



The Philip Roth Society Newsletter

Vol. 9 No.1

Fall 2011

Message from the Society's President Aimee Pozorski

On Birthdays and Biographies

Dear All,

Happy New Year! I am well aware of this small irony as we head into 2012: wishing you a happy new year in a newsletter that will ultimately be catalogued as our Fall 2011 edition. Perhaps you will allow me to appeal to poetry and history, then, and simply say that, as I write, I am happy both to look back, to 2011 and forward, to 2012 – to congratulate all of you for your tremendous work of the past and wish you all the best with your work yet to come.

As you will see in these pages, the Society has been busy on the conference circuit, both within the U.S (having a strong presence at the Jewish American and Holocaust Literature symposium in Miami and preparing for our annual events at the ALA in San Francisco this spring) and internationally (with the colloquium on *American Pastoral* in France last November and the program on Roth and Venice this coming February).

Further, many of you may have heard of the Roth@80 conference the Society is planning for 2013, in honor of Roth's 80th birthday. Mark your calendars! We will hold a two-day event in Newark on March 18-19 and would love

for you to attend. As soon as we have secured lodging, David Brauner, our program chair, will circulate a call for papers.

Finally, many of you may have seen advertising for a new Roth memoir, *Notes for my Biographer*, expected in May 2012. When we originally posted the story on our blog, we were asked to take it down, with the explanation that the book does not exist. And yet, internet searches still show traces of the book's existence, so we feel as though we are caught in a post-modern shadow game that one would find only in Roth's fiction. Derek Royal, in these pages, reports on this perplexing situation.

Happy new year, everyone! And let us know of your news. You may have noticed that this is the second newsletter to arrive in your inboxes rather than your mailboxes. We piloted the program last time and, based on its widespread success, have decided to go paperless. We will, however, run a limited number of hard copies, so if you would like one, do not hesitate to contact me, and I can put one in the mail to you soon. In the meantime, I wish you a pleasant and productive new year.

Respectfully submitted, Aimee Pozorski

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://rothsociety.org/>, 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.

ISSN 1543-1347

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. Email submissions in Word attachments appreciated. For submissions or queries, contact Richard Sheehan, *The Philip Roth Society Newsletter*, Email: sheehan@rothsociety.org

Editor

Richard Sheehan

Officers of the Society**Founder**

Derek Parker Royal

PresidentAimee Pozorski
Central Connecticut State University**Program Chair**David Brauner
The University of Reading
Reading, UK**Treasurer**Jessica G. Rabin
Anne Arundel Community CollegePhilip Roth Society web page:
<http://www.rothsociety.org>

News and Announcements

At next year's 23rd annual ALA conference (to be held at the Hyatt Regency in San Francisco, May 24-7), the Philip Roth Society will be sponsoring a panel entitled 'Philip Roth's Influences'. The panel will feature such scholars as: Royden Jay Kadyschuk, Columbia University: "Nathaning Nabokov: Rothian Resonance in *Lolita's* Afterword"; James Duban, The University of North Texas: "'Letting Go': Roth's Nemesis and Melville's White Whale"; Patrick Hayes, St. John's College, Oxford: "Roth and Nietzsche: Life as Literature"; and Nicola von Bodman-Hensler, Kings College London: "The Roots of Bucky Cantor: Philip Roth Revisits Thomas Mann's Myth of Illness." We hope to see you there.

Upcoming Events

**Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture since 1900
University of Louisville, February 23-25, 2012**

**American Literature Association, 23rd Annual Conference
May 24-27, 2012, Hyatt Regency San Francisco
Deadline for Proposals: January 30, 2012**

**Philip Roth between Past and Future: Literature, Ethics and History
Auditorium Santa Margherita
Venice, Italy. Feb 16th-17th 2012**

Thanks to the presence of Roth scholars from Europe, the United States and Israel, the conference aims at exploring Philip Roth's on-going investigation of ethics and history through literature. A session on translation will specifically address the issues at stake in crossing different linguistic (and cultural) borders.

Confirmed participants: Victoria Aarons*, Andrew Gordon, Mark Shechner, Michael Kimmage, Rémi Astruc, Mriam Jaffe Foger, Leona Toker, Till Kinzel, Velichka Ivanova*, Gustavo Sanchez Canales*, Pia Masiero*, Jerzy Jarniewicz, Debra Shostak*, Hana Wirth-Nesher, David Brauner*, Ira Nadel*.

Abstracts from Papers Delivered at Recent Conferences

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

17th Annual American Literature Association's Jewish American & Holocaust Literature Symposium, Nov. 13-16, 2011, The Betsy Hotel, South Beach, Florida

Terror and the Body in Philip Roth's Fiction

Chair: Aimee Pozorski*, Central Connecticut State University

Philip Roth's Patrimony: Ethics and Elegy after the Holocaust

Aimee Pozorski*, Central Connecticut State University.

On the surface, Philip Roth's 1991 memoir appears straightforwardly as concerned specifically with the death of Roth's father in 1989. Entitled *Patrimony*, the text promises a reconsideration of the tangible and intangible gifts inherited from one's father or passed down from one's ancestors after death. About 50 pages from the end of the book, Roth describes the patrimony he is to inherit—a patrimony that is literally shit in his hands.

