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# The Philip Roth Society Newsletter

Vol. 4 No.1

Spring 2006

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## Message from the Society's President Derek Parker Royal

**T**hings are going smoothly with the Philip Roth Society, and most of our recent activity was reported at our fourth annual business meeting, held at the American Literature Association Conference in San Francisco (May 24-28, 2006), where we covered a lot of ground. We recently held elections, and the elections coordinator, David Brauner, reported on his activity and the results of the vote (all current officers were re-elected).

The Secretary/Treasurer, Jessica Rabin, reported that membership is more or less holding steady, that a sizeable number (28%) of our members are non-U.S. residents, and that we are financially secure. Our Newsletter Editor, Joe Kraus, reported on his plans for the current issue of the *PRS Newsletter*, that the distribution largess provided by Harvard Law Professor Bruce Hay has helped us immensely, and that the society has recently signed an agreement with EBSCO for indexing the newsletter in their databases.

As society President, I reported on recent conference activity and calls for papers, the state of the journal *Philip Roth Studies*, and our need to increase

our institutional membership. In addition to being printed here, the minutes from the business meeting have been emailed to all Roth Society members, but you can also find them online at <http://orgs.tamu-commerce.edu/rothsoc/minutes2006.doc>

There is also news to report since the business meeting. Over the past year the society has had problems with its online discussion board and with its old listserv. These troubles resulted from excessive spamming (in the case of the discussion board) and general changes in computing services at our host university, Texas A&M University-Commerce. In June, I asked the university's office of computing and information services to look into these problems, and I'm happy to say that they have both the discussion board and the listserv up and running.

They were able to insert a couple of safeguards into the discussion board, so as to filter out the spam that was clogging up and shutting down the program, and they have set us up with a brand new—and much more manageable—listserv group, PRS-L. To see the changes to the discussion board, visit the PRS web-

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### About the Philip Roth Society

Founded in July 2002, the Philip Roth Society is an organization devoted to the study and appreciation of Roth's writings. The society's goal is to encourage academic conversation about Roth's work through discussions, panel presentations at scholarly conferences, and journal publications. It accomplishes this by disseminating information concerning upcoming events, calls for papers, and recent publications on Roth through this newsletter, through a web page at <http://orgs.tamu-commerce.edu/rothsoc/society.htm>, by maintaining a listserv, and through the publication of *Philip Roth Studies*, a refereed journal devoted to Roth scholarship. The Philip Roth Society is a non-profit community of readers and scholars, and it has no affiliation with either Philip Roth or his publishers. The society is an affiliated organization of the American Literary Association, and we welcome both academic and non-academic readers alike.

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*The Philip Roth Society Newsletter* is published twice a year by The Philip Roth Society and is distributed to all dues-paying members. It is indexed in the MLA Bibliography, Modern Humanities Research Association's Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature, and the Index to Jewish Periodicals.

*The Philip Roth Society Newsletter* invites submissions of 500-800 words. Contributions may be informal in tone, and may address such matters as the teaching of Roth's work or personal reactions to it. We welcome notes that add texture or background information to larger elements of Roth's writing. Disks in Word or email submissions appreciated. For submissions or queries, contact Joe Kraus, Editor, *The Philip Roth Society Newsletter*, Department of English, The University of Scranton, Scranton, PA 18510  
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## Calls for Papers

To publicize a call for papers, lecture or general event related to Philip Roth, contact the Philip Roth Society at [events@rothsociety.org](mailto:events@rothsociety.org). When deadlines expire in calls for papers, the event will be listed as an “upcoming event.”

### Upcoming Events

#### **American Literature Association Symposium in American Fiction San Diego, CA (Sept. 28-Oct. 1, 2006)**

The Philip Roth Society will sponsor a panel at the ALA Symposium in American Fiction. The event will be held at the Bahia Resort Hotel. For more information, contact the symposium director, James Nagel, at [jnagel@uga.edu](mailto:jnagel@uga.edu).

### Calls for Papers

#### **Special Issue on Philip Roth and Bernard Malamud**

*Philip Roth Studies* invites submissions for a special issue of the journal devoted to Philip Roth and Bernard Malamud. We are interested in a variety of literary, theoretical, and cultural approaches that reflect the relationship (textual and otherwise) between these two authors. Both articles and short notes are welcome. Articles should be between 4,000-6,000 words, and notes should not exceed 2,500 words. Manuscripts must be prepared according to the *MLA Style Manual*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (1998), by Joseph Gibaldi, including parenthetical citations in text and endnotes rather than footnotes. Works may be submitted either by ground mail or e-mail (as attached Microsoft Word files). All inquiries and manuscripts should be submitted to:



**Debra Shostak, Mark Shechner, and David Brauner at the ALA roundtable on *Everyman***



**Left: Tim Parrish and Cameron Golden take part in the Teaching Roth Panel from the ALA**

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Submission deadline is April 15, 2007.

**Twentieth-Century Literature and Culture Conference  
Louisville, KY (February 22-24, 2007)**

The Philip Roth Society plans to sponsor a panel next year at the University of Louisville's Twentieth-Century Literature and Culture Conference. We would like to organize a panel of three presenters and would welcome papers concerning any facet of Philip Roth studies. We are also interested in finding a panel moderator (who could also present a paper) for this panel. To submit, please email a 200-350 word abstract to [louisville@rothsociety.org](mailto:louisville@rothsociety.org). The deadline for submissions is September 8, 2006. For more information on the Philip Roth Society, please visit its Web site at <http://rothsociety.org>. The Twentieth-Century Literature Conference, now in its thirty-fifth year, is an annual international conference notable for the breadth of interests that it represents and for the combination of critical and creative work that it features. For more information on the conference, visit its website at <http://www.louisville.edu/a-s/cml/xxconf/>.

**Reading *Everyman* Hot Off the Press**  
*Philip Roth Society Newsletter*

For the next issue of *The Philip Roth Society Newsletter*, we are seeking reactions to Roth's new novel, *Everyman*. We welcome 350-800 word pieces on how the novel extends recent themes in Roth's work, about how it breaks new ground, and about its critical and public receptions. Contributions may be critically defined or may grow out of informed personal experience of reading Roth's work. For inquiries or submissions, contact Joe Kraus at [krausj2@scranton.edu](mailto:krausj2@scranton.edu).

## Abstracts from Papers Delivered at Recent Conferences

An asterisk \* indicates that the scholar is a member of the Philip Roth Society

### Modern Language Association Convention – Washington, D.C., Dec. 27-30, 2005

#### **Panel: Jewish American Writers and Their Return to Judaism**

**Paper:** “Philip Roth’s Return to Jewish American Values” – William Edward Engel, University of the South

**Abstract:** *T’shuva* literally means a turning, a return to try once more for the mark one knows was missed. In Jewish tradition and ritual (especially during Yom Kipper), *t’shuva* means repentance, and is linked to remembering and self-examination. It’s an inward turning that, it is hoped, results in a return to the world renewed. Philip Roth’s *Plot Against America* embodies and expresses just this sense of *t’shuva*, of a return through art, as an Art of Memory – a return to his Jewish American boyhood, but with a new twist on the “coming of age” narrative by imagining what if history had taken a different turn. This “counterfactual novel,” in which Lindbergh wins the 1940 presidency over FRD, demands that we pause and think about where America, with its complex history regarding civil rights, is heading. The novel therefore can be read as a document in “*orot ha t’shuva*” – the art of repentance. Moreover, in the life and work of Roth, this novel represents, even as it depicts, an opportunity for America to effect just such an inward turning, before it is too late, and seek penance for what might have been and, to some extent, for a road we might well be on today.

