

PORTRAYAL OF THE AMERICAN ANTIHERO THROUGH PHILIP ROTH’S VISION OF MICKEY SABBATH IN SABBATH’S THEATER

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Abstract

This paper explores the character of Mickey Sabbath in Philip Roth's novel "Sabbath's Theater." Mickey Sabbath is shown as a multi-faceted and ethically grey figure who questions conventional ideas of bravery. This article explores Mickey Sabbath's character through his hopelessness, arrogance, sexism, and misanthropy. It delves into the contradictory nature of Sabbath's attraction by exploring how readers are both attracted to and rejected by him. This paper examines how Sabbath's trip shapes the story and how the reader views the antihero. Considering all this, the article provides an in-depth analysis of Mickey Sabbath and his role in Roth's plan.

Keywords: Sabbath Theater, Mickey Sabbath, Antihero.

Literature Review

One may characterize Mickey Sabbath from Philip Roth's Sabbath's Theatre as a complex person who personifies the idea of the aesthete as it is understood by Kierkegaard. In addition to abandoning the moral and theological aspects of human life, Sabbath pursues sensual fulfilment (Ledesma 2023). The person in question may be described as a criminal who resembles the fictional figure Falstaff, (Scheckner's 2005). This is the person who laughs at social norms and accepts life as inherently

chaotic. A major influence on Sabbath's persona is his work as a puppeteer, which allows him to explore topics of art, sexuality, and identity while providing a critical critique of American society (Trendel 2022). The guy in issue employs puppetry as a means of manipulating identity transplanting, a theoretical construct that underscores his deviant conduct

(Yang 2017). All of the research described above paints a picture of Sabbath as a complex antihero, someone who questions social standards and struggles with his sense of self and desires.

Introduction

"Sabbath's Theatre" can be characterised as a candid and unwavering examination of the intricacies of human nature, replete with Roth's distinctive blend of humour and penetrating writing style. The literary work in question presents itself as a formidable and thought-provoking piece, providing an insightful depiction of a central character who possesses evident imperfections but remains inherently human.

Mickey Sabbath, the central character in Philip Roth's novel "Sabbath's Theatre," can be classified as an antihero due to his complex journey toward self-discovery, moral self-examination, and a deeper understanding of the human condition. Within the broader framework established by Roth regarding the portrayal of the American antihero, the present article delves into the complexities of Sabbath's character. It traces the trajectory of his personal growth and evolution.

The Antihero Concept in American Literature

In American literature, the antihero is a protagonist who demonstrates a lack of certain traditional heroic attributes and qualities, including idealism, bravery, and morality. Frequently, antagonists resist societal norms and may undertake actions that the audience perceives as morally uncertain. Despite this, their intricate motivations and relatable faults continue to elicit support or sympathy. Roman satire, Renaissance literature, and classical Greek drama are the origins of the antihero archetype. Its prominence increased in the 19th century as a result of literary Romanticism and works such as Rameau's Nephew, which contributed to its rise to prominence in the 18th



century. Demonstrating the antihero as a well-established mode of social critique, Fyodor Dostoyevsky's "Notes from Underground" features an anonymous protagonist.

The antihero has had a substantial impact on American literature, specifically in the realms of young adult literature, comic books, and action films. The antihero, which has been a topic of fascination and scholarly investigation in recent decades, is frequently linked to social and political occurrences in American culture. By facilitating the examination of morally ambiguous and complex characters, the literary antihero concept provides a more nuanced and realistic depiction of human nature. The characters frequently experience transformative or degrading trajectories, which renders them captivating and intellectually stimulating for the audience. In essence, the antihero in American literature is a central figure who defies established social norms and does not possess conventional heroic qualities. These characters are intricate and morally equivocal, providing a more authentic portrayal of human nature.

Moreover, they have exerted a substantial impact on a wide range of media formats. In American literature, notable antiheroes include Patrick Bateman in "American Psycho" by Bret Easton Ellis, Humbert in "Lolita" by Vladimir Nabokov, and Tom Ripley in "The Talented Mr. Ripley" by Patricia Highsmith. The American antihero archetype can be traced back to Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel "The Scarlet Letter" (1850), which showcases Hester Prynne as an early example. Prynne's character challenges the prevailing societal norms by refusing to conform to the Puritanical standards of her community. Similarly, Mark Twain's "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" (1884) introduces Huck Finn as another notable antihero. Finn is portrayed as a rebellious and morally conflicted character who defies the constraints of society in his pursuit of freedom and individuality.