I propose, however, that Roth is not telling the entire truth about what the shit represents. Counter to previous interpretations offered by such scholars as Gordon, Kahane, Kamentz, Kauvar, Ianoone, and Shechner—and, indeed, against the explanation provided so straightforwardly by Roth—I would like to consider the text not simply as a memoir of taking care of his father, and not simply as a genre-bending autobiographical account of Roth's father's last years, but rather as a philosophical treatise on ethics after the Holocaust. For, Roth's text also shares the philosophical dimensions of his post-Holocaust contemporaries such as Elie Wiesel and Emmanuel Levinas—dimensions that warn against forgetting and insist on an encounter with otherness that acknowledges the radical differences that exist among people.

In other words, Roth's encounter with otherness—indeed, his care for his father during the devastating, emasculating scene in the bathroom—and his insistence that “you must not forget anything” (124, 177, 238) casts the memoir not simply in terms of his personal grief, but also in terms of a cultural grief, an awareness of the importance of honoring the dead. Beginning with the epigraph: “For our family, the living and the dead,” the book reads as much as a refutation of the Nazi project—a project which demands the erasure of history and insists on health and virility at the expense of everything else—as it does a personal encounter with grief following the death of one's father.

Philip Roth and the Holocaust

Jane Statlander*, Miami International University of Art and Design

This paper explores the secular, assimilated writings of Philip Roth that employ Jewish Newark of the thirties, forties, and early fifties as textual trope. The assertion here is that the American Philip Roth—now well established in the canons of American literary history—unlike Singer's or Bellow's deep Old World roots of Judaic tradition—uses the secular Newark Jewish world he was born into—the “thin culture” as Harold Bloom referred to it—as the “scene” of his American stories. He is not hyphenated Jewish and American but the American who uses the Newark Jewish scene of Yiddish, Kashruth, the Sabbath, Torah and the Holocaust as props. In point of fact, Roth's texts exhibit little personal involvement or emotional investment in any of the Jewish Newark scene he never stops writing about. In the same vein, the Holocaust is not the focus of reverence, as it is with Cynthia Ozick, but merely part of the landscape of growing up in a Jewish Newark/America at that time in the history of the world.

Blood, History, and the Distortion of Ritual in *Indignation*
Maggie McKinley*, Marquette University

In this paper, I explore meaning behind the proliferation of blood imagery in Philip Roth's *Indignation*, with a particular focus on its symbolic role in the novel's central themes of morality and historical responsibility. Throughout the narrative, the novel's protagonist, Marcus Messner, is surrounded by blood: it covers the floor of the family butcher shop where he works, it punctuates nearly all of his childhood memories, and it infiltrates his nightmares about being killed in Korea. It is blood that Messner also seeks to escape by traveling from New Jersey to Ohio for college, with the goal of becoming a lawyer—primarily because he believes that the profession “was as far as you could get from spending your working life in a stinking apron covered with blood” (37). Yet even at Winesburg College, blood finds its way into Messner's life: it defines his girlfriend's suicide attempt, it spatters the snow on campus during a winter riot, and in the end, it marks Messner's own bayonet wounds in Korea. What, then, is Roth's goal in punctuating these disparate scenes of Marcus's life with blood? What I hope to argue here is that Roth uses this imagery to identify various manifestations of ritual throughout the novel, and that its repetition across time and place allows him to comment on the ways in which rituals become distorted: by restrictive moral codes, by fear, by a misguided sense of duty, and even by Marcus himself.

Expelled Once Again: The Fantasy of Living the Counterlife in Roth's *Nemesis*
Victoria Aarons*, Trinity University

The four short novels comprising the *Nemesis* tetralogy, *Everyman*, *Indignation*, *The Humbling*, and *Nemesis*, reveal the failure of the “counterlife.” But it is in *Nemesis*, in particular, that Roth shows the desire for autonomous self-fashioning – the fantasy of self-invention – to be a perilous undertaking. The wish to walk out of one's life and inhabit another is, at best, a deluded moment that will, with utter inevitability, have disastrous consequences. It is here that “the terror of the unforeseen” becomes the anxious fulfillment of Roth's protagonist's worst fears about himself.

Philip Roth: Pain and Perversity in the American Berserk

Chair: Holli Levitsky, Loyola Marymount University

Pain Studies in Philip Roth's *The Anatomy Lesson*
Joshua Zajdman, Independent Scholar

The Anatomy Lesson is one of Philip Roth's most complex and densely packed narratives. Deftly juggling a darker, desperation-tinged sense of humor with a crushing sense of grief, Roth is able to sustain a book-length inquiry into the very root of pain and the poisonous growths that bloom from it. In her landmark study of the nature of pain, *The Body In Pain*, Elaine Scarry writes, “Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned.” Well, that is Nathan Zuckerman. Using Scarry's text as a framework for reading *The Anatomy Lesson*, the magnitude of Zuckerman's myriad pains is further amplified. It isn't just excruciating physical pain. It is holocaust instead of Selma, Appel's harangues over Israel, baldness, an inability to write, use of sex to fill the void, and so many other things. Pain is an intrinsic part of Zuckerman throughout the novel, and not something to be separated from him but instead, embraced and understood. He's not the young, eager writer who visited E.I. Lonoff so many years ago. Instead, he is a writer haunted by his success, resentful of its consequences and on the brink of collapse. *The Anatomy Lesson* is a fascinating study of decline, destined for a place alongside *The Magic Mountain* and *The Cancer Ward*.

