A Reading of Philip Roth's *Everyman* as a Postmodern Parody

Majeed U. Jadwe
University of Anbar, Iraq

Abstract

Philip Roth's 2006 novel *Everyman* borrows its title from the famous fifteenth-century morality play *The Summoning of Everyman*. Yet, Roth establishes no clear or working connection between his novel and its medieval namesake. Roth scholars and critics have endeavored to identify intertextual continuities between these two works but with no tangible results. This article offers an alternative approach with which to view this problem by exploring the potential parodic nature of Roth's text. More specifically, the paper theorizes that Roth fashioned a postmodernist brand of parody in his novel to negotiate the politics of representation of the issues of universality and determinism in the Medieval Everyman and the ideological discourses foregrounding their textual construction.

Keywords: intertextuality, morality play, postmodern parody, representation, Philip Roth, worldview

Introduction

Everyman is the first and best known of the *Nemesis Trilogy*, a series of four short novels (more novellas than novels) that concluded Philip Roth's career as a novelist. The novel is narrated by an older man, a Jewish New Yorker who is telling the story of his life. The central character is unnamed but we identify him with the title of the novel. *Everyman* opens with an extended graveyard scene of the central character burial and then moves to the night before his fatal surgery. He reflects on his life in a bildungsroman-like style, highlighting the traumatic events and forces that shaped it. The course of his life is defined mainly by an inherited genetic disposition to medical fragility and a life-long obsession with mortality induced by childhood traumatic experiences. The novel closes with the moment of the protagonist's death. Roth's unnamed protagonist is the youngest son of a New Jersey jeweler. He succeeds in the New York advertising industry, fails in marriage three times, and faces repeated medical crises, which turns his life story into a sort of medical history of illnesses and surgeries.

Although the title of Roth's novel is an allusion to the fifteenth-century morality play, *The Summoning of Everyman*, frequently referred to simply as *Everyman*, Roth's *Everyman* is nothing like the Medieval play *Everyman*. The morality play is an allegorical representation of the Christian vision of humanity. In that play Everyman, the archetypal representative of humankind, is suddenly confronted by death and asked to make a reckoning in front of God. As everyman was not ready to do so he was given 24 hours to prepare himself for the reckoning. Everyman conducts an allegorical journey towards salvation. This Medieval play enacts the Christian ethos of salvation through good deeds. Man's deeds in his life time on Earth decide whether his immortal soul goes to heaven or hell in the afterlife. God is the ultimate judge of human deeds. The morality play, as such, preaches a warning to all Christians to consider their actions in their mortal life because it is their deeds and actions that will decide their salvation in the afterlife (King, 1994, pp. 240–241).

Roth's *Everyman* is radically different from this theological vision. By contrast, Roth's protagonist is not a Christian by faith. He is not only a Jew but also a staunch unbeliever in religion and the very existence of God. He is a nihilist who does not believe in the afterlife or salvation of human soul after death. He boldly states that there is "no hocus-pocus about death and God or obsolete fantasies of heaven for him. There were only our bodies, born to live and die on terms decided by the bodies that had lived and died before us (Roth, 2006, p. 51). This highly secularized, nihilistic, and materialistic frame of mind makes Roth's everyman a typical representative of contemporary Western Man, whose intellectual worldview is formed by an existential belief in matter and body and that what we are as human is a matter of genetics rather than metaphysics. This philosophical niche is manifestly expressed when Roth's unnamed protagonist-narrator contemplates that "Should he ever write an autobiography, he'd call it *The Life and Death of a Male Body*" (Roth, 2006, p. 51).

Furthermore, the difference between these two texts goes beyond personal temperaments. Whereas the morality play *Everyman* enacts the medieval worldview in an allegorical story where all characters are personifications of concepts, Roth is highly realistic, if not naturalistic, and his Everyman is firmly anchored in the secularist ethos of early twenty-first century America.