### Twentieth-Century Literature and Culture Conference - University of Louisville, Feb. 23-25, 2006

#### **Panel: Philip Roth and the Varieties of Literary Experience**

**Chair:** \* Monica Osborne, Purdue University

**Paper 1:** “Savage in the Text: Paul Gauguin and the Lure of the Primitive in Roth’s ‘Goodbye, Columbus’” – \* Randall S. Wilhelm, University of Tennessee

**Abstract:** Philip Roth’s 1959 novella, “Goodbye, Columbus,” tells the story of a budding summer time romance between the narrative’s working-class protagonist, Neil Klugman and the nouveau riche daughter of the Patimkin sinks and faucets cartel, Brenda, whose upper-class pretensions ultimately condemn the relationship to failure. Although Roth focuses much of the reader’s attention on the specific dynamics of such a relationship, with the concomitant pressures of each one’s particular environment – Neil’s grimy Newark surroundings versus Brenda’s country club world of Short Hills – one of the more interesting details in the narrative is Roth’s use of a “picture in the text” to comment further on the story’s themes, and even, I would argue, to complicate and undermine what many readers see as the story’s primary message. Neil, twenty-three years old, works in the Newark Library, and is surprised one day when he encounters an obviously poor black child carrying an over-size art book through the library to the checkout desk. He begins to ask Neil “[w]here is these pictures? These people, man, they sure does look cool. They ain’t no yelling or shouting here, you could just see it.” The boy then shows the book to Neil: “He lifted the book so I could see. It was an expensive large-sized edition of Gauguin reproductions. The page he had been looking at showed an 8 1/2 X 11 print, in color, of three native women standing knee-high in a rose-colored stream. It was a silent picture, he was right.” Most critics seem to skip over this episode with a few surface remarks, and when it is addressed more thoroughly, the pictorial event is used to link Neil with the disadvantaged black boy as “outsiders,” whose

quest for the American dream, in this case a silent (read “utopian”) social space, is doomed to failure. While this reading does offer insights into the formal structure and thematic concerns of the class struggle motif in the novella, the closer one looks at this episode, the more interesting it becomes. For instance, while Gauguin painted dozens of canvases of bare-breasted Tahitian women during his two sojourns there between 1897 and 1905, nowhere in the Gauguin oeuvre is there a picture that corresponds exactly to Roth’s verbal description. In fact, the verbal painting is actually an invented picture that combines elements from several different Gauguin paintings, a discovery that puts Roth, the author, in the role of picture maker and focuses even more attention on the constructed picture in the text that is obviously the conveyor of special information unique to Roth’s concerns in the story. By investigating the role of the pictorial in “Goodbye, Columbus,” I show that Roth’s construction of the painting, his use of a “reproduction” and not an original work, as well as his choice of a specific artist, Paul Gauguin, all point to the pictorial scene’s central importance in defining both the character of Neil and his relationship to Brenda, as well as furthering the story’s themes of dislocation, sexuality, and exploitation.

**Paper 2:** “Transforming Gender: The Blurring of Binaries in Philip Roth’s *The Breast*” – \* Lisa Wenger, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

**Abstract:** Much discussion has revolved around the quality of Philip Roth’s 1972 work *The Breast*. The novella, dealing with the metamorphosis of college professor David Allen Kepesh into a giant breast, is often criticized or acclaimed for its use of sexuality and its sexual content. Recent study reappraises the work’s quality, often looking at Franz Kafka’s influence. Roth’s love of Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* is renowned, but what is also striking is the use and function of magical realism within the text. Roth uses Kepesh’s transformation to explore gender roles and identity. Rather than the sexist attribution many critics have applied, instead, we see Kepesh confronting traditional concepts of masculinity and femininity. Critic Debra Shostak claims that, with Kepesh, “becoming a subject who is neither male nor female, and who is both . . . he serves to question binary constructions of gender.” But whereas Shostak explores the relationship between gender and subjectivity, I am more interested in Kepesh’s incorporation and understanding of masculinity, femininity, and gender both pre- and post-transformation. In his own fashion, Roth also rewrites the Ovidian tradition of male gender transformation. This revision, in addition to Kepesh’s unconscious and conscious application of gender concepts, leads to a “new” Kepesh who blurs the male/female division, allowing for multiple types of gender performance. Furthermore, it is this new Kepesh who, upon navigating gender and understanding its mutability, is finally empowered.

**Paper 3:** “Philip Roth’s Nostalgia for the *Yiddishkayt* in *The Plot Against America*” – \* G. Neelakantan, Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

**Abstract:** Philip Roth’s *The Plot Against America* (2004), a text that mines the imagined possibility of anti-Semitic pogroms in the United States had Charles Lindbergh, of all Republicans, routed Franklin Roosevelt, in his third consecutive run to the presidency, testifies to its author’s reengagement and recovery of his essential Jewish racial identity as well as his revision of America as the promised land for its Jews. It is an irony of Roth’s novelistic career that despite earning the opprobrium of the Jewish establishment with his early works, such as *Goodbye, Columbus* (1959) and *Portnoy’s Complaint* (1969), the novelist should eventually author a text that would more than please the Jewish cultural and religious mandarins. Much as an anti-Roth reader would like to read into this shift in novelistic direction Roth’s capitulation to the conservative Jewish ideological forces, it is evident that this appreciation of the Jewish common humanity in the author, if you will, has been steadily evolving since the publication of *The Counterlife* (1987) and forcefully gathering in novels that have followed since such as *The Operation Shylock* (1993), *Sabbath’s Theater* (1995), and *American Pastoral* (1995). Significantly, if Jewish ethnicity had driven and galvanized Roth’s fiction, it was always an ethnicity

that was eager and anxious to appropriate and assimilate into the WASP America. Thus, Roth's fiction provides eloquent testimony to the trials of the second-generation Jews of the postwar era who were keen to enmesh into the social fabric and become thoroughly Americanized. Unlike Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud, his illustrious contemporaries who represented the first-generation of the American Jewish Diaspora, Roth does not carry the baggage of the cultural, social and spiritual life of his Jewish ancestors in the *shtetl* back in Europe. While the fictional world of Bellow and Malamud share a preoccupation with the *yiddishkayt* and the attendant vision of a glorious Jewish past that dissipates in the figure of the secular Jew in the New World with its crass materialism and sensuality, Roth's fictional vision in sharp contrast celebrates the unexampled riches of the postwar America and appropriates its sexual plenitude, as it were, to libidinize his literary texts. Parodying Jewish solemnity and high-seriousness, Roth had even wondered if it would not help to "put the *Id* back in the *Yid*." Surprisingly in *The Plot Against America*, Roth does not indulge his proverbial preoccupation with sexuality. Instead, he goes on depict the trauma and mayhem that might have descended on the American Jews had the nation been something other than what it had been to the Jewish immigrants in the postwar period. And thus Roth blends the twin goals of celebrating the venerable Jewish *yiddishkayt* that obtained even in his parents' generation and also paying rich homage to America, the only land that can ever viscerally engage him.