Colloquium American Pastoral

Centre des Études Judéo-Américaines (CEJA), l'Institut d'Anglais (le Centre Charles V),
Université Paris VII-Denis Diderot, November 18, 2011,

**'What was not supposed to happen had happened and what was supposed to happen had not hapened':
Subverting History in *American Pastoral***
David Brauner*, The University of Reading

American Pastoral is one of Philip Roth's most feted novels. Winner of the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1998, a year after its publication, more recently the novel came fifth in the *New York Times* list of the 'Best American Fiction of the last 25 Years', compiled in 2006 on the basis of responses from 'prominent writers, critics, editors and other literary sages', who were asked to nominate 'the single best work of American fiction published in the last 25 years' (Scott 2006: 1). It is also one of Roth's most controversial books, interpreted by some critics as a repudiation of his earlier work and a damning indictment of the so-called permissive society, but read by others as a restatement of previous convictions and a stout defence of liberal values. One thing that almost all critics have agreed on is that the novel is about the 1960s. In this paper, I will argue that *American Pastoral* is not the conservative and certainly not the neo-conservative novel that some critics have wanted it to be, nor for that matter a defence of liberalism but rather a characteristically ambiguous and complex novel. I will suggest that its historical focus is wider than has generally been recognised (although it can be read as a novel about the sixties, it also deals in some detail with the forties, fifties, seventies and eighties) and that, formally, it is as much the product of the 1970s (when Roth first began writing it) as the 1990s (when he finally published it). Finally, I suggest, the most distinctive and interesting aspect of Roth's treatment of history in *American Pastoral* is the ways in which the novel interrogates the semantic, philosophical and political implications of the term itself. In this sense, *American Pastoral* is as much concerned with historiography as it is with history. As such, it pulls off the rare trick of being at one and the same time a powerfully affecting historical novel, a family drama, a tragedy and a novel of ideas.

La pastorale pasteurisée
Steven Sampson*.

As in the English nursery rhyme "*Mary, Mary, quite contrary,*" *American Pastoral* combines religious and botanical imagery. The (Virgin's) female body serves as a metonymy for the American landscape. Philip Roth thus continues his use of *The New Testament* as hypotext.

American Pastoral picks up where *Sabbath's Theater* left off: with the covering and uncovering of fingers. Whereas Mickey Sabbath's weekly labor consisted of penetrating his virginal girlfriend's finger puppets, Swede Levov, no less a puppeteer, manipulates and cloaks the hands of female clients for whom his enterprise has been named: Newark Maid.

The prettiest Newark Maid of all is Mary Dawn Dwyer, Miss New Jersey 1949, twenty-two years old and as pure as her namesake. But problems arise in "introducing" the Old Testament into the New. For men who follow the former must sacrifice their "glove", losing their right to remain neutral. What worked for Sweden does not for the Swede, who can't avoid the bombs.

The play-within-the-play provides the text's crux. The Father directs the Virgin to bear a child, negotiating with Her, as did Nathan Zuckerman in *The Counterlife*, to obtain his circumcision. But what results from this unholy union is the baptism of its female offspring, performed in secret to avoid the wrath of the local Jewish

(Continued ...)

power, a rite which fails, for blood flowing from Old Testament sources cannot be pasteurized in the baptismal font, returning instead to its incestuous cesspool.

Merry Levov shall not grow up to bear Merry Christmas tidings. At the age of eleven, half of Mother Mary's at her coronation, she briefly induces her father to surrender his neutrality. Years later, she sends an emissary, Rita Cohen, the pearl-Pharisee. On Times Square, time stops momentarily as the High Priestess of Jerusalem unveils her oyster and its pearl, inviting the Swede to enter The Pearly Gates, to gaze directly at the pure Holy of Holies, its naked tulip petals. Should he insert himself *à la* Mickey Sabbath? If the glove fits...

Alas, circumcision defines not only the limits of the pastoral, but of *American Pastoral*. Cutting leather for fabricating gloves is a religious act; the Son, following in the footsteps of the Father, is a cut above the rest.

Irony in *American Pastoral*

Velichka Ivanova*, University Paris 3-Sorbonne Nouvelle

Well aware that since its publication *American Pastoral* (1997) has received a great deal of critical attention, I will concentrate on an aspect that I think hasn't been studied yet—Philip Roth's art of irony. To put into play an ironic perspective on *American Pastoral* may seem unusual. The novel has been read as a tragic narrative recounting the fall of the utopianist Seymour Levov. Certainly, *American Pastoral* can be read as a tragedy, but the fact that all the pastoral projects pursued by the protagonist lead to a completely opposite result reveals the effects of situational irony. Indeed, irony is neither comic nor tragic but is simply a device whereby action leads to the opposite result of intention. Philip Roth's narrative, however, goes beyond the obvious effects of situational irony. Linda Hutcheon's analysis of irony as a discursive practice enables me to focus on verbal and structural ironies rather than situational irony. The scene of irony, Hutcheon argues, is a social scene and irony is a communicative process. I will propose then an interpretation of *American Pastoral* in terms of the reader's encounter with the text. I will focus on three key moments in the narrative: the difference between the voice of the deluded Swede and the voice of the ironic narrator, especially in instances of free indirect discourse where the voice of the narrator is combined with that of the character or superimposed on it; instances where the text seems to narrate itself without narratorial intervention and where the oscillation between voices and perspectives enables irony to happen; and the final paragraph of the novel where the sudden temporal shift, the copula "and," the exclamation "yes," and the deictics, situate the reader in the ever-present instant of experience through reading. The reader is both interpreter of the text and dramatized as a character to whom the novel's final question is addressed. Ultimately, it is in the reading process that the text reveals its ironic connections. Any claim to a definitive answer of the novel's questions should be dismissed in favor of a complex communication of different perspectives: the narrator's, the characters', and the reader's.

