



---

---

# The Philip Roth Society Newsletter

---

---

## In this issue:

**Bellow and Roth:** Reflections on reading them together

**An historian** looks at *The Plot Against America*

**Abstracts** from recent conference presentations

**Bibliographic** update of recent publications on Roth

Philip Roth Society  
Joe Kraus, Newsletter Editor  
Department of English  
The University of Scranton  
Scranton, PA 18510



---

---

# The Philip Roth Society Newsletter

Vol. 3 No. 2

Fall 2005

---

---

## A Message From the Society's President

Derek Parker Royal

As the Philip Roth Society enters its fourth year, things look very good. The society has grown significantly in the past year, the first two issues of *Philip Roth Studies* have been published, and we continue to sponsor panels at national conferences. Articles from both the journal and the society newsletter are now listed in the MLA Bibliography. What is more, Harvard University is now underwriting our newsletter by assisting us with its printing and distribution. (Heartfelt thanks to Prof. Bruce Hay, at the Harvard Law School, for bringing this about.) We had a productive business meeting at this year's American Literature Association Conference in Boston, MA, and there we discussed ideas for development over the next year. (Minutes to the meeting can be found at <http://orgs.tamu-commerce.edu/rothsoc/directory.htm>).

The health of Roth studies is strong as well. The Library of America has issued the first two volumes of their definitive editions of his writings, and the latest

news is that Roth's next novel, *Everyman*, will be published in spring 2006. And as you can see from the bibliographical update in this issue of the newsletter, there's been a flurry of scholarly activity in 2005.

The first half of next year looks promising as well. The Roth Society will sponsor a panel at the annual Twentieth-Century Literature and Culture Conference at the University of Louisville (Feb. 23-25), and two panels at the American Literature Association Conference in San Francisco (May 25-28).

Still, there is a lot of room to grow. As you can see from the current issue of the newsletter, editor Joe Kraus is expanding the size and scope of this publication. I encourage everyone to contact Joe with ideas for future issues and perhaps with brief contributions of your own. And even though we have successfully published the first volume of *Philip Roth Studies*, we nonetheless need to build a stronger subscription base. I hope that every member of the society will subscribe to the journal individually (see

*continued on page 23*

### 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 this most significant author's work through discussions, panel presentations at scholarly conferences, and journal publications. We do so 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 this newsletter and *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, the Modern Humanities Research Association's Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature, and the Index to Jewish periodicals.

The newsletter welcomes announcements of upcoming events and conferences, short articles, and reviews (500 to 800 words) on topics related to Philip Roth. Send material for consideration to Joe Kraus at [krausj2@scranton.edu](mailto:krausj2@scranton.edu). Submissions preferred as Word or .rtf attachments; otherwise, mail to Joe Kraus, Department of English, The University of Scranton, Scranton, PA, 18510. E-mail the society at [roth\\_society@tamuc-commerce.edu](mailto:roth_society@tamuc-commerce.edu).

**Editor**

Joe Kraus  
The University of Scranton

**Managing Editor**

Amanda Siegfried

**Officers of the Society****Founder and President**

Derek Parker Royal  
Texas A&M University -  
Commerce

**Treasurer**

Jessica G. Rabin  
Anne Arundel Community College

Philip Roth Society Web page:

<http://rothsociety.org>



## Calls for Papers

To publicize a call for papers, lecture, or general events 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 Event

#### **Twentieth-Century Literature and Culture Conference Louisville, KY (February 23-25, 2006)**

The Philip Roth Society will sponsor a panel at the thirty-fourth annual Twentieth-Century Literature and Culture Conference. This is an international event, and it is sponsored by the University of Louisville's Dept. of English and the Dept. of Classical and Modern Languages. For more information on the conference, visit its Web site, <http://www.louisville.edu/as/cml/xxconf/>.

### Calls for Papers

#### **American Literature Association Conference San Francisco, CA (May 25-28)**

The Philip Roth Society is pulling together a panel on teaching Philip Roth in the classroom. The topic is open, and the society welcomes any papers devoted to pedagogical issues surrounding Philip Roth and his fiction. Everyone who presents on the panel must be a member of the Philip Roth Society by the time of the conference. Please send a 200-350 word abstract, along with contact information, by January 15, 2006 to:

Derek P. Royal at [royal@rothsociety.org](mailto:royal@rothsociety.org) or  
Jessica G. Rabin at [jgrabin@aacc.edu](mailto:jgrabin@aacc.edu)

#### **New Book Collection of Essays - Philip Roth's America**

Recently I guest edited the 2004 annual volume of *Studies in American Jewish Literature*, Vol. 23, one devoted exclusively to Philip Roth's most recent fiction. I'm now looking to develop this special issue into a book collection of essays, and I'd like to include several new critical works. I'm particularly interested in essays devoted to *Sabbath's Theater*, *The Dying Animal*, and *The Plot Against America*. Thematic/theoretical focus on these novels is open.

Completed essays would be preferred, but detailed abstracts on a project-in-progress are also welcome. Final essays should be approximately 5000-6000 words in length. Deadline for submission is open. Submissions can be emailed (as an attached MS Word file) or sent via the USPS. For submissions, queries, or questions, please contact:

Derek P. Royal  
Department of Literature and Languages  
Texas A&M University-Commerce  
Commerce, TX 75429-3011 USA  
Email: [derek\\_royal@tamuc-commerce.edu](mailto:derek_royal@tamuc-commerce.edu)

## Membership Information

To become a member of the Philip Roth Society, fill out this form and mail it to the address below. Annual membership dues are \$15 (\$20 for overseas addresses, \$30 for institutions), and they should be paid by check or money order to the "Philip Roth Society." In addition to supporting the work of the society through your membership, you will receive biennial copies of the *Philip Roth Society Newsletter*. To indicate your willingness to be listed in the directory of members on the Roth Society's web site, please check the appropriate lines below.

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

Academic or Professional Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_\_ Home or work address? \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

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 \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_ Postal address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Web page URL \_\_\_\_\_

Full name signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to:

Philip Roth Society

c/o Jessica Rabin

Anne Arundel Community College

Department of English

101 College Parkway

Arnold, MD 21012

### **Message** - *continued from page 1*

subscription details inside this issue of the newsletter), but just as important, I appeal to all faculty members to make sure that your college and university libraries subscribe to *Philip Roth Studies*. Institutional subscriptions are vital for the life of the journal, and I hope that all Roth Society members will lobby their acquisition librarians on this matter.

On a similar matter, please make sure that you renew your membership for 2006, and encourage others to join as well. Things are going well, indeed, and it feels good to be part of a vibrant and growing organization. Thanks to you all!

**Bibliography** - continued from page 21

**Hutchison, Anthony.** "Purity is Petrefaction': Liberalism and Betrayal in Philip Roth's *I Married a Communist*." *Rethinking History* 9.2/3 (2005): 315-27.

**Kaplan, Brett Ashley.** "Anatole Broyard's Human Stain: Performing Postracial Consciousness." *Philip Roth Studies* 1.2 (2005): 125-44.

**Maslan, Mark.** "The Faking of the Americans: Passing, Trauma, and National Identity in Philip Roth's *Human Stain*." *Modern Language Quarterly* 66.3 (2005): 365-89.

\* **Medin, Daniel L.** "Trials and Errors at the Turn of the Millennium: On *The Human Stain* and J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*." *Philip Roth Studies* 1.1 (2005): 82-92.

**Newman, Herta.** "Philip Roth's Return in *The Plot Against America*." *Midstream* May-June 2005: 20-22.

**Parrish, Tim.** Rev. of *The Plot Against America*, by Philip Roth. *Philip Roth Studies* 1.1 (2005): 93-101.

**Pinsker, Sanford.** "The Tortoise and the Hare; Or, Philip Roth, Cynthia Ozick, and the Vagaries of Fiction Writing." *Virginia Quarterly Review* 81 (2005): 214-24.

\* **Royal, Derek Parker.** "Critical Unmoorings: An Introduction to *Philip Roth Studies*." *Philip Roth Studies* 1.1 (2005): 4-6.

**Rudnytsky, Peter L.** "Goodbye, Columbus: Roth's Portrait of the Narcissist as a Young Man." *Twentieth-Century Literature* 51.1 (2005): 25-42.

**Scheckner, Peter.** "Roth's Falstaff: Transgressive Humor in *Sabbath's Theater*." *The Midwest Quarterly* 46.3 (2005): 220-35 .

**Schur, Richard.** "Dream or Nightmare? Roth, Morrison, and America." *Philip Roth Studies* 1.1 (2005): 19-36.

**Schwartz, Larry.** "Roth, Race, and Newark." *Cultural Logic* 7 (2005): 26 pars. 1 Aug. 2005 <<http://eserver.org:16080/clogic/2005/schwartz.html>>.

**Stanley, Sandra Kumamoto.** "Mourning the 'Greatest Generation': Myth and History in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*." *Twentieth-Century Literature* 51.1 (2005): 1-24.

