

# Exile and Quest for the Identity: Philip Roth's Diaspora Writing in *The Patrimony: A True Story*

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**Abstract:** *The Patrimony: A True Story* is a non-fiction by Philip Roth, which constantly reflects the memory fragments of an ordinary Jewish family in America. As a Jewish writer, Roth cannot deny the fact that he is influenced by the traditional culture of the Jewish nation. *The Patrimony: A True Story* contains the writing of the Jews, represented by Roth's father, adhering to religious independence, observing traditional Jewish culture. It depicts the integration and coexistence of Jewish culture and multiculturalism. Roth tracks down the origin of Jewish culture and seeks Jewish identity. Eventually, Roth accepts his American Jewish identity and inherits Jewish blood and cultural traditions. These characteristics are an important manifestation of Roth's Jewish identity, which indicates *The Patrimony: A True Story* is a significant representation of diaspora writing.

**Keywords:** Philip Roth; Non-fiction; Diaspora; Jewish culture; Jewish identity; Diaspora writing.

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## Introduction

Philip Roth (1933-2018) is a second-generation Jewish-American writer, renowned for the irony and depth with which he portrays the existence of American Jews in his works, garnering widespread attention from various circles. *Patrimony: A True Story* is Roth's work of non-fiction, which won the National Book Critics Circle Award upon its publication in 1991. The book chronicles the story of a son accompanying his dying father through the final stage of his life. It not only perpetuates the traditional motif of conflict between "father and son" but also transcends and elevates it. In the twilight of father's life, the mutual dependence between father and son embodies a warming of their relationship, and the experience of accompanying his father to the end of his journey enabled Roth to truly understand him.

Jewish literature is regarded as a significant component of diaspora literature in contemporary literary studies. In the context of multiculturalism, its critical paradigm primarily focuses on analyzing the Jewish cultural traditions and characteristics embedded within it. American scholar Ruth Wisse posits that Jewish literature should be defined as an expression of Jewish life and its unique culture. The intricate details in *Patrimony* profoundly reflect Roth's inheritance of his Jewish identity. During his final days spent intimately with his aging father, Roth completed, in an essential sense, a national return to his Jewish identity: he embraced his Jewish identity, acknowledged Jewish cultural traditions, and thereby underwent a spiritual transformation. Thus, the work fully embodies the Jewish characteristics of father and son. "Jewishness primarily refers to a set of ideas and beliefs related to Jewish culture or religion expressed by Jewish writers in their works." (Qiao 17) Roth sought an outlet in the Jewish people's inherent sense of exile and alienation, as well as in the exploration of Jewish identity. The documentary details of his daily companionship with his father in *Patrimony* reflect the deep-rooted Jewishness in Roth's thought,

his recognition of Jewish culture, and his inheritance of Jewish identity.

## Discussion and Analysis

### I. Jewish Cultural Root-Seeking

"Diaspora" is a term rooted in ancient Jewish history, also translated as ethnic dispersion, scattering, exile, or the Great Diaspora. Diasporic literature boasts a long history, tracing back to epics, poems, prose, and other works by literary giants such as Homer, Cicero, and Virgil in ancient Greece and Rome. According to diaspora studies scholar Homi Bhabha Tölölyan, the term "diaspora" originally described the dispersal of Jews, Greeks, and Armenians but has since expanded to encompass meanings like immigrants, expatriates, refugees, migrant workers, exiled communities, overseas communities, and ethnic communities (Tölölyan 4-5). For millennia, the Jewish people have been displaced, earning them the title of true global citizens. The Bible records the Hebrews (Jews) arriving in Canaan and their subsequent four to five centuries of wandering and displacement to escape calamities until Moses led them back to Canaan. The Jews, displaced and culturally uprooted, find in Roth's concept of Jewish traditional redemption embodied in *The Heritage* a significant expression of Jewish cultural root-seeking in literature.