What is Wrong with their Life?"

Virginia Ricard, Michel-de-Montaigne-Université de Bordeaux 3

American Pastoral ends with two rhetorical questions that seem to assert that nothing is wrong with Seymour Levov's life. In this paper I examine what the novel has to say about our perilous modern moral condition. The simplicity and ordinariness of Levov's existence serve not—as is so often the case with pastoral—as oblique criticism of the values and hierarchies of the world around him, but rather as an indictment of complexity itself. Initially, the Swede has the makings of a hero, and, though certainly not an heir in the Bourdieusian sense, he has all the patrician attributes of a quietly-spoken scion of an Anglo-American whose family tree can be traced back to the revolution. Yet this is the man whose daughter fails to learn to observe "that most fundamental prohibition" of murder. When her father finds her, Merry has killed four people, been raped repeatedly

and lives in utter sloth and filth. In the final scene of the novel, moreover, Levov and his circle are shown to be adulterers, alcoholics, nihilists, or at the very least, hypocrites and liars. Evil exists, in other words, and even on Arcady Hill it is impossible to keep it outside. But, off the playing field, the Swede is incapable of putting up a fight: he turns out to be unable to stand up to his own daughter; he accedes to her, to his wife—and to the world—and comes to stand for a sort of bland neutrality that his daughter despises. He slips into a life devoid of singularity, attempts in fact to abolish singularity. The origin of the problem, the novel seems to argue, stems from Levov's incapacity to see difference. First he cannot interpret religious signs, which he refers to as meaningless "stuff." And soon he cannot interpret any signs at all. In the end, not only can he not name what he sees, he cannot *see* what he sees. Ultimately, in *American Pastoral*, Roth redefines the terms of the Jewish American dilemma: the Swede does not need to be less Jewish to be more American or less American to be a better Jew: what is wrong with his life is not so much that he is not Jewish enough and loves America too much, but that he does not love America enough to strike out on his own, to forge his own meanings, to articulate an inner self, or even to recognize the existence of an inner self.

Ambiguïté de la tragédie dans *American Pastoral*

Michael Taugis, univ. de Poitiers,

American Pastoral is explicitly presented as a tragedy, "the Swede's tragedy" but the definition of the term "tragedy" appears to be problematic in the context of the novel. On the one hand, the novel seems to conform to the Aristotelian conception of tragedy with its emphasis on causality, intelligibility, human guilt and responsibility. The narrator assumes that Seymour Levov felt guilty and responsible. And, at first, his "realistic chronicle" appears to be an imaginative reconstruction of Seymour's quest for explanations, for the origins and causes of his family's suffering, and in particular of his daughter's stammering and of her subsequent conversions to anti-Vietnam-war terrorism and then to Jainism.

But no explanations, no causes, seem to be conclusive or commensurate with his daughter's difficulties, violence and fanaticism. The search for the whys or wherefores recurrently leads Seymour (and the narrator) into a deadlock. The interpretive effort gives way to a more descriptive approach in the first part or is openly opposed by Seymour at the end of the second part. And the final questions at the end of the novel also undermine the various interpretations presented in the third part. From this anti-interpretive perspective, tragedy is conceived as essentially undeserved, unjustified, and unamenable to any definitive interpretation, in keeping with Clement Rosset's description of the tragic (in *La philosophie tragique*, inspired by Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*).

My paper examines the relevance of these two apparently antagonistic conceptions of tragedy and shows that both are pertinent and useful to explore the ambiguities of tragedy, in particular the tension between the urge to understand and explain, and the counter-urge to reject any explanation, any justification. This analysis serves as a prelude to the examination of another conception of tragedy, Jean Pierre-Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet's interpretation of Greek tragedy (in *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*), in which Greek tragedy is essentially characterized by problems and questions without answers, by tensions and ambiguities. Two of the ambiguities underlined by Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet are particularly interesting and relevant: the ambiguity of causality, and that of fiction. Causality is ambiguous because tragedy not only stresses human responsibility but is also haunted by myth which suggests that men are puppets in the hands of obscure, humanly inexplicable, supernatural forces. Thus destructive fury is not only a human feeling but also a daemonic force which takes the form of a *mania* (madness), *lussa* (rage or belligerent fury) and is ultimately rooted in uncleansed *miasma* (stain). The ambiguity of fiction originates in the blurring of the boundaries between reality and appearances, in the theatrical illusion created by tragedy for the first time in the history of Greek drama, according to Jean-Pierre Vernant.

The Philip Roth Society Turns Ten!

The Philip Roth Society will celebrate an important milestone this year, in 2012. Ten years ago, in the spring of 2002, Derek Parker Royal founded the society after querying various American Literature Association scholars and asking why there wasn't a Roth society already. After organizing quickly, he attended the annual convention of the ALA and passed around a sign-up sheet at as many ALA sessions as he could get to. With that list of contacts and possible members—and not much else to go on, outside of a vague idea on what he wanted to do--the society was officially incorporated that summer, allowing the Society's first sponsorship of panels at the 2002 Jewish American and Holocaust Literature Symposium in Boca Raton. By some happy accident, I was working on trauma and *The Dying Animal* at the time, and Derek generously accepted my proposal for the inaugural event. The first Society *Newsletter* came out in the fall of that year.

At this point, ten years in, we are happy to reflect on this as an important milestone in the Society. As a result, we have been granted permission to add a third panel to our ALA program this year: an anniversary roundtable celebrating and reflecting on our founding. If you would like to participate in this event, please contact Derek Royal or David Brauner by January 25th. Happy Birthday, Roth Society! We look forward to many more years to come.