**Steed, J. P.** "The Subversion of the Jews: Post-World War II Anxiety, Humor, and Identity in Woody Allen and Philip Roth." *Philip Roth Studies* 1.2 (2005): 145-62.

**Steinberg, Gillian.** "Philip Roth's 'Defender of the Faith': A Modern Midrash." *Philip Roth Studies* 1.1 (2005): 7-18.

---

**Book collection of essays devoted to Philip Roth as a comic writer**

We are looking for essays that specifically deal with Philip Roth as a comic writer. The “comic” here can be approached as ironic, satiric, wry, burlesque, mockery, etc. Contributions can deal with a general comic theme and preferably focus on a specific work or works. All contributions should be formatted using the latest edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style*. For more information concerning this project, especially in terms of potential contributions, please contact:

Ben Siegel at BSiegel@CSUPomona.edu

or

Jay L. Halio at jlhalio@yahoo.com

**Philip Roth Studies**

Ongoing

*Philip Roth Studies* is a peer-reviewed journal published by Heldref Publications in cooperation with the Philip Roth Society, and we welcome all writing pertaining entirely or in part to Philip Roth, his fiction, and his literary and cultural significance.

Submission details: The journal welcomes both full-length articles as well as shorter notes. Articles should be 4,000-8,000 words, and notes should not exceed 2,500 words. A brief abstract (approximately 50 words) should accompany each submission. Manuscripts and book reviews must be prepared according to the *MLA Style Manual*, 2nd ed. (1998) by Joseph Gibaldi and should contain endnotes rather than footnotes. Electronic submission via email (as attached Word files) are particularly welcome. If sending through postal mail, please submit two copies of the manuscript with author identification on a separate cover sheet. Works accepted for publication must be supplied both in paper and electronic format (Microsoft Word).

Address submissions to Derek Parker Royal, Executive Editor, *Philip Roth Studies*, Department of Literature and Languages, Texas A&M University-Commerce, Commerce, TX 75429-3011; email Derek\_royal@tamuc-commerce.edu. For the journal's web page, see <http://www.heldref.org/roth.php>

**The Philip Roth Society Newsletter**

Ongoing

The Philip Roth Society invites submissions of 500-800 words for our newsletter. 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, but we may determine that certain submissions are more appropriate for our journal, *Philip Roth Studies*, than they are for the newsletter.

For submissions or queries (always welcome), contact Joe Kraus at krausj2@scranton.edu or by mail at:

Joe Kraus

Department of English

The University of Scranton

Scranton, PA 18510

## Bellow and Roth

Saul Bellow's death on April 5, 2005 marked the end of one of the 20th century's great literary careers. Bellow and Roth were linked for most of the last 40 years as friends, as world-class authors, and as interpreters of the American-Jewish experience. Below are four reflections on the two writers in light of one another.

**Reading Bellow and Roth: Some observations on *The Victim* and *Operation Shylock: A Confession***  
**Sarah Shieff with Owen Bullock, Chris Burke, Steve Chappell, Michelle Coursey and Brent Walsh**  
**University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand**

Hamilton, New Zealand, may seem an unlikely place for a graduate course in modern Jewish literature. Historically, New Zealand's Jewish population of around 8000 has concentrated in the country's four main centres; about 30 Jewish families make their home in Hamilton, the country's fifth-largest city. A few members of this community are faculty members of the University of Waikato. Several years ago, this small, peaceful academic community found itself at the centre of a scandal: a German holocaust denier had been permitted to enroll in the doctoral program in the German department, and had proposed a dissertation topic which would have brought him into contact with unwitting Jewish informants. During our painful, protracted and public efforts to alert the recalcitrant university administration to the ethical impropriety of this situation, many Jewish faculty members found that being Jewish in New Zealand was not quite as unproblematic as our immigrant and refugee parents and grandparents had hoped it might be. Perhaps the most worrying aspect of the mare's nest of accusation and counter-accusation in which we found ourselves-in which it was possible to hear echoes of the unstable, paranoid and latently violent worlds of *The Victim* and *Operation Shylock*-was the degree of ignorance we discovered around us.

My own response to the so-called Kupka Affair was to mount a graduate seminar in modern Jewish writing, which ran for the first time this year (2005). It was my hope that such a seminar would render Jewish experience urgent and visible for a dynamic, articulate (and inevitably non-Jewish) student cohort: these are New Zealand's future teachers, lawyers and film-makers, and the responsibility for history and memory lies as firmly in their hands as in our own.

We began the seminar with a consideration of some narratives of Jewish life in Europe from before World War 2, and then read Primo Levi's survivor account of the decimation of European Jewry. Subsequent strands of inquiry included the representation of Jewishness in novels by Saul Bellow (*The Victim*), Philip Roth (*Operation Shylock: A Confession* and *Portnoy's Complaint*) and Aharon Appelfeld, writing by Jewish women (Cynthia Ozick and Anne Michaels), and the legacy of the Holocaust for a younger generation of writers, including Art Spiegelman and Michael Chabon. We found ourselves discussing, amongst other things, anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, Israel, diaspora (and Diasporism), assimilation, religious observance, Yiddish, the ghetto, and golems.

The call for papers from *The Philip Roth Society Newsletter* provided us with an occasion to consider more closely the thematic preoccupations linking *The Victim* and *Operation Shylock*-preoccupations that encompass (but of course extend beyond) manifestations of the double, illness, guilt, responsibility, assimilationism, and configurations of the (Jewish, male) self. I challenged students to devise their own discussion topics, suitable for graduate students of English and expressed as notes or questions, which would focus tightly on the relationship between these texts. I have shaped our various responses into a single document, below.

In his essay "Imagining Jews" (1974), Philip Roth himself provides several starting points for a comparative close reading of *The Victim* and *Operation Shylock*. The first is the figure of the troublesome, ailing double. Not long after the publication of *Portnoy's Complaint* in 1969, Roth found himself the victim of so much journalistic myth-making and speculation that he took up residence at the Yaddo writers' retreat at Saratoga Springs, leaving "Philip Roth", the character the media had been happy enough to invent, to put in appearances where the real Philip Roth had "not yet dared to tread, or twist" (217). News of his

**Parrish, Tim.** "Becoming Black: Zuckerman's Bifurcating Self in *The Human Stain*." Royal 210-23.

-. "The End of Identity: Philip Roth's Jewish *American Pastoral*." Halio and Siegel 131-50.

\* **Pozorski, Aimee.** "How to Tell a True Ghost Story: *The Ghost Writer* and the Case of Anne Frank." Royal 89-102.

\* **Rabin, Jessica G.** "Still (Resonant, Relevant and) Crazy after All These Years: Goodbye, Columbus and Five Short Stories." Royal 9-23.

\* **Royal, Derek Parker.** "Pastoral Dreams and National Identity in *American Pastoral* and *I Married a Communist*." Royal 185-207.

-. "Texts, Lives, and Bellybuttons: Philip Roth's *Operation Shylock* and the Renegotiation of Subjectivity." Halio and Siegel 68-91.

**Safer, Elaine B.** "*Operation Shylock*: Double Double Jewish Trouble." Royal 153-67.

**Shechner, Mark.** "Is Philip Roth an Erotic Writer?" *Eros USA: Essays on the Culture and Literature of Desire*. Eds. Cheryl Alexander Malcolm and Jopi Nyman. Gdansk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdansk, 2005. 75-85.

**Showalter, Elaine.** "Into the Twenty-First Century: Tragic Towers." *Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and Its Discontent*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2005. 100-17.

\* **Shostak, Debra.** "Philip Roth's Fictions of Self-Exposure." Halio and Siegel 31-57.

\* **Smith, Margaret.** "Autobiography: False Confession?" Halio and Siegel 99-114.

-. "*My Life as a Man*: 'The Surprises Manhood Brings.'" Royal 75-87.

\* **Tuerk, Richard.** "Caught between *The Facts* and *Deception*." Royal 129-42.

**West, Kevin R.** "Professing Desire: The Kepesh Novels." Royal 225-39.

\* **Wilson, Alexis Kate.** "The Ghosts of Zuckerman's Past: The Zuckerman Bound Series." Royal 103-17.

-. "The Travels of the American Talush." Halio and Siegel 92-98.

### Journal Articles

**Allen, Brook.** "Roth Reconsidered." *The New Criterion* Oct. 2005: 14-22.

**Dobozy, Tamas.** "The Holocaust as Fiction: Derrida's Demeure and the Demjanjuk Trail in Philip Roth's *Operation Shylock*." *Philip Roth Studies* 1.1 (2005): 37-52.

**Freedman, Samuel G.** "Philip Roth and the Great American Nightmare." *Azure* 20 (2005): 33-43.

**Gooblar, David.** "'Oh Freud do I know!' Philip Roth, Freud, and Narrative Therapy." *Philip Roth Studies* 1.1 (2005): 67-81.

**Gordon, Andrew.** "Philip Roth's *Patrimony* and Art Spiegelman's *Maus*: Jewish Sons Remembering Their Fathers." *Philip Roth Studies* 1.1 (2005): 53-66.