Antiheroes became popular in American literature in the 20th century after World War I, the Great Depression, and the Vietnam War disillusioned many. Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and John Steinbeck's heroes struggled with existential anxiety, moral uncertainty, and the American Dream's disappointment. Postmodernism and counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s gave the antihero its due in the mid-20th



century. Kurt Vonnegut, Joseph Heller, and Philip Roth used antiheroes to critique mainstream culture and question heroism and morality.

Philip Roth's Mickey Sabbath from "Sabbath's Theatre," for example, is an antihero who is morally repulsive but magnetic and vulnerable, eliciting both pity and loathing from readers. In American literature, the antihero represents a great interest in individuals who reject traditions, question authority, and struggle with human complexity. In an uncertain and contradictory world, American authors explore morality, identity, and purpose via their writings.

Sabbath Theater by Philip Roth

Philip Roth, a highly acclaimed and controversial figure in American literature, gained recognition for his profound examinations of Jewish-American identity, sexuality, and the intricate dynamics of human connections. The individual in question was born on March 19, 1933, in Newark, New Jersey, and subsequently passed away on May 22, 2018, in Manhattan, New York City.

Roth's extensive literary career, which endured for more than five decades, was marked by the creation of a substantial corpus of literature encompassing novels, short stories, and essays. The individual in question has garnered significant recognition for his literary works, several of which are widely regarded as enduring masterpieces within the realm of American literature.

The writing of Roth was distinguished by its incisive humour, profound exploration of the human psyche, and courageous engagement with topics considered socially unacceptable. Throughout his illustrious career, the esteemed individual in question has been the recipient of a multitude of prestigious accolades and distinctions. These include, but are not limited to, the highly esteemed Pulitzer Prize, the esteemed National Book Award, and the distinguished Man Booker International Prize. Roth's literary contributions, while undoubtedly significant, have not been without their fair share of controversy. One aspect that has drawn considerable attention is the explicit language employed in his works, which has raised eyebrows and sparked debates among readers and critics alike. Additionally, Roth's exploration of sexual themes and his unflinching portrayals of Jewish life have further contributed to the contentious



nature of his writings. Notwithstanding these circumstances, the individual in question persists as an exceptionally influential and significant figure within the realm of American literature, spanning both the 20th and 21st centuries. Consequently, he has bequeathed a substantial and enduring literary heritage that remains the subject of scholarly examination and discourse. "Sabbath's Theatre" is a literary work authored by the renowned American writer Philip

Roth, which was officially published in the year 1995. This novel holds a significant place in Roth's extensive body of work, showcasing his exceptional storytelling abilities and profound exploration of human nature and its complexities. This work can be characterised as intricate and thought-provoking, as it explores profound subjects such as mortality, desire, and the quest for existential significance.

The narrative of the novel revolves around the experiences and trajectory of Mickey Sabbath, an individual who has faced public shame and now resides in the bustling metropolis of New York City. The character known as Sabbath exhibits larger-than-life qualities, displaying a crude and irreverent demeanour, while also grappling with profound personal turmoil. The individual in question is currently experiencing a period of mourning following the demise of their romantic partner, namely Drenka Balich. Drenka Balich is described as a vivacious and alluring

individual who holds a significant position in the individual's life.

As the individual known as Sabbath grapples with the profound emotional distress caused by the loss of his beloved companion, Drenka, there is a noticeable escalation in his preoccupation with preserving and reliving the recollections associated with their fervent and intense connection. The individual in question engages in a sequence of sexual encounters, frequently involving individuals of a significantly younger age, to mitigate the emotional void resulting from the absence of Drenka. Within the narrative, the character of Sabbath engages in introspection regarding his finite existence and the inherent lack of purpose in life. The individual in question engages in a profound exploration of existential inquiries and actively confronts their imperfections and shortcomings. The protagonist's narrative unfolds as



a poignant amalgamation of tragedy and dark comedy, wherein he grapples with the inherent absurdity of human existence, displaying a complex interplay of defiance and despair.