Notes for My Gullibility

Derek Parker Royal

On December 11th of last year, I posted on the Philip Roth Society website's blog information about a brand new book by the novelist, *Notes for My Biographer*. Looking for upcoming reprints or media adaptations, I had run an advanced search on Amazon.com, searching for any new publications with Roth's name and sorting the information by publication date. To my surprise—"surprise" because there is usually some kind of information released to the media months before a new book by the author, and there hasn't been—I found a listing for this new book, which, according to Amazon.com, was scheduled to be released on 2 May 2012. There was very little additional information on the upcoming release, other than a vague descriptor of "biography" and an ISBN. An advanced Google search revealed basically the same evidence, most of the hits coming from online booksellers, major (e.g., Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble, and Powell's) as well as minor. Since this information was public—not only public, but propagated by major booksellers such as Amazon.com and Barnes & Noble, who wouldn't list anything even bordering on speculation or innuendo (would they?)—I saw no problem whatsoever in posting it to the Roth Society's blog. In order to find out more about this new book, I sent an email to both Roth's agent and the trade publicity department at Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. If anyone could fill me in on more information, it was these sources.

A week later, December 22nd, I get emails from others who had read the blog posting, wondering where I got the information. When I mentioned Amazon.com and Barnes & Noble, they told me that they couldn't find anything. Needless to say, I found this odd, so I went back and searched again on both major online booksellers...and lo and behold, there was nothing on *Notes for My Biographer* (other than some obscure, out-of-print 1926 text by an E. W. Howe that came up on Amazon.com). Still, several other online booksellers, such as Powell's, The Book Depository, and Buy.com, still listed the book in their preorder inventory. In the meantime, I still hadn't heard back from either Roth's agent or his publisher, so I was at a loss as to what to think. Had the major booksellers jumped the gun in listing the book? May 2012 really wasn't that far away, and I had doubted that they would post anything unsubstantiated that close to the actual publication date. In doing another advanced Google search, I found that references to *Notes for My Biographer* were still out there. But they were now mostly found on individual blogs, websites, and Facebook postings...and most of those linked back to the Roth Society's original blog posting of the week before. Not wanting the Society to be the

hub of any potential rumor, but at the same time not wanting to admit any culpability in creating anything out of thin air—remember, this information was out there and widely available from reputable booksellers the week before—I created a follow-up posting for our blog, stating that the book was no longer listed in most major booksellers’ inventory, that no response or explanation was ever forthcoming from either Houghton Mifflin Harcourt or the Wylie Agency, and that perhaps there was some possible error in communication between Roth’s publisher and the online booksellers. (Although the latter struck me as highly unlikely, given the prominence of Roth and the gravitas accompanying each new publication by the novelist.) And just to make light of the situation—for, indeed, it already appeared to be approaching the fringes of absurdity—I speculated on the fact that perhaps mischievous forces were behind the earlier information: Perhaps merchants were jumping the gun on any announcement of any such book by Philip Roth...if indeed any such book is *actually* in the works. One finds it difficult to imagine that such august and responsible booksellers as Barnes & Noble or Amazon.com could have been duped. On the other hand, there has always been a certain amount of playfulness that surrounds Roth's writings. Perhaps this is just an example of that impish doppelgänger, Moishe Pipik, playing with all of us once again. And that, I thought, was that.

Later that day the Roth Society is contacted by a knowledgeable and authoritative source—I won’t mention who—asking that we take down our two blog postings mentioning *Notes for My Biographer*. This source suggested that the information surrounding the upcoming release was unfounded and, as such, shouldn’t be listed on our website. Any further mentioning of the book would be counterproductive. Not wanting to transmit false or misleading information, and not wanting to be accused of furthering literary gossip in any way, the Society officers decided to take down the two blog postings, as per the wish of this authoritative source. Obviously, I had deep reservations about doing so. Weren’t we an independent scholarly and reader-oriented organization? Shouldn’t we let Society members know what information might be available out there? Wasn’t the whole point of the blog to inform, something like a news source, and wasn’t this—the listing of the book on Amazon.com, the fact that it was no longer there, the potential confusion generated by all of this—worthy of reporting, especially with the caveat that the information out there is conflicting? What is more, I was still wondering why neither the publisher nor the agent had responded my inquires from the previous week. Wouldn’t just a few words from them clear up all of this mess, or if not clear it up, then at least help toward putting it in focus? And if official sources didn’t want us to spread any unsubstantiated rumors, shouldn’t it be the responsibility of the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt’s publicity department, at the very least, to try to contact us about this matter? Still, despite these reservations, I and the other Society officers decided that the best thing for us to do would be to remove the posts from the blog. Which I did. And again, that, I thought, was that.

Then, in the third week of January 2012, the Roth Society discovered a posting on the website of the University of Connecticut’s bookstore, announcing an upcoming discussion by Ross Miller, Professor Emeritus of English at that university and Roth’s official biographer. The website stated that on January 26th at 6:00 pm, Miller will “update us on the progress of [Roth’s official biography] to be published by Houghton Harcourt.” This is good news, since there has been little word on the planned biography that was first announced several years ago. But much more curious was what came after: “Roth, one of the most honored writers working today, has won two National Book Awards, two Book Critic’s Circle Awards, three PEN/Faulkner Awards, a Pulitzer and more. He is often hailed as the most important novelist in America. Roth’s next book is *Notes for My Biographer*, due this spring.” None of us at the Roth Society had the faintest clue as to what to believe, or what was going on. After being asked to remove information on *Notes for My Biographer* from our blog, we find several weeks later that *Roth’s official biographer* has this title listed in his speaker’s biography. I guess one could chalk this up to an error by the people at the University of Connecticut’s bookstore, but that would be stretching believability to unbelievable limits.