**Greenham, David.** "The Concept of Irony: Jane Austen's *Emma* and Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theater*." *Philip Roth Studies* 1.2 (2005): 163-74.

**Hedin, Benjamin.** "A History That Never Happened: Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America*." *Gettysburg Review* 18.1 (2005): 93-106.

**Hunter, T. Willard.** "Philip Roth's Lindbergh: Not Who's Right but What's Right." *Vital Speeches of the Day* 71 (2005): 409-12.



## Bibliographical Update

For a complete listing of bibliographical resources in English, go to the Roth Society Web site <http://rothsociety.org>

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

### Books

\* **Halio, Jay L., and \* Ben Siegel.** *Turning Up the Flame: Philip Roth's Later Novels.* Newark, DE: U of Delaware P, 2005.

\* **Royal, Derek Parker, ed.** *Philip Roth: New Perspectives on An American Author.* Westport, CT: Greenwood-Praeger, 2005.

### Chapters from Books

\* **Aarons, Victoria.** "Is It Good-for-the-Jews or no-good-for-the-Jews?: Philip Roth's Registry of Jewish Consciousness." *What Happened to Abraham?: Reinventing the Covenant in American Jewish Fiction.* Newark, DE: U of Delaware P, 2005. 64-81.

\* **Brauner, David.** "'Getting in Your Retaliation First': Narrative Strategies in *Portnoy's Complaint*." Royal 43-57.

**Cooper, Alan.** "It Can Happen Here, or All in the Family: Surviving *The Plot Against America*." Royal 241-53.

**Daniel, Anne Margaret.** "Philip Roth, MVP: *Our Gang, The Breast, and The Great American Novel*." Royal 59-74.

**Dickstein, Morris.** "The Complex Fate of the Jewish American Writer." *A Mirror in the Roadway: Literature and the Real World.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005. 168-83.

-. "The Face in the Mirror: The Eclipse of Distance in Contemporary Fiction." *A Mirror in the Roadway: Literature and the Real World.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005. 184-98.

\* **Gentry, Marshall Bruce.** "Newark Maid Feminism in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*." Halio and Siegel 160-71.

**Gerstle, Ellen L.** "The Dying Animal: The Art of Obsessing or Obsessing about Art?" Halio and Siegel 194-99.

**Gordon, Andrew.** "The Critique of Utopia in Philip Roth's *The Counterlife* and *American Pastoral*." Halio and Siegel 151-59.

\* **Halio, Jay L.** "Eros and Death in Roth's Later Fiction." Halio and Siegel 200-06.

**Hedin, Benjamin.** "The Measure of All Things: *Patrimony*." Royal 143-51.

**Hughes, Darren.** "The 'Written World' of Philip Roth's Nonfiction." Royal 255-69.

**Husband, Julie.** "Female Hysteria and Sisterhood in *Letting Go* and *When She Was Good*." Royal 25-41.

**Kaplan, Brett Ashley.** "Reading Race and the Conundrums of Reconciliation in Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*." Halio and Siegel 172-93.

**Lyons, Bonnie.** "En-Countering Pastorals in *The Counterlife*." Royal 119-27.

-. "Philip Roth's American Tragedies." Halio and Siegel 125-30.

**Mellard, James M.** "Death, Mourning, and Besse's Ghost: From Philip Roth's *The Facts* to *Sabbath's Theater*." Halio and Siegel 115-24.

\* **Neelakantan, G.** "Textualizing the Self: Adultery, Blatant Fictions, and Jewishness in Philip Roth's *Deception*." Halio and Siegel 58-67.

**Omer-Sherman, Ranen.** "'A Little Stranger in the House': Madness and Identity in *Sabbath's Theater*." Royal 169-83.

Doppelgänger's activities reached Roth by mail and telephone. One evening he received a call from a friend inquiring after his health: he had heard Roth had suffered a breakdown and been committed to hospital, and was phoning to be sure this wasn't so (217). *The Victim* and *Operation Shylock* both demonstrate the peculiar force of this insubordinate, faintly abject double or shadow as a trope for Jewish subjectivity. Later in the same essay, Roth hints at a second point of connection between these narratives, in their figuration of moral imperatives and ambiguities: "To be Jewish in [*The Victim*] is to be accessible, morbidly so, to claims made upon the conscience, and to take upon oneself, out of a kind of gruff human sympathy and a responsiveness bordering dangerously on paranoia, responsibility for another man's pain and misfortune" (224-5). Roth's obvious admiration for Bellow, whom he here describes as "the grand old man of American-Jewish writers" (224), may alert readers to the possibility that the relationship between *Operation Shylock*'s "Philip Roth" and Moishe Pipik—those victims of paranoia, illness, erotic anxiety, moral uncertainty and each other—is a strong misreading of the problematic relationship between *The Victim*'s Asa Leventhal and Kirby Allbee. Another point of connection, also adumbrated in "Imagining Jews", leads in the direction of questions of Jewish and personal survival which figure so prominently in both texts: "One can only speculate about how much writing *The Victim* may have served to settle the author's own conscience about touchy matters of survival and success (the bedeviling issue for Leventhal, right along with the issue of Jewish self-defense)..." (225) Substitute the title *Operation Shylock* and the character "Philip Roth" in this comment, and the ethics of survival and success—along with guilt, paranoia, victimization and responsibility—become pressing lines of inquiry for both novels.

Readers may also wish to consider the strands of thematic significance that thread through the representation of disease, home-life, and gender relationships in the novels. Could the diseases manifest in each of the doubles—Allbee the alcoholic; Pipik the cancer sufferer—represent the deformed inner selves or ids of the main characters, Asa Leventhal and Philip Roth? Is it possible to consider the conflicts between these characters as a version of the conflict between Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde? Specifically, do these doubles appear and function because of certain repressions and denials?

Some of the most charged confrontations in these texts take place at home, calling into question comfortable stereotypes of cozy Jewish domesticity. Home is the main combat zone for Asa Leventhal and Kirby Allbee, who do battle in Leventhal's squalid apartment; Philip Roth faces the demons unleashed by the sedative Halcion in his Connecticut retreat, and emerges from that contaminated domestic environment to confront Moishe Pipik in the quasi-domestic spaces of Jerusalem's hotel rooms, lobbies, and restaurants. What does "home" mean for these men? Outside these confined interior spaces, the twin imaginative sites of contemporary Jewish identification do their own thematic work: in what ways do the cities of New York and Jerusalem shape the conflicts that take place within them? Whether they tackle each other in domestic or urban spaces, Philip Roth and Asa Leventhal and their doubles inhabit largely homosocial environments; indeed, a degree of narcissistic or homoerotic fixation—and latent violence—characterizes the relationship between the pairs of men. To what extent does the presence—or absence—of women determine the relationships between them?

These suggestions are necessarily limited in scope. We have not touched, for example, on the significant differences in mood and mode of the two narratives, the problematics of diaspora and Zionism which are implicit in one and explicit in the other, or the shadow cast in each by the Holocaust. We hope, however, that these notes might at least sow the seeds of discussion elsewhere, and for other people.

**From *The Plot Against America* to *Mr. Sammler's Planet*  
Jeff Shantz, York University, Toronto**

It is highly unlikely that I would ever have read Saul Bellow if not for Philip Roth. As a lefty teaching literary sociology with a focus on literature and resistance, I had never been particularly drawn to Bellow. Indeed the

***Bellow & Roth*** - continued from page 5

only people who ever even suggested I read Bellow were conservative colleagues for whom Bellow was an example of the great writing produced by conservatives by comparison with the socialist agit-prop they accused me of passing off as literature. For me Bellow was another example of a writer who started out nominally on the left, as indicated by an early flirtation with Trotskyism and involvement in the *Partisan Review*, only to wind up among the paleo-conservatives of the Reagan-era backlash against the sixties. While I was intrigued by the fact that his earliest work was published in an anarchist circular *Retort* I could not get past Bellow's promotion of the reactionary ideas of Harold Bloom, someone I viewed to be an enemy in the so-called culture wars that Bloom himself had stoked.

Then came Roth. I set out to read *The Plot Against America* in the wake of the angry and polarized election of 2004. The election results had shattered so many of my friends and colleagues in the US. Several expressed a desire to move to Canada to escape what they saw as a confirmation of America's turn to something approaching fascism.

So in order to gain some more insight into the fears and uncertainties gripping so many people as well as to reflect on the fragility and uncertainty of contemporary democracy I turned to one of my favourite writers. And Roth's story was not disappointing. It provides a deep sense of the everyday anxieties, what Roth calls the "perpetual fear," experienced by many Americans in the current period of creeping repression at home and war overseas. At the same time I had a sense that something was missing. While Roth provides a compelling account of the dread experienced by would-be victims of the Lindbergh government and makes the reader confront the precariousness of democratic rights and freedoms he has perhaps too little to say about the feelings and anxieties of those who turned to Lindbergh. Certainly their motivations are a crucial part of the story of American democracy, whether that story is a fictional account of life under Lindy or the reality of Bush Jr.