However, the word "Everyman" is mentioned one time in the whole novel but it occurs in a totally different context to be relevant to the title of the novel. Somewhere at the beginning of the novel the unnamed everyman tells about his father's genius as a jeweler back in the

Elizabeth, New Jersey, of the 1920s and 1930s. Although a Jewish by faith his father called his store "Everyman's Jewelry Store" (Roth, 2006, p. 29). His father chose this name for its Christian connotations in order not to alienate the thousands of his Christian customers, especially in Christmas and Easter seasons. However, this is not developed any further in the novel and remains a mere detail with no symbolic or thematic significance to qualify as a title. What complicates matters further is Roth's own distancing of his novel from the Medieval morality play. Ina 2006interview with the Danish magazine *Spiegel International* shortly after the release of his novel Roth denied that he intended to pay homage to the medieval morality play. He told his interviewer Volke Hage that he:

> didn't begin with it. Along the way I had various titles. Only at the end did I remember this play, which I had read in college. I hadn't read it since 1952, fifty-four years ago. I re-read it, and I thought this is the right title. But I wasn't thinking about the medieval drama when I was writing my book (2006, August 25, para. 4).

According to Roth, his novel should not be read as an allegory and that leaving his protagonist nameless was purely coincidental.

Critical Endeavor to Relate Roth's *Everyman* to the Medieval Text

But in spite of Roth's distancing of his novel from the Medieval morality play critics were not ready to trust the teller at the expense of the tale. Claudia Franziska Brühwiler, for instance, boldly states that "Still, the novel cannot deny a certain palimpsestic nature as it shares parallels with its English namesake." (2013, p. 120) She lists one parallel, however, which is that "between the summoning by Death and the unnamed Rothian hero's constant confrontation with medical warnings" (2013, p. 120). The act of summoning in the medieval *Everyman* materializes through the agency of Death as a mediator between Man and deity. But in Roth's Everyman the unnamed protagonist's denial of an ultimate metaphysical cosmology renders death a finality by itself, a complete closure of the human existence as a moment of utter annihilation. This renders the act of summoning out of place with the very logic of Roth's text as there is no deity to summon Man through the agency of death.

Similarly, the critic David Brauner adopts the same view when he states that "for all the obvious differences of form and sensibility, however, the two *Everymans* share certain structures." (2007, p. 220) He finds in Roth's *Everyman* echoes of the medieval Everyman's anguished exclamation when he realizes that his time on earth is up – "O Death, thou comest when I had thee least in mind," (1962, p. 201) especially when the former was lying anesthetized on the operation table at the end of the novel. Roth's preoccupation with aging and death is also in line with the morality play's sole concern with the fate of its protagonist at the point of death. The protagonists of both works share the same increasing "sense of loneliness" (Brauner, 2007, p. 220) as both are gradually forsaken by all their worldly allies and flesh. Finally, Roth's *Everyman* "borrows from its medieval precursor aspare, elliptical quality that is its shortness and brevity". As in its medieval counterpart, the brevity of Roth's novel is "contributing to and enacting the sense of urgency felt by its protagonist" (Brauner, 2007, p. 221).

Liliana M. Naydan goes a step further beyond hunting for structural and thematic parallels between the two texts. She theorizes that Roth negotiates the ethics of the fifteenth-century English morality play to "showcase the ideological and dialogic impasse between religious and secular rhetoric that aim at cross-purposes to ascribe meaning to life, and he suggests that intertextuality as postmodern parody enables him to transcend this impasse (2016, p. 57).

Naydan's hypothesis is based on the premises that this act of textual negotiation is central to the fashioning of the textual politics of Roth's *Everyman* as a contemporary text in cultural dialogue with preceding texts. This gives Roth's the critical edge necessary to engage in such a cultural dialogue via difference and distance. This aspect of Roth's text has been noted by critic Ben Schermbrucker who argues that Roth's novel is "critical of the Christian cosmology expressed in the medieval play *Everyman*" (2015, p. 41). However, this is mostly ascribed to aesthetic ideology rather than to the textual politics of representation in Roth's novel, a case that obliterates the pervasive working of the parodic in *Everyman*.

The Possibility of Postmodern Parody Highlighted

Naydan specifies the brand of parody operative in Roth's *Everyman* to be postmodern because the traditional view of parody, as "a mocking imitation of the style of a literary work or works, ridiculing the stylistic habits of an author or school by exaggerated mimicry" (Baldick, 2001, p. 185), is completely out of context here as Roth's *Everyman* neither imitate nor ridicule the style of content of the medieval morality play *Everyman*. On the contrary, postmodern parody goes beyond the classic attributes of imitation and ridicule to re-conceptualize the pervasive working of parodic textuality. Naydan is right to name in particular Linda Hutcheon's postmodern approach to parody as a potential approach to Roth's text. But, unfortunately, she fails to apply this approach to *Everyman* or to develop further her proposition. She, actually, mentions this approach in a short note and devotes much of her discussion of the novel to establishing intertextual continuities instead of focusing on its parodic nature.

