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# The Philip Roth Society Newsletter

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Vol. 8 No.2

Summer 2011

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## Message from the Society's President

Aimee Pozorski

"I was overcome" – Philip Roth, 2011

Perhaps the biggest news in Roth Studies since the publication of our last newsletter is Roth's receipt of the Man Booker International Prize 2011. And perhaps the second biggest story involves Carmen Calill – one of the three judges on the Booker committee – who stepped down in protest of Roth's receipt of the award. In fact, I read several messages from members that day with a link to the article, and the observation that Roth continues to find himself in the news. Indeed. What struck many of us, I believe, is the nature of Calill's vitriolic rant against Roth – a rant I imagine she wishes she had back: "He goes on and on and on about the same subject in almost every single book. It's as through he's sitting on your face and you can't breathe." And although Calill seems to be trying to communicate something of the "closed world" of Roth that might, at times, feel suffocating, what she actually communicated is something far more provocative: A type of sexual fantasy we might see in any number of Roth's books.

A few days later, in celebration of Roth winning the Booker award, despite Calill's complaints, Roth sat down with Benjamin Taylor for an incredibly lucid and heartfelt interview. Roth and Taylor touched on such topics as the importance of Roth's literary forefathers (Kafka, Bellow, Malamud) as well as the weight of history and of place in his work. What struck me, however, is that, around the eight-minute mark, Taylor asks Roth if he always knew he wanted to be an author. To that, Roth explains that, although he knew, as a child, what books are, he didn't actually grasp the work of an author until he started reading literature during his second year of college. And, in response to that reading, Roth says (at least three times in this short section): "I was overcome." The word choice is fascinating here, as it refers not only to being defeated or conquered—what an excellent image: the defeat of books over its readers!—but also has connotations, looking back to the fifteenth through nineteenth centuries, to that which is left over, in excess, surplus.

(Continued...)

### About the Philip Roth Society

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

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

*The Philip Roth Society Newsletter* invites submissions of 500-800 words. Contributions may be informal in tone, and may address such matters as the teaching of Roth's work or personal reactions to it. We welcome notes that add texture or background information to larger elements of Roth's writing. Email submissions in Word attachments appreciated. For submissions or queries, contact Richard Sheehan, *The Philip Roth Society Newsletter*, Email: sheehan@rothsociety.org

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<http://www.rothsociety.org>

(From Page 1)

As readers of Roth's work, we might say that we, too, are overcome by his novels – not simply in terms of their often provocative content, but also, more importantly still, in terms of the craft of his sentences, the richness of his images. But we might go even further still to argue that Calill, in her own way, is also overcome; and although her statement, "It's as though he is sitting on your face" was meant as the worst possible insult she could muster, it may likely be Roth's most recent and greatest gift: If not validation of his ability to overcome, such a statement could certainly be fodder for his next book.

If you are interested in seeing the entire interview with Taylor, you can access it on You Tube here:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QeIJ\\_xO7ns](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QeIJ_xO7ns).

In the last newsletter, I also reported on two new books by Roth members to watch for: a monograph by David Gooblar entitled *The Major Phases of Philip Roth* and a collection of essays edited by Deb Shostak entitled, *Philip Roth: American Pastoral, The Human Stain, The Plot Against America*. Both books are now available through Continuum Press, as well as my own monograph: *Roth and Trauma*. Further, Pia Masiero's new book *Philip Roth and the Zuckerman Books: The Making of a Story-World* is now available through Cambria Press, and Velichka Ivanova's edited collection, *Reading Philip Roth's American Pastoral* with Mirail University Press, is forthcoming in October of this year. Congratulations to Gooblar, Shostak, Masiero, Ivanova, and others who are publishing excellent work on Roth. It has been a big year thus far in Roth Studies. It has been a big year for Roth himself.

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**Annual Business Meeting of the Philip Roth Society  
Boston, MA : American Literature Association Conference  
26 May 2011**

Present: Aimee Pozorski (President); David Brauner (Program Chair); Daniel Anderson, Miriam Jaffe Foger, David Gooblar, Pia Masiero, Elena Mortara, Ira Nadel, Debra Shostak

**Minutes of the Annual Business Meeting of the Philip Roth Society**

The meeting was called to order at 4:40 p.m.