Then Bellow died. The obituaries led me back to Roth's 2000 *New Yorker* piece on Bellow and from there, finally, and with some reluctance, to Bellow himself. And there, in *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, (borrowed from a startled colleague), I found what I felt to be missing from *The Plot Against America*. There, in a painfully sustained expression, was the anguish, what Roth called the "overwhelming estrangement" (of Sammler and Bellow), in the face of a pluralistic America transformed by the events of the sixties. Through Mr. Sammler's xenophobic lenses, tinted especially with racism and contempt for uncivil youth, one sees something deeper, what Roth identified as "that most disorienting of blows to civic confidence - the disappearance, in a great city [New York], of security, of safety, and, with that, the burgeoning among the vulnerable of fear-ridden, alienating paranoia." And all of this expressed in a manner and context that goes well beyond unhelpful caricatures of "Red State voters." There's a lot there and it's worth reading, not for approval, but for understanding.

This year, in discussing democracy in the US, my course will include both *The Plot Against America* and *Mr. Sammler's Planet*. I'll do it with Roth's reminder not to slip into that other "great communal passion, the ecstasy of sanctimony."

**Bellow's Ghost and *The Ghost Writer*****Tara Johnson - Ball State University**

Saul Bellow's death marked a great loss to twentieth-century literature, especially for fellow Jewish American writer Philip Roth. Roth and Bellow were not close, although Roth's reading of Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March* (1954) convinced him that it was acceptable to write about the younger generation of Jewish Americans. Roth even dedicated *Reading Myself and Others* "[t]o Saul Bellow, the 'other' I have read from the beginning with the deepest pleasure and admiration." When Bellow died at age 89 on April 5, 2005, Roth compared Bellow to William Faulkner, Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Mark Twain. Roth's greatest achievement has always been his ability to portray not only his cherished Weequahic

***Bellow & Roth*** - continued from page 8

The first and last lines of *Augie March* moved me like nothing else I've ever read. I feel no less American for growing up with bagels and subways rather than hamburgers and station wagons, and for this I owe so much to Bellow's notion that one can be simultaneously 100 percent American and 100 percent unlike a Rothian "shiksa." Bellow knew what it means to be American, and that one is no less American for being born in a city and to non-WASP parents. He understood why "American" is unlike any other nationality, why the technicalities and hyphens don't so much matter, and yet need not be entirely discounted.

Bellow makes for a refreshing post-Roth read, in his insistence to go "free-style" rather than just ruffle some feathers or bemoan one's background. As an undeniably urban writer who captures American cities—especially Chicago—in a way that makes them sound perhaps more fascinating than they really are, Bellow should be a must-read for anyone who's spent too much time poring over Brooks's odes to the clean exurban lifestyle. For these reasons, I have no doubt that Bellow's relevance lives on.

Note: A version of this essay was originally published on April 12, 2005 in *The Chicago Maroon* as "Bellow must be remembered and revered."

***Abstracts*** - continued from page 16

been done to consider these four works, two novels and two memoirs, as a significant and distinctive movement in Roth's oeuvre. By considering these four books as a discrete series, this paper plans to explore how the tetralogy marks Roth's most complex engagement with the connection between his own identity and the act of writing, an engagement that not only continues the skeptical exploration of identity that emerges in *The Counterlife* (1987), but one that also enables Roth in the subsequent Zuckerman novels to move beyond the self and toward a reconsideration of postwar American history.

Through the progression of the four books of "Philip," Roth delves into the implications of Nathan Zuckerman's declaration in *The Counterlife* that he is a "theater and nothing more." By the conclusion of the tetralogy, he has neither completely proven or dispelled Zuckerman's claim; however, by alternating memoirs and novels, fact and fiction, Roth develops a conception of selfhood that both affirms the value of the facts and memory - Herman Roth's insisting that "You must not forget anything" - and upholds imagination and performance as fundamental components of any tenable conception of the self (P 238). By juxtaposing the "facts" with "deception," the straight-forwardness of *Patrimony* with the mischief of *Operation Shylock*, Roth is able to construct a conception of selfhood that is far more compelling and complex than the postmodern denial of self that Zuckerman posits in *The Counterlife*. For while the tetralogy does not resolve the tension between fact and fiction, identity and performance, it ultimately creates a structure that holds the contradictory positions that Roth wants to explore, without ever fully endorsing a single position.

### **Subscribe to *Philip Roth Studies***

Please remember to purchase a subscription to our new journal, *Philip Roth Studies*, now put out by Heldref Publications. To subscribe, visit the journal's Web site at Heldref, <http://www.heldref.org/roth.php>, click on the "Subscribe Today!" link, and follow the subscription directions. You may subscribe online, via email, over the phone, or through the U.S. mail. Subscriptions for Philip Roth Society members are \$30.40 for individuals and \$70.40 for institutions, a discount of 20% off the regular subscription rates. When you subscribe through Heldref, please tell them that you are a Roth Society member so that you will receive the discounted rate.

---

***Counterfactual*** - continued from page 17

---

rushed part of the novel, Roth's final two chapters are a swift-moving shift: from Lindbergh's popular presidency, to a campaign for the presidency by the gossip columnist Walter Winchell-announced and begun in 1942, at the midpoint between presidential elections-to anti-Semitic pogroms scattered across the U.S., to Lindbergh's mysterious disappearance and the utterly implausible military dictatorship declared by his successor, Vice President Burton K. Wheeler (who in reality shared Lindbergh's isolationism). Here Roth crams in too many events, and gives too little consideration of the reality of American history and especially its political habits and processes.

It's too bad, really, because Roth's storytelling up to that point-about three-fourths of the book, or 25 of the 27 months covered by his story-does a fine job of adhering to the minimal-rewrite rule. Part of the uneasy feeling that I and many reviewers have had while reading the book is that the developments Roth imagines-Lindbergh's simple populism, his overwhelming approval ratings, the slow but inexorable spread of official and unofficial anti-Semitism-do seem like they could have happened, had things turned in this way. Lindbergh's own anti-Semitism, for example, was expressed specifically in the context of the debate over U.S. involvement in the European war, most famously in a speech he gave in Des Moines in September 1941, in which he said that the Roosevelt administration, the British government, and American Jews were trying to push the US into a war which, Lindbergh argued, did not serve American interests. (Indeed, to validate his point that the book's scenario is not so far-fetched, Roth reproduces the text of Lindbergh's speech as an appendix to the book.)

Several reviews of *The Plot Against America* have pointed to this real history to argue that Roth's purpose in writing the book is to present an allegory about a currently growing threat of anti-Semitism in this country. Others assert that his subject is fear (the subject of the book's opening line, "Fear presides over these memories, a perpetual fear.")-fear of terrorism, fear-mongering by the current administration, fear felt by unfortunate American Muslims who are victims of guilt-by-association in our current conflicts. Roth, who is notorious for provoking (even embracing) controversy; whom one critic calls "a defiant provocateur who gives whole new universes of meaning to the phrase 'in your face' -denies any such intent. The book is about what it's about, he insists in his New York Times essay and in numerous interviews. He wasn't writing an allegory or a roman à clef to the present time, but is interested in the historical game of "what if."

Should we believe him? I think so. Lindbergh, the real and imagined denizens of Newark, Fiorello la Guardia, Burton Wheeler, Walter Winchell-the characters that populate the book-are just devices, tools for Roth to examine what really intrigues him, how historical events impact the individual. Historians do this all the time-the genre is known as "the history of everyday life"-but with real people and real events and developments. Roth here does it with the ordinary people whom he knows best: his parents. It is they who are at the center of his crucible. As Roth said in one interview about the book, "I'm talking about the historical fire at the centre and how the smoke from that fire reaches into your house." In another, he explains that this is the first time he could really write about his parents, since their stolid ordinariness had little drama, until he used his imagination to expose them to unexpected pressures. Then he could examine their response and come up with this memorial to their integrity, fortitude and decency. As such, Roth's historical fiction may well be, above all, a memorial to his parents.

neighborhood of Newark, but also the father-son struggle that has characterized the Zuckerman trilogy and many of his other novels. In typical Nathan Zuckerman-angst, Adam Bellow wrote a column titled "Missing: My Father" in *The New York Times* on June 10, 2005, about the relationship that he didn't have with his father, the great writer and Roth's inspiration.

On the day that would have been Saul Bellow's ninetieth birthday, Adam consoles readers of *The New York Times* by announcing that "he is no more gone today than he was a few months ago, or at any other time in my life." One of four children from five marriages, Adam only lived with his father for the first two years of his life. He confesses that what he had with his father while Saul Bellow was still alive was "a fond but highly attenuated bond with a frequently distracted, often absent, much older father." Adam only interacted with his extended family when they began to gather for Saul Bellow's "milestones," which did not include Thanksgiving or Hanukkah, at the end of his father's life in Boston, Vermont, or on Lake Michigan. Adam reveals that Saul Bellow "just sat up there like Wotan on his mountain, in Vermont, or in his aerie overlooking Lake Michigan, and I made pilgrimages by bus or car or plane." Wait a minute - is this Adam Bellow writing as Saul Bellow's son or Roth writing as Nathan Zuckerman? All that is missing from Adam's narrative is the infamous deathbed curse that Zuckerman receives from his father for writing and publishing Carnovsky in *Zuckerman Unbound*. Maybe Adam's deathbed curse from Saul Bellow was for writing *In Praise of Nepotism*.