Hutcheon's postmodernist model of parody departs radically from the classic model of parody as ironic imitation. In her book *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) she rejects the standard definitions and theories of parody that originated in Eighteenth-century theories of wit. Instead, she postulates parody as the defining feature of postmodernism. She finds that the "collective weight of parodic *practice* suggests a redefinition of parody as repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signaling of difference at the very heart of similarity" (1988, p. 26). Parody, as such, is still a form of ironic representation but it does not highlight similarity as much as difference in order to foreground the politics of representation and the ideologies that promote such a mode of representation. Postmodern parody is not concerned with the formal structural or thematic ironic re-writing of texts as much as with the very politics of textual representation of the "background" or "parodied" text(s). "Through a double process of installing and ironizing, parody signals how present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both continuity and difference." (1989, p.93) parody, in other words, "works to foreground the *politics* of representation" (Politics, 94) and the historiography of past representations. Hutcheon posits postmodern parody as "a kind of contesting revision or rereading of the past that both confirms and subverts the power of their presentations of history" (1989, p. 95). This engagement of postmodern parody with past representation is not "apolitical", or "de-historicized" like Fredric Jameson's pastiche. It is rather "doubly coded in political terms: it both legitimizes and subverts that which it parodies" (1989, p. 101). Hutcheon takes this form of "authorized transgression" as a vital sign of Postmodern parody engagement with history and social reality as it uses irony to interrogate "culture's means of ideological legitimation" (1989, p. 101). Parody, in other words, can offer a way of investigating the history of the cultural process which dictates how do some representations get legitimized and authorized? (1989, p. 101)

Reading the Postmodern Parody in Roth's *Everyman*

Roth's *Everyman*, perhaps unconsciously, invokes this politics of postmodern parody. Roth barrows the title of a Medieval morality play to signal the parodic nature of his work then works hard to distance his text from that morality play in every single detail. Hutcheon sees the title of a literary work as the ultimate sign to signal to the reader its parodic textuality. Roth, however, hammers further the parodic nature of his text by forcing the reader to identify his Jew with the title by refraining to mention the name of his protagonist throughout his narrative. This critical distancing operative in Roth's *Everyman* works by binary displacement; that is, each of the elemental aspects underlying the worldview of the Medieval *Everyman* is replaced by its antithetical binary such as divine/human, allegorical/realist, Thanatos/Eros, Christian/Judaism, etc. In most of these cases the distancing is ironic because the reader, who is already posited into the frame of reference of the Medieval *Everyman*, is soon caught in the grip of ironic inversion. The Christian Everyman gives way to an unbelieving Jew, the classic Christian cosmology of reckoning and redemption gives way to utter atheism, and the allegorical loses its significance in the abyss of excessive naturalism. This ironic inversion happens through the "incongruity" of classic wit. Roth keeps the underlying paradigm of the medieval play but challenges its universality through the incongruous. This congruity is sometimes obvious but most of the time it is very subtle as it operates on deeper layers of the text. The most immediate ironic inversion occurs on the level of the protagonist, his atheism and the absence of any quest except for sensual gratification. However, the space of irony is at times allusively subtler as it is increasingly appropriated in the critical space of the inversion itself. This often happens when the inversion is directed to negotiate, rather than to distancing, the ethos of representation in the Classic *Everyman* as is the case with Roth's parodic appropriation of Everyman begging for a day to prepare for the reckoning:

> Now, gentle Death, spare me till tomorrow That I may amend me With good advisement.
> Death**:** *(raising his dart)*
> Nay, thereto I will not consent,
> Nor no man will I respite;
> But to the heart suddenly I shall smite Without any advisement.
> And now out of thy sight I will me hie;
> See thou make thee ready shortly,
> For thou mayst say this is the day That no man living may escape away (1962, p. 203).