As a Jew, Roth's father struggled to make a living in the United States. His arduous pursuit of life suggests he was a lonely wanderer. His tenacious battle against cancer in his later years implies he was a redeemer of his own spirit. Roth's care and attention for his ailing father can also be seen as a form of salvation for him. Roth's portrayal of his father's hardships during his early years of struggle and his resilient fight against illness in his later years profoundly elucidates that suffering is a path to redemption, revealing the essence of Jewish identity and spirit. Roth stood alongside his father, encouraging him to confront his illness with optimism and to abandon the "illusory salvation of the

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Messiah" -- shifting from absurdly waiting for redemption to actively and tenaciously resisting. The Messiah is an emissary appointed by God to redeem humanity, and the Jewish concept of the Messiah signifies the eventual salvation of the Jewish people. In reality, the Messiah does not passively await the whims of God or fate but represents God's bestowal of a great mission upon the Jewish people, a mission through which they achieve self-realization.

Roth's father was a practitioner of Jewish spiritual culture. Although incapacitated in his later years, he did his utmost to be self-reliant, just as he had persevered through the toughest times when he built his business from nothing. A tumor in his brain caused paralysis on the right side of his face. "He could only drink through a straw, or liquid would dribble out of his paralyzed half of his mouth; eating was also difficult, and he ate bite by bite, embarrassed and helpless. Only when soup splashed on his tie did he reluctantly agree to let Lillian tie a napkin around his neck." (Roth 4) Clearly, despite the inconvenience of eating, Roth's father did not want to be treated differently. "Sometimes Lillian leaned over and wiped away the food that had leaked from his mouth and stuck to his chin without him noticing, which annoyed him." (4) On the surface, his annoyance stemmed from rejecting Lillian's treatment of him as incapacitated; deep down, it reflected his sadness and anger at losing his self-care abilities. Although the situation worsened over time, and his father seemed to realize the severity of the issue, when "I" called to ask if he had trouble eating, he dismissed it, resolutely fighting the illness, and replied nonchalantly, "I just can't drink sweet beverages" or "It's just that the food is too hot." "No difficulties, I'm fine." (187) His father knew that this battle was his alone to fight, and he had to endure it on his own, relying solely on optimism to win. Sometimes, the illness exhausted his aging father, like an adversary against whom he had to muster all his strength to resist in the face of life's challenges. Rather than begging for mercy, he persevered with all his might, not wanting those around him to worry. Roth's meticulous portrayal of his father's daily life demonstrates his unyielding and resilient "self-redemption" perspective.

Besides his "self-redemption" in fighting illness in his later years, Roth's father's efforts to integrate into American society and coexist harmoniously with non-Jews during his youth, constantly facing challenges in the thorny path of society, also constituted a form of "self-redemption." This aligns with the Jewish classic, the Talmud, which teaches Jews to pursue justice and harmony, considering honesty and justice as prerequisites and the most effective safeguards for harmony. It also demands a rigorous moral life, emphasizing love, humility, charity, honesty, forgiveness, and moderation (Abraham 242-70). *The Talmud* is the most important work after the Hebrew Bible, encompassing a vast range of topics including law, religion, ethics, folk customs, medicine, superstitions, diet, daily life, bathing, clothing, sleep, and more, with over 613 regulations governing various aspects of Jewish life. It defines what is sacred and profane, clean and unclean, providing guidance for the practical life of the Jewish people for over a thousand years thereafter. (Qu 43-54)

Roth's father worked and lived methodically under the discipline of *the Talmud*. "I never even went to high school; I grew up on my own on Immigrant Street. [...] I am a loyal husband, a patriotic American, and a proud Jew." (108) As a member of an ethnic minority, despite feeling a sense of exile and alienation, his father persevered in an environment where he faced discrimination everywhere. He ultimately established himself in the challenging

insurance industry, even earning promotions and salary increases, before retiring with a generous pension. "The real work of his life, and indeed of his entire generation of Jews, that invisible and arduous task, was to make himself an American." (99) Facing an identity crisis, his father strove to create a stable environment for his children to grow up in, facilitating their healthy development. "I gave my two good kids opportunities I never had." (108) Roth admitted, "Even as a child, I wasn't unaware of the influence of non-Jewish American society, from top to bottom, threatening and excluding Jews." (150)

Roth once published an autobiographical article in *The New York Times Book Review* that alluded to the collective discriminatory behavior of the insurance company where his father worked, Metropolitan Life. Executives from the company responded with a letter clarifying their position, which only further angered Roth: "In the late 1980s, this simple historical fact still had to be denied." (151) American Jews, including Roth's father, faced threats and damages to their equal rights and dignity, enduring prejudice, discrimination, and suppression from the white mainstream society. His father endured obvious injustice and even defended it: "They don't like the truth. What's so strange about that? Do me a favor, okay? After this letter, let's leave it at that." (155) His father endured humiliation solely to avoid trouble and preserve the hard-earned, decent life his family had built through numerous struggles and hardships. In fact, Jews scattered across the globe often resort to such compromise, seeking survival opportunities in the crevices of different cultural, social, and economic environments.