Certainly there are striking similarities between book editor/nonfiction writer Adam Bellow and fiction writer Nathan Zuckerman's egotistical tales. Both are Jewish sons growing up in America, apparently searching for father figures as well as writing mentors. Adam's experiences growing up as Bellow's son much resemble Zuckerman's indecision in *The Ghost Writer*, choosing between Felix Abravanel and E. I. Lonoff after his father chastises his writing of the short story "Higher Education." One humorously recalls Zuckerman's descriptions of Abravanel as the celebrity writer who comes to the University of Chicago for a public lecture and discussion with Zuckerman's advanced writing class (centered of course on Zuckerman's short story). Although Abravanel's young blonde mistress hints to Zuckerman that Abravanel will share his short story with an important New York editor, Zuckerman knows from the socially acceptable "good luck" during coffee after class that Abravanel will not contact the editor on behalf of a talented young writer. After Zuckerman chooses to mail his four published short stories to Lonoff, he makes the journey to Lonoff's secluded farmhouse in the Berkshires, where Zuckerman connects with Lonoff during their discussion about literature and Jews. Zuckerman learns from Lonoff that he has true freedom in his writing, even with his father's ambivalent feelings.

Zuckerman therefore yearns to live his life as Lonoff and singularly devote his life to his writing, which takes forty years, the controversial publication of Carnovsky, four divorces, his parents' death, and his younger brother Henry's estrangement for him to achieve. Hopefully it will not take Adam Bellow as great a length of time for him to become comfortable with his own heritage as the second son of one of the greatest twentieth-century American writers. Otherwise Roth will have plenty more material to use as he writes about the struggles between Jewish American fathers and sons. Adam may suggest that he can break away from his father's legacy when he shares a dream of his in which he gains the upper hand on his father "with love." Adam says in his column that his dream made him happy "because I was able to speak up for myself in real time and refused to be paved over or ignored." Like Zuckerman after his father's death on his drive through the Weequahic neighborhood in *Zuckerman Unbound*, Adam finally acknowledges that his father will always be a part of him, "a bond that transcends time and space, and even death, because my father, though absent, is deeply, unpredictably, stubbornly present in me." Adam could have been speaking not only for Roth's Zuckerman, but Seymour Levov in *American Pastoral* and Coleman Silk in *The Human Stain* as well.

---

---

***Bellow & Roth*** - continued from page 7

---

---

**Augie March as the Anti-Portnoy**  
**Phoebe Maltz**

I chose to attend college at the University of Chicago in the fall of 2001 for many reasons. I wanted to be forced to learn more math and science than I would voluntarily have subjected myself to at a school without a core curriculum. I wanted to make up for the high school years I spent watching “Designing Women” and figured that a few years of Aristotle and Adam Smith might be just the thing. I wanted to live in a large city with decent public transportation but did not wish to spend college in New York City, where I grew up. But really, I went to this school because of Philip Roth. Chicago via Roth just sounded so intense, so bleak, with such harsh winters, and had, right on campus, an International House that had nothing to do with pancakes. And, as far as I could tell from *I Married a Communist*, it was a school without butt-shorts or the equivalent.

Well, I’ve discovered that the U of C does, in fact, have butt-shorts (I even, ahem, bought a pair), fraternities, and even the occasional snow-free day, but I’ve also learned that Roth isn’t the novelist who best captures the University. That would be Saul Bellow, whose recent death at the age of 89 (fun tidbit: he had his last child at 84) ought to give him a place in the paper of the University with which he is most commonly associated, and which he describes so vividly in his novels, especially *Herzog* and *Ravelstein*.

I’m not the first U of C to write on Bellow, so before launching into my own take, I must turn to what’s already been said by *New York Times* columnist David Brooks, A.B.’ 83, as well as Philip Roth, A.M.’ 55. Brooks and Roth, looking primarily at Bellow’s 1953 novel, *The Adventures of Augie March*, both see Bellow as significant because of his redefinition of what it means to be an American, his refusal to let his own Jewish (not to mention Canadian) background hold him back.

In his *Times* column memorializing Bellow, Brooks writes that “contact with European seriousness only made [Bellow] more acutely aware of his own Americanness, as it has with so many others...Attracted by the rarefied but often anti-Semitic world of high culture, he had that Jewish instinct to want entry into that world and yet not want it at the same time. Out of that tension between European elitism, which stoked Bellow’s ambition, and America’s leveling democratic shtick, which was in his bones, emerged Bellow’s manic conception of the American dream.”

Odd, though, that Brooks—a columnist who has written about the immorality of casual sexual relationships, and who encourages women, at least, to start families as soon as possible—writes, approvingly: “Bellow’s best America would be a Times Square version of a German university, with intellectual rigor on one side and scrambling freedom-sex included—on the other.”

In a 2000 *New Yorker* essay, Roth, in turn, praises Bellow’s “assertive gusto,” which, Roth argues, permitted Bellow to transcend his background. “It may well have been the precious gift of an appropriate fury that launched him into beginning his third book not with the words ‘I am a Jew, the son of immigrants’, but, rather, by warranting that son of immigrant Jews who is Augie March to break the ice with the Harvard-trained professors (as well as everyone else) by flatly decreeing, without apology or hyphenation, ‘I am an American, Chicago born.’”

Interesting, then, that Roth—whose novels tend to be beginning-to-end explorations of or laments on being “a Jew, the son [or recent descendent] of immigrants”—should congratulate Bellow for not beginning his novel with identity crisis or hyphenation. Why, if Roth sees this as admirable, did he not choose such an angle for his own fiction? Why are Roth’s protagonists always apologizing?

Roth also highlights the powerful end of *Augie March*: “Look at me, going everywhere! Why, I am a sort of Columbus of those near-at-hand.” Odd that Roth should cite this line, when his own character Alex Portnoy, in a novel written a good while after *Augie March*, felt he had to sleep with women from the American heartland in order to conquer America, that simply being born in this country or spending much of one’s life here wasn’t enough.

## Counterfactual History and Roth's Purpose in *The Plot Against America* by Arthur Brenner, Siena College and University at Albany

In recent years, counterfactual or "virtual" or "alternate" history, at it is variously termed, has grown beyond its status as a parlor game or a "low-rent," "pulpy" literary genre. It has earned growing respect among a small cadre of professional historians. They have written books and essays, dedicated issues of some journals to a round of "what if" histories, and have convened conferences on the merits and uses of the genre. Alternate history, they argue, can help produce "a more sophisticated appreciation of causation" and can lead us to question long-held assumptions, define true turning points, and show that tiny occurrences may have major repercussions. Professor Richard Lebow of Ohio State University, who organized one such conference in 1998, says that it can help historians reduce what he identified as "hindsight bias": After an event has taken place, "people readjust their estimates of the probability of that happening. ... That makes history appear more pre-ordained than it really is. We to get people to better understand contingency, that there are many realistic possibilities for what actually happens." Niall Ferguson of Oxford and NYU, editor and author of the 1998 book *Virtual History*, says its purpose is "to recapture the chaotic nature of experience and see that there are no certain outcomes."

By his own account, Philip Roth believes that history has, to paraphrase Niall Ferguson, a chaotic nature with no certain outcomes. Roth articulates this in a poignant scene in *The Plot Against America* where the father, the rock-steady Herman Roth, breaks down in uncontrollable tears at the strains buffeting the family and nation.

... as Lindbergh's election couldn't have made clearer to me, the unfolding of the unforeseen was everything. Turned wrong way round, the relentless unforeseen was what we schoolchildren studied as "History," harmless history, where everything unexpected in its own time is chronicled on the page as inevitable. The terror of the unforeseen is what the science of history hides, turning a disaster into an epic. (pp. 113-14)

This conception of history accounts at least in part for Roth's choice to undertake a novel in this counterfactual vein.

How well has Roth done in his attempt to write an alternate history of the U.S. from 1940-42? Geoffrey Parker, writing in *History Today*, posits two rules for the genre: one is the "minimal-rewrite" rule-that is, change as little as possible of the actual historical record while still achieving a significant rerouting of subsequent events. A second rule is to let the clock of history keep running: subsequent history may return events to the course from which the changed antecedent was intended to divert it. Without Pearl Harbor we might still have had a war with Japan at some time not too much later than when it actually started.