What is at stake here is the play of a teleology of death as a temporal closure of human existence. Death's rhetoric of its absolute inevitability signifies human mortality. Death is an inherent condition of human existence because the latter is subject to temporality. The Medieval morality play *Everyman* posits death into the ontology of human existence by allegorizing it as a reminder of human subjection to temporality. Death uses this rhetoric of temporality to legitimize itself as temporal closure of human existence which means that the time Everyman is given on earth is not a life but a death. Roth's text appropriates death out of its metaphysical context in the form of mortality. The moment of textual citation in Roth's *Everyman* is essentially parodic as such because Roth relocates death into a condition of human existence. The Medieval *Everyman* celebrates the metaphysics of death whereas Roth's affirms the physicality of mortality. The moment of death in the morality play is a ritualized threshold: Led by his Good Deeds, Everyman steps inside the tomb and is received by death from the inside of the tomb. What is being fashioned here is a politics of transcendence. But is Roth's the citation of this moment is parodic, in the postmodern sense of the word, in that it distances

itself from this ritualized threshold by presenting death as a sudden termination of consciousness, a mere sudden going into the darkness of oblivion: "He was no more, freed from being, entering into nowhere without even knowing it. Just as he'd feared from the start" (Roth, 2007, p. 182). Roth translates the physical entrance of the medieval Everyman into the tomb as a nihilistic annihilation of existential consciousness. This difference, however, unmask an essential similarity between the two texts treatment of death which is that both texts present death as absence from human world regardless of the means to propagate this absence whether through death or mortality.

Claudia Roth Pierpont observers in this respect that "like the fifteenth-century morality play from which it takes its title, *Everyman* is about the fate that claims us all" (2014, p. 285). She quotes Roth's narrator as he muses on death at the age of twenty two: "the adversary that is illness and the calamity that waits in the wings" (Roth, 2007, p. 41). Seen from a comparative perspective, these two works might share a focalized thematic concern with death, yet; they differ in the phenomenality of death in the human context. In the Medieval text death intrudes in the human world through the window of cosmology but in Roth's it is a persistent condition of human existence. The personified gives way to the perceived through human consciousness. Eventually, this qualitative difference in the textualization of death leads each text to develop its distinct semiotic paradigm. In the Medieval Everyman death is a "signifier" of the presence of a "divine" cosmology but in Roth's it is a "signified" in itself as a no-beyond phenomenon in terms of human perception. This is clearly seen in the fact that death persists all over Everyman's life in Roth's novel in a variety of manifestations like disease and aging. But in the Morality play it appears at the beginning and end of Everyman's life journey for salvation. Unlike in Roth's protagonist, death is never a foundational condition of human life in the Medieval text: "Oh Death, thou comest when I had thee least in mind" (1962, p. 201).

While Roth acknowledges this absolute inevitability of death he destabilizes its ontological premises on two scores: deconstructing the cosmology of the classic Everyman by positing death as a nihilistic closure of human existence and, most importantly, the fashioning of a desire for a transcendence of the eclipse of death. This latter desire keeps figuring repeatedly in Roth's text. Such a desire finds its best moments in the closing sentence of the novel: "He was no more, freed from being, entering into nowhere without even knowing it" (182). In the medieval play when Everyman jumps into the grave, the allegorical moment of death, there follows three speeches given by Knowledge, Angel, and Doctor (1962, pp. 229–231). They respectively stand for human existence, divine originary and textuality. They act as a Derridian supplement where the materiality of Death is negotiated and inscribed as a presence in both originary eternity and textuality. Roth, however, takes the other way round as he fashions the moment of death as absence from both existential contingency and textuality. What Roth was doing, says critic Debora Shostak, is to re-invents Death as "nothing more than absence, the yawning grave, offered as a blank hole in the narrative if not as the character's reconciliation to fact" (2014, p. 8).