**Panel:** "American Pastorals: Childbirth, Family, and Pedagogical Portraits."

**Paper:** "Author as Fiction: Failure of the Artist in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*" – Paul Tolliver Brown, University of South Carolina

**Abstract:** *American Pastoral* centers around the dissolution of an American family during the sixties. The main character, Seymour Levov, embodies idealized industriousness and a selfless, moral fortitude, but his daughter, Merry, grows up to become a terrorist. One of the thematic struggles throughout the work builds upon a questioning of contemporary American values and an incredulity regarding the failure of those values.

In addition to the musings upon the inability of fifties idealism to cope with problems faced by the sixties generation, Roth also presents a commentary on the role of authorship in the text. In my paper, I assert that Roth's conception regarding the author function serves as the primary subject of his work rather than the dissolution of American values or the failure of reason. This is revealed through the character of Zuckerman, who produces a work of fiction about the Levov family, the result of which remains contextualized within Roth's own work; therefore, Roth's novelistic approach stresses the inextricability of the author function from any given storyline. Part of Roth's larger project serves to undermine the romantic notion of authorship, in this case the unbiased representation of Levov, and engages Foucault's sense of the author as integral to a text's mode of existence. As a reflection of *Everyman*



**Derek Parker Royal and Bernard Rogers from the ALA Roundtable on**

the link between text and author, Roth utilizes a fictionalized alter ego, Zuckerman, who colonizes the real personages from his life, projects his internal struggles onto them, and effaces their identity. This serves to reflect Roth's outlook on the artistic struggle to create depth of character when presented with only surfaces, and how the process necessarily becomes self-reflective. I argue that Zuckerman's failure to match cause and effect regarding the Levov family history reveals the complex relationship between an artist and his work.

**Panel:** "Insiders and Outsiders: Literary Depictions of Contemporary Jewish Identity"

**Paper:** "Roth's Impotence: The Futility of Liberation in *Portnoy's Complaint*" – Dan Colson, Missouri State University

**Abstract:** To many, *Portnoy's Complaint* is a story of exile, of Oedipal longings, or even of depravity, but Roth has characterized himself as a liberator who encourages freedom through his fiction. Thus, much scholarship has focused on the nature of Portnoy's liberation – from his domineering mother, his religious upbringing, and his own sexual cravings – a liberation through psychoanalysis that seeks to curb presumably "unnatural" desires. I will argue that Portnoy was not deprived, but rather that his sexual adventures brought him very close to a form of liberation he never recognized.

This paper will examine Portnoy's misconception of freedom, the various levels of liberation he seeks, and, on a larger scale, culture's efforts for revolution and liberation through sex and sexuality. Toward these ends, I will call upon the works of Michel Foucault to identify the multiple "local centers of power" which Portnoy was both rebelling against and subjecting himself to. I will reveal the underlying, Foucauldian power strategies that restrained Portnoy and led him to see salvation in sex and to show that liberation – the freedom Roth hoped for Portnoy and others – was within reach, through an embrace, an enjoyment, of his "depravity." Ultimately, I will suggest Portnoy's relevance as a symbol for understanding the dynamic culture of the 1960s. He is both a product of and reflection of society's failure to embrace pleasure instead of mere sex. Roth's novel vividly demonstrates the effects of a culture that made sex a metaphor for sweeping social change rather than centering on bodies and pleasure, which are, in Foucault's words, "the rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality."

American Literature Association Conference – San Francisco, May 24-28, 2006

**Panel: Philip Roth's *Everyman*: A Roundtable Discussion**

**Chair:** \*Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr., Simon's Rock College of Bard

**Participants:** \*Debra Shostak, The College of Wooster; \*David Brauner, University of Reading, UK; \*Mark Shechner, State University of New York, Buffalo; \*Derek Parker Royal, Texas A&M University-Commerce

In keeping with what we hope has become a tradition at the American Literature Association, the Philip Roth Society sponsored a roundtable discussion that generated free-flowing and open discussion and debate among the panelists and with the audience. The subject of this year's conversation was participants' initial reaction to Roth's newest novel, *Everyman*.

**Panel: Teaching Philip**

**Chair:** \* Elaine B. Safer, University of Delaware

**Paper 1:** “Shock Value: Teaching Sex and Dirt in Roth,” \* Andrew Gordon, University of Florida

Roth’s fiction is often deliberately provocative and may offend some students. Professors may be reluctant to deal with such transgressive material in the classroom out of uncertainty or fear of alienating students. One way to approach such taboo-breaking, shocking, and sometimes hilarious material is to emphasize that Roth is not advocating libertinism but is a highly moral, critical, and self-critical writer. Roth recognizes the ineradicable “human stain,” the bodily imperfections which are part of the human condition. Repeatedly in his fiction, as in *Portnoy’s Complaint*, *Paternity*, *The Human Stain*, *American Pastoral*, *Sabbath’s Theater*, and other works, he denounces the Puritanism and hypocrisy which would deny the full range of the human.

**Paper 2:** “Teaching Roth to Christians,” \* Timothy Parrish, Texas Christian University

After years of teaching Roth to students who are predominantly white Protestant Christians, I have found that their religious-cultural background makes Roth a difficult and even threatening author for them to read. In an exchange with Roth about her reading of *The Counterlife*, Mary McCarthy admits that she finds offensive Roth’s portrayal of Christians and their Christian holidays. She admits this is surprising given that she does not consider herself especially religious. My students likewise are often uncomfortable with Roth’s accounts of how Jews perceive and experience Christian America. Like McCarthy, they suspect that Roth is laughing at them and is being impious toward a belief system they hold dear. Roth, more than any of the African American writers they read, makes them feel that they are “Other.” On the other hand, Roth allows the braver among them to identify and confront cultural biases they did not know that they had. Teaching Roth to Christians is not quite like being thrown to the lions, but it is a reminder of how the best literature challenges and transforms what readers most want to believe about themselves.

**Paper 3:** “Zuckerman Unread: Teaching *The Ghost Writer*,” \*Cameron Golden, University of North Carolina, Greensboro

**Abstract:** This paper will examine the challenges I faced teaching Philip Roth’s *The Ghost Writer* in an introductory literature class at University of North Carolina, Greensboro this spring. The focus of the course was “Writing about Writing,” and Roth’s portrait of the young Nathan Zuckerman’s overnight visit with his idol E.I. Lonoff was a perfect match for the class (which also included narratives by Don DeLillo, Francine Prose, and Charles Baxter among others). But, despite my use of Louise Rosenblatt’s methods to encourage students to respond emotionally and intellectually to the text, I faced difficulty in bridging the gap between Zuckerman and Roth’s ideas of the importance of writing and the imagination and the students’ desire for a less complex narrative. Careful time was spent in class discussing postmodernism, theories of writing, clichés of the writer’s life and creative imperative, yet *The Ghost Writer* remained out of reach of most students.