Throughout its more than 300-year history in the United States, the Jewish community has created the most glorious achievements in Jewish diaspora history, making an indelible contribution to American culture, economy, and social development. However, "Black teenagers even rob elderly Jews in broad daylight." (100) Different religious backgrounds, the overlaying, blending, and mutual influence of exotic cultures result in complex emotions and ideologies that lead to conflicts between white culture and Jewish culture. "They're all from Newark, riding bicycles, stealing money, and laughing as they go home." (100) His father didn't hold a grudge; he understood that every Jew struggling in American society had their own misfortunes. He tried to avoid escalating conflicts and stiffening relations. He even said to him, "Don't go gamble with that money." (100) His father's journey to America was fraught with thorns and constant setbacks, yet it was also a path to success. This is often the case for Jews scattered around the world; no matter how harsh the environment or difficult the road, they always find a way to persevere. In *Patrimony*, Roth praises the Jewish community represented by his father: "They fight because they are fighters; they fight because they are Jews." (2)

As a Jew, Roth's father had no choice but to uphold Jewish cultural traditions, adhere to the "chosen people" consciousness, and preserve Jewish ethnic heritage. Abandoning our cultural roots would mean the disappearance of the Jewish foundation that is closely tied to the well-being of the Jewish people. However, this adherence inevitably clashed with the mainstream white American culture, leading to discrimination and cultural collisions, which were to be expected. Therefore, Roth's father made compromises and concessions, but he never gave up fighting against the discriminatory environment in American society. He never lost hope in life; even in his most helpless moments, he faced his battle with cancer in his twilight years, bravely going against the odds.

Roth's father toiled for the family throughout his life, wore out his body from years of hard work and psychological stress, resulting in serious illness. Yet, Roth's father stood tall and persevered; the pressures of work in his youth and the illnesses of his old age did not break his will. He would never easily surrender to his ailments. Roth's father despised the disdain and cold shoulder he received while struggling in American society. Time and again, he gritted his teeth and persisted, emerging from the dark clouds of life. He held fast to his bottom line and refused to yield to fate. It takes courage to be a fighter, even at the cost of his life. As a Jewish father, he was fearless and a daring fighter throughout his life. "They are people who never give up." (99) His self-esteem and self-reliance were his self-redemption and a valuable spiritual legacy left to future generations.

## II. Inheritance of Jewish Identity

Jewish culture possesses a powerful spiritual appeal, and through religious cohesion, the Jewish people, despite their diaspora, have never been assimilated. (Xia 25) In the process of inheriting Roth father's estate and caring for him, Roth gradually felt his father's piety towards Jewish doctrine, his silent adherence to religious laws, and his steadfast commitment to cultural roots. His father's respectful attitude invisibly inspired Roth. The small items in his father's estate served as tokens that awakened Roth's Jewish identity, such as the phylactery case, razor, and handkerchief. Especially, Roth vividly remembered, "Our family belonged to a large clan that formed an associative family organization after the outbreak of World War II in Europe in 1939." (62) Roth took great pride in coming from such a vast family. Scattered across the world, the strength of the Jewish family provided a sense of belonging and security for the wandering and helpless Jewish descendants. "This family consisted of about eighty households in and around Newark and seventy households around Boston. There was an annual family reunion, a summer vacation, a quarterly family newspaper, a family anthem, a family crest, and standardized stationery." (62-63) Roth's family had well-established rules and regulations, making it not difficult to infer their prominent lineage. Roth's detailed recounting of these details is not only a record of the family's illustrious history but also a documentation of the family spirit being passed down from generation to generation. "In 1943, Herman Roth was elected as the fifth patriarch of the family." (63) Roth clearly remembered the term and time of his father's election, delighted that his father had brought honor to the family and immensely proud to have such a wonderful father.

