



The Philip Roth Society Newsletter

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Philip Roth Society
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The Philip Roth Society Newsletter

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A Message From the Society's President

Derek Parker Royal

In the spring issue of the newsletter, I had ended my message from the founder with these words: "Six months from now, who knows what accomplishments we might list in these pages?" Little did I know then that I would be able to use those exact words, and appropriately so, as a way to setting up the significant developments that have occurred since May.

First, there is the matter of officers. This is the first time that I've had the pleasure of writing to you as the Philip Roth Society's President. The Society held its first business meeting at the May 2003 American Literature Association Conference in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and one of the first orders of business was to nominate and elect officers. I had the privilege of being elected as President, and Jessica G. Rabin, at Anne Arundel Community College, was elected as the Society's first Secretary/Treasurer. During the past six months I've thoroughly enjoyed working with Jessica, and together we have brought about a number of sig-

nificant additions to the Society.

One of the first things we did was to work towards adopting a Society constitution. As was decided at the ALA business meeting, Jessica and I worked up a draft of a constitution which we then sent around to all members for editorial comment and then final adoption. A copy of the constitution can be found on the Roth Society's Web site as well as in this issue of the newsletter.

Jessica and I have also worked on utilizing the Internet to improve inter-societal business and communications. New members can now join, and current members can now renew, online by using PayPal, a safe way to perform electronic business transactions. Just go to the Roth Society's "membership" Web page and follow the simple directions for online renewals. We have also established a new listserv group for the Society. It is an unmoderated listserv (for now) and subscription is open to anyone interested. For more

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About the Philip Roth Society

Founded in July 2002, the Philip Roth Society is an organization devoted to the study and the appreciation of the writings of Philip Roth. Its goal is to encourage the exchange of ideas and texts concerning this most significant author through discussions, panel presentations at scholarly conferences, and journal publications. In order to accomplish this, the Society provides a membership newsletter, a scholarly refereed journal, information concerning upcoming events, calls for papers devoted to Roth's fiction, ongoing sponsorship of scholarly conference panels, an extensive list of bibliographical resources, a society listserv group, and a growing directory of organizational membership. The Society welcomes both academic and non-academic readers alike. The Philip Roth Society is a non-profit community of readers and scholars and has no official affiliation with either Philip Roth or his publishers.

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

The newsletter welcomes announcements of upcoming events and conferences, short articles and reviews (500 to 800 words) on topics related to Philip Roth. Disks in Word or email submissions are appreciated. Please address inquiries and send contributions to Derek Parker Royal, Editor, *Philip Roth Society Newsletter*, Dept. of Literature & Languages, Texas A&M University-Commerce, Commerce, TX, 75429. email to: royal@rothsociety.org

Editor

Derek Parker Royal
Texas A&M University-Commerce

Managing Editor

Amanda Siegfried

Philip Roth Society Web page:
<http://rothsociety.org>



Conferences and Events

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

Upcoming Events

2003 Modern Language Association Annual Convention December 27-30, 2003, San Diego, Calif.

A special session panel, “Philip Roth and Race,” will present a first-of-its-kind approach to Roth’s literature. Rather than studying what Roth thinks about identity issues—or what critics and cultural groups think about what Roth thinks—the three papers in the panel will consider how Roth draws from and participates in a discourse on race in America. For more information, please contact the session coordinator, Dean Frano at francodj@wfu.edu.

Calls for Papers

American Literature Association Annual Conference May 27-30, 2004, San Francisco, Calif.

“Pop Goes Roth / Roth Goes Pop” - The Philip Roth Society will hold two panels at the 2004 ALA Conference in San Francisco, CA. It welcomes formal submissions on essays concerning Philip Roth and popular culture. Possible topics could include:

- The translation of Roth’s fiction into film, including the Hollywood representations of “Goodbye, Columbus,” *Portnoy’s Complaint*, and/or the recent release of Robert Benton’s *The Human Stain*.
- Popular canonicity and Roth’s place (or lack of place) in it.
- The type and function of music in Roth’s fictions.
- The realm of literary celebrity as played out in such novels as *Zuckerman Unbound* and *Operation Shylock*.
- *Portnoy’s Complaint*, bestsellerdom, and the question of “serious” fiction.
- The recent popularity of novels on political correctness and the ways that *The Human Stain* may fit into that genre.
- Philip Roth’s popular literary reputation overseas, and how it might differ from his popularity in the U.S.
- Roth’s relationship with the press.

Please send a 200-350 word abstract, along with contact information, by January 15, 2004 to: Derek P. Royal, Texas A&M University-Commerce, Dept. of Literature and Languages, Commerce, TX 75429-3011 Email: royal@rothsociety.org Fax: 903-886-5980.

Membership Information

To become a member of The Philip Roth Society, fill out this form and mail it to the address below. Annual membership fees are \$20 for individuals and \$30 for institutions. Please add \$5 for subscriptions outside of the United States. Membership includes subscription to the journal *Philip Roth Studies* as well as to the Society newsletter, and should be paid by check or money order (made out to "Philip Roth Society"). If you would like to be listed in the directory of members on the Society's Web site, please indicate so by checking the appropriate space(s) on the form.

Name: _____

Academic Affiliation (if any): _____

Address: _____
_____ Home or work address? _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Web Page: _____

I give permission for the following information to be listed on the directory of members at The Philip Roth Society's Web site (please check all that apply):

_____ Name _____ Email Address _____ Postal Address _____ Phone Number _____ Web Page Address

Full Name Signature: _____

Mail to:
The Philip Roth Society
c/o Derek Parker Royal
Department of Literature and Languages
Texas A&M University-Commerce
P.O. Box 3011
Commerce, TX 75429

Now you can renew your membership online

New members can join and current members can renew their Society memberships via PayPal on the Philip Roth Society Web page. Go to the "membership" Web page, <http://orgs.tamu-commerce.edu/rothsoc/membership.htm>, and follow the directions for online payments.

It's safe, it's easy, and it's hassle-free!

Announcing a New Journal

Philip Roth Studies

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SUBSCRIPTIONS

Philip Roth Studies will be published semi-annually by the Philip Roth Society. Subscription to the journal comes with membership to the Philip Roth Society. The yearly membership rates are \$20 for individuals and \$30 for institutions. Please add \$5 for subscriptions outside of the United States. Payments can be made through PayPal at the Roth Society Web site, <http://rothsociety.org>, or by mailing a check or money order (made to "Philip Roth Society") to:

Philip Roth Society
c/o Jessica G. Rabin
Department of English
Anne Arundel Community College
101 College Parkway
Arnold, MD 21012

SUBMISSIONS

Manuscripts and book reviews must be prepared according to the *MLA Style Manual* and should contain end-notes rather than footnotes. Please submit two copies of the manuscript, with author identification on a separate cover sheet. Individuals whose works are accepted for publication must supply them in both paper and electronic format (Microsoft Word). Articles should be between 2,500-7,000 words in length. Please include a SASE with submission to:

Derek P. Royal, Editor
Philip Roth Studies
Department of Literature and Languages
Texas A&M University-Commerce
Commerce, TX 75429-3011

b. The Secretary / Treasurer shall keep a record of monies received and dispersed and prepare an annual report of the Society's finances. The Secretary / Treasurer shall also maintain an on-going history of the organization. He or she shall also work with the Editor in distribution of the Society's annual newsletter.

c. The Editor shall prepare and edit the Society's annual newsletter, the *Philip Roth Society Newsletter*, working with the Secretary / Treasurer. The Editor will:

- i. Assemble a yearly calendar of appropriate conferences (see Article IX, Section 2d and 2e) and their deadlines;
- ii. List new publications on Roth;
- iii. Publish any open Call for Papers (CFPs);
- iv. Report pertinent news regarding Philip Roth and/or his writings;
- v. Include brief reviews and articles on texts and issues relating to Philip Roth.

d. The Webmaster-Bibliographer shall compile and distribute the annual bibliography of Philip Roth Studies and maintain the Web site.

