insisting that "artists should take a certain responsibility for their compatriots, for the society they live in, and for the cause of truth and justice" (184). His father tried to persuade him into changing his idea, but in vain. Then he turned to Judge Leopold Wapter, the most respected Jewish judge in the city for help. "People don't read art—they read about people" (196). Judge Wapter wrote to Nathan, asking him ten questions and recommended him to see *Anne Frank's Diary* in Broadway. As a second-generation immigrant, Nathan's feeling for the "sacred family" of Jews was not strong as that of his father. As a wild and intractable young man, Nathan longed to enter the mainstream of literature, become a serious writer, and portray the real life. So, he didn't reply to the judge, and didn't make any explanation to his father, either. "I am on my own!" (231) Therefore, Nathan removed the deified image of his own nationality under the view of religious culture and restored the true image of it. In his father's eyes, Nathan's behavior means his inner rebellion against the religious tradition and his son was no longer a pure Jew. "[...] after two decades of a more or less unbroken amiable conversation, we had not been speaking for nearly five weeks now, and I was off and away seeking patriarchal validation elsewhere" (18).

In Sartre's "Free choice", a man is free to choose to do anything, but at the same time he must be responsible for any consequences of his choice, not to blame God or fate. Nie Zhenzhao further holds that "everyone lives in an ethical choice, which must be made all the ethical choice is to make a choice according to certain social requirements and moral norms, which needs to conform to the specific ethical environment and context" (90-91). Therefore, ethical choice is not free choice; it is a kind of responsibility choice—everyone should be responsible for their own

choice. Being responsible for one's own choices, one must make choices about one's own choices. In the second chapter of the novel, on the night, boarding in Lonoff's study, to ease the strained relation between my father and "I", "I was about to write to my father to explain myself. But at the thought of Lonoff's praising my "my voice started back of my knees and reached above my head" (231), I tore the letter again in anger. "Hadn't Joyce, hadn't Flaubert, hadn't Thomas Wolfe, the romantic genius of my high school reading list, all been condemned for disloyalty or treachery or immorality by those who saw themselves as slandered in their works? Literary history was in part the history of novelists infuriating fellow countrymen, family, and friends" (Roth, *The Ghost Writer* 234). What I insist on now is my responsibility. "Writers weren't writers, if they didn't have the strength to face the insolubility of that conflict and go on" (234). However, boarding in his spiritual mentor, Lonoff's house, Nathan was also infected by the protagonist of his own novel. At heart, he rekindled a feeling of kinship for his own basically Americanized clan. To insist on his free choice to be a serious and pure writer, or to become a Jewish defender against his free will? Nathan was trapped into an ethical dilemma. On the one hand, from the works of a group of literary predecessors, such as Lonoff, Nathan realized that his circumcision had been engraved in the depths of his soul, and that Jewish identity had long been deeply rooted and would not and could not be discarded. But on the other hand, he was not able to ignore the artistic responsibility of a social writer simply to cater to his family and his own nation. Therefore, as a Jew's son, subconsciously Nathan couldn't neglect the tragedy that happened to his compatriots. He suffered a great deal for the desired to be both a qualified son and a serious writer to reflect the real life. Nathan finally solved the problem by making a compromise between his Jewish family and him.

While sharing breakfast with Lonoff the next day, Nathan constantly imagined himself returning to New Jersey to announce to his family:

"I met a marvelous young woman while I was up in New England. I love her and she loves me. We are going to be married."

"Married? But so fast? Nathan, is she Jewish?"

"Yes, she is."

"But who is she?"

"Anne Frank." (336)

Here, getting married to Anne, whose image is in accordance with the national image in his father's eyes, showed Nathan's strong desire to keep a harmony with

Jewish tradition. By imagining Amy's identity as Anne, who survived the Holocaust, Nathan hoped that by marrying with the suffering Jewish writer, he could also take the responsibility for his fellow citizens and be accepted by the Jewish community. Accordingly, he could look back the source of his literary career and redefine the relationship between the past and now, trying to understand how art comes from life, and reviews both his views on his father and his moral struggle.