As his father approached the twilight of his life, memories flooded back, and Roth endeavored to meticulously document the family's glory, praising it through his father's words: "'Our family,' he said, 'was one of the largest and strongest of its kind in America at that time.'" (63) Family is synonymous with 'roots,' and Roth's tracing of his family's ancestry and lineage demonstrates his sense of belonging. Roth's meticulous recording of family history reflects his deep-seated awareness of seeking his roots. The family serves as a bridge for Jewish people to communicate and a spiritual symbol of homesickness and ancestral reverence. Having experienced the vicissitudes of life and spent days and nights with his aging father, Roth's attitude towards Jewish tradition has quietly shifted, from initially scoffing at it to genuinely cherishing the phylactery case, although he concealed his feelings out of pride. "I didn't ask him why he didn't give them to me. I didn't ask him why he returned all those handkerchiefs,

tablecloths, and place mats to me but not the phylactery case." (73) The reason Roth didn't directly ask his father face-to-face was that he didn't want to put them both in "that sentimental situation." (74) In his early years, Roth "defined himself as a son who could almost disregard material interests." (80) After experiencing the vicissitudes of life and reaching middle age, Roth regretted and reflected on his immature mindset from his youth, thinking, "Now, I feel speechless about my behavior at that time: naive, foolish, speechless." (80-81) Roth's desire to inherit his father's phylactery case is essentially a pursuit of identity, which can be seen as Roth's psychological journey of affirming his individual identity and recognizing his belonging to the Jewish community.

From the outset, Roth was carefree and unattached to secular matters like inheriting relics, but later became deeply concerned about legacies such as the phylactery case. This was not due to Roth deliberately saying one thing and meaning another, but rather a change of heart nurtured by his long-term immersion in Jewish culture. "He fully expected that the idea of passing the phylactery case to me would elicit my ridicule--and he would have been right if this were forty years ago." (73-74) Roth freely admitted to this transformation. After coming to terms with it, Roth even contemplated from his father's perspective why it wasn't passed on to others, primarily because they were only superficially Jewish, having neither continued the internal Jewish way of life nor inherited Jewish cultural traditions. "The reason my father didn't give the phylactery case to these two grandsons is even easier to understand than why he didn't give it to me. These nephews of mine grew up in a secular society, knowing nothing about Judaism; they are only Jewish on the surface." (75) Roth had inherited something of the essence of Jewish culture from his father. As a writer who pays attention to the current state of Jewish ethnicity, Roth has demonstrated a nuanced humanistic concern for their hardships, at least within the realm of Jewish traditional thought. "Throughout Roth's writing career, he has indeed narrated various aspects of American Jews' real and spiritual lives in his unique expressive way," (Qiao 441) evoking societal interest and discussion about the Jewish ethnicity through his delicate prose.

In contrast, Roth's brother and nephew appeared even more assimilated into American culture. No wonder "my father probably thought that Sandy, like me, would be unwilling to accept such an inheritance." (75) Roth had initially suggested that he would not inherit his father's estate, but when it actually came to it, Roth experienced "an unexpected reaction: I felt abandoned. Although it was my own doing that he didn't include me in his will, it didn't lessen my feeling of being abandoned by him in the slightest." (80) Although Roth had made a generous gesture in his youth, he regretted it in his later years. "This was something he had to give me, something he wanted to give me, and something that traditionally should have been given to me. Why couldn't I just keep my mouth shut and let everything happen naturally?" (81) Originally, Roth had tried to break free from the shackles of secular traditional beliefs and bid farewell to the Jewish tradition, culture, and spirit represented by his father, only to find his attempt futile. Not only could he not escape, but he also regretted his earlier stance. "I now regret realizing too late that as a son, I had a natural right to inherit." (81) According to traditional beliefs, it is only natural and right for a son to follow in his father's footsteps. Roth's attempt to break away from traditional constraints essentially meant that he was refusing to acknowledge Jewish tradition and culture and rejecting his own Jewish identity.