Moishe Pipik, indeed!

New Books on the works of Philip Roth

Velichka Ivanova

Fiction, utopie, histoire

Essai sur Philip Roth et Milan Kundera

Préface de Stéphane Michaud



L'Harmattan

Fiction, utopie, histoire: Essai sur Philip Roth et Milan Kundera
by Velichka Ivanova

L'Harmattan has published Velichka Ivanova's Fiction, *Utopie, Histoire: Essai Sur Philip Roth et Milan Kundera*, with preface by Stéphane Michaud.

**Reading Philip Roth's
American Pastoral**

Velichka D. Ivanova (Ed.)



PRESSES UNIVERSITAIRES DU MIRAIL

Reading Philip Roth's American Pastoral
By Velichka Ivanova

Presses Universitaires du Mirail has just published Velichka Ivanova's edited collection, *Reading Philip Roth's American Pastoral*.

The result of fruitful dialogue amongst an international team of scholars, this book offers many lines of analysis to address a work that is regarded among the best American novels of the twentieth century. This book is for all lovers of contemporary literature who wish to understand the complexity of *American Pastoral*.

Contributors:

Philip Abbott, Ann Basu, David Brauner, Matthew McKenzie Davis, Erica D. Galioto, Velichka D. Ivanova, Judith Johnsey, Gary Johnson, Till Kinzel, Pia Masiero, Matthew McBride, Aimee L. Pozorski, Jessica G. Rabin, Ben Railton, David Rampton, Derek Parker Royal, Gustavo Sánchez-Canales, Debra Shostak, Linda S. Watts, Hana Wirth-Nesher.

STEVEN SAMPSON

CORPUS ROTH

Une lecture de Philip Roth

Corpus Rothi: Une lecture de Philip Roth
By Steven Sampson

Editions Léo Scheer has just published Steven Sampson's *Corpus Rothi: Une lecture de Philip Roth*.

CLEFS CONOURS ANGLAIS - LITTÉRATURE

Patrick Badonnel Derek Parker Royal Daniel Royot

Philip Roth

American Pastoral



Atlande

Philip Roth: American Pastoral

French publisher, Atlande, has just released *Philip Roth: American Pastoral*, written by Patrick Badonnel, Derek Parker Royal, and Daniel Royot.

Essay

Philip Roth, editor of the “Writers from the Other Europe” series

by **Velichka Ivanova**

In May 1972, Philip Roth visited Prague for the first time. Kafka’s city represented for him something more than a bleak place where free thought was strangled by the communist regime— rather, it became an important part of his personal and creative life. His annual visits to Prague continued until 1977, the year he was denied an entry visa. Out of these visits “have come personal friendships,” Roth declared—“and also an interest in current Czech literature, which in turn, has encouraged me to read in translation the works of novelists who have been working throughout Eastern Europe since the end of the World War II” (“In Search of Kafka” 7). The fate of banned authors from Central and Eastern Europe, the exceptional quality of their art, and the ways in which their work could be brought to the knowledge of the American audience, became, at that time, the center of Roth’s preoccupation. He proposed a reprint paperback series titled “Writers from the Other Europe” to Penguin Books and became its general editor. During that time, he published nineteen books, a significant number which, according to Christopher Koy, made Roth “a kind of Max Brod to more than a few banned” authors from “the Other Europe” (180). I offer here the titles listed chronologically by publication date:

“Writers from the Other Europe”

Philip Roth, general editor

- Kundera, Milan. *Laughable Loves*. Trans. Suzanne Rappaport. Introd. Philip Roth. NY: Penguin, 1975. (1974 1st US ed).
- Vaculík, Ludvík. *The Guinea Pigs*. Trans. Káča Poláčková. Introd. Neal Ascherson. NY: Penguin, 1975. (1974 1st UK ed).
- Borowski, Tadeusz. *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen: And Other Stories*. Trans. Barbara Vedder. Introd. Jan Kott. NY: Penguin, 1976. (1967 1st UK ed).
- Konwicki, Tadeusz. *A Dreambook for Our Time*. Trans. David Welsh. Introd. Leszek Kołakowski. NY: Penguin, 1976. (1969 1st US ed).
- Schulz, Bruno. *The Street of Crocodiles*. Trans. Celina Wieniewska. Introd. Jerzy Fikowski. NY: Penguin, 1977. (1963 1st UK ed).
- Kundera, Milan. *The Farewell Party*. Trans. Peter Kussi. Introd. Elisabeth Pochoda. NY: Penguin, 1977. (1976 1st US ed).
- Roth, Philip, Tadeusz Borowski, Danilo Kiš, Milan Kundera, and Bruno Schulz. *Writers from the Other Europe*. A set of 4 vol. Harmondsworth; NY: Penguin, 1979-1980.
- Schulz, Bruno. *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*. Transl. Celina Wieniewska. Introd. John Updike. NY: Penguin, 1979. (1978 1st US ed)
- Kiš, Danilo. *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich*. Trans. Duška Mikić-Mitchell. Introd. Joseph Brodsky. NY: Penguin, 1980. (1978 1st US ed).
- Andrzejewski, Jerzy. *Ashes and Diamonds*. Trans. David Welsh. Introd. Heinrich Böll. Harmondsworth; NY: Penguin, 1980. (1962 1st UK ed).
- Kundera, Milan. *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. Trans. Michael Henry Heim. Afterword Philip Roth. Harmondsworth; NY: Penguin, 1981. (1980 1st US ed).
- Hrabal, Bohumil. *Closely Watched Trains*. Trans. Edith Pargeter. Introd. Josef Skvorecky. NY: Penguin, 1981. (1968 1st US ed).