Section 5. Officers shall be elected triennially by the Society membership, by mail, e-mail, or vote at the Annual General Meeting, from a slate of nominees. Names of nominees may be submitted by any member of the Society. Terms of office shall be three years, beginning June 15.

Article VI: Meetings

Section 1. The Society will meet at least once a year for the transaction of business. The Annual General Meeting shall be held in conjunction with the ALA Conference. Secondary business meetings may also be held at other conferences such as the Modern Language Association (MLA) Convention or the ALA Jewish American and Holocaust Literature Conference. Special meetings may also be called by the President, for social and/or business purposes.

Section 2. Voting by proxy shall be allowed. Such votes can be brought to any of the officers of the Society.

Section 3. Robert's Rules of Order shall govern meetings, unless a majority determines that an alternative procedure is preferable.

Article VII: Funds and Liabilities

Section 1. The funds of this Society shall be collected and dispersed by the Secretary / Treasurer, for the Society's needs and lawful expenditures. Disbursement of the Society's funds will be in accordance with the Articles of Incorporation of the Philip Roth Society.

Section 2. No member of the Society shall be liable except for the payment of dues.

Article VIII: Procedures

Section 1. Amendment to this Constitution shall be voted upon, by mail, e-mail, or vote at the Annual General Meeting, by the full membership; approval will need a two-thirds majority of those voting. Amendments may be proposed by the officers of the Society, or by petition signed by ten or more Society members in good standing.

Section 2. The Philip Roth Society will post CFPs online whenever a member wishes to chair a panel at a conference, or edit a collection or journal issue.

a. Any member seeking to post a CFP on the Philip Roth Society Web site must secure the permission of the Philip Roth Society officers before doing so. Each CFP should briefly (250 words or less) describe the topic, announce the deadline and provide an address for submissions. These CFPs will be publicized in the Philip Roth Society Newsletter.

b. If more than one member wishes to post a call for a single conference, and the conference organizers will only allow one Society panel to be sponsored, the membership will vote to select which CFP the Philip Roth Society will sponsor.

c. Anyone desiring to post a CFP must do so no later than a month before the submission deadline.

d. The Philip Roth Society particularly seeks to maintain a presence at the annual ALA Annual Conference.

e. The Philip Roth Society also encourages yearly participation at the regional MLA conferences, the MLA Convention, the ALA Jewish American and Holocaust Literature Conference, the Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the United States (MELUS) Conference, and the Twentieth-Century Literature Conference.

Article IX: Dissolution and Termination

Section 1. Upon termination and dissolution of the Society the officers shall proceed to wind up affairs of the association in accordance with the laws of the State of Texas in such case provided, paying all bills and debts of the association, and distributing remaining assets, if any, to such similar non-profit, tax-exempt, charitable, or educational institution as the Officers shall in their best discretion deem advisable, which charitable or educational institution shall be an organization included in the provisions of Section 501 © (3), 1954 Internal Revenue Code as amended from time to time. Upon dissolution and termination, no monies or profits whatsoever shall be paid to any officer or any other person except for compensation for services rendered or verified out-of-pocket expenses.

Bibliographical Update *(continued from page 19)*

Shechner, Mark. "On the Road with Philip Roth." *New England Review* 24.3 (2003): 89-96.

A selection from the introductory chapter of Shechner's new book, *Up Society's Ass, Copper!* (see above). Here the author discusses the significance of Irving Howe's and Norman Podhoretz's 1972 dismissals, both appearing in *Commentary*, of Roth as a serious American writer. Shechner aligns his own intellectual development and sensibilities with those of Roth after the publication of *Portnoy's Complaint*, leading to his subsequent attempts to defend Roth in the pages of *Partisan Review*.

Dissertations

Cohen, Samuel. "The Novel of Retrospect in American Fiction of the 1990s: Pynchon, Morrison, Roth." Diss. City U of New York, 2003.

Fisk, Gloria Lynn. "Tragic Knowledge in Postmodern Novels." Diss. City U of New York, 2003.

Tanenbaum, Laura. "'Sundered by a Memory; The Sixties in Historical Novels and Films of the Postwar United States.'" Diss. New York U, 2003.



Become a Member of the Bernard Malamud Society

Membership includes a subscription to the *Bernard Malamud Society Newsletter*. Annual fees are \$15 (\$20 for libraries and overseas addresses). To subscribe, please contact:

The Bernard Malamud Society
 c/o Professor Victoria Aarons
 Department of English
 Trinity University
 715 Stadium Drive
 San Antonio, TX 78212
 Email: vaarons@trinity.edu

Calls for Papers

We are seeking papers that treat the subject of race in Philip Roth's literature, for a new collection of essays titled *Philip Roth and Race*. The collection will have three sections. The first will examine the racial status of Jewishness in Roth's work. The second will examine race in the plots of Roth's novels, including inter-racial interaction in the novels, and race as a plot motivator. The third section will compare Roth's work to writers of other racial and ethnic groups.

The questions that prompt this call for papers are: How does recent scholarship on race help us re-read Philip Roth's older literature or approach his new work? In what ways is Roth's literature, as an exemplar of Jewish American literature, in conversation with other ethnic literatures? How are Jews "raced" in Roth's literature, and in writing about Roth? We are looking for new essays which address these questions, and which will place Roth's work in the mainstream of American and multi-ethnic literary histories. Topics to consider:

- The taxonomy of Jewish being in *Operation Shylock*, along with Roth's treatment of the image of the Jew as Shylock.
- The recent debate in *Prooftexts* amongst Michael Kramer and his respondents about whether Jewish literary history benefits from a raced-based conception of Jews.
- The efforts by David Biale and the contributors to *Insider/Outsider: Jews and Multiculturalism* to situate Jewish studies in the race and ethnic studies curriculum.
- Approaches to *The Human Stain* or other works in a multicultural context.
- Adam Zachary Newton's trope of "Facing" blacks and Jews—are there other pairings possible?
- Treatments of Roth's fiction which take into account Karen Brodtkin's analysis of "how Jews became white folks."
- An analysis of raced characters in Roth's fiction.
- Teaching *The Human Stain* or any other novel in a multi-ethnic literature course, or at an ethnically diverse (or HBCU) campus.
- And, of course, postmodern and deconstructive approaches to race and ethnicity which analyze the performativity of Jewishness in Roth's literature.

For more information Contact: Dean J. Franco, Dept. of English, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, NC 27106 Email: francodj@wfu.edu

Philip Roth as a comic writer: Essay collection

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 either Ben Siegel at BSiegel@CSUPomona.edu or Jay L. Halio at jlhalio@yahoo.com

Philip Roth Society Constitution

(Adopted September 1, 2003)

Article I: Name

Section 1. The name of this organization shall be the Philip Roth Society. The Society shall be incorporated as a non-profit organization under the laws of the State of Texas or under the laws of the state to which the Society membership votes to move the Society hereafter.

Article II: Purpose

Section 1. The purpose of this Society shall be to encourage the scholarly study and the general appreciation of the writings of Philip Roth, and to facilitate the exchange of ideas and texts concerning Philip Roth. The Society is a forum for research and the dissemination of this research globally, through the *Philip Roth Society Newsletter*, Society website, as well as through books, articles and publications, panels, and professional meetings deemed appropriate by the members of the Society. The Society officers shall review all proposals to expand the Society internationally to determine if these international groups are financially viable and willing to abide by the Philip Roth Society Constitution. No international organization may use the Philip Roth Society name without meeting these criteria.

Section 2. An important function of the Society shall be the sponsorship of the Philip Roth Society Sessions at the annual American Literature Association (ALA) Conferences. It shall conduct its Annual General Meeting during each ALA Conferences.