**President's Report – Aimee Pozorski**

Based on our discussions from last year's meeting, we had several new items on the Society agenda: Work toward achieving allied status with the MLA; establish a scholarship in honor of Ben Siegel and John McDaniel; update the website; host a conference; and encourage graduate student membership and involvement.

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- Allied Status: We had one special session approved; this year's entitled, "Roth and Music" was rejected; we can revise and resubmit for 2013. We need to have one more special session approved in order to apply for allied status.
  - The first year of the Siegel/McDaniel year was a success: We gave \$500 to graduate student Tony Wong, who presented at last year's ALA. This year, we have decided to open up the field to all those graduate student members who have worked extensively on Roth. We will put out the new call soon.
  - The website is much improved, thanks to Derek Royal and artist Julie Phillipps! It is now set up as a wordpress blog, so it is easy to update news related to conferences, members' publications, and Roth's awards.
  - We have organized a conference committee composed of David Brauner, Miriam Jaffe-Foger, Derek Royal, Jim Bloom, and Aimee Pozorski. We will begin planning this week (!) so we can have everything in place for Roth's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2013 in Newark, NJ.
  - We have managed to nurture interested graduate students through free memberships, conference participation, publication in the book review section of PRS and commissioning essays for collections. This takes a lot of energy and time so, unfortunately, few students are reaping many rewards. Is this the model we wish to continue?
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### **Secretary's/ Treasurer's Report – Jessica Rabin**

#### Membership Statistics and Financial Report, June 2010-May 2011

Total members 2011 YTD (November 2009-May 2010): 49

Society only: 12

Society and journal: 37

Total members at this time in 2010: 55

Total members 2010: 64

Total members 2009: 73

Total members 2008: 51

Total members 2007: 53

Total members 2006: 79

Total members 2005: 71

Total members 2004: 81

Total members 2002-2003: 42

Number of past members who renewed in 2011: 30 (61%)

New members in 2011: 19

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2011 members with US addresses: 29, representing 12 states and the District of Columbia

2011 members with international addresses: 20 (41%)

Canada: 1  
France: 2  
Germany: 1  
India: 1  
Israel: 1  
Italy: 2  
Portugal: 1  
South Africa: 1  
South Korea: 1  
Spain: 2  
Switzerland: 1  
United Kingdom: 6

2011 members who did not provide an academic or professional affiliation: 9 (18%)

Current balance: \$6667.05

Debts: start-up costs incurred by Derek Royal (\$121.43); to be reimbursed as a perpetual membership.

Tasks accomplished:

- maintained and updated membership spreadsheets
  - transmitted Directory of Members information to our webmaster (Derek Royal) and our Newsletter editor (Richard Sheehan)
  - deposited dues into our Amegy Bank account
  - renewed CELJ membership and domain name
  - sent out welcome emails to new members and confirmations of renewals to returning members
  - solicited renewals (no rate increase)
  - confirmed that contributors to conference panels and journal issues were current members of the Society
- communicated with Purdue University Press regarding the publication, printing, and mailing of *Philip Roth Studies*

Suggestions for the next year:

- make multi-year memberships available; numerous people allow their memberships to lapse and then are surprised to discover that they are no longer current members
- make provisions that allow members to pay dues through electronic transfer (several international members have had trouble with paypal and/or with regular mail)
- keep the “membership without journal” option (Purdue UP was pressuring us to eliminate it); proportionately more members are joining at this level
- modify membership form (and Paypal form) to allow new members to indicate where they found out about PRS and use this information to target our recruitment efforts
- modify online membership form to allow members to indicate whether they wish to be listed in the Directory
- try to update Directory more frequently
- continue to make Newsletters available in PDF form for members who join after one of the year’s newsletters has already been sent out

- coordinate Newsletter publications with solicitations for renewals (November)
- consider allowing members to choose whether to receive their newsletter by US Mail or PDF
- consider if there are ways we can be appealing more to the interests of members with no stated academic affiliation (a substantial demographic)
- actively solicit memberships from academic libraries

#### Membership trends:

Year	total members	total # renewals	% who renew
2003	42	n/a	n/a
2004	81	28	34%
2005	71	28	39%
2006	79	36	45%
2007	53	31	60%
2008	51	27	53%
2009	73	35	48%
2010	64	44	69%
2011	49*	30	61%

\*Nov-May

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#### **Program Chair's Report – David Brauner**

This year the Society sponsored panels at the following conferences:

American Literature Association 2011, Hyatt Regency, San Francisco, May 27-30 ('Roth and Women' and a Roundtable Discussion on 'The Humbling')

American Literature Association 2010 Jewish American & Holocaust Literature Conference, Miami, South Beach, Florida, November 7-11, 2010 ('Roth and the Holocaust')

American Literature Association Symposium on American Fiction 1890 to the Present, Savannah, Georgia, October 8-9, 2010.