Konwicki, Tadeusz. *A Dreambook for Our Time*. Harmondsworth; NY: Penguin, reprinted 1983.
 Csáth, Géza. *Opium and Other Stories*. Biographical note Marianna Birnbaum. Trans. Jascha Kessler and Charlotte Rogers. Introd. Angela Carter. NY: Penguin, 1983. (1980 1st US ed).
 Kundera, Milan. *The Joke*. Trans. Michael Henry Heim. NY: Penguin, 1983. (1982 1st US ed).
 Konwicki, Tadeusz. *The Polish Complex*. Trans. Richard Lourie. Introd. Joanna Rostropowicz Clark. NY: Penguin, 1984. (1982 1st US ed).
 Gombrowicz, Witold. *Ferdydurke*. Trans. from the French Eric Mosbacher. Introd. Czeslaw Milosz. NY: Penguin, 1986. (1961 1st US ed).
 Konrád, György. *The Case Worker*. Trans. Paul Aston. Introd. Irving Howe. NY: Penguin, 1987. (1974 1st US ed).
 Konrád, György. *The City Builder*. Trans. by Ivan Sanders. Introd. Carlos Fuentes. NY: Penguin, 1987. (1977 1st US ed).

Kundera's and Vaculík's novels opened the series in 1975. London Magazine Editions first published Vaculík's *The Guinea Pigs* (1968) in 1974. Roth himself edited Kundera's *Laughable Loves* in 1974 and featured it in the series the following year. Entitled "Milan Kundera, The Joker, an appreciation by Philip Roth," his introduction first appeared in *Esquire* in 1974.

Reprinted in paperbacks, the books became more accessible to a wider audience. Roth not only reprinted the books, he also commissioned, edited and promoted them. He arranged for writers of international renown to contribute introductions to the works in order to place them within the proper literary and historical context for an American readership. Although the series ended in 1987, Roth's project continued to arouse critical acclaim among contemporary writers. In 2001 for instance, William T. Vollmann praised him for having brought to light the "unearthly beauty of Bruno Schulz's sentences, the spirit of doomed tenderness which shines like a magnesium flare in Jerzy Andrzejewski's *Ashes and Diamonds*, the moral dilemma of Hrbal's *Closely Watched Trains*, the extraordinarily effective study of how memory is tainted by atrocity in Konwicki's *A Dreambook of Our Time*, the despairingly ironic 'jests' of Kundera's short stories" (138). The literary merits of these works go beyond the sometimes confining boundaries of the "literature of dissent." Indeed, these narratives represent great art.

How Roth brought European authors into his workshop, to learn from them and to grow under the influence of his kinship with them, is what my current research sets out to explore. This note is part of a larger book project entitled *Philip Roth: Transatlantic Perspectives*, which aims to establish the intellectual and literary tradition that Roth reinvented. His work has deep roots in the American canon and at the same time shows a persistent need for contact with his European forebears and contemporaries.

Sources:

- Koy, Christopher. "Philip Roth's Fiction about Czechs and Kafka." Proceedings 2002 University of West Bohemia. Vydavatelství ZČU Plzeň, 2002. 179-191.
 Roth, Philip. "In Search of Kafka and Other Answers." *New York Times Book Review* Feb. 15, 1976: 6-7.
 Vollmann, William T. "Afterword." Danilo Kiš, *A Tomb for Boris Davidovitch*. 1st Dalkey Archive ed. 2001. 136-145.
 Worldcat. 27 Sept. 2010. Web. 17 Dec. 2011. <<http://www.worldcat.org>>.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC UPDATE - Compiled by Derek Parker Royal

Below is a listing of secondary critical resources that have appeared since (or not listed in) the last issue of the newsletter. For a complete listing of bibliographical resources in English, go to the Roth Society Web site at <http://rothsociety.org>. An asterisk * indicates that the scholar is a current member of the Philip Roth Society.

Books: Monographs

Sampson, Steven*. *Corpus Rothi: Une lecture de Philip Roth*. Paris: Édition Léo Scheer, 2011.

Books: Edited Collections

Ivanova, Velichka* D., ed. *Reading Philip Roth's American Pastoral*. Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2011.

Book Chapters

Abbott, Philip. "‘Defeat of my dream’: Democratic Theory, Populism and Philip Roth’s American Trilogy." Ivanova 89-103.

Basu, Ann. "American Pastoral: The Post-War American Man on Trial." Ivanova 75-86.

Brauner, David*. "American Anti-Pastoral: Incontinence and Impurity in *American Pastoral* and *The Human Stain*." Ivanova 195-204.

Davis, Matthew McKenzie. "In Search of a Pastoral America: The Proustian Narrative Structure of *American Pastoral*." Ivanova 255-63.

Galioto, Erica D. "‘Every word she spoke was a bomb’: Merry Levov’s Anamorphic Stutter." Ivanova 127-36.

Ivanova, Velichka* D. "The Ordinary Life of Ivan Ilych Levov: *American Pastoral* in Dialog with Tolstoy." Ivanova 241-54.

Johnsey, Judith*. "Travelling on an Invisible Passport: Space, Place and Belonging in *American Pastoral*." Ivanova 61-73.