It turned out that Roth's evasion of his Jewish identity was in vain. "But after going my own way, I found that sometimes my fundamental feelings are more conventional than my steadfast moral commitments." (81) Roth could hardly believe that he had already been deeply influenced by Jewish tradition, inscribed in his heart. The inheritance of his father's estate was, in essence, an inheritance of his Jewish identity. As he grew older, Roth increasingly sought identity and adhered to traditional beliefs, though he hadn't realized it before. Roth's exploration of Jewish ethnic identity is a significant manifestation of his Jewishness and a revelation of his writing about Jewish diaspora. Needless to say, even though Roth, as a second- or third-generation Jewish immigrant, had long bid farewell to Jewish tradition and abandoned its way of thinking and behavior, the Jewish tradition and culture still flowed in his blood, and the Jewish spirit was inseparable from him. The essence of the Jewish spirit is forever passed down through the veins of Jewish descendants, and the accumulation of Jewish ethnic feelings over thousands of years had subtly changed Roth, infiltrating his bones.

After undergoing inner struggles and conflicts, Roth followed his heart's calling and accepted and acknowledged the Jewish tradition, culture, and spirit represented by his father, even though he hadn't always held a firm stance. "When I was a child, I longed for a knowledgeable and distinguished father to replace this uneducated one who made me feel a little ashamed." (149) In his later years, spending time inseparably with his father and deeply understanding the "glorious history" the old man had walked through and every footprint he had left behind, Roth was torn between his inner desire for identity and the influence of external factors. However, his actual actions reflected his true thoughts. Roth carefully kept his grandfather's shaving mug, engraved with "S. Royh," which mirrored the ups and downs and the storms the Roth family had experienced. As time passed, its connotation and depth grew. The shaving mug was not only a witness to the struggles of three generations of the Roth family in America but also carried the flesh-and-blood affection passed down through loved ones. When his father handed the shaving mug to Roth, he solemnly "wrote a line of capital letters with a marker on the folded flap of the wrapping paper, high and low: 'From father to son.'" (93) His father's serious attitude towards the shaving mug reflected its awe-inspiring status. Not only did his father write the inscription himself, but he also "tied the shaving mug up with Scottish ribbons of different lengths, most of which were rolled up in circles like DNA helixes." (93) The shaving mug embodied the family's spiritual strength and had cultural and historical value beyond money, carrying precious family memories. It entrusted the emotions and spirit of the older generation, and passing it down represented the transmission of the family's and the Jewish nation's culture and spirit. "His mug had an air of an unearthed artifact, [...] and for me, it was like a Greek vase revealing the mysterious origins of the Greeks." (16) The cultural symbolic significance of the shaving mug constantly reminded Roth to embrace the essence of his ancestors, continue the family's dignity, experience Jewish ethnic feelings, and perpetuate the Jewish lineage. After taking over the family heirloom from his father, Roth "gripped his grandfather's shaving mug tightly" (104), indicating his determination to face up bravely, confront history, frankly accept his identity as a descendant of the Jewish nation, and strive to inherit the spirit and integrity of his predecessors.

Through his autobiographical writing in *The Heritage*, Roth chronicles the days and nights he spent with his aging father,

during which he gradually came to embrace the Jewish traditional moral, values, and religious beliefs that his forebears held steadfast. Roth no longer felt embarrassed by his father; instead, he developed admiration and reverence for him. "He taught me the mother tongue. He was the mother tongue--unpoetic, expressive, straightforward, with all the limitations and endurance of the mother tongue." (149) In *The Heritage*, Roth even interspersed certain words with Yiddish, imbuing them with profound meaning. For example, "If you just keep 'hocking' at him, 'hocking' at him, 'hocking' at him, he'll come to his senses and do as you say." (58) The word "hock" used here is Yiddish, meaning to warn, command, implore, pester, or force someone, as Roth himself notes in the text. Yiddish, a German dialect mixed with Hebrew and Polish, is the ethnic language of the Jewish people, arising from the gradual and geographically varied evolution of Judaism and Jewish culture. Another example is "pushke," which appears in the text and refers to a Jewish charity box in Yiddish (87). Roth's fluent responses to his father's sudden questions and his use of Yiddish in his writing reflect his practical efforts to preserve the traditional Jewish ethnic language. Roth's recognition of his ethnic tradition and his father's spiritual legacy signifies his sense of belonging to Jewish ethnic tradition and culture, not only realizing a return to the Jewish ethnic spirit but also gaining a leap in understanding and profound insight into Jewish culture and tradition.