Conference on American Literature and Culture since 1900, University of Louisville, Kentucky, February 24-26, 2011.

These all seemed to go very well, with the exception of the Louisville conference, where we only had two speakers and their session didn't attract much of an audience (in fact I believe their audience was each other!). Consequently, I think we agreed to discuss at this year's business meeting whether it would be worth continuing to have a presence at this conference.

The other item that we agreed to discuss, of course, is the 'Roth at 80' conference.

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## **Newsletter Editor's Report – Richard Sheehan**

In the past year we produced two issues of the newsletter, both of which included over twenty pages of news, reviews and information on the works of Philip Roth. I hope to keep the size of the newsletter at this level so that it provides a reasonably substantial publication for the members.

While compiling the newsletter, I try to make sure that I accomplish the three goals that I set out to achieve and hopefully I've managed to do this.

The goals are:

1. Inform the members about matters pertaining to the society.

We have continued to communicate the news of the society as well as report back on its annual meeting and any other matters pertaining to it.

2. Provide news about Philip Roth and his works.

We have reviewed Roth latest novel, *Nemesis* and I have also continued series of brief essays examining Philip Roth's earlier uncollected short stories.

3. Provide a place where shorter essays about the author and his writing can be submitted, particularly those that are perhaps less formal in tone than those used in the "Philip Roth Studies" journal.

This is still an area of concern for me due to the lack of submissions received. I currently have one of two subjects that I'm researching but other than that we're a little short on topics to cover. I would like to encourage short submissions (500-1500 words) investigating aspects of Philip Roth's works, or other authors as they relate to him. This can be expanded to include how work in other forms of media such as film, theatre and TV use Roth as an influence.

I would also be interested to hear from the members with regard to anything they would like to see covered in the newsletter, whether it is new ideas, an expansion of current features or a re-introduction of old ones. For the future, I hope, as well as encouraging new essays into the newsletter, that it will continue to work as a regular source of information and news about the work of Philip Roth.

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### **Report from the Executive Editor of *Philip Roth Studies*:**

- Since the last business meeting in May 2010 (ALA Conference in San Francisco), the executive editor has overseen the publication of two completed issues of *Philip Roth Studies*, volume 6 number 2, and volume 7 number 1.
    - Vol 6 No 2 included four essays, two book reviews, the 2010 annual bibliography, and a memorial to former editorial consultant John McDaniel.
    - Vol 7 No 1 included five essays and five book reviews.
  - The editorial staff is just beginning to copyedit material for the Fall 2011 issue, volume 7 number 2. Plans are to include three regular essays, a transcript of the 2010 ALA multi-author roundtable (on which the Roth Society participated), and a photo essay surrounding the work of Robert Peterson, who followed Roth in 1969 for *Life* magazine, on the cusp of the publication of *Portnoy's Complaint*.
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Philip Roth himself, through his agent at the Wylie Agency, has provided commentary and context for many of Peterson's images.

- Submissions to the journal over the past year have picked up slightly from that of the past several years.
  - The journal has received 22 submissions since May 2010. Of those 22 submissions, 9 essays were rejected or rejected with an invitation to resubmit, 7 were accepted pending final revisions, and 6 are still under consideration.
- Personnel changes on the editorial board:
  - Victoria Aarons has stepped down as book review editor and has been replaced by Aimee Pozorski.
    - Pozorski has been building upon Aaron's previous efforts with plans to increase the size and scope of the book review section of the journal.
  - Victoria Aarons will remain with the journal as a consulting editor. Aimee Pozorski will retain her duties as consulting editor, in addition to her work as the new book review editor.
  - Miriam Jaffe-Foger joined the journal as its new editorial assistant.
  - James Bloom, Catherine Morley, and Gurumurthy Neelakantan come to the journal as new consulting editors.
  - Richard Tuerk has stepped down as a consulting editor.