This paper will outline the pedagogical approaches I undertook to make Roth’s work more meaningful and resonant and the elements of Roth’s work that remained elusive and frustrating for the students. While I had assumed that Nathan’s youth, conflicts with his family, and desire to impress his mentor would appeal to a general college population, my students were confounded by Zuckerman’s struggle with his father, found his reverie of Amy/Anne confusing, and were alienated by Roth’s foregrounding of the Jewish experience. *The Ghost Writer* demanded a certain kind of reading that my students were initially unwilling to perform, and I will discuss the elements of Roth’s work and Zuckerman’s experience that the students resisted, why they had difficulties, and the pedagogical strategies (from Janet Emig’s thoughts on the connections between learning and writing – Zuckerman’s writing about Amy/Anne clarifies his own conflicts – to Karen LeFevre’s ideas on rhetorical invention) I used to combat their frustrations. And finally, I will argue for continuing to use *The Ghost Writer* in future 100-level classes, in spite of my experience with these resisting readers.

# Become a Member of the Philip Roth Society



To become a member of the Philip Roth Society, print out this form and mail it to the address at the bottom of the page. You can find a copy of this form on our society website under "Membership" at [www.rothsociety.org](http://www.rothsociety.org) as well as directions for joining the Society over the Internet.

Annual membership fees are \$15 for individuals and \$30 for institutions (add \$5 for overseas addresses), which includes a subscription to *The Philip Roth Society Newsletter* as well as a 20 percent discount on subscription to *Philip Roth Studies*, published by Heldref Publications.

If you would like to be listed in the Directory of Members, please indicate so by checking the appropriate space(s) on the form.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Institutional Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Is this your work or home address? \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Web page: \_\_\_\_\_

I give permission for the following information to be listed in the Directory of Members at the Philip Roth Society's web site. (Please check all that apply):

Name  Institutional Affiliation  Email  Address  
 Phone  Web Page Address

Full Name Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

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# Making it into America's Library:

## A Conversation with Max Rudin, Publisher of Library of America

*The following is a transcript of a conversation between Max Rudin, publisher of the Library of America, and Joe Kraus, editor of The Philip Roth Society Newsletter. The Library of America has recently published two volumes of Roth's novels.*

Joe Kraus: Just to begin, what drew you and the selection committee to Roth as someone worthy of being included in your list in the first place?

Max Rudin: Roth has always been on the list of writers we would eventually get to, when we began to broach the post-WWII period. I mean we have a short list of writers we want to look at, develop editorial plans for. Roth is a natural and obvious person to be on that list. The reasons why we got to him sooner rather than later are in some ways more accidental, which is to say that – I don't know how interesting this is going to be for your audience – we had just successfully published Saul Bellow, and we happened to be talking to the Andrew Wylie Agency, which is Saul Bellow's literary agency and also Philip Roth's. We were just brainstorming about which projects we might think about doing in the future and several ideas came up. Cheever was mentioned, as was William Maxwell, and Norman Mailer – all projects we hope to get to some day. When Roth's name came up we both seized on it as a natural next step for a lot of reasons. One, because we admire his work, because we feel he is one of the towering figures of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and now into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And you and I can talk more about that.

But there were other reasons as well why we chose to do it now. We knew that Ross Miller, whom we had long felt would be the ideal editor for our project, was about to be named as the authorized biographer, and that would mean full access to Roth's papers, to Roth himself. And we knew from conversations with Professor Miller that the way that he intended to work on the biography was to read chronologically through Philip Roth's works with Philip as a kind of reading group of two. They would start from the beginning, they would read through and discuss them, and Ross would prompt Philip to talk about the creative background and the historical background of the work, taking notes all along for his biography. This is an ideal situation for us because we needed to have authoritative texts established, and we felt that we could – Ross could – kill two birds with one stone, so to speak. Which is to say, as he was reading through the work with Philip for his biography he could be establishing the authoritative Library of America text as well. So that was an ideal situation. Also, he would have access to all the biographical material that he would need to write the chronology of Roth's life for our edition. So the timing was right from that point of view.

It seemed right from other points of view as well. *The American Trilogy*, which had recently been published, had redefined Roth's literary aspirations and raised his stature in the minds of some readers and critics, and so it seemed to be good timing from that point of view as well: from the current vantage point to allow readers and critics to look back at the early work, at the whole career – to see where Philip Roth came from and how he got to where he is.

So those were some of the reasons behind it. But it was not a controversial choice, from our point of view, to publish Roth in the series. Very few of our decisions are. Library of America has two

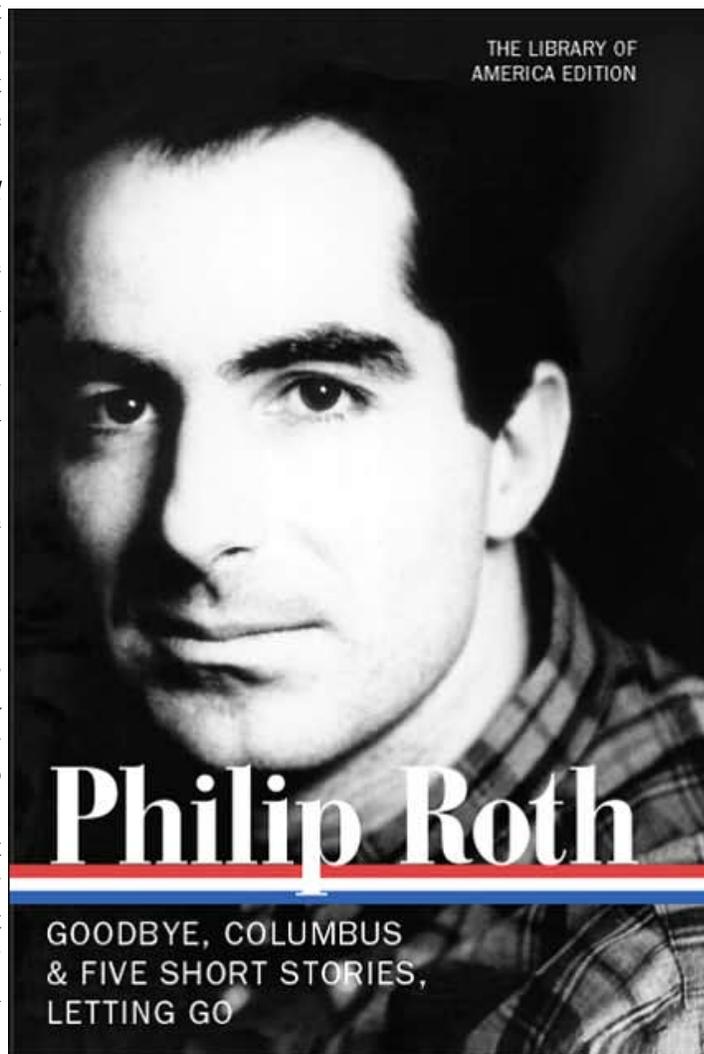
imperatives. One is to build a permanent national library of the best, most significant American writing. The other is probably an imperative of any cultural institution – or any institution that depends on the marketplace for some or all of its revenue– to never be boring or predictable while we’re doing it. So from both points of view Roth seemed like a good choice, a natural editorial choice and an interesting publishing choice.