Death in Roth's novel, as such, does not affect any sense of closure as in the medieval *Everyman*. "The circularity of the narrative" says Shostak, "ultimately taking precedence over its linear promise of enlightenment. The ending returns us to the beginning, without ending in insight" (2014, p. 8). This circularity is deliberately employed to signal the parodic nature of Roth's text. The opening scene of the narrator's funeral re-enacts the cemetery scene which closes the medieval *Everyman* which means that Roth's *Everyman* starts where the medieval *Everyman* ends. Roth affects the parodic in his re-enactment in order to highlight communal mourning as a ritual of resistance to the oblivion of death. Roth de-allegorizes the ritual of death in favor of a communal ritual of mourning by choosing not to focus on the teleology of

death as much as its aftermath. Choosing this moment makes death as absence more accessible because what is really represented is the textual translation of death in terms of human experience. Death, as such, is inscribed in the epistemological paradigm of human existence. It derives its materiality from human perception of absence and loss. This is in keeping with the elaborate description of the act of burial which is conducted according to Jewish rituals. This act of burial lays emphasis on the corporeal participation of all mourners in actual burying of the deceased with dust on their bare hands. Although the ritualistic is invoked here as in the Medieval *Everyman*, the aim is to highlight the materiality of death as an event with no metaphysical pretentions whatever. The critic Ben Schermbrucker argues for this case when he states that the wry humor and concision, the phrase "and he was left behind" "confirms how Roth's atheism is also aligned with a materialistic emphasis upon the human body" (2015, p. 40). In almost all the funeral scenes in Roth's *Everyman* the focus is on the dead body in a sharp materialistic way The funeral scene which opens *Everyman* "thus intensifies and continues Roth's materialistic reading of religious rites by focusing on the locus of materiality that, in Roth's view, is constitutive of human subjectivity–the body" (2015, p. 40).

Furthermore, the placidness and serenity of the narrative voice makes it clear that this is a textual space where the narrator is no longer under the sway of temporality, and therefore, a space where death does not exist. Roth, however, re-frames his cemetery scene with a retrospective tone of irony when his already buried Everyman speaks tongue-in-cheeks that "in a matter of minutes, everybody had walked away – wearily and tearfully walked away from our species' least favorite activity – and he was left behind" (Roth, 2016, p. 55). Off Course the irony is directed at the cemetery scene of the Medieval morality play when all of Everyman's new hard earned friends refuse to jump with him into the grave. The aim is to establish the Medieval morality play as the frame of reference of this scene and to establish through irony a critical distance with its ethos. The critic David Brauner declares that this is the point where Roth's Everyman "really connects up most powerfully with the medieval play" (2007, p. 23). He argues that Roth "translates" the narrative trajectory of abandonment that the medieval play enacts where Everyman is gradually being abandoned by his worldly friends and allies. Roth translates this trajectory into "a secular framework" whereby "in old age people do find themselves increasingly isolated because their friends start to die, their parents have died, and often, as in this case, their family is estranged or divorced, not close either geographically or emotionally. That is the most frightening thing about this book, and I think that is where it" (2007, p. 23).

Roth further pushes ahead his negotiation of the teleology of this scene as it occurs in the Medieval *Everyman* through the lengthy (and often artificialized) speeches that some of the mourners give during the burial. Howie, the protagonist's elder brother, mentions something curious about his brother's obsession with the hundreds of broken watches that his brother inherited from his father. Howie evocates this nostalgically:

> All these old watches that he accumulated – most of them beyond repair – were dumped in a drawer in the back of the store. My little brother could sit there for hours, spinning the hands and listening to the watches tick, if they still did, and studying what each face and what each case looked like. That's what made that *boy* tick. […] He used to take them and wear them – he always had a watch that was out of that drawer. One of the ones that worked. And the ones he tried to make work, whose looks he liked, he'd fiddle around with but to no avail– generally he'd only make them worse (Roth, 2006, pp. 7–8).

Roth's equally allegoric old watches parody the time given to the medieval Everyman by Death. The drawerful of old watches stands for Everyman's life and because he used to put on a new watch every day from this drawer Everyman is said to literally "tick"; that is, subject to temporality and, therefore, his mortality. But since most of the watches are broken and beyond repair the parody can be seen as already carrying the seeds of subversion to this ontological paradigm of human existence. Everyman puts on broken watches most of the days to signify his desire to transcend the inevitability of death. But there is more at stake here than a simple human desire to resist the inevitability of death. The parody unmasks the finitude of determinism of the human world. Nancy, the protagonist's ever loving daughter, puts this eloquently in her funeral speech when she mentions the "stoical maxim" of her father: "There's no remaking reality…. Just take it as it comes. Hold your ground and take it as it comes" (Roth, 2006, p. 5). The deterministic ethos of this maxim is meant to underpin the ironic absurdity (if not impossibility) of the Medieval Everyman's absurd request from Death for extra time to prepare himself for reckoning. Critics, like David Gooblar, interpret this maxim as epitomizing the stoicism and realism of Roth's Everyman. David Gooblar, for one, takes this maxim as "an acceptance of death as a part of life, an acceptance that however unfathomable and intolerable the fact of death is, "there's nothing [. . .] we can do," there is no escape from this universal fate" (2011, p. 153).