Beginning in Spring 2010, the journal has been made available on Project Muse. In addition to all current issues, Purdue University Press has provided all back issues to Muse, so that now every issue of *Philip Roth Studies* is available through the database.

- Purdue University Press has agreed to share all revenues generated through Muse online access, giving the Philip Roth Society half.
- Summary statistics on the journal, from May 2010 to May 2011, are as follows:

Days resource(s) accessed	321
Articles (full-text) viewed	3669
HTML Articles (full-text) viewed	766
PDF Articles (full-text) viewed	2903
Table of Contents viewed	3610
Journals viewed	1
IPs used to access database	3231

- Beginning in 2010, the journal began working with the society and its Siegel/McDaniel Award. The winner of the first annual competition, Tony Fong, will have his essay published in the Spring 2012 issue of the journal.
- Future plans:
  - The next special issue will be guest edited by David Gooblar, and it has the tentative title, "Roth and Women." It was originally slotted for the Fall 2011 issue, but due to low initial submissions, it has been pushed back to the Spring 2012 issue.
  - The Fall 2012 issue will be a regular issue.

- Plans are in the works for the next special issue, “International Roth,” which will reflect one of the panels sponsored by the society at the 2011 ALA Conference. As of now, and due to the unique nature of this special issue (primarily invitation only, and mainly with non-US and non-UK scholars), the executive editor will serve as that issue’s editor.

Respectfully submitted,

Derek Parker Royal

After the attending executive board members reviewed their reports (see attached), we turned our attention to new business, which consisted of three main topics: the Roth Society newsletter, the Roth at 80 conference in 2013, and ways to build the society membership.

The membership chair suggested we send the newsletter out in November of every year so it is timed alongside renewal notices. We also need to think about making them available in PDF format and sending electronically, if members prefer, and putting copies on the web after a significant amount of time has passed. All members agreed that the newsletter is an important resource and does not need a new look.

The subcommittee in charge of planning the “Roth at 80” conference to be held in Newark in the spring of 2013 consists of Brauner (program chair), Jaffe Foger, Bloom, Royal, Nadel, and Pozorski. *We need to start with a viable date and begin dividing our planning tasks.* We want to involve Jeff Bennett, who leads walking tours in Newark; the Jewish Community of Newark and surrounding areas; Anthony James and the Newark Public Library; the Jewish Historical Society of MetroWest; Rutgers-Newark; and Newark’s mayor, Cory Booker.

We spent the most amount of time discussing ways to build the society membership. Ideas include: Requesting names from program chairs of graduate students in the area of 20<sup>th</sup> century American literature and inviting them to join directly; Subscribe to Google Scholars updates and contact with congratulations new and emergent authors on Roth; Determine faculty teaching Roth during various semesters and reach out to those faculty and their students; Evolve the Roth Society website as a Wiki and generate a listserve to which all members can contribute; Ask other Society Presidents how they’ve successfully attracted and maintained new members; Invite new Roth Society presenters to become members of the Society rather than requiring their membership; Promote the bibliography as one protected resource accessible only to Roth Society Members; Propose special sessions on Roth’s works at such various conferences as the MSA, MELUS, and Narrative.

Finally, Pia Masiero volunteered to do the groundwork for a Roth Society event in Venice, Italy in 2012. We have since decided to work toward a date of February 17, 2012.

The meeting adjourned at 5:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Miriam Jaffe Foger & Aimee Pozorski