Decoding the complexities of Mickey Sabbath

In "Sabbath's Theatre," Philip Roth presents readers with the intriguing character of Mickey Sabbath, who serves as a compelling embodiment of the American antihero. Through Sabbath's journey, Roth delves into the complexities of morality, identity, and the human condition, thereby challenging conventional notions surrounding these themes. The complexities surrounding Sabbath's character warrant a comprehensive examination that delves into the intricacies of his

persona and its wider implications within Roth's literary vision.

The core essence of Sabbath's character is deeply rooted in a profound and pervasive feeling of existential angst and disillusionment. By his rebellious nature and indifference towards established social conventions, Sabbath emerges as a character who challenges conventional categorization. The individual's confrontational demeanour towards figures of authority, in conjunction with their inclination towards engaging in self-destructive actions, reflects the more extensive societal disillusionment that was widespread in postwar America. From a theoretical standpoint, it can be argued that Sabbath assumes a metaphorical role, serving as a potent emblem of the profound existential quandary that confronts individuals as they navigate the intricate complexities and ambiguities inherent in contemporary existence.

Moreover, the Jewish identity of Sabbath serves to introduce an additional stratum of intricacy to his persona. Roth, a distinguished Jewish-American writer, infuses the character of Sabbath with a profound appreciation for cultural heritage and a keen awareness of historical significance. The examination of Sabbath's challenges pertaining to his sense of self, encompassing his Jewish heritage and his American nationality, serves as a manifestation of Roth's overarching investigation into the complexities of Jewish identity within the framework of American society. Through the incorporation of Sabbath into this cultural context, Roth presents an opportunity for



readers to contemplate the interplay between one's sense of self, ancestral background, and sense of belonging in influencing the trajectory of one's life.

The examination of Sabbath's relationships with other characters serves to shed light on the intricate nature of his persona as an antihero. The examination of his tumultuous affair with Drenka serves as a means to uncover and analyse both his inherent capability for experiencing authentic love and his inclination towards engaging in destructive behaviours. Moreover, the examination of the protagonist's interactions with both family members and friends provides valuable insights into the intricate workings of his fractured psyche, shedding light on the enduring traumas that continue to haunt him from his past experiences. By exploring the complex interplay of interpersonal dynamics, Roth skillfully weaves together a vivid portrayal of the diverse range of human sentiments and drives. This masterful depiction serves to emphasise the profound influence of the intricate network of relationships on Sabbath's perspective and outlook on life.

Furthermore, the journey undertaken by Sabbath can be interpreted as a representation of the United States, encapsulating its inherent paradoxes and internal struggles. As the protagonist traverses the tumultuous realm of romantic relationships, bereavement, and the inevitability of death, the Sabbath personifies the unrelenting essence of a nation undergoing significant changes. The unwavering determination displayed by the individual in question, in his unyielding endeavour to attain personal liberty and distinctiveness, serves as a manifestation of the perpetual pursuit of self-identification and self-actualization that characterises the United States of America. This pursuit remains steadfast, undeterred by seemingly insurmountable challenges.

Conclusion

It can be argued that "Sabbath's Theatre" stands as a definitive example of Philip Roth's skilful exploration of the American antiheroic archetype. In his meticulous examination of Mickey Sabbath's journey, Roth offers readers a stimulating reflection on the complex nuances of the human condition, the pursuit of meaning, and the enduring influence of the American Dream. The character portrayed in the novel Sabbath showcases a plethora of imperfections and inconsistencies that mirror the

societal contradictions that were widespread during the era in which the character was conceived. The above-mentioned portrayal functions as an enticement for readers to engage with and address the disconcerting realities that are firmly embedded within the fabric of the

American encounter. The present article posits the argument that Sabbath's journey serves as a miniature of the United States, providing a window into the inherent contradictions and conflicts that permeate the nation's realities and belief systems. Roth adeptly depicts the enigmatic antihero, thereby stimulating readers to contemplate profound inquiries concerning the essence of human nature, ethical considerations, and the pursuit of significance within a world characterised by disorder and unpredictability.

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