The danger with such interpretations is that they focus on the quality of Everyman's response rather than on its philosophical underpinnings. Such a maxim unmasks an existential negation of free will which is posited to counter the teleological polemics of the medieval Everyman. Both texts see human existence as governed by determinism but differ on issues of paradigmatic conceptualization and human response. In the morality play determinism is never worldly, as in Roth's *Everyman*, but is an attribute of a universal cosmology. In Roth's *Everyman* determinism is a condition of human existence as it is dictated by genetic and environmental conditioning. Allowing that death is the ultimate form of determinism in both works each author proceeds to delineate a radically different type of human response to this determinism. In the medieval play the only human response that is legitimized is to fashion oneself to the ethos of the prevailing cosmology. Although the resulting Everyman here is generic, its self-fashioning involves a unification or identification with authority (divine not human) through the familiar politics of hegemony. Roth's novel affects a re-location of divine authority into human agency which ultimately negates any human identification with a metaphysical authority, simply because of the stark materialism of Everyman's world. The resulting Everyman is also generic but is born out of multiplicity and deferral.

Roth concretizes this epistemological paradigm of human existence by shaping the medical Bildungsroman of his Everyman around the play of a Freudian Eros and Thanatos. Indeed, the ever expanding presence of death in the life of Roth's *Everyman* is countered with excessive indulgence in sex and art. In his discussion of "Eros and Thanatos in Roth's Later Fiction," the critic Jay L. Halio observes that while erotics have been a major subject in Roth's fiction death did not figure prominently in his novels in the context of Eros until the later novels where "Eros successfully defies death" (2005, p. 205). This is true of *Everyman* where death (as Thanatos) looms large in the protagonist's life through the latter's ever deteriorating heath, and the detailed medical procedures and surgeries attending this deterioration. Death is also present on the symbolic level of the text. Two traumatic experiences recur throughout Everyman and are used to structure and stratify the protagonist's fear and obsession with death: the floating corpse from a German submarine and the boy in the next bed in the protagonist's ward in his first hospitalization. This excessive presence of death is countered by a mutually excessive indulgent on the part of the protagonist in Eros. Marriages, sexual escapades, and a life-long

desire to paint map the crucial turns in the protagonist's life. Because the dominant drivers in Everyman's world are fulfilment and self-preservation the only option left for the individual is to assert the Life drive or Eros. With the total absence of a rational metaphysics this drive is the only possible sort of salvation available. This indeed is the nexus of the parodic inversion in Roth's Everyman which effaces, in a deconstructive manner, the metaphysical transcendence of divine salvation in favor of a worldly fulfilment. This inversion is both critical and ironic. It is critical as it interrogates the metaphysical premises of the human notion of salvation (as redemption from the prison of worldly human existence as substantiated in the medieval morality play). The irony attending this inversion is equally devastating as Roth's Everyman is set to commit all immoral deeds that his Medieval counterpart is admonished to renounce in his pursuit for divine salvation.

This ironic inversion operative in postmodern parody plays on what Hans Robert Jauss calls the reader's "horizon of expectation" (1982, p. 22) in such a way as to reflect its double-coding politics of history and genre, to use Hutcheon's terminology. "What postmodern parody does," says Hutcheon, "is to evoke what Hans Robert Jauss calls the "horizon of expectation" of the spectator, a horizon formed by recognizable conventions of genre, style, or form, which is then destabilized and dismantled step by step" (1990, p. 130). The background text, which is the medieval morality play, is encoded, via ironic inversion in the foregrounded text, which is Roth's novel. This act of encoding assumes the form of textual appropriation whereby the textual paradigm of the Medieval morality play is interpellated by Roth's text mainly through a de-allegorization of human agency. Hutcheon points out this textual process clearly when she says that postmodern parody "uses and abuses dominant conventions to underline both the process of subject formation and the temptations of easy accommodation to the power of interpellation" (1990, p. 126).