Section 3. The Philip Roth Society is organized and shall be operated exclusively for such charitable, scientific, literary or educational purposes as the membership may approve at the Annual General Meeting and as are within the purposes herein expressed. The Society is not organized for pecuniary profit, and shall not engage in any activities for any pecuniary profit and no officer, member or employee of the Society shall receive any pecuniary profit from the operations thereof except repayment of expenses reasonably incurred in effecting or carrying out one or more of its activities. No part of any net earnings of the Society shall inure to the benefit of any member or individual.

Article III: Membership

Section 1. Any individual, business, educational institution, or corporation interested in the aims of the Philip Roth Society may join.

Section 2. Membership in this Society shall be through payment of annual dues, according to schedules determined by the Annual General Meeting of the Society. These dues shall be used to support the services provided to the members of the Society.

Section 3. Membership begins January 1 of each year. Payment of dues shall allow the member to receive the *Philip Roth Society Newsletter* and any other publication determined by the Annual General Meeting of the Society for distribution to the entire membership.

Section 4. A member who has not paid dues for two years shall be classified as not in good standing; this being the case, all privileges and benefits will be terminated.

Article IV: Privileges

Section 1. All members in good standing shall have the right to stand for office, vote for officers of the Society and for session proposals for the ALA and other conferences, serve as a chair or organizer of an ALA or other conference session, and receive all publications issued by the Society, in accordance with the scale of dues set by the Annual General Meeting.

Article V: Officers

Section 1. The officers of the Society shall be a President, a Secretary / Treasurer, and an Editor (of the newsletter).

Section 2. Officers shall serve without compensation. They shall be entitled to reimbursement for legitimate Society expenses.

Section 3. A vacancy in any of these offices occurring during the incumbent's term of office because of illness, death, resignation, or any other reason shall be filled by a volunteer chosen by the remaining officers of the Society until such time as a new election can be held.

Section 4. The officers shall perform the following duties:

a. The President shall preside at the Annual General Meeting unless unable to do so. The President shall be responsible for organizing the Philip Roth Society sessions at the annual ALA Conferences or any other conferences in which the Society participates.

Movie Review: “The Many Lives of Coleman Silk: From Novel to Screen”

Elaine B. Safer, University of Delaware

The Human Stain, directed by Robert Benton and starring Anthony Hopkins and Nicole Kidman, is Hollywood’s latest effort to translate a novel into a film. In many respects such a project is similar to the endeavor to translate a literary work in English into another language, such as French. A twentieth-century American text written in English carries its own baggage—a set of references to place, people, and temper of the times which would be difficult to translate into French. To do so the translator needs to use his imagination to find French “equivalents” (in spirit and tone). In the process, the translator creates a new work of art, one that is akin to the original but also has its own life. A similar process, I believe, takes place in the transformation of novel to film.

Robert Benton’s film has been called “mesmerizing, multilayered, erotically charged” (Rex Reed, *New York Observer*); its lead characters “miscast”; it suffers because it lacks the constant presence of narrator Nathan Zuckerman; it misses an authorial presence to help explain the import of events; it can be compared to a bachelor’s apartment: “a mess” (*The Washington Post*). In the novel, a satiric awareness of the tragi-comic nature of experience grows out of narrator Zuckerman’s consciousness of events. In *The Human Stain*, as in the other novels of Roth’s trilogy, these experiences are seen in the context of historic events since WWII. In this novel, the effect of political correctness moves from the Clinton-Monica Lewinsky scandal to the Colman Silk disgrace at Athena College.

By necessity, making a film requires paring down and simplification. This means diminishing lengthy scenes, eliminating most of the sub plots, and reducing multifaceted characters and the themes connected with them, as well as trying to convey emotions as clearly as possible. Most reviewers see the film as offering “a new take on the politics of racial identity,” as well as showing the tragedy that results from what director Benton has described as “the notion that we can reinvent ourselves every generation, but while we gain our freedom, we leave history behind.”

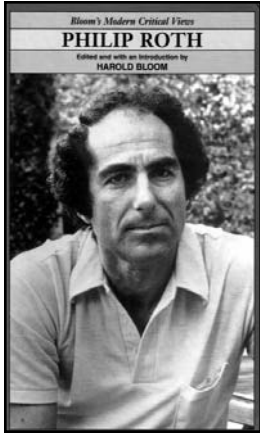
In the process of simplifying the focus of the book, the filmmaker has eliminated certain themes and emotional responses. A few that should have been examined are the theme of hypocrisy—hypocrisy on the part of Coleman Silk who passes as white, Faunia who passes as illiterate so as to diminish any threat she might otherwise pose, and self-deceiving hypocrisy as evidenced in politically correct spokespeople like Delphine Roux and her followers. Hypocrisy—especially self-deceiving hypocrisy—as Henry Fielding long ago illustrated, is central to lampooning the objects of satirical comedy. The movie eliminates the comic elements of the novel, including Lester’s actions in the Chinese restaurant and at the Vietnam Moving Wall Memorial, and Delphine’s act at the computer—sending her personal ad to all the faculty. The film thus eliminates the combination of humor and the absurd that intensifies the tragic elements of the work.

When *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* was transformed into a movie, author Ken Kesey (who early on had sold the rights) complained that he would have used surreal details instead of realistic ones, he would have done it “weird” so that the cinema audience would be so shocked and distraught “when they left there, they couldn’t find the exit” (Kesey, interviewed by Goodwin). Roth’s greatness as an artist in no small measure is shown by the ease with which he is able to intertwine strands of tragedy and farce, by the degree to which they interact and by the way they throw light on one another. Benton’s film has been praised by students of mine who have not read the novel. Whether the translation of novel into film is successful is something that I wish to consider at greater length.



The Human Stain, © Miramax Films

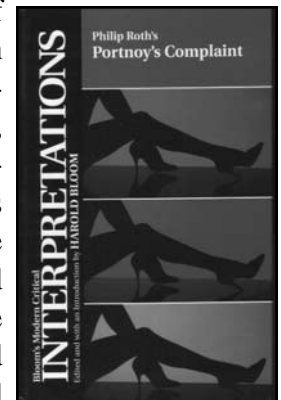
**Book Review: *Philip Roth*, edited by Harold Bloom,
and *Philip Roth's Portnoy's Complaint*, edited by Harold Bloom**
Victoria Aarons, Trinity University



As part of its two series, Modern Critical Interpretations and Modern Critical Views, both edited by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House Publishers has recently produced two collections of essays on Philip Roth. The two volumes, *Philip Roth* (Bloom's Modern Critical Views) and *Philip Roth's Portnoy's Complaint* (Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations), are clearly designed as resource texts for classroom use. Both span over 30 years of Roth criticism, one focusing singly on *Portnoy's Complaint* and the other on Roth's corpus of work from *Goodbye, Columbus* (1959) to *The Human Stain* (2000). Both collections attempt to cover the recurring critical responses to Roth's work and the central trends in what for decades has focused of Roth scholarship: Jewish stereotypes; the post-war Jewish-American/American-Jewish dilemma; narrative playfulness and self-reflexivity; Freudian psychoanalysis; Roth's sexual preoccupations; the Jewish mother; Roth's own debatable Jewishness; his relationship to Israel; and the fate of the American Jewish writer. This chronological focus on central patterns in Roth criticism is both the strength and weakness of the two volumes. And one sets forth tensions and literary achievements in Roth's fiction, I think, better than the other.