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## Philip Roth News

### Philip Roth receives National Humanities Medal



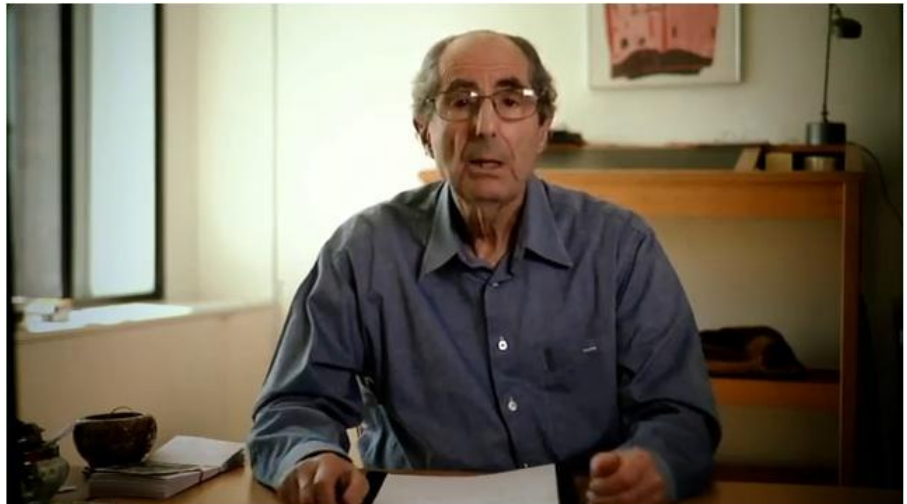
On Wednesday, March 2, Philip Roth was one of the 20 recipients of the National Humanities Medal. The award was presented by President Obama at the White House.

Other winners of the 2010 Medal included authors Harper Lee and Joyce Carol Oates; poet Donald Hall; actress Meryl Streep; musicians James Taylor, Sonny Rollins, and Van Cliburn; producer Quincy Jones; sculptor Mark di Suvero; theater critic Robert Brustein; and historians Bernard Bailyn and Gordon S. Wood.

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### Philip Roth wins Man Booker International Prize 2011

Announced on May 18, Philip Roth is the winner of the fourth Man Booker International Prize. He was chosen from a list of 13 eminent contenders. The Man Booker International Prize, worth £60,000, is awarded for an achievement in fiction on the world stage. It is presented once every two years to a living author for a body of work published either originally in English or widely available in translation in the English language.



Roth commented, "I would like to thank the judges of the Man Booker Prize for awarding me this esteemed prize. One of the particular pleasures I've had as a writer is to have my work read internationally despite all the heartaches of translation that that entails. I hope the prize will bring me to the attention of readers around the world who are not familiar with my work. This is a great honour and I'm delighted to receive it."

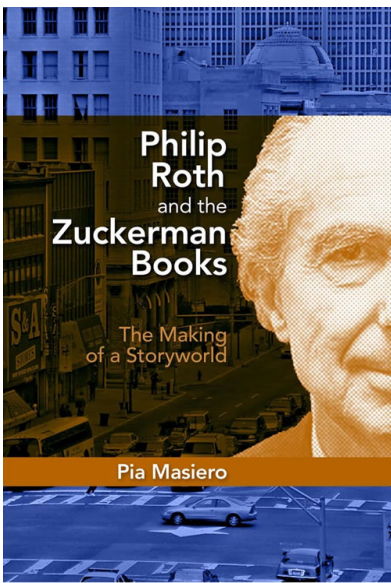
## Al Pacino and director Berry Levinson to bring *The Humbling* to the screen.

As of early June 2011, various entertainment news outlets are reporting that director Barry Levinson and actor Al Pacino will be collaborating on an adaptation of Philip Roth's 2009 novella, *The Humbling*

## New Publications

### Philip Roth and the Zuckerman Books: The Making of a Storyworld

By Pia Masiero, Cambria Press,



Cambria Press has just published *Philip Roth and the Zuckerman Books: The Making of a Storyworld*, by Pia Masiero. Pia Masiero is an assistant professor of American literature at the University of Venice, Ca' Foscari. She has previously worked and published on African American literature in the twentieth century and William Faulkner's short stories. Her research and teaching focus on Hawthorne and the American Renaissance, literary theory and narratology and contemporary American fiction.