Apparently, Nathan's insistence on his free choice was considered anti-Semitic and self-hating by his family. In fact, as an educated youth with modern higher education, Nathan accepted the educational view with modern rationality as the core, which inevitably broke the traditional family education with Judaism as the core and is greatly different from the world outlook and values with religion as the core advocated by his elder generation. This is the primary cause of his irreconcilable contradiction with his father. After experiencing a multiple personality struggle, Nathan realized the eternal significance of the contradiction between the artistic pursuit of free choice and the responsibility of family community. In this novel, just like Nathan, Roth himself has also experienced the conflict between writer's identity and Jewish nationality, as well as the conflict between fact and fiction. Both in writing and viewing Jewish culture, Roth has taken an objective attitude of taking the essence and abandoning the dross. Roth himself admitted that "my life is to falsify autobiographies from the real plot of my life, to fabricate history, and to make up a real and unreal substance" (Blake 381). In all literary works, characters can be regarded as a sphinx factor containing both goodness and evil. "The value of literature is to reveal the process of ethical selection conducted by human beings through disciplining the interplays of human factor and animal factor" (Nie Zhenzhao 15). Evidently, Roth helps readers crack the modern Sphinx riddle by demonstrate the process of the protagonist's ethical choice.

### **Lonoff's Ethical Dilemma and Ethical Choice: From Free Will to Ethical Responsibility**

To hold on to his artistic responsibility and embrace the world of art, Nathan did not hesitate to abandon his Jewish family and Jewish tradition, thus leaving him in isolation. So, he had to find another home to seek the support from his elder generation. At the same time, as a writer, he was also faced with other constraints and puzzles conflicts among various literary influences. With these confusions and puzzles, he visited Lonoff, his spiritual mentor, in the hope of finding answers with his help and guidance. However, both in literary creation and in family life, Lonoff, who lived far away from the crowd for a long time, was also caught in a

difficult dilemma. Through Lonoff, "my" spiritual mentor, Roth demonstrates the confrontation and restriction between human free choice and ethical responsibility.

Long-term living with his wife in nature far away from the crowd and breathing enough fresh air, Lonoff still felt himself gradually exhausted in writing creativity due to lack of flavor of life, coupled with the constraints of various external forces. For him, writing is equal to playing on words "I turn sentences around. That's my life" (36). On the relationship between art and life, Lonoff showed a negative reclusive creative mode, because his creation is almost entirely isolated from life. The only chance of contacting with the outside world is to teach writing at Athena College twice a week. "Going to the college is the high point of my week" (42). In addition to playing on words, Lonoff felt that his works in thirty years were all the products of his imagination and were composed completely divorced from life. His artistic belief is to refuse life. This is his free choice, and he took the responsibility. For decades, living in this pattern of complete detachment and repetition, he was at a loss. "And if I knock off from this routine for as long as a day, I'm frantic with boredom and a sense of waste" (36). Lonoff's creation model confirms the complete disconnection between literature art and real life; and art does not come from reality but replaces reality. However, as for the relationship between literary creation and life, he seems very confused. On the one hand, as for Zuckerman's isolation from his family and Jews, Lonoff thinks it's natural and acceptable for he believes that any real writers will feel isolated and cold for they generally stand higher than ordinary people do, and the pleasure of ordinary people is right the price of success. However, on the other hand, he advised Zuckerman not just immerse himself in art "If your life consists of reading and writing and looking at the snow, you'll wind up like me. Fantasy for thirty years" (64). Initially Zuckerman agreed that literary creation and real life should be strictly separated from each other. However, when Nathan told Lonoff his experience about writing, Lonoff said in a tone of disgust, "I wish I knew that much about anything. I've written fantasy for thirty years. Nothing happens to me" (32). This made Nathan rather puzzled, "Why, genius had happened to him, art had happened to him?" (33) Later, Nathan finally realized that real life and artistic creation should be complementary to each other, and the real literary works are the products of their blending.