Philip Roth's Portnoy's Complaint opens with an introduction by Bloom that, somewhat unnecessarily, makes a case for Roth's contemporary currency in literary studies and the continual relevance of reading *Portnoy's Complaint*. Bloom's focus on Roth's "Shakespearean or Falstaffian vitality" in the introduction seems gratuitous, since it fails to set up the more recent historical focus of the rest of the collection. The likeness to Faulkner, too, seems just to hang there, unrelated and unfleshed-out, especially in terms of the rest of the collection. The essays that follow begin with George Plimpton's well-known and often referred to 1969 interview with Philip Roth, in which Roth raises the not surprisingly anticipated issues and criticisms directed to his work: charges of anti-semitism, Jewish "self-hatred," obscenity, literary merit, as well as Roth's response to these criticisms. The interview sets the stage for the essays that follow, such as Jeffrey Berman's "Philip Roth's Psychoanalysts" and Sam Girgus's "Portnoy's Prayer: Philip Roth and the American Unconscious," which lay out the repeated categories of interpretation and responses to *Portnoy*, since its publication in 1969. The collection concludes with some more current essays on Roth, which introduce, if not entirely new, nevertheless refocused perspectives on *Portnoy*, such as Martha Ravits's "The Jewish Mother: Comedy and Controversy in American Popular Culture." While the essays individually are provocative in the way that Roth criticism generally is, the collection as a whole falls flat, lacking the kind of vitality that Bloom attributes to Roth in the introduction. For those who know *Portnoy's Complaint* all too well, much of this seems to be old news.

Philip Roth is, I think, the more successful of the two volumes. It, too, includes some old favorites, such as Bruno Bettelheim's "Portnoy Psychoanalyzed" and Theodore Solotaroff's "Philip Roth: A Personal View." And this, much more so than the volume devoted to *Portnoy's Complaint* alone, demonstrates an evolving reading of Roth's fiction. In his introduction, Bloom makes claims for Roth as "a Jewish writer in the sense that Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud are not, and do not care to be," and the essays that follow certainly speak to this perspective. The early essays in the collection are interesting in retrospect and a pleasure to reread, especially as they predict the future of Roth's fiction, as taken up later by writers such as Timothy Parrish in "Imagining Jews in Philip Roth's Operation Shylock," Andrew Furman's "A New 'Other' Emerges in American Jewish Literature: Philip Roth's Israel Fiction," and Elaine Safer's "Tragedy and Farce in Roth's *The Human Stain*." These later essays attempt to make current the language of contemporary criticism on Roth. Finally, both collections work as valuable introductions to Roth, especially for the uninitiated.



Bibliographical Update

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

Books

Bloom, Harold, ed. *Philip Roth*. Rev. ed. New York: Chelsea House, 2003. A revised edition of Bloom's 1986 volume for his Modern Critical Views series. As with most of the other books in this series, the fifteen essays included here are all reprints from previous sources. There are a number of significant problems with this revised edition. First, given the sheer proliferation of Roth criticism in recent years, Bloom could have done a better job of including a more cohesive collection of essays—replacing some of the older essays originally included in the 1986 edition and being more diverse in the novels (and the contributing authors) he chooses to focus on. Second, of those original 1986 edition essays that he did cut out, it is unfortunate that he eliminated Irving Howe's "Philip Roth Reconsidered," one of the most significant, if not controversial, essays in Roth studies. Finally, the book's bibliography is extremely limited with almost no reasoning to its organization.

Bloom, Harold, ed. *Philip Roth's Portnoy's Complaint*. New York: Chelsea House, 2004. One of the latest additions to Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations series. Like the new edition on Roth for the Modern Critical Views series, this one is a collection of previously written material. It includes twelve essays originally published in the early 1970s, soon after *Portnoy's Complaint* was released, as well as pieces published in the past several years. Compared to the Modern Critical Views edition, this text is the stronger of the two, particularly due to its tighter focus and more diverse range of contributors and topics. However, the book is nonetheless weakened by some of Bloom's editorial inclusions. One anomaly is Martha A. Ravits's otherwise useful essay on the Jewish mother in American popular culture (appearing originally in *MELUS*). Only a few paragraphs are actually devoted to Roth's novel, causing one to wonder why, with so much material out there on *Portnoy's Complaint*, Bloom chose to disregard much of the pertinent criticism.

Lévy, Paule, and Ada Savin, eds. *Philip Roth*. Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier III: CERCLA, 2002. This bilingual collection of new essays is No. 15 in the French "Profils Américains" series. Half of the fourteen contributions are in English. The editors more or less try to touch on key moments in Roth's career, from his earliest fiction all the way up to *The Human Stain*. The list of contributors is impressive, including André Bleikasten, Robert Alter, Lilian Kremer, Jay Halio, Daniel Walden, Lazare Bitoun, and Ada Savin.

Shechner, Mark. *Up Society's Ass, Copper: Rereading Philip Roth*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2003. Although most of this material has been previously published in book review or essay form, Shechner updates and re-edits the content so that the pieces work well together. Most of Roth's novels are discussed here, although the author neglects much of the early work including "Goodbye, Columbus," *Letting Go*, *When She Was Good*, *Our Gang*, and *The Great American Novel*. What is unique about this book is that Shechner brings a more personable, informal style to his analysis. The result is a serious contribution to Roth studies that not only maps out the various twists and turns his writing has taken, but one that contextualizes these narrative progressions in terms of Shechner's development as a critic.

Journal Essays

Capo, Beth Widmaier. "Inserting the Diaphragm In(to) Modern American Fiction: Mary McCarthy, Philip Roth, and the Literature of Contraception." *Journal of American Culture* 29.1 (2003): 111-23. Using Mary McCarthy's 1954 story "Dottie Makes an Honest Woman of Herself" and Roth's novella "Goodbye, Columbus," this essay examines the effects of contraceptive technology on the shifting power dynamics in sexual and romantic relationships. Capo argues that these narratives played an important role in the birth control movement by revealing the ideological contradictions involved.

continued on page 22

President's Message - continued from page 1

information on how to subscribe, see page 7.

Perhaps the most significant Society news is the founding of a new journal, *Philip Roth Studies*. Earlier this fall several members of the Society decided to begin what many of us have been discussing for some time, although this time the tone was not distant or speculative. We have pulled together what I think is an outstanding Editorial Advisory Board. Jessica, Victoria Aarons, and I have agreed to serve as the journal's Associate Editor, Book Review Editor, and Editor (respectively). We announced the founding of the refereed journal at this year's ALA Jewish American and Holocaust Literature Conference in Boca Raton, and an open call for papers has already gone out internationally. The editors welcome essays devoted to Roth and his writings, and I encourage all Society members to consider submitting. The journal will become a part of the membership package (along with the *Newsletter*), so please make sure that you renew your membership for 2004. Due to the costs of publishing the journal, we have decided to increase slightly the membership fees. For more on membership, submission procedures, and complete editorial information, go to page 4.

The founding of the new journal is just one facet of what seems to be a mushrooming of Philip Roth criticism. This fall season alone, three new books on Roth's work have been published. Mark Shechner's *Up Society's Ass, Copper!: Rereading Philip Roth* has come out from the University of Wisconsin Press, and Chelsea House has put out two new books in Harold Bloom's series for the press: *Philip Roth's Portnoy's Complaint* for his Modern Critical Interpretations series, and a revised edition of *Philip Roth* for his Modern Critical Views series (reviews of all these books can be found in the current issue of the *Newsletter*, as well as brief annotated listings in the "Updated Bibliography"). These follow the latest volume in the Profils Américains series out of the Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier III, *Philip Roth*, edited by Paule Lévy and Ada Savin.

And these are just the tip of the iceberg. Next year will see the publication of at least two other books on Roth. The University of South Carolina Press will publish *Philip Roth: Countertexts, Counterlives* by Debra Shostak, who also serves as one of the editorial advisors for the new journal. Later in 2004 Praeger-Greenwood will put out an edited collection of brand new essays covering the entire scope of Roth's career, tentatively titled *Philip Roth: New Perspectives on an American Author*. Other upcoming works on Roth includes a book by Elaine B. Safer (also on the new journal's editorial advisory board), *Mocking the Age: Philip Roth's Later Fiction*, and *Turning Up the Flame: Philip Roth's Later Novels*, a collection of essays edited by Jay L. Halio (another board member) and Ben Siegel. In addition to all of this, next year I will guest edit a special issue of *Studies in American Jewish Literature* (vol. 23) titled "Philip Roth's America" containing eleven essays on the American Trilogy, *Sabbath's Theater*, and *The Dying Animal*.