Although Roth effectively keeps the clock of history running in his counterfactual, he fails the first test. The book ends with Roosevelt restored to the Presidency in 1942 and Pearl Harbor taking place in December of that year-so that the fictional Lindbergh presidency gives way to World War II as we know it. That is, the Lindbergh episode as Roth imagines it delays but does not divert America from its historic undertaking. But Roth fails the first test by the device he uses to bring the story back around to Roosevelt. In the most unsatisfying, implausible, and, frankly,



**Abstracts - continued from page 15****Tara Johnson\* - Ball State University****American Dreams of Paradise, Progress, and Freedom in Philip Roth's *The Human Stain* and *American Pastoral***

Philip Roth's recent novel *The Human Stain* expands on critical questions of how the myth of the American dream affects cultural assimilation. In *American Pastoral*, Roth's alter ego Nathan Zuckerman explores the life of a former classmate, Seymour "Swede" Levov, whose life has been the culminating moment of Jewish assimilation in America. However, Zuckerman learns that Swede's daughter Merry destroyed her father's pastoral dream of American success when she blew up the post office and killed an innocent man in quaint small town Rimrock. In *The Human Stain*, Zuckerman's neighbor Coleman Silk forsook his African American heritage to create his pastoral dream as a professor, husband, and father of three in a small New England college town. Silk's life is destroyed by accusations of racism that his denied past would free him from. Through Swede and Silk's lives, Roth suggests the problematic nature of assimilation that plagues his protagonists: why should my being a minority keep me from sharing in the American dream? In this paper I will deconstruct such American concepts as athleticism, capitalism, individualism, and education that provide illusory evidence for successful assimilation in the twentieth century. I will also place Zuckerman's life within the context of Swede and Silk's lives to demonstrate how Roth uses Jewishness to explore the nature and psychology of the American promise of freedom.

**Daniel L. Medin\* - Stanford University****Loving Lies? Philip Roth's "Looking at Kafka."**

Philip Roth is one of the most reflexively literary writers of the past three decades. His novels conflate life and art-"the written and the unwritten world"-in a manner that not only surpasses the modern dichotomy represented so saliently in the early to middle work of Thomas Mann, but boldly navigates yet unexplored parameters of Cervantes's terrain where fictions pen the lives of their authors. While Mann, Dostoevsky, Flaubert, and Henry James have all shared recurring roles in Roth's work, Kafka alone has surfaced with obstinate regularity since the publication of *Portnoy's Complaint* in 1969. Roth has since expressed his filial relation to Kafka regularly. While numerous critics have praised his insight into his precursor's work, none has yet addressed the violent appropriations of Roth's initial renderings. Harold Bloom deems misreading necessary for strong poets "to clear imaginative space for themselves." In this paper I will demonstrate how "Looking at Kafka" does precisely this through Roth's uncanny exercise of misreading as he has elsewhere defined it: the hybrid essay-story is "skillful, cultivated, highly imaginative, [and] widely read," but ultimately "quite bizarre" and "fixed in its course by the reader's background, ideology, sensibility, etc."

**Matthew Shipe - Washington University****Personality Crisis: The Reconstruction of Identity in the "Philip Roth" Tetralogy**

In his most recent novel, *The Plot Against America* (2004), Philip Roth continues his reassessment of American history that, with the exception of *The Dying Animal* (2001), has been the primary subject of his fiction for the better part of the last decade. More than just an extension of his "American trilogy," however, the return of Philip Roth as a character within a Roth novel evokes the four books that he published successively from 1988 to 1993 - *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography* (1988), *Deception: A Novel* (1990), *Patrimony: A True Story* (1991), and *Operation Shylock: A Confession* (1993) - a sequence memorable for Roth's decision to abandon temporarily the alter-egos that had become his trademark as a novelist and depict himself as the central character in his fiction. Although *The Plot Against America* has little thematic connection with the previous "Roth" books, its publication invites a reconsideration of this previous sequence. While his recent work has received a great deal of critical attention, particularly his "American" trilogy, very little work has

*continued on page 19*

## Abstracts from Papers Delivered at Recent Conferences

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

### American Literature Association Conference in Boston, MA May 26-29 2005

#### Panel: American Visions of Europe: From Past to Present (ALA)

Moderator: Elaine Safer\*

#### Andrew Gordon - University of Florida

##### Performing Whiteness in Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*: Novel vs. Film

Philip Roth's *The Human Stain* (2000) concerns the price of racial passing, of renouncing one's birth family and living one's life as a lie. It also deconstructs the notion of whiteness, demonstrating that it is a performance. Unfortunately, director Robert Benton's film *The Human Stain* (2003) does not do justice to Roth's novel because of a mistake in casting. The young Coleman Silk is convincing because he is played by the bi-racial Wentworth Miller, who could pass as Jewish. But the elderly Coleman is played by Anthony Hopkins, who, although convincing in portraying the emotions of the old man, hardly resembles or sounds like his younger self and looks and sounds neither African-American nor Jewish. Many reviewers complained about the miscasting of "a Welshman to play a black American playing a Jew." Because the hero is miscast, and because the film lacks continuity between the flashbacks to the past Coleman and the scenes of the present Coleman, it cannot effectively deconstruct the notion of performing whiteness.

#### Panel: Women and Philip Roth (ALA)

Moderator: Annette Zilversmit\*, Long Island University

#### Beth Widmaier Capo\* - Illinois College

##### Sex and the Single Girl: Redeeming Brenda Patimkin

This paper will analyze Roth's portrait of women in his 1959 novella "Goodbye, Columbus" as compared Mary McCarthy's 1954 story "Dottie Makes an Honest Woman of Herself." These texts provide a fascinating counterpoint on issues of female sexuality and birth control in the 1950s. Both works include scenes of their female characters being fitted for a diaphragm before engaging in premarital sex. Both reinscribe a sexual dynamic of male control and place birth control firmly within this relationship. Dottie and Brenda are fitted for diaphragms not on their own motivation, but because their lovers tell them to. However, Roth's Brenda is a less romantically idealistic character than McCarthy's Dottie. Her ambivalence to the diaphragm and to her relationship with Neil, in addition to her competitive spirit in athletics and education, present Brenda as a more complex "modern" woman.

Roth allows for multiple readings that complicate the insertion of contraception into relationships. While Dottie and Brenda are adults, their "modern" freedom as sexual beings is limited, despite the ability to escape pregnancy, by the disciplining force of cultural judgment (for instance, the role of Brenda's mother). The paper will discuss the symbolic significance of the diaphragm, the use of consumerism and marriage as dual tropes in representing female sexuality, and Roth's women in "Goodbye, Columbus" as precursors to his female characters in later works (such as *The Human Stain*).

**Abstracts - continued from page 9****Josh Lambert\* - University of Michigan****Reading Portnoy Backwards: The Shiksa as Allegory in Roth's Comic Masterpiece**

Imagine picking up *Portnoy's Complaint* for the first time as if it were a Hebrew book, and opening it from right-to-left. The first words you would see, naturally enough, would be the doctor's call to begin. You would then encounter a chapter titled "In Exile," about a Jewish-American man visiting Israel, obsessed with the nature of Jewish identity. According to such a backwards reading, it would seem that at stake throughout *Portnoy's Complaint* is, above all, the question of Jewish identity after WWII, explored through the allegory of one man's sex life. I propose, first, that the non-Jewish women, or shiksas, of *Portnoy's Complaint*-whom critics have complained are flatly and unsympathetically depicted-can alternatively be read as figures within a socio-political allegory, and, second, that such an allegory fits naturally within a Jewish literary tradition. As Tikva Frymer-Kensky, Christine Benevenuto, and David Biale have shown, from its beginnings in Jewish texts (in the stories of Jezebel, Cozbi and Zimri, Ruth, and Samson, for example) the figure of the non-Jewish woman is used allegorically to explore the relationships between Jewish and non-Jewish communities. In a 1958 essay, Leslie Fiedler makes a similar point about the shiksa in modern Jewish-American literature. Such an allegorical use of the non-Jewish woman, as a textual representative of assimilation and its dangers, is sharply and concisely on display in a 1943 fable by S. Y. Agnon, "The Lady and the Peddler." Following in this tradition, my paper presents an allegorical reading of the non-Jewish women in Portnoy's *Complaint*-whom Portnoy calls The Pilgrim, The Pumpkin, and The Monkey-in an attempt to illuminate the ways that Roth's representations of shiksas reflect his ambivalence about Diaspora, and function within his explorations of Jewish-American identity.

**Lew Livesay\* -- St. Peter's College****The Witch Hunt for Resistant Readers in Philip Roth's *The Human Stain***

With the character of Coleman Silk, Roth once again dissects the social attitudes that grant status through ingrained assumptions about money, race, gender, age, and education. Roth has persistently played with the idea of how much freedom an individual can expect to have in determining one's own course amidst this rigid system of social markers that determine identity. Coleman Silk turns out to be a quintessential Roth protagonist in the sense that he will find himself to have less freedom than he had long supposed. Silk never quite sees his involvement in bringing others against himself. By ignoring social norms, Silk inflames an enmity that inevitably turns into a witch hunt. In the opening chapter of *The House of Seven Gables*, Hawthorne wrote that an understanding of what motivates a witch hunt "should teach us, among its other morals, that the influential classes, and those who take upon themselves to be leaders of the people are fully liable to all the passionate error that has ever characterized the maddest mob." The mob will ultimately pursue Coleman Silk as relentlessly as the mob pursues Joe Christmas in *Light in August*.