Therefore, as for the question "whether the reality follows art or the art demonstrates reality" (67), Lonoff was always in an ethical dilemma. To uphold his artistic beliefs, for decades he had been practiced producing out of the reality. "It means I know who I am. I know the kind of man I am and the kind of writer. I have my own kind of bravery" (71). However, the creation out of reality had already

made his works lose the charm of art, and he had to spend his time in biting phrases and chewing characters every day and felt gradually exhausted in writing creativity. Just as Lonoff said when commenting on Nathan's work, "that an unruly personal life will probably better serve a writer like Nathan than walking in the woods and startling the deer. His work has turbulence that should be nourished, and not in the woods. All I was trying to say is that he oughtn't to stifle what is clearly his gift" (69). At the same time, it also expressed Lonoff's dissatisfaction with his own current imagination. However, this is his choice, and he had to take responsible for it.

In literature, "the Sphinx factor has taken on the forms of natural will, free will and rational will. Natural will, to some degree, designates the primitives desire of human beings, and free will is the representation of human desire, while rational will is representation of ration. The three wills are the different realizations of Sphinx factor" (Nie Zhenzhao 42). "Natural will is similar to such primitive will as sexual instinct, and free will is closer to such a rational will as deliberate pursuit of a certain aim, while rational will is closest to ethical consciousness, which is concerned with the awareness of moral standard and the distinction between good and evil" (Shang Biwu 146). In reality, Lonoff is also confronted with the ethical choice between his wife, who has been his companion for many years but is no longer passionate, and his soul mate, Amy. Will he follow the ethical responsibility to maintain the family stability, continue the dreary marriage, and take responsibility, or adhere to his free choice crazy for art and start an immoral love?

His wife, Hope, a typical qualified wife, and mother, was born of gentle blood in New England. After marriage, she took good care of her husband and gave birth to three children. Later she lived in seclusion out of the crowd to support Lonoff's writing career. Thirty years' hard work had made the former noble lady become an old woman. "She was a smallish woman with gentle gray eyes and soft white hair and a multitude of fine lines crisscrossing her pale skin" (64). The inexorable passage of time has deprived Lonoff of his passion and romance for his perfectly obedient wife. The only thing left is habit and boredom between them and what connects them is not their mutual sincere feelings and empathy with each other, but the law. During the time when Lonoff was playing on words whole day, his wife was absolutely excluded from his world and was "materialized" as a "thing "without function and emotion, an invisible person. Although Hope had repeatedly obediently and tactfully reminded him: "his life had consisted of something more than reading and writing and looking at snow: it had also consisted of her and the children" (68), he still drove her out of his world. On Sundays when he had to walk up the maintain, he looked at his watch from time to time, showing that he was busy. "I'm nearly

crazy at the prospect of all those unusable hours. To avoid trouble, she makes me leave my watch at home. The result is that I look at my wrist instead. We're walking, she's talking, then I look at my wrist—and that generally does it, if my foul mood hasn't already" (Roth, *The Ghost Writer* 36-37). He could take Amy home without his wife's permit, allow her to sleep in his daughter, Becky's bed, play his daughter's piano, and under his wife's eyes, he entered his lover, Amy's room late at night and talk to each other, outrageously showing their intimate relationship. Finally, full of grievance, loneliness and anger, Hope threw a glass cup against the wall, and broke a plate into half to prove her existence, "I want you to chuck me out [...] I'd rather live and die alone, I'd rather endure that than another moment of your bravery! I cannot take any more moral fiber in the race of life's disappointments! Not yours and not mine! I cannot bear having a loyal, dignified husband who has no illusions about himself one second more!" (89). Lonoff just looked at the broken dish calmly and disapprovingly and said, "She can glue it" and then "In the kitchen he left the dish for her to repair on a long wooden counter" (96). The next day, he just hummed "my blue heaven", and pretended to be a clown, which immediately made Hope more happier. With a strong sense of male chauvinism, he thought his wife belonged to the kitchen. "It did indeed look to be the headquarters of a woman who, in her own unostentatious way, could glue anything and do anything, except figure out how to make her husband happy" (98). She was just his close nanny and loyal companion. Anyway, he manipulated all her joys and sorrows, and she is only his accessory.