Finally, this autumn we saw the nationwide release of Robert Benton's film adaptation of *The Human Stain*. The reviews have been mixed. It has been called, among other things, an Oscar contender for 2004, a miscast disappointment, a serious piece of American filmmaking, and a flawed adaptation of the book (we're just lucky that Gene Shalit hasn't called it the "feel-good hit of the year"). I guess it all depends on your film aesthetics and, to a large degree, whether or not you've actually read the novel. You can read Elaine Safer's review of the film in this issue.

All in all, it's been a mighty busy six months. And in light of this, I won't even begin to predict what will occur before the next issue of the *Newsletter* comes out.

Book Review: *Up Society's Ass, Copper!: Rereading Philip Roth*, by Mark Shechner. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2003. pp. xii + 255. Cloth \$50; paper \$22.95. Jay L. Halio, University of Delaware

Mark Shechner is undoubtedly one of the best critics writing today on Philip Roth's fiction. His book, *Up Society's Ass, Copper!*, is aptly titled *Rereading Philip Roth*. What Shechner has done is to collect all of his previous reviews of Roth's work along with his essays, but he has done a good deal more. Not only has he updated everything, he has added postscripts, or second and sometimes even third thoughts, commenting further on what he originally wrote in the light of his subsequent readings and reflection. He claims, therefore, that the essays are essentially new works, and in this claim he is very well justified.

Shechner's book also contains an interesting introduction explaining his longstanding involvement in Roth's work. He first became acquainted with the fiction while still a graduate student at Berkeley and deeply influenced by his mentor, Frederick Crews, and the then fashionable psychoanalytical approaches in literary criticism. Although he subsequently modified this approach in his own criticism, he has let stand most of what he originally wrote while critiquing it in his "second thoughts," when and as he felt necessary to do so.

Shechner's book is excellent, full of penetrating insights, wit, and humor, the latter mostly directed against himself, other critics on Roth, or literary criticism as it exists today or where it was earlier in the twentieth century. Readers will enjoy and profit much from this book, especially those readers seriously interested in Roth's growth and development as a novelist and, yes, Shechner's own growth and development, too.

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Abstracts from papers delivered at recent conferences

American Literature Association Conference, May 22-25, 2003, Cambridge, Mass.

Panel: Figuring America in Philip Roth's Recent Fiction

Chair: Elaine B. Safer - University of Delaware

David Brauner - The University of Reading, UK

Illiteracy, Incontinence and Indignation: Philip Roth's American Anti-Pastoral

Throughout Philip Roth's fiction, but particularly in his recent trilogy—*American Pastoral*, *I Married a Communist*, and *The Human Stain*—he has been preoccupied with the relationship between domestic and national politics, and with the tension between self-denial and self-indulgence, self-justification and self-incrimination. This paper analyses Roth's treatment of these themes in the context of what I call his anti-pastoral poetics of fiction: that is to say, a conscious rejection of what, in *The Counterlife* (1987), he calls "the appealing idyll of living unencumbered by man-made ritual," in favour of a worldview that embraces all that is antithetical to innocence: guilt, experience, corruption. Drawing on, and extending, ideas first articulated in my book *Post-War Jewish Fiction: Ambivalence, Self-Explanation and Transatlantic Connections*, I argue that this anti-pastoralism manifests itself in a distrust of, and anxiety about, Nature (in all its various guises) and in a valorisation of human fallibility and the desire for knowledge, carnal and intellectual.

In *Portnoy's Complaint*, Roth's succès de scandale, the protagonist, Alex Portnoy, tells us that as a boy "indignation was my favourite word in the English language," and I argue that in late Roth indignation is the modus operandi, the characteristic register in which disillusionment with the American pastoral dream is articulated. As a young man Portnoy owes his job as Assistant Commissioner for Human Opportunity, and his sexual apotheosis with the barely literate Mary Jane Reed, to the late-sixties climate of political and sexual liberalism. In *The Human Stain*, the protagonist, Coleman Silk, loses his job as Dean of Athena College, and finds his sexual relationship with the (apparently) illiterate Faunia Farley threatened because of the late-nineties climate of political and sexual intolerance. I conclude by suggesting that Roth's treatment of the relationship between illiteracy and (sexual and other types of) incontinence reveals a profound ambivalence towards, and constitutes a radical critique of, the prevailing values of post-war America.

Kathleen L. MacArthur - George Washington University **Shattering the American Pastoral: Philip Roth's Vision of Trauma and the American Dream**

The assassination of John F. Kennedy, for many, is the event that symbolically, if not literally, demarcates the loss of faith in the American Dream. Though Philip Roth's *American Pastoral* does not directly treat the Kennedy assassination, it is set against the chaos and turbulence of the period following this event when the country endured the Vietnam War, the sometimes-violent protests at home, and, more local to the setting of the novel, the Newark riots. The hero-protagonist of the novel, Seymour "Swede" Levov, is likened to Kennedy. Furthermore,



Elaine Safer, left, and Kathleen MacArthur in Cambridge, Mass.

There they appear unexpectedly, without warning, yet, at the same time, inevitably, their arrival somehow anticipated by their accidental petitioners, like a haunting, uncanny reminder of something left undone, unfinished business, a memory of possibility. And the typically understated, matter-of-fact way in which Malamud introduces the presence of such characters suggests an extension of belief, an imaginary stretch in which these characters reside. Here, for Malamud, such figures of promise and incredulity are themselves a combination of the realistic and the preposterous, made all the more believable exactly because of their understated and thus admitted extravagance, their unbelievability.

And so, the appearance of the stranger, the “double,” often comes not only when the other character least expects it, but also when that character falsely believes himself to be autonomous, inured from and having escaped kinship with others. Such characters appear in Malamud’s fiction initially as strangers, who would seem to arrive incidentally but surreptitiously. But their arrival only seems inadvertent and inconsequential to the one who least expects it, the character who considers himself cast out, or one who has cast himself out.

For Philip Roth, unlike Malamud, I think, the seemingly autonomous, isolated self is a given, there to be affirmed, there to be assailed. And, unlike Malamud, Roth’s “doubles” are the source of playful self-irony. While for Malamud, the doubles are a projection of both desire and fear, for Roth, especially in, say, a novel like *The Counterlife*, the doubled self is a willed construction of fantastical and sometimes pathological dissembling, an evasion and attempted escape from the disappointments and contingencies of the lives and lies that “an exchange of existences,” as Nathan Zuckerman puts it, would hope to conceal. For Roth, I think, the double figures forth the desire to change into something else, “an impersonation,” but as a performative act, it is but a ruse, a transparent dodging of one’s failures and failed expectations. There is no redemption for such characters, “no escape,” as Zuckerman admits at the close of *The Counterlife*.

But typically, for Malamud, there is a proposed escape from one’s failures, or at least the opportunity or invitation for one. And it is the ability to imagine oneself as something else to which Malamud consistently returns. The voice of the stranger becomes the echo of obligation, never before heard but nevertheless anticipated, remembered, ultimately to him bound. And these doubles of voices create the kind of dialogue in Malamud’s short fiction that allows his characters to step out of themselves, if only momentarily. For the single defining condition of ethical conduct for Malamud is the open embrace of responsibility to others, a choice that lays claims to a shared past and latticework of belief, however concealed. This responsibility to others is, for Malamud, a necessary acknowledgment of a Jewish history not to be denied, since to “know what responsibility means,” in the terms claimed by Susskind, is, indeed, to be “a Jew.”



Victoria Aarons, left, and Evelyn Avery at Boca Raton, Fla.