Roth's vivid memories of his family are an abbreviation of his inheritance of Jewish identity, etched indelibly in his heart, ready to awaken at any moment. Like DNA, it is a part of him. Roth's father's Jewish identity "made him glad to be a Jew, more than my critics can imagine, a complex, interesting, morally demanding, and very strange experience. And I like it. In the historical predicament of being a Jew and all that it entails, I have found myself." (Roth, *Reading Myself and Others*, 20) The sense of displacement and wandering that haunts the Jewish people is ever-present. "And we children, whether waiting to be evacuated or not, gathered at the dock. [...] The feeling of evacuation in the heart is this: to be expelled, rejected, born." (197) "I expected my father to be on the boat, among the crew, but there was no one on board." (196-7) Roth finally understands that his father is the boat. The image of the boat is a metaphor for his father and symbolizes the Jewish people. "The thick armor" signifies the unbreakable bond between father and son, and Roth ultimately recognizes his own Jewish identity.

### III. Adhering to Religious Doctrine and Uniting Jewish Brethren

Judaism is the oldest religion in the world, with religious beliefs gradually becoming the lifestyle, way of thinking, and behavioral norm for the Jewish people, exerting a profound and far-reaching influence on Jewish society's ethics, customs, social relations, and legal norms. Jewish dietary habits strictly follow Jewish dietary laws, and Jewish holidays all originate from religious festivals in Judaism. As a Jewish adherent, Roth father's phylactery case is a symbol of his devout commitment. It is a set of small black leather boxes containing parchment inscribed with passages from the Five Books of Moses, worn during weekday morning prayers in Judaism. "One on the forehead, one on the left arm." (70) Despite spending his younger years selling insurance day and night, "unable to observe formal prayer rituals, [...] he could only go to the nearby synagogue on Yom Kippur and confess when necessary." (70) However, there is no doubt about my father's piety and reverence for Judaism. Upon retiring, "he began

to attend synagogue almost every Friday night.” (70) Like a wanderer in need of spiritual solace, Jewish adherents scattered around the world view their faith as a comfort for their souls. In his later years, my father strictly adhered to religious practices, “not out of hypocrisy or mere etiquette, [...] but because he felt the harmony that religion had given him throughout his long life, as if his parents were communicating with him.” (71) Having striven alone, my father found solace in the melancholic melodies of the synagogue choir, which seemed to bring him before his deeply missed parents, with the melodies of the hymns like a soothing murmur from them, touching the most sensitive chords of his soul. Adhering to religious doctrines was a way for my father to find peace in his heart and also a means of preserving Jewish religious and cultural traditions.

The traditional moral values of the Jewish people remain a “family heirloom” even while living in the United States, including kindness, generosity, and unity. My father valued unity among Jewish brethren and emphasized religious rituals. Judaism sustains Jewish ethnic identity and preserves Jewish ethnic characteristics through the inner spiritual strength of faith. Ethnic cohesion centered around Judaism plays a crucial role in uniting the Jewish people. My father often participated in the Hebrew Young Men’s Association. “The choir leader from that synagogue came to see me. [...] They heard about my tumor and said they would drive me to the Young Men’s Association every day.” (110) The Hebrew Young Men’s Association is one of several Jewish communities in which my father was active, providing a wide range of cultural, educational, recreational, and social activities free of charge to Jewish individuals of all ages, ensuring that Judaism plays a positive role in American society and promoting cultural unity within the Jewish community.

According to Jewish doctrine, everyone should be treated with dignity and respect. Therefore, my father lent a helping hand to every Jewish person in need. In fact, there are countless Jewish civic groups and charitable organizations in the United States. After my mother passed away, my father, overwhelmed with grief but still rational, planned to discard her old clothes, saying, “They can be used to help Jewish people—they’re still brand new.” (18) My father never stinged on his kindness, never underestimated the power of unity, and helped Jewish vulnerable groups as much as possible, while also gaining warmth in return. My father even asked Roth to enthusiastically assist a writer friend he had met at the Hebrew Young Men’s Association, whom he had never met before, in publishing a book about his experiences in the Auschwitz concentration camp. “This wasn’t the first time he had introduced an eager author to me.” (173)