However, in front of the young and attractive Amy, Lonoff is full of warmth. At the age of sixteen, Amy wrote to Lonoff for help and became his student. Over time, the unique charm of the young girl, their tacit resonance for literature, and the mutual appreciation of each other made the two lonely hearts get closer and even cross the moral boundaries of marriage. For Lonoff, she has "deep and quiet eyes, gentle and intelligent eyes" (78). When he first introduced Amy to Zuckerman, Lonoff couldn't help expressing his appreciation for her:

She has a remarkable prose style. The best student writing I've ever read. Wonderful clarity. Wonderful comedy. Tremendous intelligence. She wrote stories about the college which capture the place in a sentence. Everything she sees, she takes hold of. And a lovely pianist. She can play Chopin with great charm. She used to practice on our daughter's piano when she first came to Athene. That was something I looked forward to at the end of the day. (Roth 59)

More importantly, the two had a similar identity: survivor of the massacre of Jews. Just as Nathan said, Lonoff was a Jew who got away. “You got away from Russia and the pogroms. You got away from the purges. You got away from Palestine and the homeland. You got away from Brookline and the relatives. You got away from New York” (106). And in Nathan’s imagination, Amy was a “Jewish Saintess”, who used to suffer a lot during the World War Two and survived the holocaust but concealed her identity. Similar experiences make the two more heart-to-heart, and they made joint efforts to build a world belonging to themselves, letting no one enter. When Amy left after work, Lonoff, who was always stingy with time, could stand on the doorstep, watching her clean the front and rear windows of the car, and say “drive slowly” (109). After he got into bed late at night, he could immediately drive to the hotel in New York for a few hours as soon as he received a call from Amy, listening patiently to Amy and comforting her broken heart until nine o’clock the next day. Sarcastically, he kept watching his watch when walking with his wife. For him, it seemed to be a waste of time staying with his wife, but eternal with Amy. Lonoff used to hesitate when Amy asked him to leave his boring wife and live a happy life with her in a villa outside Florence. He was very clear in heart, “[...] it is not our high purposes alone that make us moving creatures, but our humble need and cravings” (43). Even though, for his private property—his wife Hope, Lonoff couldn’t abandon. On the one hand, he had become accustomed to the life mode in which she took good care of him and followed his orders with worship, letting himself “compose freely beyond annoyance of trifles”. She was his private property, which he had the right to enjoy, but also had the responsibility to protect. “But how can I live alone?” (379) On the other hand, as a spiritual mentor worshipped by Nathan, deeply guided, and influenced by his own cultural norms, Lonoff could not and would not trample on family ethics and break through the prudent, rational, and moral barriers. “You don’t chuck a woman out after thirty-five years because you’d prefer to see a new face over your fruit juice” (152). “You want a corpse on your conscience?” “We’d be what we’ve always been. Stop dreaming” (254). Eventually, Lonoff choose his ethical responsibility said goodbye to the emotional impulse, stopping the immoral love abruptly and returning to his family rationally.

In a way, Lonoff, the literary master is a contradictory person with dissociated personality. Anyhow, from literary creation to family life, he experienced a change from pursuing free choice to taking ethical responsibility. In literary creation, he could obey the drive of his free choice, and persistently put aside life, “crazing for art” in fantasy. However, in real life, Lonoff’s human factor (rational will) conquers his animal factor (free choice), which forced him to “return to reality” (Roth 374).

At the end of the novel, Lonoff “opened the door”, watched Amy go, and then went after the “escaping wife” (376). Eventually he maintained family ethics with ethical responsibility and took the responsibility of a husband.