Lazare Bitoun - Université Paris 8

The 'Shoah': Malamud's 'The Last Mohican' and Roth's 'Eli, the Fanatic'

The paper is based on a close reading of Bernard Malamud's "The Last Mohican" (in *The Magic Barrel*) and Philip Roth's "Eli The Fanatic" (in *Goodbye, Columbus*). The two stories deal with young, relatively affluent Jewish-American characters of the fifties. Both Arthur Fidelman and Eli Peck are intellectual professionals in a broad sense—art critic and lawyer—and both are assimilated Jews in the sense that they have more or less forsaken their Jewish heritage. The two characters think, or want to think, they are "Americans," an identity they crave and have constructed for themselves. This new identity remains however shaky and both characters are ill at ease: they do not wholly believe and accept this new definition of themselves and know that they should make no waves vis-à-vis their Gentile neighbors, as if they were on probation. In a sense, that identity is an ill fitting mask waiting to fall off the face of those who wear it.

Within the first paragraphs of each story, both Eli and Fidelman are confronted with the recent collective past of Jews when they come into contact with two ur-Jews, Susskind in the first story and Tsoref in the second, two refugees who have survived the camps. In a second stage, both characters are forced to revise their own notion of who they are and are drawn into a spiral of compassion and responsibility. In both cases, this acceptance is sanctified by a symbolic exchange of clothes between the two American Jews and their ur-Jewish counterparts.

With the exchange of clothes Fidelman and Eli realize the preposterousness of their position. It transforms them into men—or better still into *menschen*—willing to acknowledge the existence of these newly discovered alter egos—older egos?—and through them of the shoah and their bond with it.

All the events in these short stories function as a ritual—initiation to the secrets of the group, change of clothes—designed to introduce the men to the mystery of the founding myth of their tribe. Myth is taken here in the sense of something that happened in unrecorded times, something the characters have no direct knowledge of, but that explains the unexplainable, here, among other things, Fidelman's and Eli Peck's malaise.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the study of these short stories. First, at the time they were published, the shoah was almost totally absent from Jewish-American writing. Malamud (in 1950) and Roth (in 1959) appear therefore as precursors since they are the first to introduce the idea of the holocaust as one of the elements upon which contemporary Jewish-American identity is grounded. Second, the relationship between Fidelman and Susskind on one hand, and Eli and Tsoref on the other can also be seen as belonging to the American tradition—Chingachook/ Natty Bumppo, Queequeg/Ishmael, Jim/Huck—in which the representative of a disappearing world serves as tutor to a younger tyro. Finally the similarities in the construction, the imagery and the language of the two stories show that the writing of "Eli, the Fanatic" probably owes much to *The Last Mohican* published nine years before.

Victoria Aarons - Trinity University

Malamud's Doubles and a Doubling of Voices in the Short Fiction

Malamud consistently places his characters in situations—frequently hopeless, often comic—in which they find themselves at the seat of judgment. It's a curious and precarious place to be in Malamud's world, since his characters are often judged by those even more flawed than they. Such figures appear in one form or another in virtually all of Malamud's fiction, but especially in the abbreviated dramatic narratives of the short stories.



Lazare Bitoun, left, and Derek Royal at Boca Raton, Fla.

Roth's novel features the story of a man seemingly living the American Dream as the Dream explodes around him, quite like the fate of Kennedy. Philip Roth's narrator and alter-ego, Nathan Zuckerman, takes on the project of describing the traumas that surround him. In telling and reconstructing the Swede's story, Zuckerman travels back through history to try to make sense of how life for the Swede, and the rest of his generation, could have ended where it has despite the promise of those early years.

In this paper I argue that the symbolic links that Roth (through Zuckerman) forges between Seymour Levov and John F. Kennedy are so profound as to make it impossible not to read the examination of one as the examination of the other. I discuss the ways in which the American Dream is reevaluated through the prism of the assassination and the Swede's personal tragedies by Roth. In treating these themes and linking these two heroes, one real and one fictional, Roth lays bare the trauma associated with the destruction of the American pastoral. Second, I delineate the manifestations of trauma as defined by Cathy Caruth as exhibited within the context of the novel and the project of the novel as a whole. For Zuckerman as an author, his childhood idol becomes part of his writer's life. With this project, he is able to take up the Swede and give him life again in its pages. He is able to order the chaos of the Swede's life. With this project, he responds to the traumas of losing the Swede, losing Kennedy, losing his Kennedy, and losing the way of American life that typified his childhood. Ultimately, I argue that *American Pastoral* seeks to confront the trauma of the assassination and the ensuing cultural turmoil and, in so doing, reevaluates the American Dream.

Ada Savin - Université de Versailles-Saint Quentin **Exposure and Concealment in *The Human Stain***

The Human Stain brings together, even as it gives them a new twist, the themes that have dominated Roth's fiction over the years—the identity of the self and the portrayal of American social mores. A multi-layered literary work, *The Human Stain* is a campus novel tinged with topical political overtones and sprinkled with indomitable satirical wit; it is moreover “a novel of passing” with all the potential ingredients of a race-centered “American tragedy.” With the character of Coleman Silk, the betrayer of his family and of the Black community, Roth carries “self-transformation,” the leitmotiv of his entire fictional work, to its logical extreme—the individual's radical rejection of a prescriptive collective “we.”

The paper argues that in *The Human Stain* Roth's search for an “encapsulating fiction” takes the form of an elegy for America as *Paradise Lost* and of a eulogy for the individual who dares challenge the American dream. By juxtaposing the contingent and the archetypal, the contemporary and the archaic, the writer zooms in on the immediate history of the country but also views the human stain—man's tainted nature—in an a-historical and universal perspective.



Ada Savin in Cambridge, Mass.

Laura Tanenbaum - New York University **Roth and the Sixties: All Apologies?**

Since the publication of Philip Roth's historical trilogy of *American Pastoral*, *I Married a Communist* and *The Human Stain*, critical considerations of Roth's work have presented a renewed discussion of the challenges of historical representation for the contemporary novel as well as important reconsiderations of Roth's long engagement with questions of group and individual identities. In the case of *American Pastoral*, however,

the initial and largely polarized response of critics who alternatively hailed the novel's presumed celebration of middle class stability or denounced its seeming demonization of the radical movements of the sixties, has yet to be fully assimilated into this discussion. In this paper I argue that these politically charged responses, largely reflective of ongoing debates about the meaning of the transformations of the sixties, offer an important context for a careful examination of the novel's historical project. Drawing on the responses of reviewers as well as on the readings of critics including Timothy Parrish, Jeffery Rubin-Dorsky and Derek Parker Royal and on non-fictional accounts of the period with which Roth's work is in dialogue, I consider several of the most striking aspects of the novel's treatment of the recent past. First, I consider the novel's distant and somewhat bewildered treatment of radicalism in light of Roth's treatment of extremes in other works. I further discuss the novel's reversal of the promise of sexual liberation into images of repression, sublimation and sexual violence and examine the relation of this treatment of sexuality to the problems of nostalgia and its role in debates about the transformations of the sixties and their representation. Finally, in considering the historiographic questions raised by the novel, I argue that in depicting the loss of the Swede's pastoral dream of a world outside history as a tragic one, Roth not only negates the possibilities of historical consciousness embodied in the period's radicalism but extends a strange legitimacy towards the very dream of pastoral return so deftly satirized in many of his earlier and subsequent works.