JK: Obviously Roth’s literary reputation plays a big part in making him a desirable person to publish. He’s also got a famous history of being notorious, of having been criticized. Is that a part of the draw at all, the idea that here’s a person who, even in his later years, is often a lightning rod for various and diverse readings?

MR: Well I think it’s an interesting thing about him. And I think it’s interesting to think about the ways in which his books remain scandalous or outrageous. *Everyman*, in its own way, is an outrageous book. But no, I don’t think that you can say that it played a role in our decision. We’re interested in literary excellence. It’s an old fashioned idea, I know, but it really is Roth’s literary stature and his literary virtuosity that are the reasons he’s in the series, and his importance on the American literary landscape, the way in which he seems more and more to be the crucial figure to have emerged from the cultural firmament of the 60’s, to have found his voice, to have worked his way into his natural voice in that period...

The remarkable polish of his literary debut is the first amazing thing. The second is the astonishing literary ventriloquism, that it could be the same writer who wrote the first four books, who could write the Dreiserian naturalism of *When She Was Good* and the outrageous, hyperreal farce of *Portnoy* – is amazing. The way in which he seems to have written his way into his own kind of literary freedom, his creative freedom in *Portnoy*. He talks about the verbal flood gates having opened when he found the form and subject matter of *Portnoy*. (The fact that he found this freedom in this highly artificial form of comic monologue is itself interesting.)

But then beyond that, the way he has sustained a career: how many literary careers are there like that? Very few, in America anyway. I mean, the way he has periodically found ways to reinvent himself, to find new imaginative directions forward. It’s hard to think of whom to compare that to. I think of Henry James, maybe partly because James and Roth will have the most volumes in the series. Roth will probably not match James’ fourteen volumes and counting, but it’s comparable. The phases



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of Roth's career are interesting. The way he's not only found literary and imaginative ways forward through experimentation but always – how to put this? Even though he's continually experimenting and pushing the form and finding new ways to recast it, he's always also brought his audience firmly along with him--whatever you want to call it, the literate middle class audience, the mainstream audience I guess you'd say. I think that's an astonishing thing.

JK: In speaking of future volumes do you have in mind already the principles within which you'll group those later books?

MR: Well we have a tentative plan. The next volume, volume three, which we are planning to publish this fall, will include *The Great American Novel*, *My Life As A Man*, and *The Professor of Desire*. That will allow volume four to be the Zuckerman books together, *The Ghost Writer*, *Zuckerman Unbound*, the *Anatomy Lesson*, and *The Prague Orgy* in one volume. After that, this is tentative, probably volume five will be *The Counter Life*, *The Facts*, *Deception*, and *Patrimony*. Six would be *Operation Shylock* and *Sabbath's Theater*, which would allow seven to be the American trilogy: *American Pastoral*, *I Married a Communist*, and *The Human Stain*. And then, obviously, we don't know what happens. Volume eight, very tentatively right now is *The Dying Animal*, *The Plot Against America*, and *Everyman*. So we'll see what happens. We've promised Philip that we'd try to have the edition out completely by 2013 on his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. But I guess we'll have to see what happens.

JK: Do you plan on including a volume that might have some of his short stories outside of *Goodbye, Columbus* and maybe some of the nonfiction writing?

MR: Probably not the uncollected short stories since he doesn't seem to be interested in collecting them. It's like Henry James' New York edition. The writer gets the chance, if he's still around for his collected edition, gets the chance to omit things from his canon if he wants to, and I don't think Philip wants those stories collected. That's my understanding. Nonfiction volumes certainly. We haven't discussed it yet, but *Reading Myself and Others* and other reviews, essays is a natural idea. But the fiction has priority.

JK: This question may be a question for Ross Miller, but are you having any difficulty establishing authoritative texts in these? Is there textual history that you're having to work through to sort out the exact, definitive version that you want to bring together?

MR: Whenever we publish a book at Library of America we go through the same process: we collate texts to determine where authorial revisions were made or typographical errors were corrected. So Ross, with Philip, is doing that. Often we're in the position of having to try to surmise the authorial intention from the publishing/printing record. Here it's much easier: if there are a couple words changed in the trade paperback edition that came out after the first edition, Ross can say, "Philip did you make this change or is this an error?" And Philip can say, "Yes, I made that revision for the paperback." So they are identifying a few things. It's not a very messy [textual] situation because Philip, from more or less the beginning, didn't have to wrestle with publishers making changes he didn't want. Which is to say that in almost every case the first book edition will be the copy text. But there have been some occasional subsequent revisions, that is to say errors corrected.

JK: Can you tell me, what's your relationship now with Random House. How does that work since you're bringing out books, in the case of something like *Everyman*, not that many years behind

them?

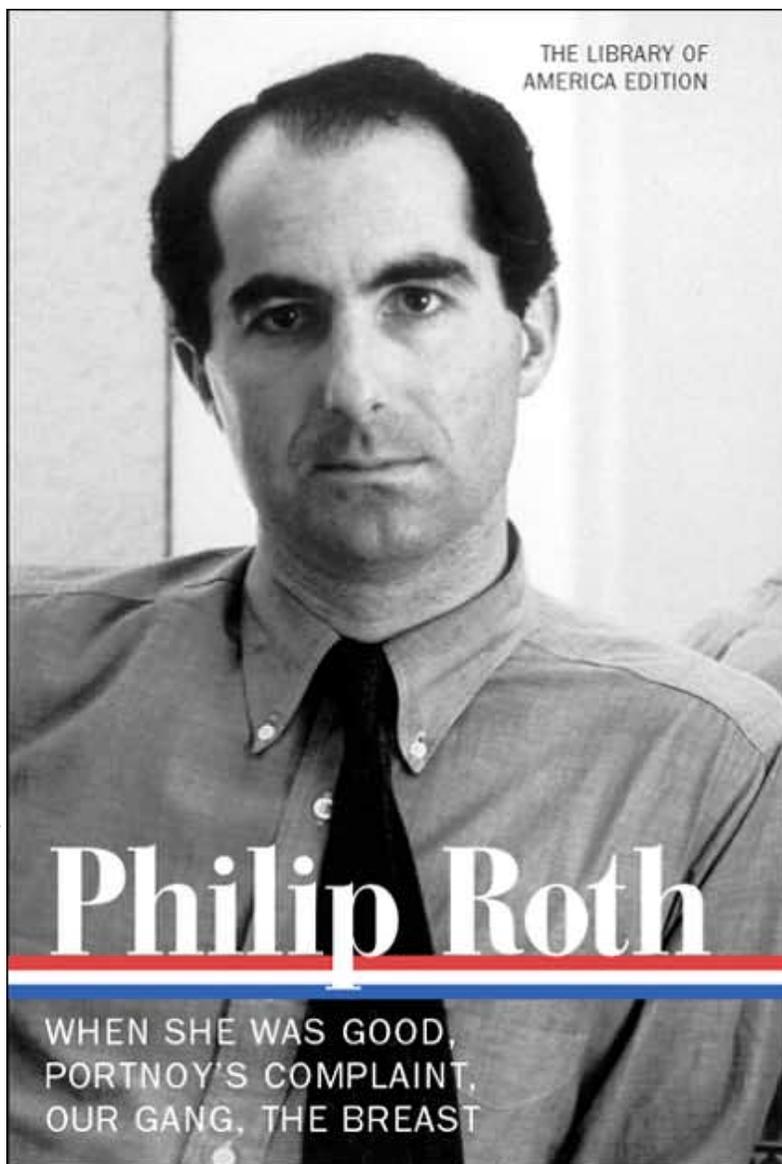
MR: Philip Roth has published with many different publishers. He's published with Houghton Mifflin, with Random House, with Simon and Schuster, with Farrar, Straus, and our relationship with all of them is the same. We go to each of them, we tell them what we have in mind and we strike a standard publishing arrangement. We pay them a certain advance against future royalties. I would say that it's almost always the case after the book is first published that, generally speaking, the originating publishers draw their revenue from paperback trade and text sales. Our omnibus hardcover at \$35 or \$40 is really for quite a different audience and is not directly competitive with their editions, and they understand that. In fact often quite the reverse: publication of The Library of America edition, the attention it receives, stimulates sales in all formats.