Roth’s father took a keen interest in the affairs of his fellow Jews. Though he had little formal education, he always helped others to the best of his ability. He was sociable and made many good friends, demonstrating his broad vision, great courage, and profound empathy. Even when “he couldn’t help directly, he wasn’t discouraged; he would persist in asking for the office numbers of my editor friends, Aaron Asher or David Leaf, and then bypass me to deal with them directly.” (173) Although my father’s communication methods were sometimes less than ideal, he was humorous, witty, and talkative, skilled at interpersonal interactions, and thus had many friends from all walks of life. From government officials to business executives, from workers to intellectuals, from merchants to writers, from skilled craftsmen to doctors and shop assistants, even restaurant chefs and street vendors -- he had friends among them all. His friends even praised

him in front of Roth, saying, “Your dad is really something-- wherever he goes, there’s energy.” (39) Through persistence, my father successfully recommended books for publication, “and my father received a recommendation bonus for it [...] After that, whenever he had the chance, he kept at it.” (174) Tireless even in retirement, my father continued to contribute his wisdom and energy, leading by example to promote mutual assistance within the Jewish community. He also actively participated in community family organizations and attended various public welfare events at the “Jewish Federation Plaza” on a regular basis. It goes without saying that Jewish teachings have shaped Roth father’s sense of cohesion and unity as a member of the Jewish people. Deeply influenced by these teachings, he advocated for mutual encouragement and support among Jewish compatriots. This cohesion fosters a sense of belonging among Jewish people. The closely united Jewish people, through various institutions and associations, advocate for equal rights and dignity for Jews in American society. By joining forces with other ethnic minority organizations, they have gradually eliminated barriers against minorities, leading to the establishment of a series of social and legal norms that eliminate discrimination and exclusion. This achievement is the result of long-term struggles by Jewish groups, including members like my father.

Jews are usually not only active within their own communities but also play an active role in American philanthropic circles, a tradition rooted in Jewish charitable values. Just as my father actively participated in raising funds for the Maso Foundation to assist needy Jews. “This foundation raises funds specifically for providing Passover food to Jewish poor in the southern beach area of Miami.” (37) Maso is a traditional Jewish food, and Passover is a traditional Jewish holiday. The atmosphere created by traditional holidays fosters unity and progress among the Jewish people, and the symbols of these holidays reinforce mutual assistance within the community. Later, despite the disastrous concert that followed the foundation’s report, “the applause was long and enthusiastic [...] There was a spirit of kindness and self-discipline in the way they returned to their seats and sat quietly, reminding me of the people I saw in the Jewish synagogue as a child, patiently enduring until the prayer ceremony ended.” (41) The piety of Jewish believers is awe-inspiring, and the Jewish people have endured many hardships. Through years of war and turmoil, long periods of exile and migration, and suffering from hunger, persecution, slaughter, and humiliation, they have always upheld their faith, following ‘Gods’ teachings in adversity and striving for progress. “After reading the Five Books of Moses, the entire ceremony was not yet over, and no one knew what they were reading, but they sat quietly out of respect for their religion.” (41) Jewish teachings require believers to obey unconditionally throughout their lives, and under their influence, Jews strictly discipline themselves and adhere to the teachings. Devout Jewish believers, represented by Roth’s father, unconditionally obey the creeds, doctrines, and religious rituals that are regarded as eternal truths, demonstrating unlimited loyalty to their beliefs and churches in their hearts and actions.

Jewish doctrine prohibits intermarriage with non-Jews. To prevent assimilation, Judaism strictly enforces endogamy, preserving the purity of the Jewish nation and its religious beliefs. Regardless of hardships, perilous circumstances, or calamities, the Jewish people adhere to the covenant made by their ancestors with God, upholding ancestral rules and refraining from intermarrying with non-Jews. My grandfather once resorted to violence to stop

his son, saying, “My father had to beat my brother Ed to prevent him from marrying a non-believing woman. He had no other choice.” (64) As a teenager, Roth stormed out in anger because his father supported his grandfather’s harshness, but his father believed it “saved him, saved him from that woman.” (65) When he was young, Roth and his father held diametrically opposed views on his uncle’s intermarriage. However, in his twilight years, Roth reacted differently from the young man who “leaped up from the dining table in a fit of rage and rushed out...” (65); he now echoed his father’s words: “Young people nowadays are just lawless.” (65) Roth could now calmly view the uproar of his youth with indifference, even forgetting the scene, because he had come to share his father’s views. More importantly, in his later years, Roth embraced his grandfather’s principles for preserving Jewish traditions. He understood why his father had deemed his protest misguided; in other words, Roth identified with and accepted Jewish moral values.