Panel: The Textual (Counter)Worlds of Philip Roth

Chair: Derek Parker Royal - Texas A&M University-Commerce

Benjamin Hedin - The New School for Social Research

The Uncollected Short Fiction of Philip Roth

Of the nineteen stories Roth has published in his career, most were written when he was in his mid and late twenties. Redoubtably prolific in those years, in 1958 and '59 he sold nine pieces—including five of the *Goodbye, Columbus* tales—to the most respected fiction periodicals of the era: *Esquire*, *Commentary*, *The New Yorker* and *The Paris Review*. One is reminded of the young Joyce in Trieste, composing the bulk of *Dubliners* in a matter of months. He has released just two stories since 1964, none since 1986 and aside from the inclusion of "Novotny's Pain" in *A Philip Roth Reader*, the only short fiction to appear in book form since his debut are the "useful fictions" penned by Tarnopol in *My Life As A Man*. This leaves twelve stories to the obscurity



From left, Benjamin Hedin, Ryan Poll, Simon Stow, and Jessica Rabin in Cambridge, Mass.

of microfilm. These uncollected works share little with Roth's novels, and most suffer in comparison to the contents of *Goodbye, Columbus*. Often they reveal an underlying frustration with the form, a desire to discard the need for trim plots and sharp, subtle epiphanies. Once Roth had found the starting point to his method of fiction and began his forays into the novel, story writing was a superfluous exercise—what started as a labor of love had become, by the time he turned thirty, love lost.

Not often will a writer bury a story selected for *The Best American* series, but "Aaron Gold," when imagined as a seventh member of *Columbus*, comes off as not being Jewish enough. "The Psychoanalytic

Panel: Imagination & Style in the Fiction of Bernard Malamud & Philip Roth (joint panel with the Bernard Malamud Society)

Moderator: Evelyn Avery - Towson University

Respondent: Daniel Walden - Pennsylvania State University

Derek Parker Royal - Texas A&M University-Commerce

Fouling Out the Pastoral in Philip Roth's and Bernard Malamud's Baseball Novels



Evelyn Avery and Daniel Walden in Boca Raton, Fla.

It has been roughly fifty years since the publication of Malamud's *The Natural*, and thirty since Roth put out *The Great American Novel*, and, in light of recent developments in Roth's fiction on America, perhaps one could approach these two novel as critiques on American idealism. Roth's American Trilogy has garnered him increased recognition of late, and it is to these novels that one can turn to reassess the two writers' literary excursion into baseball. Much like the latest trilogy, *The Natural* and *The Great American Novel* have at their core the demythologizing of American "truths," the most significant of these being the pastoral ideal.

It is without question that *The Great American Novel*, regardless of what one might think of its novelistic merits, is an anti-pastoral tour de force. Certainly the thematic contents lend themselves to the debunking of many of America's cherished myths. However, Roth's demythologizing becomes even more significant through the use of his narrative frame, the octogenarian and former sports writer, Word Smith, or Smitty, as he is known. This use of the first-person narrative not only contextualizes the novel's plot—who better to chronicle the details surrounding the Mundys' ignoble 1943 and '44 seasons than a sports writer with a keen eye for baseball's history and legends?—but, perhaps more importantly, it also underscores the complex nature of Roth's critique.

Whereas Roth engages in narrative gamesmanship to critique America, Bernard Malamud in *The Natural* uses elements of the fantastic. The many scenes in the novel that bend or challenge verisimilitude call to mind Nathaniel Hawthorne's discussions of Romance writing, where reality is infused with the open-endedness of imagination. And just as the nineteenth-century writer used the Romance to explore the American ideal, so too does Malamud engage in his more contemporary critique. In many ways, Roy Hobbs represents America itself in all of its idealism and temptations. Yet it is through the "Romance" of the narrative that Malamud holds up Roy to be not only an unfinished project, but one whose behaviors undermine the pastoral ideals to which he strives.

In exposing the fiction of the pastoral, both Roth and Malamud are not completely dismissive of the sport, especially as a stand-in for America itself. Baseball, for both writers, still held out a defining quality worth holding on to. As Roth writes in his reflective essay, published immediately after the subversive baseball novel, "Baseball made me understand what patriotism was about, at its best." In *The Great American Novel* and *The Natural*, Roth and Malamud attempt to demythologize the game of baseball not only to expose constructively its (and America's) many inconsistencies and hypocrisies, but perhaps more importantly, to draw attention to the sheer gratification of creative play and its meaning for national identity, mischievous, fantastical, or otherwise.



From left, Mark Shechner, Elaine Safer, and Derek Royal in Boca Raton, Fla.

with their life? What on earth is less reprehensible than the life of the Levovs?", Roth challenges us to take another look at what we have been told. And what emerges is that not only the question itself, but also the possible answers are astonishingly ambiguous. The strained relationship between the paradisaical yearning that we all have and its nightmarish collapse creates a tension that sometimes results in the comic, sometimes in the tragically grotesque. And it is this combination that makes the travesty of our American pastoral dream so shattering.

Mark Shechner - SUNY Buffalo

Can't Get No Satisfaction, or Where Did Merry Levov Stash Her Record Collection?

Roth is no stranger to soundtracks, and has indeed orchestrated early pages of *American Pastoral* as well as sections of *Portnoy's Complaint*, *I Married a Communist*, *The Human Stain*, and *The Dying Animal* with appropriate background, and sometimes foreground, music. The point of this paper is not to demonstrate an exemplary musical erudition, though the sixties did leave an indelible impression on me, and its music continues to evoke scenes of some pretty hairy experience. Clearly, it did not do the same for Roth. It seems, moreover, that Roth's personal sound card, that circuit of neural connections that puts any of us at one with the music of our time, crashed on him at the end of the 1940s, while he was still in his teens. Everybody's shuts down sooner or later; nobody remains a musical sponge through an entire lifetime, and even most of what appears in this paper I've had to research, as Roth would have had to as well. I add this mainly in the hope that it just might be read by those people, whoever they may be, who will make the film of *American Pastoral* and will be mindful to restore some of the crucial details that Roth omitted, in order to bring Merry some credibility as a creature of her time, and not simply as a symptom of suburban anomie or of growing up absurd. To default to a soundtrack by, say, Randy Newman, would only compound the damage.

to grasp why. But we think that we do know why: partly his own hybris and seemingly innocent self deception, and partly because of an outside world in convulsions, a chaotic world that he never made. But what are we meant to think of it all? Most of what has been said so far suggests that the author's own attitude is that of *Midsummer Night's Dream's* Puck: "What fools these mortals be." And undoubtedly that is one part of the answer. But Roth is too inveterate a trickster and too subtle a mind to be satisfied with such simplicities. At the very end of the book, in less than the last half page, the whole question of meaning is thrown wide open and we are left weighing, pondering, wondering. By having the narrator ask, "What is wrong

Special” and “An Actor’s Life For Me” encapsulate a classic Rothian struggle. Psychoanalysis vs. Licentiousness, in these stories, is the sublimation of Reality/Morality vs. Imagination/Hedonism, appearing in Roth’s oeuvre well before the conflict fascinated Portnoy and Zuckerman. Amidst a time that produced Portnoy, Trick E. Dixon and Kepesh, “On the Air” represents Roth’s most outrageous and hardened effort to trump reality.

A pious student of tradition, Roth’s short output doesn’t approach that of his masters Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Kafka and Bellow. Nowhere is it said that a writer must reprint the work he published as an apprentice. Roth’s is a different case from Pynchon’s *Slow Learner*, say, and the posthumously released *Thirteen Uncollected Stories* by John Cheever. A famous and controversial talent was his burden immediately, and the uncollected catalog would not be judged as the juvenilia en route to maturity, but as misdirected sketches left in the wake of *Goodbye, Columbus* and *Letting Go*. Nor is it likely that the Library of America volumes will include any of these stories, “On the Air” possibly excepted. Someone will doubtlessly publish a few or all of them once they lapse from copyright, and to behold a book that Roth so judiciously omitted from his oeuvre is a credible, even irresistible urge. We can be grateful for the minor complement to the author’s catalog offered by these stories: they enrich the context of his novels, twenty-some and counting, where the idea of Roth is never at rest.