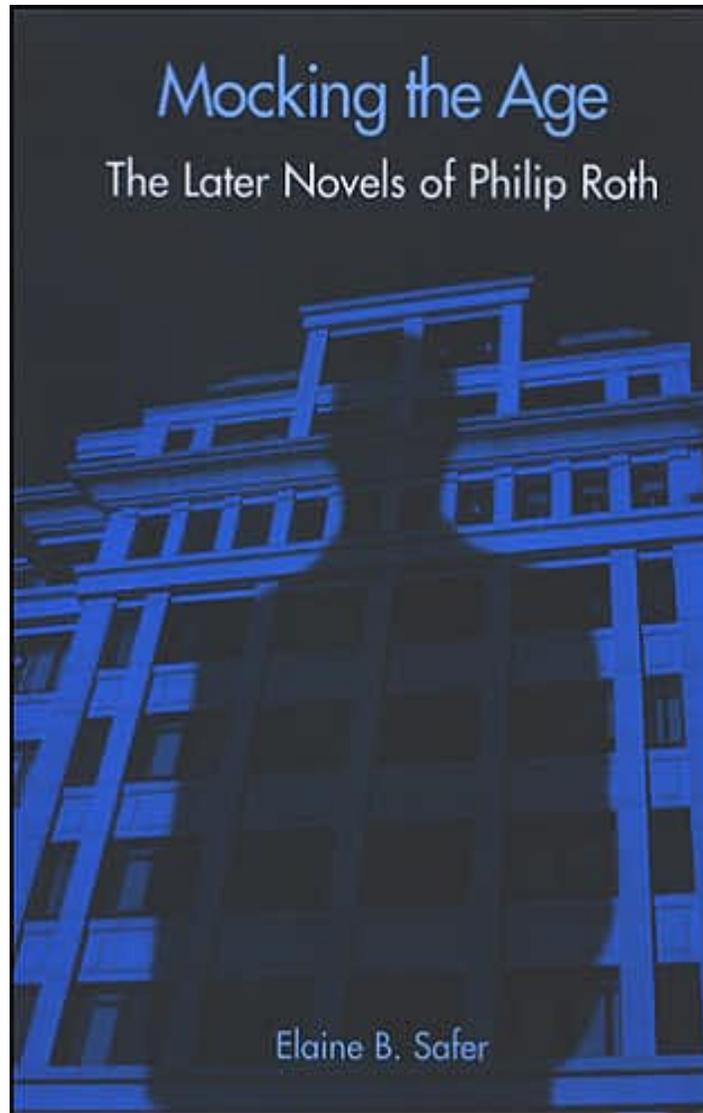
JK: And a final question, how has the experience doing the Roth been different from doing the Bellow?

MR: Eudora Welty was the first writer we published while she was still alive. Both Welty and Bellow have since died. Well, the difference is that Roth is active and Eudora Welty was in decline by the time we were working on our two-volume Welty edition. Saul Bellow was on his deathbed and we were not able to work directly with him. The relationship with Philip is quite different. He is very energetic, very active, so it really is working with an author, and it's been fantastic. It's like being able to talk to Henry James about *The Portrait of a Lady*. Something that at Library of America we don't ever get the chance to do, or rarely get the chance to do.

To speak personally for a moment, I love Roth's work, I always have. It is a thrill for me personally to be involved in this project and to be able to talk to him on the phone after I see the galley of *Everyman* or the manuscript of *Plot* and to talk about the creative process, ask questions about it. And then to reflect on how each of these newer works picks up strands from the earlier works has just made it a fascinating project for me. It's daunting, too, to have an author involved. All those processes that usually go on here among ourselves are more collaborative because the author is around, and I think that's to the benefit of the book ultimately. It keeps us on our toes, I'll say that.

*The Philip Roth Society gratefully acknowledges Lynn Springer of the University of Scranton for her work in transcribing this interview.*





*New from SUNY Press, 2006:*

***Mocking the Age: The Later Novels of Philip Roth (2006) - Elaine B. Safer***

Table of Contents:

1. Introduction: "Sheer Playfulness and Deadly Seriousness"
2. From *The Ghost Writer* to *The Counterlife*: Comic Incongruity and the Road to Postmodernism
3. *Operation Shylock*: The Double, the Comic, and the Quest for Identity
4. *Sabbath's Theater*: Sabbath's Fear of Death--Raunchy? Picaresque? Heroic?
5. *American Pastoral*: The Tragicomic Fall of Newark and the House of Levov
6. *I Married a Communist*: "A Grave Misfortune Replete with Farce"
7. *The Human Stain*: Comic Irony and the Lives of Coleman Silk
8. *The Dying Animal*: "Pleasure Is Our Subject"
9. *The Plot Against America*: Paranoia or Possibility
10. Conclusion: "The Farcical Edge of Suffering"

## Philip Roth Society Annual General Meeting Minutes

### Held in Conjunction with the American Literature Association Meeting, 5/27/06

**Present:** Derek Parker Royal (Society President), Ben Siegel, Joel Salzberg, Bernard F. Rogers, Debra Shostak, Elaine B. Safer, David Brauner.

**Apologies from:** Jessica Rabin (Society Secretary/Treasurer), Joe Kraus (Society Newsletter Editor)

#### Report of the Elections Coordinator

David Brauner, who coordinated the recent elections of the society, reported the results of the April elections. Jessica Rabin, Joe Kraus, and Derek Parker Royal were all re-nominated for the positions that they had previously held, all ran unopposed, and all were reelected.

#### Report of the Newsletter Editor

With the anticipated publication of our spring issue soon after ALA is over — cross your fingers that my wife waits long enough to go into labor so that I have time to get it out — we will have published two issues this year. I anticipate an issue slightly shorter than the last two.