The way Roth chose to lay his father to rest conformed to Jewish tradition: burial in the earth and returning to his roots. Jewish funerals carry profound religious significance, stemming from a shared belief in the sanctity and equality of human life. Jews attach great importance to the body after death, considering it the vessel of the deceased’s soul and therefore deserving of respect and proper handling. After discussing with his brother, Roth said, “He should be buried in his shroud. As I spoke, I thought about how his parents were buried and how Jews are traditionally buried.” (195-6) In Jewish society, the dead are buried in the earth without cremation or coffins. His father had prepared for this: “At the bottom of my father’s bedroom closet, I found a shallow box containing two prayer shawls neatly folded. [...] I took the larger shawl home, and the other was wrapped around him for burial.” (195) Prayer not only plays a vital role in Judaism and Jewish culture but is also an integral part of Jewish worship rituals. It is closely intertwined with the lives of Jews. Wrapping his father in his prayer shawl for burial allowed him to rest peacefully in the earth. Roth adopted the traditional Jewish custom that had been practiced for thousands of years: “We will wrap his body in the ancestral shroud.” (196) Although his father had worked in insurance in America all his life and seemed like an “ordinary city dweller,” his sons, who “believed in no religion,” ultimately chose loyalty to Jewish tradition amid the tension between Jewish culture and American mainstream culture. Roth finally acknowledged the Jewish identity bestowed upon him by God. His actions suggested that Jewish culture and values had penetrated deeply into his heart.

Judaism views life and death as intrinsic attributes granted to humanity by God. Although his father had left him, the Jewish people’s unwavering faith gave Roth fearlessness in the face of death. His father’s actions conformed to the commandments of the covenant, allowing his soul to rest in God’s embrace. After his father’s death, Roth dreamed that his father was furious, saying, “I shouldn’t have let him wear this in the afterlife.” (198) Roth believed in an afterlife where his actions in this world determine whether the soul is accepted by God. This religious concept, embraced by Roth, a university professor, reflected his acculturation to Jewish doctrine. His father’s adherence to the covenant with God determined his blessings or misfortunes. This

covenantal concept governs Jewish life, establishing criteria for judgment and loyalty to Jewish faith.

## Conclusion

“Exile (galut) and return are central concepts in Jewish religion, crucial for Jews in defining themselves and their identity.” (Ursula 1-44) A Jew is always a Jew by identity. Despite the cultural rift caused by his ancestors’ immigration to America, and even differences with his father in religious theory and practice, Roth, as a descendant of Jews, venerates the same ancestral patriarch of Jewish doctrine and shares with the Jewish people the common core of religious beliefs and historical and cultural traditions.

Aharon Appelfeld believes that “Philip Roth is a Jewish writer, not because he considers himself one or because others see him as one, but because he writes about things that are dear to him as a novelist, such as Zuckerman, Epstein, Kepesh, their mothers, their lives, and the ups and downs they encounter.” (13) Roth’s portrayal of diaspora in *Patrimony* chronicles the struggles of his parental generation as they immigrated and made their way in America, “from his parents’ voyage across the Atlantic in steerage to his own bitter struggles and resistance against numerous obstacles in pursuit of survival and success.” (198) Roth’s exploration of his Jewish identity ultimately reflects his recognition of Jewish national culture and his identification with the Jewish people. The concluding line in *Patrimony* “You must not forget anything” (198), serves as the finishing touch, suggesting that Roth, with Jewish blood coursing through his veins, bears the indelible imprint of his Jewish heritage. Deeply influenced by his father, Roth’s adherence to Jewish cultural traditions, observance of Jewish doctrine, and solidarity with the Jewish people serve as a lens through which he views his Jewish identity.

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