Johnson, Gary. "Philip Roth’s *American Pastoral*: Finding the Meaning in a Life." Ivanova 153-63.

Kinzel, Till. "Philip Roth’s *American Pastoral* as a Novel of American Cultural Memory." Ivanova 265-73.

Masiero, Pia*. "‘Nothing is impersonally perceived’: Dreams, Realistic Chronicles and Perspectival Effects in *American Pastoral*." Ivanova 179-92.

McBride, Matthew. "American Berserk: The Creation of Merry as a Hysterical Subject." Ivanova 117-26.

- Pozorski, Aimee L*. "American Pastoral and the Traumatic Ideals of Democracy." *Ivanova* 33-45.
- Rabin, Jessica G*. "Requiem for a Dream: Philip Roth's *American Pastoral* and William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*" *Ivanova* 219-30.
- Railton, Ben. "'I dreamed a realistic chronicle': American Literary (Meta-)Realism and the Novelist-Narrator in *American Pastoral*." *Ivanova* 139-51.
- Rampton, David. "Arguing with the Absolute: The Allusion to 'The Death of Ivan Ilych' in Roth's *American Pastoral*." *Ivanova* 231-40.
- Rowe, John Carlos. "Neoliberalism and the U.S. Literary Canon: The Example of Philip Roth." *Afterlives of Modernism: Liberalism, Transnationalism, and Political Critique*. Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2011. 187-208.
- Royal, Derek Parker*. "Fictional Realms of Possibility: Reimagining the Ethnic Subject in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*." *Ivanova* 47-59.
- Sánchez-Canales, Gustavo*. "'There is a bomb blast in the most elegant greek revival house': Classical Motifs in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*." *Ivanova* 205-17.
- Shostak, Debra*. "The 'very sudden thing': Narration and the Fall into History." *Ivanova* 165-78.
- Watts, Linda S. "'The burning subject was the daughter': Meredith 'Merry' Levov as Revolutionary Bomber and Outlaw Daughter in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*." *Ivanova* 105-15.
- Wirth-Nesher, Hana. "Philip Roth's Counter Pastoral: The Return of History." *Ivanova* 27-32.

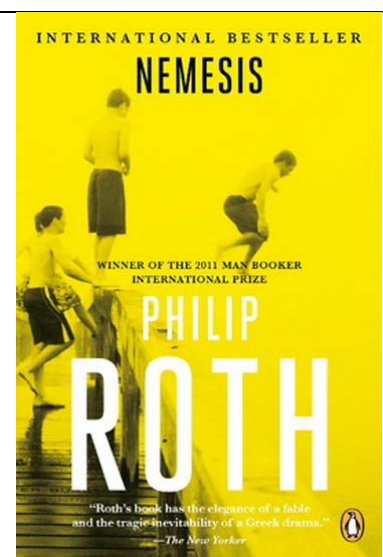
Journal Articles

- Grausam, Daniel. "After the Post(al)." *American Literary History* 23.3 (2011): 625-42.
- Scanlan, Margaret. "Strange Times to Be a Jew: Alternative History after 9/11." *Modern Fiction Studies* 57.3 (2011): 505-31.

Paperback release of *Nemesis*

On 13th October 2011, the paperback version of *Nemesis* was released. Interestingly, the US and UK versions of the novel used the same cover photograph, but the US version retained the yellow colouring of the hardback, whereas the UK version used a monochrome cover.

The critical response to the release mirrored that of the hardback in that it was generally very positive. In fact, if anything the novel seems to have gained more praise this time around with many reviewers including it in their end of year 'Paperbacks of the Year' lists.





It's more than just jokes about liver . . .
Become a member of the

Philip Roth Society

Beginning in 2009, members have a choice of two membership options: Membership with the *Philip Roth Studies*, and Membership without the journal. Both options include a subscription to the official society organ, *Philip Roth Society Newsletter*, and all members, regardless of membership option, will be included in all future email notifications regarding Roth Society-related announcements, calls, and news.

OPTION 1: Membership with *Philip Roth Studies*

Membership to the Roth Society includes an automatic subscription to *Philip Roth Studies*. *Roth Studies* is a semi-annual peer-reviewed journal published by Purdue University Press in cooperation with the Philip Roth Society, and is devoted to all research pertaining entirely or in part to Philip Roth, his fiction, and his literary and cultural significance. Annual membership fees for Membership with *Philip Roth Studies* is \$50, which will include subscription to a full volume year (2 issues).

OPTION 2: Membership without the journal

Regular membership to the Roth Society, but without a subscription to *Philip Roth Studies*. Annual membership fees for this option are \$20.

For either membership option, fees should be paid by check or money order (made out to "Philip Roth Society").

Membership with *Philip Roth Studies* \$50

Membership without the journal \$20

Name: _____

Professional Affiliation: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Mail to: The Philip Roth Society
c/o Jessica. G Rabin, Secretary/Treasurer
Department of English
Anne Arundel Community College
101 College Parkway
Arnold, MD 21012

For more information, and a sample newsletter, visit the Philip Roth Society Web site at <http://rothsociety.org>



The Philip Roth Society Newsletter

In this issue:

Message from the Society President

Philip Roth, editor of the “Writers from the Other Europe” series

by Velichka Ivanova

Abstracts from recent conference presentations

Bibliographic update

Philip Roth Society
Richard Sheehan,
Newsletter Editor
39 Forge Close
Fleckney
Leicester
United Kingdom
LE8 8DA