Ostensibly this Roth novel is about race. Many reviewers have discerned the similarity between Coleman Silk and the portrait of Anatole Broyard published as "White Like Me" by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in *The New Yorker* in 1996. Just as Broyard found it possible and easier to go into the army as a white man, since his appearance led to no questions about ethnicity, so to Silk goes into the navy as a white man and begins a career that virtually takes his African heritage out of the identity equation, until a point in time when Professor Silk refers to two persistently absent students with the term "spooks." Silk's attempt to read his own intent into this term is overwritten by the consensus against him as an insult aimed at black students. This "conflict of interpretations" reveals how cultural identity is written and read by cultural signifiers beyond any one person's control. No person could be more haunted by traces of painful slander. Coleman Silk had long ago decided to exist behind his white appearance when he was repulsed by someone having hurled the "N" word at him. He refused having limiting and debilitating labels placed upon himself. That he himself gets accused of such

impact on his development as a writer, my paper uses the sociologists who defined the era - such as David Riesman and William H. Whyte, Jr. - to analyze Roth's first novel as a product of Fifties thought. Neil Klugman is twenty-three years old during the summer of 1957. His love interest Brenda Patimkin is immediately situated as the Eisenhower-establishment when she tells Neil she plans to practice her golf swing. Neil's initial reaction to this force differs from Roth's own, who recalls his reaction to Eisenhower's victory, his rage at the "philistine majority" who had elected him, and his conviction that "a moronic America was our fate" (*Facts* 63). Although Neil is hardly as overtly political as the writer who created him, he serves as an ideally snide guide through those notoriously conformist times. My paper does not fall into the reflexive reading of *Goodbye, Columbus* as a chronicle of the assimilation of Jews; instead, it investigates the narrative as a product of the prevailing national thought of the time.

I will discuss primarily Roth's treatment of work and the structure of organizations: the Newark Public Library; Patimkin Kitchen and Bathroom Sinks; and the most seductive organization of all, the Patimkin family themselves. The operation of these networks is prototypically Fifties in nature, and Whyte and Riesman help us analyze the complexities within the relationships in *Goodbye, Columbus*. Ultimately, this angle of inquiry allows us to learn more about Neil's dilemma, and his crucial choice at the novella's end. When we understand that his decision takes place in the context of the climate of the 1950s and all that that implies, we can better appreciate it for the triumph that it is.

**Sam Cohen\* - University of Missouri -Columbia**  
**"American Trauma"**

In this paper I read *American Pastoral* against a critique of trauma studies in order to address an issue raised in many readings of the novel, namely its politics, in particular in regard to the "trauma" of the 1960s. My reading is based on two analyses—one of the book's form and the other of the field of trauma studies. The formal analysis corrects the misconception that the book is a realist novel by describing Roth's careful use of superficially realist techniques and his employment of a broken frame narrative that doubly ironizes the main character, the Swede's, view of the sixties and Zuckerman's view of the sixties, in part by pointing out their 1990s context. The analysis of trauma studies historicizes the field in the same context *American Pastoral* comes out of, the post-Cold War 1990s, and argues that the dangerous attraction to endings evident in the triumphalist narratives of American history, an attraction trauma studies can be seen as at least in part motivated by, is also something to which trauma studies itself is susceptible in its attraction to healing the past's wounds. This conclusion allows me to reread *American Pastoral*'s politics: they are not conservatively anti-1960s, as they are often read to be, nor are they naively pro-1960s, ignoring the violent upheavals of the time. Rather, the novel leads us to see how our views of the past are affected by the needs of our present by making us perform the forgetting of that very fact in our reading of the novel—by forcing us to misread the novel as so many critics have done, by leaving out the parts that don't fit the meaning we want it to have. As in the field of trauma studies, *American Pastoral* demonstrates, in our rush to make symbols of the past so that we can heal over its trauma, we elide the messy details and in doing so curtail the past's ability to mean. Just as the Swede is more than his symbolization let Zuckerman see, the 1960s were more than that time's symbolizations let us see. Our desire to heal history's wounds, *American Pastoral* shows us, causes us to misunderstand them, and ourselves.

*continued on page 16*

**Abstracts - continued from page 13**

The effect was an “unambiguous sense, . . . immediately after the victory over Nazi fascism and Japanese militarism, of belonging to the greatest nation on earth,” in contrast to which the Europe of his ancestors was a place where “life was so awful, . . . so menacing or impoverished or hopelessly obstructed, that it was best forgotten” (123). Roth revives that contrast in his fiction by repeatedly importing international figures (dead and alive) and international incidents (historical and imagined) into his American stories and by continually condemning his American protagonists to failed missions abroad. The premises remain comic even when the tone does not. Kafka turns up as a New Jersey Hebrew school teacher in “I Always Wanted You to Admire My Fasting” (1973), Anne Frank as a hopelessly constrained author in *The Ghost Writer* (1979). All of world literature (plus a little world history) becomes the basis for *The Great American Novel; The Counterlife* (1986) takes Nathan Zuckerman from New York to Judea, Basel, and finally to London, where in the metaphorical site he calls “Christendom” his Americanness and Jewishness are separated and his marriage to an Anglican Englishwoman falls apart. American ideals remain untarnished despite despicable political acts. In this vein, Roth’s most recent novel, *The Plot Against America* (2004), which reimagines nativist 1940s America as a Nazi colony led by President Charles A. Lindbergh, returns in a serious mode to the comic proposition of an alternative history offered in *The Great American Novel* (1973). This paper will survey the arc of ideas expressed by Roth’s imperialist humor over the thirty years between these two novels of American politics.

**20th Century Literature and Culture Conference, February 24-26, 2005, Louisville, KY**

**Jason Baskin****“In the Middle of a Jewish Joke”: Romantic Irony and Jewish Identity in *Portnoy’s Complaint***

Though it has become a hallmark of much that we like to call post-modern fiction, irony is rarely analyzed in terms of its Romantic lineage, or as a serious response to specific historical and literary pressures. Likewise, most readings of *Portnoy’s Complaint*, beginning with Irving Howe’s attack on the novel as an “assemblage of gags,” interpret Roth’s ironic rhetoric through terms inherited from modernism, ignoring its roots in romanticism. Whether celebrated as Roth’s breakthrough into meta-fiction or taken for granted as a youthful sin for which Roth, in his later “more serious” work, might still be apologizing-irony in *Portnoy’s Complaint* is seen monologically, as an unraveling of reality into a joke or textual game. In this paper, I want to complicate this picture, particularly the assumption that irony can best be understood as an evasion of the social and historical conditions that it purports to mock. Working in the romantic mode, Roth rejects the monological (modernist) view of irony shared by both Howe (his greatest critic) and Portnoy (his most famous protagonist), each of whom mistakenly view irony as a means of escape from Jewish identity. I want to begin by positioning Howe’s reading of Roth within his larger critique of emerging post-modern writing in his essay “The Culture of Modernism.” Within his conception of modernism, I suggest, Howe remains blind to the work of romantic irony-the result is a negative understanding of irony and humor, in the later essay on Roth, as merely a joke or “gag.” Turning then to Friedrich Schlegel’s theory of romantic irony, via Anne Mellor’s comprehensive study, I want to suggest a re-categorization of Roth’s rhetoric in *Portnoy’s Complaint* as romantic (rather than post-modern). As Mellor’s discussion makes clear, rather than an escape from reality into the fictions of language or the self, romantic irony functions as a means to critically engage with social and historical reality-what Roth has called (quoting Wallace Stevens) the “unalterable necessity” of identity within a society and within a literary tradition.

**Mark Cirino - City University of New York  
Goodbye, Columbus and the 1950s**

When the 1950s began, Philip Roth was a high school student. At the end of the decade, he was accepting the National Book Award for *Goodbye, Columbus*. Because the decade had such an enormous

behavior underscores the irony of what forms the repressed can take upon its return to a cultural battlefield.

In similar fashion, Roth's novel examines the contingent manner in which gender is a culturally constructed category. Silk rises to a position of preeminence in the academy by learning to read the Greek classics that form the origin of white western civilization. Silk sees Achilles as representing "phallic entitlement, the phallic dignity, of a powerhouse of a warrior prince" (5). Silk fully identifies with the authority and attendant power of being a ruling leader, and in the process, he conceals his own non-white origins. But he does not entirely assimilate as he fosters an identity of excluded whiteness as a Jew. He takes his identity from his wife, who, in every sense, plays the role of traditional female in the patriarchal order. She defines herself as passively submissive, lending her identity to another.

My paper will consider how each of the other females in the novel represents some kind of variant on being a resistant reader. Delphine Roux cannot read literature according to her empathic identification with Kundera; instead, her scholarly reputation dictates that she must "deal with literature through literary theory" (267). In her extremism, Roux decides that "Beauvoir sold out to Sartre - a very intelligent woman but in the end his slave" (269). In the politics of gender identity, from Judith Fetterley and Laura Mulvey to more recent accounts in Kaja Silverman and Diana Fuss, the Hegelian binary of Master and Slave defines the two positions of male identity as the dominant position and female identity as the submissive position. When Coleman Silk tries to defend his interpretation of "spook" to Delphine Roux, he is sitting on the wrong side of the desk. He has become the resistant reader to her authority, placing him in the unfamiliar feminine position at the mercy of a masculine "predator." The second time that Roux calls Silk on the carpet occurs when he refuses to accommodate a female student's "feminist perspective on Euripides" (192). She turns the tables on Silk when she decides, "Her whole life had been a battle not to be cowed by the Coleman Silks, who use their privilege to overpower everyone else and do exactly as they please" (197). In these exchanges, humanist politesse is at the mercy of power.