I plan on an issue for the fall built largely around reviews of *Everyman*. I welcome any ideas for additional material in that issue and in an as-yet-unimagined spring 2007 issue.

It has worked very well to accept Harvard Law Professor Bruce Hay's offer to distribute the newsletter through his office. I look forward to continuing that arrangement with him.

One change to report is that our managing editor has passed the torch along to me. Amanda did a great job of creating the look of the publication, and I will do everything I can to maintain that. At a technical level -- because I am several such levels below Amanda -- we have switched from Quark to Microsoft Publisher. I make that switch on the basis of my own familiarity with the software; I don't believe it will affect the overall look of the product.

We have also just entered into an agreement to have EBSCO/Host make material from the newsletter available to its subscribers.

If I were on hand to bother all of you, I would raise one question: do we want to make back issues of the newsletter available on our web site? I have had a couple of requests to that end, but some have mentioned to me that doing so would diminish the value of society membership by making one of its perks available without charge. I welcome any ideas from you.

— **Joe Kraus**

The meeting accepted this report with thanks and welcomed the idea of making back issues of the newsletter available on the website but suggested that issues might be made available in this way only after a certain time period had elapsed, so as to address the concern raised above about diminishing the value of Society membership.

There was also a discussion about sending out copies of the newsletter to Society members in electronic form. The members present decided that it might be a good idea to make past copies of the newsletter available on the Roth Society website, but only past issues that have been out at least a year.

#### Secretary/Treasurer's Report, May 2006

##### Philip Roth Society: Membership Statistics and Financial Report, June 2005-May 2006

Total members 2006 (November 2005-May 2006): 50

Total members 2005: 71

Total members 2004: 81

Total members 2002-2003: 42

Number of past members who renewed in 2006: 28

New members in 2006: 23

2006 members with US addresses: 37

2006 members with international addresses: 14

Argentina: 1

Austria: 1

Belgium: 1

Brazil: 1

Canada: 1

Germany: 2

India: 1

Ireland: 1

Italy: 1

Norway: 2

United Kingdom: 2

Current balance: \$2199.99

Debts: start-up costs incurred by Derek Royal (\$231.43); to be reimbursed as a perpetual membership

Tasks accomplished:

- maintained and updated membership spreadsheets
- transmitted Directory of Members information to our webmaster (Derek Royal) and our Newsletter editor (Joe Kraus)
- deposited dues into our Amegy Bank account (formerly Klein bank)
- renewed CELJ membership
- sent out welcome emails to new members and confirmations of renewals to returning members
- solicited renewals
- generated Calls for Papers for conferences and reviewed submissions
- published *Philip Roth Studies* with Hel-dref Publications

Suggestions for the next year:

- modify membership form (and Paypal form) to allow new members to indicate where they found out about PRS and use this information to target our recruitment efforts

- make Newsletters available in PDF form for members who join after one of the year's newsletters has already been sent out
- coordinate Newsletter publications with solicitations for renewals (November)
- consider allowing members to choose whether to receive their newsletter by US Mail or PDF
- keep Paypal, as a number of our members have taken advantage of it
- try to increase percentage of members who renew
- consider offering a 2-year membership for people who are committed to PRS but find it bothersome to renew each year
- actively solicit memberships from academic libraries
- promote *Philip Roth Studies* amongst PRS members
- promote PRS in *Philip Roth Studies*

— **Jessica Rabin, Secretary/Treasurer**

The meeting accepted these reports with thanks and endorsed all the suggestions for maintaining and increasing Society membership.

### **President's Report**

The President was able to report that it had been another successful year for the Society, with several important developments that ought to help raise the Society's profile, notably the EPSCO contract for distributing the newsletter and the accompanying indexing of the Society on Thompson Scientific.

200 bookmarks promoting the Society were being distributed at this year's ALA conference in San Francisco and such material, as well as flyers and copies of the PRS journal, had also been circulated at a number of other major conferences over the course of the year.

The President drew the attention of the meeting to several forthcoming conferences at which the Society was going to present panels: the ALA Symposium in American Fiction (Sept. 28-Oct. 1 2006, San

Diego) the Twentieth-Century Literature Conference (February 2007, Louisville), the Jewish-American Literature Conference (March, 2007, Boca Raton) and next year's ALA Conference (Boston, May 2007).

### Report of Executive Editor of *Philip Roth Studies*

It was reported that, after some discussion with Hel-dref, it has been agreed that the journal will become a quarterly. Although the Executive Editor had some initial reservations, the publishers argued that this move was likely to increase library subscriptions (currently there are only 8 institutional subs for the journal) and the Editor reported that this new format for the journal would allow him more flexibility, notably the possibility of devoting more space to book reviews, special features and advertisements. As part of the deal, the Editor had ensured that Society members would receive at least a 30% discount on their journal

subs. The editor reported that calls were going out for contributions to a special issue of the journal, devoted to Roth and Bernard Malamud, to be guest-edited by Victoria Aarons. It is envisaged that the journal becoming a quarterly will also facilitate further special issues of this kind.

— **Derek Parker Royal**

The meeting accepted these reports with thanks. The meeting agreed to retain the format of one traditional panel and one roundtable at next year's ALA and there were a number of proposals for possible topics, including Roth as a comic writer and Roth's America. The meeting concluded with discussion about how best to increase the number of library subscriptions to *Philip Roth Studies*.

### Special Issue of *Philip Roth Studies*:

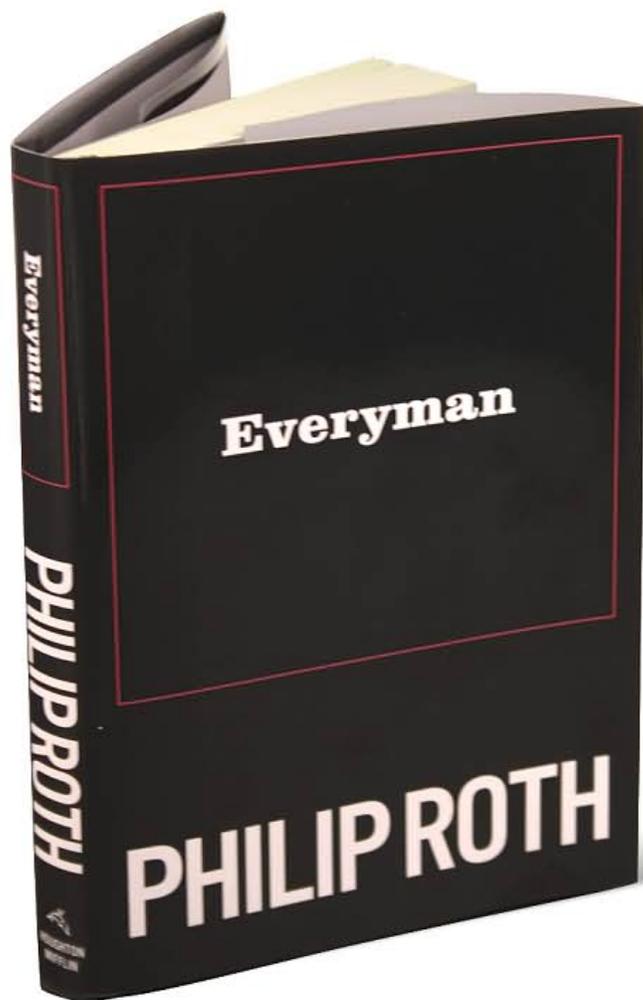
## Philip Roth and Bernard Malamud

*Philip Roth Studies* invites submissions for a special issue of the journal devoted to Philip Roth and Bernard Malamud. We are interested in a variety of literary, theoretical, and cultural approaches that reflect the relationship (textual and otherwise) between these two authors. Both articles and short notes are welcome.