### **A Jewish Saint or an Ordinary Everyone—Amy's Ethical Choice**

In *The Ghost Writer*, “Jewish Saintess” (Amy's identity) of is Nathan's inner illusion, which stemmed from a letter from Judge Wapt in which the latter would like to awaken his Jewish conscience by suggesting that he watch the play, Anne Frank's Diary, and the ambiguous dialogue between Amy and Lonoff overheard by Nathan when he boarded in Lonoff's house that night. Accordingly, Nathan developed his imagination and made up the sequel to *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1960) in which Anne, Lonoff's student and secret lover, was imagined to be a Jewish saintess who used to suffer the Holocaust during the World War II. Through this fiction, Nathan deconstructs the crucifixion consciousness complying with the traditional ethical orientation of Judaism, thus disintegrating the symbolic meaning of Anne in the traditional sense, removing the holy halo around her head, and restoring the holy figure to be a living, worldly woman with emotions and sensory pleasures.

At this moment, Amy was Anne Frank, who suffered a lot and survived the Holocaust. To forget the painful past, she renamed her Amy Belet and lived in England all the time. Later with Lonoff's help, she came to America and came across by chance her father's publication of *The Diary of Anne Frank* written by herself when she was detained in a backroom by Germans. Then she rushed to New York to watch the play adapted based on her diary. As a result, she cried hysterically and called Lonoff for help. But what should Amy or Annie do? Will she call his father immediately, tell him she is still alive, and then make farewell to the pain of separation and enjoy family reunion, or continue to conceal her identity? For the moment she was faced with a choice. Why was she so hesitated to make her free choice? In the theater, she was shocked by the atmosphere surrounding her, “But it was the women who frightened me [...] The women cried. Everyone around me was in tears” (261). In Jewish religious culture, suffering and sublime are often linked together, carrying the same connotation, which also makes the cultural philosophy of obtaining noble morality by suffering a great deal deeply rooted in the hearts of Jews. *The Diary of Anne Frank* displays Anne's noble qualities of strength, optimism, and kindness in dangerous and difficult circumstances, which are highly appreciated and admired, and people even regarded Anne as an excellent model of Jewry. Anne clearly realized that she had gradually changed from an innocent

persecuted girl to a Jewish image of a religious saint. “They weep for me said Amy; they pity me; they pray for me; they beg my forgiveness. I am the incarnation of the millions of un-lived years robbed from the murdered Jews. It is too late to be alive now. I am a saint” (Roth, *The Ghost Writer* 321).

If she declared her survival, would it make her diary lose some of its power in the eyes of people? Amy felt bewildered and had to call Lonoff at midnight to ask for help from her lover. Ultimately, in order to maintain Anne’s holy image of Jewish martyrs in people’s hearts, she decided to “die” and not let her father know that she was still alive, “To keep her existence a secret from her father so as to help improve mankind [...]” (Roth 313)

If it were known that Anne’s diary is written by a living girl, it would never have great meaning. Sadly, she thought, “I knew then what’s been true all along: I’ll never see him again. I have to be dead to everyone” (Roth 262). Her stereotyped religious ethics and moral sense forced her to reject family ethics. To maintain her own glorious image, “Saintess Anne” continued to act as a “ghost writer,” and ruthlessly refused to get together with her father who also suffered in the concentration camp, causing them not to be reunited forever. However, the “dead” Amy seduced her teacher, Lonoff, who can be her father in age, which made her wife, Hope run away from home. So, she failed to obey the family ethics and became a disgraced image.