The other principal female characters have their issues with reading. Coleman Silk's first involvement with a woman led him away from his family. Silk is still reading a letter from Steena Pallson which he received over forty years ago. He no more has a clear interpretation of that letter than he does of the poem that she wrote for him in their youth - a poem he describes as "opaque" (113). Silk's own daughter, Lisa, leaves her job as a teacher to work in what is called a "Reading Recovery program." In Faunia Farley, we encounter a character who has tried to remove herself from being read culturally. Silk declares, "The ability to read seems to have perished right along with the childhood when she learned how" (34). It is through Faunia that reading is identified with the body.

Consideration will also go to the gendered positions of Coleman Silk and Nathan Zuckerman. At the beginning of the novel, they have both passed over from late middle age masculinity. On their first Saturday evening together, they dance about Silk's front porch. And then, with the assistance of Viagra, Silk resurrects his lost libido and finds a new dance partner in Faunia. When their relationship ends tragically at the hands of her former husband, Zuckerman is left to put a meaning on their lives. He has to write the story and fill in what reader-reception critics, like Ingarden and Iser, call the blanks or gaps. In doing so, Zuckerman discovers that he cannot write a mimetic tale that fulfills "the human desire for a beginning, a middle, and an end" (314). In realizing that the death of the two mismatched lovers is a crime, Zuckerman is faced with the fact that neither the authorities nor Silk's children will entertain the possibility of his reading. As a novelist, on the periphery of culture, Nathan Zuckerman is left to ponder that his reading represents an imaginative version that will be ignored by today's culture. The novelist finds himself among the powerless and excluded resistant readers. By leaving things as they are, Zuckerman chooses not to provoke the wrath of the mob which might bring the witch hunt after him.

**Abstracts - continued from page 11****Stephanie Cherolis - Central Connecticut State University****Consuela Castillo: Pornographic Woman and Icon of Loss in Philip Roth's *The Dying Animal***

*The Dying Animal* features a rare moment of self-reflexivity for David Kepesh, a moment where he must confront the loss of a woman he has come to love. At the height of his mourning, Kepesh turns not to a discussion of the classical art or music that once sustained him, but rather to a discussion of pornography. Kepesh asks, "What am I able to offer instead in this milk-and-honey society of free-market sex? And so that's when the pornography begins. The pornography of jealousy" (41). Kepesh finds himself in an unfamiliar situation of wanting something beyond a sexual relationship with a woman, and is ill equipped to compete or assert control. Roth, through Kepesh, theorizes a "pornography of jealousy" as devoid of the control, distance, and pleasure traditional pornography offers. Inspired by his lost relationship with Consuela, this new form of mourning offers not consolation and control, but rather more grief and sustained helplessness.

As such, Kepesh's meditation resembles Jahan Ramazani's theorization of the modern elegy in his book, *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney*. Here, Ramazani explores the shift from a traditional and consoling elegy of the past, to the melancholic elegy seen today. Modern elegists no longer have access to the traditions of the past that, according to Ramazani, offered the mourner some kind of dominance over their loss. Modern society has done away with such conventions, and inadvertently the inextricable benefits. In *The Dying Animal*, Roth seems to point to a similar lack of conventional control as consolation. He radically focuses on pornography, and in making a young woman suffering from breast cancer the inspiration for his aesthetic of melancholy, Roth has unexpectedly placed the objectification of women at the heart of impossible loss to offer a hope Ramazani fails to find.

Through this pornography of jealousy, Kepesh finds a way to experience the reality of loss without requiring the traditional pleasurable distractions or illusions. Whereas in the hands of any other contemporary writer, pornography would take on its traditional sense of empty passivity, Roth uses it to theorize a new mode of loss. Herein lies the uniqueness of Roth's theory. Kepesh is forced to move beyond a safe, superficial, and degrading regard for women, to finally understand the necessity of human relationships and accept the needed depth and unavoidable danger. Roth's new formulation of loss is something we all seem to be able to relate to in the twenty-first century, and it is a consideration made possible only through Consuela—a woman who not only embodies a new understanding of pornography and control, but more significantly, the changing society and its need for a new model of mourning. This pornography of jealousy, a pornography not condescending to, but inspired by, his relationship with Consuela, encompasses the real experience of loss, the pain and hopelessness at the heart of this novel.

**Francoise Kral\* - University of Paris****The De-sublimated Muse**

Although the opening pages of the novel may leave the reader with a sense of déjà vu, *The Dying Animal* soon departs from the now famous Rothian plot of the charismatic literature professor in love with a young and attractive female student. As readers progress through the text, they discover a deeply-moving and unsettling narrative in which the balance of power is inverted and the mentor is taught and initiated by the student.

Despite her Cuban origins and her sensual beauty, Consuela Castillo is not merely a stereotyped figure of the exotic beauty nor the typical student awaiting a mentor. When she exposes her cancer-encysted breast to his now lustless eyes, Consuela confronts him with the reality of a body he can neither desire nor sublimate into a work of art. Her Modigliani-like curves are bound to become a body in ruins, beyond reparation and resublimation. Not only does Consuela force David Kepesh to look at her body, she also asks him to take pictures of it, to immortalize her beauty. Yet the whole scene, narrated in a de-eroticised mode, points at the failure to reconstruct the muse into an object of desire, whereby suggesting the incapacity of art and also its

vanity in front of the bare reality: man is but a dying animal.

In this paper I propose to concentrate not so much on the love story itself as on the role played by Consuela in David's realisation of the fragility of life and the vanity of art. Interestingly enough, the female figure is not doomed to a traditional role - that of object of desire - but becomes a catalyst and triggers a process of questioning and an indictment of art.

### **MELUS (Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States) Conference in Chicago, April 7-10, 2005**

**Roy Goldblatt - Uppsala University, Sweden**

#### **The Whitening of the Jews and the Changing Face of Newark**

In the course of more than forty years of writing Philip Roth has chronicled the Jewish community of Newark, New Jersey in its attempt to initially gain full acceptance as Jews in an America perceived as hostile, and later as Americans who have become sanitized as Jews. Setting works such as Karen Brodtkin's *How the Jews Became White Folks & What That Says about Race in America*, Matthew Frye Jacobson's *Whiteness of a Different Color. European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, and David Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness and Colored White: Transcending the Racial Past* as my context, I will examine the transformation of Newark as an thriving ethnic enclave in which Jews like Alexander Portnoy or Neil Klugman explore the mysteries of life behind the "white goyish curtains" or the world of the Jewish nouveau riche emulating them. In seeking escape into America they fail to escape the yiddishkeit of the city and reflect the divided self, the conflict between being Jewish and American. In his most recent works Newark is a discarded place where Jews have-and are-only memories, where they no longer work but function as deracinated and totally whitened absentee factory-owners (the workforce now black or outsourced in Puerto Rico), as in the case of Seymour Levov, whose physical characteristics and nickname-"Swede"-represent the embodiment of tall, blond-haired, blue-eyed whiteness. Full Jewish acculturation in Roth proves to be as nightmarish as the demise of the American city, and Newark is a potent example.

**Judith Yaross Lee - Ohio University**

#### **The Imperialist Humor of Philip Roth**

If practices of empire include the subordination of other nations and their values for American aggrandizement and the exploitation of extra-national materials for American nation-building, then the dominant tradition of American humor is defined by such imperial practices, and the comic fiction of Philip Roth exemplifies their contemporary expression. American writers have comically asserted the superiority of their nation to others ever since Royal Tyler's 1787 play, *The Contrast*, offered the invidious comparison of Yankee and Englishman for our pleasure. Not coincidentally, American humor studies emerged in university literature and folklore departments in the 1920s and '30s, a period when international fascism, communism, and nativism promoted nationalism at home. In 1931, for example, Constance Rourke theorized in *American Humor* that humor revealed the "national character," a manifestation of post-colonial identity. A few years later Walter Blair equated American comic conventions with national ideology in his (now embarrassingly named) *Native American Humor* (1937), which charted the divergence between British and American humor as superior democratic ideals replaced inferior aristocratic values. Philip Roth studied American humor with both Blair and Napier Wilt at the University of Chicago in the mid-1950s and invoked their lessons not only in *Our Gang* (1971) and *The Great American Novel* (1973), two early satires of American culture dedicated to his former professors, but also throughout his career in fictions examining America and contrasting Americans with others.

Roth's imperialist humor reflects the idealism with which he grew up in the 1930s and 40s, when, as he wrote in *The Facts*, "growing up Jewish . . . and growing up American seemed to me indistinguishable" (122).

*continued on page 14*