The ultimate aim of this double-coding is to subject to interrogation the fictionality of the Medieval *Everyman* and the specific historical worldview it fashions. It specifically seeks to negotiate the reciprocity of art and historicity underlying the textual fashioning of the Medieval *Everyman*. This might look more akin to New Historicism than to the kind of postmodernist inquiry that Linda Hutcheon advocates because what is really at stake here is not, strictly speaking, what Hutcheon terms historiographic metafiction as much as a New Historicist self-fashioning and the cultural ideologies inspiring it. The parodic remains essential to this self-fashioning as the latter requires the sort of critical and ironic distancing of parody to operate.

Conclusion

What Roth was doing in *Everyman* is not just to fashion a twenty-first century Everyman but to parody the process of self-fashioning operative in the Medieval *Everyman*. Historical determinism fashioned the morality play as the textual medium to disseminate authority during the later Middle Ages. Authority, especially a religious one, often establishes its legitimacy from an ontological paradigm of divine cosmology. Because such religious authority identifies the universal with a metaphysical transcendence it fashions ideological discourses that fix the human in a power web of cosmological relations. Because the allegorical is the only mode capable of incorporating the metaphysical and the human it became a natural choice to disseminate the ideological discourses of this cosmology. The allegorical mode of the morality play affords textual space where a metaphysical transcendence and human eclipse can be inscribed into a discourse of universality.

References

Baldick, C. (2001). *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Oxford: Oxford University press.

Brauner, D. (2007). *Philip Roth*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press. https://doi.org/10.7228/manchester/9780719074240.001.0001

Brühwiler, C. F. (2013). *Political Initiation in the Novels of Philip Roth*. New York & London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Gooblar, D. (2011). *The Major Phases of Philip Roth*. London & New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Halio, J. L. (2005). "Eros and Death in Roth's Later Fiction". In Jay L.Halio & Ben Siegel (Eds.), *Turning Up the Flame: Philip Roth's Later Novels* (pp. 200–206). Massachusetts: Rosemont Publishing & Printing Corp.

Anonymous (1962). "*Everyman*." In Vincent F. Hopper & Gerald B. Lahey (Eds.). *Medieval Mystery Plays, Morality Plays and Interludes* (pp. 196–230). Woodbury & New York: Barron's Educational Series, Inc.

Hutcheon, L. (1988). *A Poetics of Postmodernism*. London & New York: Routledge.

Hutcheon, L. (1989). *The Politics of Postmodernism*. London & New York: Routledge.

Hutcheon, L. (1990). An epilogue: Postmodern parody: History, subjectivity, and ideology *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, *12*(1–2), 125–133. https://doi.org/10.1080/10509209009361343

Jauss, H. R. (1982). *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (Timothy Bahti, Trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

King, P. M. (1994). "Morality Plays" In Richard Beadle (Ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre* (pp.240–260). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Naydan, L. M. (2016). *Rhetorics of Religion in American Fiction Faith, Fundamentalism, and Fanaticism in the Age of Terror*. Maryland & London: Bucknell University Press.

Pierpont, C. R. (2014). *Roth Unbound: A Writer and His Books*. London: Jonathan Cape.

Rodgers, B. F., Jr., & Royal, D. P. (2007). Grave commentary: A roundtable discussion on *Everyman*. *Philip Roth Studies*, *3*(1), 3-25. https://doi.org/10.3200/PRSS.3.1.3-25

Roth, P. (2006). *Everyman*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Roth, P. (2006, August 25). Old age is a massacre (Volke Hage, Interviewer). Spiegel International. Accessed June 22, 2021 from http://www.spiegel.de/international /spiegel-interview-with-philip-roth-old-age-is-a-massacrea-433607.html

Schermbrucker, B. (2015). "There's no remaking reality": Roth and the embodied human condition in *Everyman*. *Philip Roth Studies, 11*(2),39-53. https://doi.org/10.5703/philrothstud.11.2.39

Shostak, D. (2014). Roth's graveyards, narrative desire, and "professional competition with death". *CLC Web: Comparative Literature and Culture, 16*(2), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2407

Corresponding author: Majeed Jadwe
Contact email: jadwe@uoanbar.edu.iq