Roth boldly writes the sequel to *The Diary of Anne Frank* and changed the “crucified heroine” in the eyes of thousands of people into an immoral woman who got involved in extramarital affairs, thus completely subverting Anne’s image. After making the free choice, Anne bid farewell to the image of “Jewish martyrs” and “moral saintess” and became a secular woman destroying other’s family happiness:

Oh, Manny, I want to live with you! That’s what I need! I thought of the trips we’d take. I thought of the afternoons in the museums and having coffee later by the river. I thought of listening to music together at night. I thought of making your meals. I thought of wearing lovely nightgowns to bed. Oh, Manny, their Anne Frank is theirs; I want to be your Anne Frank. I’d like at last to be my own. (Roth 330)

When her affectionate expression came across merciless rejection, her moral conscience also tormented her. Finally, in a quarrel with Hope, she ran away from Lonoff’s house, just like runaway Anne Frank, driving into the cold snow. Amy bore the consequences for her free choice.

### Conclusion

Consciously or unconsciously, “literature inevitably reflects human nature and living conditions at different stages of humanity and shoulders the important mission of carrying the humanistic spirit in face of the relationships between people and reality” (Yi Zheng 73). Led by Roth, we come to a fantastic ethical scene, get acquainted with three writers—Nathan Zuckerman, a fledging young Jewish writer; Lonoff, a well-known Jewish writer in literature; and Amy, a Jewish girl who suffered and survived the Holocaust. We “witnessed” them struggling in ethical dilemmas and finally made ethical choices. Nathan acted as an “alter-ego”, whose experience embodied many aspects of Roth’s self-conflict. Whether falling into the trap of religious differences with his natives of Jews, or wandering and bewildering between reality and art? Nathan felt rather confused, because at the bottom of his heart there are always two conflicting voices in his ears, then he turned to Lonoff, his spiritual mentor for help. However, at that moment, Lonoff, the literary master himself was also struggling in the gulf of life and art. Along with the temptation of Amy, a young attractive girl, he was faced with severe test of family ethics. Lonoff’s ethical choice in the end displayed his contradictions and ethical responsibility. Wandering between a suffering “Jewish saintess Anne” and a worldly ordinary girl, Amy finally chose the former after intense moral suffering, acting as a “ghost writer” and leaving Lonoff to get rid of the disgraceful role of an immoral woman.

The blood flowing in his body made Nathan recognize that he couldn’t ignore and abandon his family and Jewish culture. He tried to ease and improve the relationship modern civilization and Jewish culture through Anne, the materialized saint image. Therefore, he fell in love with Amy, a fictional crucified Jewish saintess, who was an image of kindness, strength, and innocence and was in accordance with Nathan’s father’s recognition of his own national image. Nathan even imagined marrying Amy and having children, which demonstrates his confusion about self-positioning between modern civilization and Jewish culture. Anyway, Nathan just kept his love for Amy deep in mind and never showed his love to her; and Amy, obsessed with Lonoff, had no feeling for him, either. Finally, the two went their separate ways, which shows that Nathan’s efforts to improve the relationship ended in vain, and he must make a choice to position himself. Through these protagonists’ inner contradictions, confusion, uncertainty and helplessness, Roth perfectly interprets the living state of contemporary human beings for us.

Through this novel, Roth demonstrates his view on freedom which seems somewhat similar with Sartre’s free choice. However, Roth transcends Sartre’s view.

“Sartre emphasizes free choice, which takes being as the only ethical criterion” (Chen Houliang 19). Roth emphasized the ethical choice of human beings, which is not measured by the existence of self-being, but by the recognition and maintenance of ethical norms that already exist in the public domain, which coincides with Nie Zhenzhao’s view on ethical choice. In Roth’s view, man is no longer a free individual from the moment he becomes a man, but “the existence of an ethic” (Philip Roth, *New Perspectives on an American Author* 59). The existence of human ethics means that he is always in relationship with people and needs to follow a variety of widely accepted and recognized ethical order. Through this autobiographical novel, Roth presents his views on ethics of literature: human ethical identity and responsibility are not restrictions on freedom. but mean mutual understanding, compassion, and tolerance. Therefore, the transformation and growth of the writer’s ethical consciousness help him make the right ethical choice. In a word, by exhibiting the specific ethical choices the protagonists in his work are faced with, Roth helps us understand the whole selection process of life and get instruction and inspiration from it.

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