Articles should be between 4,000-6,000 words, and notes should not exceed 2,500 words. Manuscripts must be prepared according to the *MLA Style Manual*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (1998), by Joseph Gibaldi, including parenthetical citations in text and endnotes rather than footnotes. Works may be submitted either by ground mail or e-mail (as attached Microsoft Word files). All inquiries and manuscripts should be submitted to:

Victoria Aarons  
Department of English  
Trinity University  
1 Trinity Place  
San Antonio, TX 78212  
vaarons@trinity.edu

Submission deadline is April 15, 2007.



## Bibliographic Update

For a complete listing of bibliographical resources in English, go to the Roth Society Web site at <http://rothsociety.org>. Individual book chapters are cross-listed with their sources. An asterisk \* indicates that the scholar is a member of the Philip Roth Society

### Bibliographies

- \* Royal, Derek Parker. "Annual Bibliography: Philip Roth Criticism and Resources - 2004." *Philip Roth Studies* 1.2 (2005): 185-89.

### Books

- \* Safer, Elaine B. *Mocking the Age: The Later Novels of Philip Roth*. Albany: State U of New York P, 2006.

### Chapters from Books

- Boyers, Robert. "The Indigenous Beserk: Philip Roth." *The Dictator's Dictation: The Politics of Novels and Novelists*. New York: Columbia UP, 2005. 9-19.
- Krupnick, Mark. "'A Shit-Filled Life': Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theater*." *Jewish Writing and the Deep Places of the Imagination*. Ed. Jean K. Carney and Mark Shechner. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2005. 15-39.
- . "'We Are Here to Be Humiliated': Philip Roth's Recent Fiction." *Jewish Writing and the Deep Places of the Imagination*. Ed. Jean K. Carney and Mark Shechner. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2005. 40-50.
- \* Shechner, Mark. Afterword. *Jewish Writing and the Deep Places of the Imagination*. By Mark Krupnick. Ed. Jean K. Carney and Mark Shechner. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2005. 287-35.
- Wirth-Nesher, Hana. "Accent Marks: Writing and Pronouncing Jewish America." *Call It English: The Languages of Jewish American Literature*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006. 1-31.
- . "Sounding Letters." *Call It English: The Languages of Jewish American Literature*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006. 149-76.

### Journal Articles

- \* Cherolis, Stephanie. "Philip Roth's Pornographic Elegy: *The Dying Animal* as a Contemporary Meditation on Loss." *Philip Roth Studies* 2.1 (2006): 13-25.
- Chodat, Robert. "Fictions Public and Private: On Philip Roth." *Contemporary Literature* 46 (2005): 688-719.
- \* Kral, Françoise. "F(r)ictions of Identity in The Human Stain." *Philip Roth Studies* 2.1 (2006): 47-55.
- Michaels, Walter Benn. "Plots Against America: Neoliberalism and Antiracism." *American Literary History* 18 (2006): 288-302.
- Rankine, Patrice D. "Passing as Tragedy: Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*, the Oedipus Myth, and the Self-Made Man." *Critique* 47 (2005): 101-12.
- \*Royal, Derek Parker. "The Blood before the Stain: An Interview with Joel Rapp." *Philip Roth Studies* 2.1 (2006): 3-11.
- . "Plotting the Frames of Subjectivity: Identity, Death, and Narrative in Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*." *Contemporary Literature* 47 (2006): 114-40.
- \* Schiff, Sarah Eden. "Family Systems Theory as Literary Analysis: The Case of Philip Roth." *Philip Roth Studies* 2.1 (2006): 25-46.

### Review Essays

- Kauvar, Elaine M. "Philip Roth: A Heart with Dichotomies." *Contemporary Literature* 46 (2005): 720-35.
- Lennon, Patrick. "And Roth begat Portnoy, and Portnoy begat Roth." *BELL: Belgian Journal of English Languages and Literature New Series* 3 (2005): 197-204.

*It's Easy:*

## Subscribe to *Philip Roth Studies*

Remember that membership in the Philip Roth Society is separate from subscribing to our journal, *Philip Roth Studies*. Even if you are a member, you will need to make a separate order through Heldref Publications, the publisher of the journal, in order to begin your subscription.

The good news is that they can offer you a 20 percent discount on the subscription price if you are a society member.

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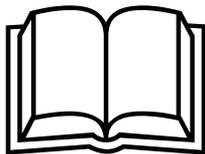
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However you place your order, be certain to indicate that you are a society member.

The full price for subscriptions is \$38 a year; with your society discount it is \$30.40.

In addition to a personal subscription, please consider requesting that your library subscribe to the journal as well. Any subscription is, of course, helpful for the life of the journal, but institutional subscriptions carry particular weight. They represent support for the work for the work of the society, and they make our work accessible to larger numbers of people.




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## President's Message: An Update on the Society

*(Continued from page 1)*

site (<http://rothsociety.org>) and follow the "Forum" link. To subscribe to the new society listserv group, go to <http://mailman.tamu-commerce.edu/mailman/listinfo/prs-l>.

A number of our society members have been active since the last newsletter. You can see the various publications and conference presentations by members in the appropriate sections of this newsletter (members are indicated by asterisk). Of particular note is Elaine B. Safer's new book, *Mocking the Age: The Later Novels of Philip Roth*, published in March from the State University of New York Press. Also, Victoria Aarons has announced that she will be guest editing an upcoming special issue of *Philip Roth Studies* devoted to Roth and Bernard Malamud. (You can see the specifics in her call for papers in this issue of the newsletter.) The journal's first special issue, one devoted to

Roth and race, will be coming out this Fall and is guest edited by Dean Franco. Please make sure that your subscription to the journal is up-to-date.

Other important calls and announcements are listed in this issue of the newsletter, so be sure to check them out. And let me add one more note: please make sure that your institutional library subscribes to *Philip Roth Studies*. The journal has a solid individual subscription base, but we need more libraries to subscribe. I know how tight things are right now with library budgets, and how many libraries are already cutting the journal subscriptions that they already have. But I would nonetheless appreciate all of your efforts in helping to build our institutional distribution, one library at a time.

That said, everything is going well with the Roth Society. I look forward to reporting the same in another six months.



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# The Philip Roth Society Newsletter

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## **In this issue:**

- Conversation with Max Rudin:** The editor of the Library of America talks about Roth
- Abstracts** from recent conference presentations
- Bibliographic** update of recent Roth publications

Philip Roth Society  
Joe Kraus, Newsletter Editor  
Department of English  
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