Jessica G. Rabin - Anne Arundel Community College
Staying Power in “Goodbye, Columbus”: The Jewish, the American, and the Jewish-American

In any number of interviews (including one just last year when he received a National Book Award recognition of lifetime achievement), Roth denies being a Jewish-American writer, preferring to think of himself as just an American writer. Paradoxically it is arguably the combination of ethnic particularity and American universality that has allowed the novella “Goodbye, Columbus” to stay in print and retain its relevance over the past fifty-some years. This paper contextualizes the novella in terms of discussions of ethnicity and Americanization, seeking to explore what literary and cultural elements have contributed to its longevity. It also situates Roth’s attitudes towards ethnicity within contemporary theories of ethnic, personal and national identification (esp. Sollors, Gleason, Burch, Bottomley).

The “becoming American” theme in the novella suggests Roth’s awareness of and tacit agreement with the notion that American identity is not conferred simultaneously or automatically with citizenship. Neil fulfills elements of the role of both the individualist American hero and the prototypical Ethnic American hero, a blending that might provide insight into Roth’s own ambiguous status or multiple affiliations. For example, Neil’s claim to be “just Jewish” in the face of Mrs. Patimkin’s challenge about whether he is orthodox echoes Roth’s insistent that he is just American. Further, Roth’s indictment is not just of Jewish-American materialism but of the American Dream in general.

“Crossing” is a major motif in American (and particularly Ethnic American) literature, and this recurs in Neil’s migrations from Newark to Short Hills. His attempt to pass for a Patimkin is further highlighted by the counterpoint of the African American boy in the library who does not share Neil’s advantages and therefore cannot even attempt to pass. Further, Neil’s insider-outsider status and multiple affiliations position him as an artist, a comparison highlighted by the Gauguin motif. In addition, the novella is conscious not just of place (as Roth has agreed many times) but of movement or migration—psychological as well as physical.

Over the past half-century, “Goodbye, Columbus” has established itself in the American literary canon; its concerns are still relevant, both for Jewish and non-Jewish audiences. Given Roth’s own attitudes about ethnicity and affiliation, it is interesting and worthwhile to examine the literary elements of the text in a larger social

and cultural context in order to better understand the novella's staying power.

Simon A. Stow - College of William and Mary

Written and Unwritten America: Roth on Reading, Politics and Theory



Simon Stow in Cambridge, Mass.

Philip Roth's recent fiction—most notably the “thematic trilogy” of *American Pastoral*, *I Married a Communist*, and *The Human Stain*—explodes contemporary critical pieties about what it means to read a text for critical or moral insight. Recent work at the intersection of literary criticism and political theory seeks to articulate a politico-ethical role for literature: Martha Nussbaum and Richard Rorty argue that novels generate moral values in their readers useful to the practice of liberal-democracy; whilst theorists as divergent as Terry Eagleton and Judith Butler embrace literary criticism as a source of political insight. However, these readers find little in the text that they did not themselves bring to the reading.

Roth states, “At their best writers change the way readers read. That seems to me the only realistic expectation.” Drawing on his distinction between the world of the text—the written world—and the world in which that text is written—the unwritten world—Roth meets this expectation in the texts of his “American Trilogy.” In the location of another writer—the character Nathan Zuckerman—and in the space between the author and the events of the written world, we are reminded of the ways in which the events we witness are the stylized recollection of another, not simply the recounting of historical events in the unwritten world. It is an effect that is intensified by the history of Zuckerman's idiosyncratic and often unreliable voice. With this repositioning of Nathan Zuckerman, their portrayals of a complex and morally ambiguous America, and their surprising reversals, the texts of the trilogy find new uses for the self-modernist paradoxes and halls of mirrors that mark—and occasionally mar—Roth's earlier fiction. Specifically, by exploring and exploiting the complex relationship between the America of the text and the America in which that text is written, Roth's fiction frustrates straightforwardly reductive moral and political readings. As such, it begins to teach us a new way to read and think about the relationship between literature and politics: creating a dialectical space—between the written and unwritten worlds—in which critical thought about morality, politics and society can begin anew.

Ryan Poll - University of California-Davis

The Failure of the Aesthetic Framework in Philip Roth's *The Dying Animal*

In the recent continuing adventures of David Kepesh, the sexually motivated professor experiences a radical rupture in his understanding of the world: the loss of an aesthetic framework. Throughout *The Dying Animal*, Kepesh uses an aesthetic framework not only to organize the reality that surrounds him, but what is more, he uses an aesthetic framework to render that reality understandable. My paper explores the various means in which Kepesh uses aesthetics to attain distance from the world. Through Kepesh's narrative, this distance is presented as a healthy detachment necessary for objectivity and understanding. This philosophy is clearly expounded by George O'Hearn, Kepesh's “worldly confessor,” and lived by Kepesh whose confession, not coincidentally, takes its title from a Yeats poem.

However, when encountering Consuela Castillo, the aesthetic framework that Kepesh employs to gain distance, objectivity and intelligibility is shattered. As George says to Kepesh about his relationship with the much younger Consuela, “you violated the law of aesthetic distance.” After exploring the various strategies that

Kepesh employs throughout most of his confession to gain this aesthetic distance, the center of my paper examines how the novel establishes a binary between intelligibility and intimacy. In *The Dying Animal*, intelligibility is achieved by means of aesthetic distancing, while intimacy is presented as a mode of relationship that defies definition and categorization, resisting all forms of intelligibility.

In conclusion, I open to the wider question of the role of aesthetics and art in organizing our lives according to Philip Roth's fiction. Is art a filter that enables us to enrich our experience of the world, or a medium that distances us from the terra incognita of intimacy?

ALA Jewish-American and Holocaust Literature Symposium October 22-26, 2003, Boca Raton, Fla.

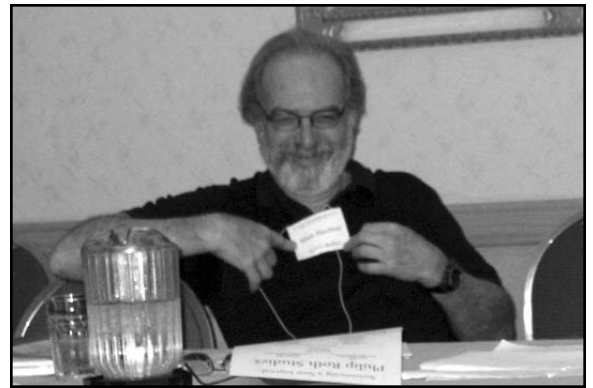
Panel: Re-Reading Roth

Moderator: Ben Siegel - California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

Mark Shechner - SUNY Buffalo

“Up Society’s Ass, Copper!” Rereading Philip Roth

Mark Shechner's paper was an abridged version of the introduction to his recently published book, *Up Society's Ass, Copper! Rereading Philip Roth*. In it, Shechner talks about the precipitating events that got him interested in Roth's fiction to begin with, starting with shared childhood homes in the Weequahic neighborhood of Newark, New Jersey. Shechner recounts how, as a student at the University of California at Berkeley his encounters with the cultural revolution on the one hand and the psychoanalytic movement on the other gave him points of contact with Roth's more radical fictional gestures, like *Portnoy's Complaint*, and how, later on, the attacks on Roth by Irving Howe and Norman Podhoretz came at a time when he—Shechner—was scouting around for a subject. His very dismay at those attacks gave him a subject instantly, and he has never looked back.



Mark Shechner in Boca Raton, Fla.

Panel: (Re)Considering Philip Roth's Later Fiction

Moderator: Derek Parker Royal - Texas A&M University-Commerce

Elaine B. Safer - University of Delaware

American Pastoral: The Fall of the House of Levov

It is possible to see Roth's *American Pastoral* as the story of tragic losses of Seymour Swede Levov during the years following World War II. He is Jewish and seemingly imbued with all the virtues of a secular modern American. Narrator Nathan Zuckerman relates that as a youth, the Swede was a neighborhood hero, a “steep-jawed, insentient Viking . . . this blue-eyed blond born into our tribe.” The Swede becomes a legend through whom the neighborhood can fantasize about sports and, as Zuckerman explains, be “almost like Gentiles.”

American Pastoral is the tragedy of a good man whose world collapses around him and who is unable