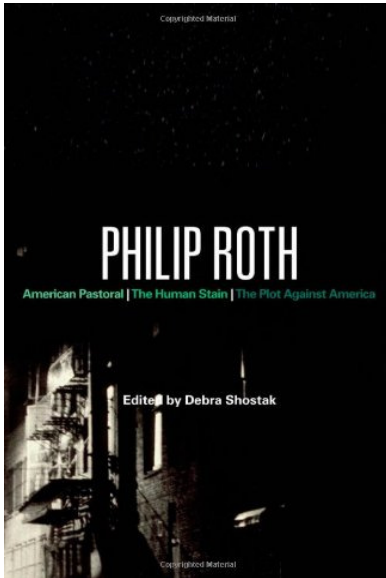
This book traces Zuckerman's fictional birth in *My Life as a Man* and *The Ghost Writer*, his growth through *Zuckerman Unbound*, *The Anatomy Lesson*, *The Prague Orgy*, *The Counterlife*, *The Facts*, his development in *American Pastoral*, *I Married a Communist*, *The Human Stain* and his death in *Exit Ghost*, to explore how Roth has been progressively creating and refining this mask and his voice as a means to come to terms with his own biography, his history, and his own self as a writer. All the defining features of Roth's poetics—masking practices, ventriloquism, meta-fictional focus, cultural significance—are visible in the creation of Zuckerman as narrator. This study keeps up the ongoing reflection in Roth's scholarly literature on the foundational relationship between facts and fictions demonstrating how Zuckerman amplifies and perfects the typically Rothian tendency to draw materials for his fictional writing from his own life and reveals Roth's ambition to create a monument out of a specific and well individualized identity: the writer steeped in American history. As Roth's most cherished mask, Nathan Zuckerman opens for the reader interested in the Jewish American author a perfect window on the crucial issue of authorship and on the range of Roth's thematic preoccupations.

In proposing to view *The Ghost Writer* as a narrative beginning, *The Counterlife* as a middle and *Exit Ghost* as an end, the book addresses the stakes at play in reading across multiple narratives directly: how is Zuckerman's identity shaped? How does narrative technique interact with biographical data? How do readers make (progressive) sense of Zuckerman and how do they cope with inconsistencies? What kind of coherence can be ascribed to Zuckerman in spite of the gaps his long narrative presents? What if anything is specifically "Jewish" about the creation of Zuckerman as narrator of numerous books? What are the literary functions, the formal and narratological underpinnings and the psychological needs Zuckerman activates and reveals?

This book is important for the general reader interested in contemporary American fiction, as well as for teachers of American literature and Jewish studies, for graduate students and advanced undergraduates, and, of course for Roth scholars and literary theorists.

March 2011, 9781604977547 , PP 292, HB \$ 109.99 (Note: ebook prices start at \$ 32.99—See publisher website )

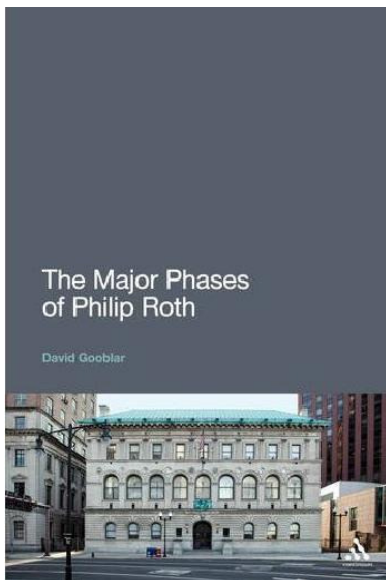
## Philip Roth: *American Pastoral*, *The Human Stain*, *The Plot Against America*, edited by Debra Shostak, Continuum Press



Continuum Press has just published *Philip Roth: American Pastoral, The Human Stain, The Plot Against America*, edited by Debra Shostak. Philip Roth collects new essays by noted Roth scholars on three essential novels appearing in recent years, *American Pastoral* (1997), *The Human Stain* (2000), and *The Plot Against America* (2004). The volume illuminates Roth's multilayered perceptions of twentieth-century America as a place, a culture, and an idea that shapes its inhabitants in profound ways. Focusing on such topics as ethnicity, race, the family, trauma, American history, historiography, fact vs. fiction, narrative form, and Roth's literary antecedents, the essays in Philip Roth offer fresh readings of Roth's penetrating explorations of the American self and the American scene. The contributors probe this American Jewish writer's insights into the paradoxes of freedom, the politics of identity, especially as defined by racial or ethnic affiliation, and the possibilities available for self-definition and transformation within modern American history and culture.

April 2011, 9780826422279, PB 208 pages, £17.99 / \$29.95

## The Major Phases of Philip Roth by David Gooblar, Continuum Press



Fifty years into Philip Roth's career, agreement has not yet been reached on the nature of his achievement. Is he the post-war Jewish-American writer par excellence, or a hyphenless American, commentator of American experience? Is he the faithful defender of the realist tradition, a citizen of the world, or the playful postmodernist?

The Major Phases of Philip Roth confronts his remarkable diversity by accounting for each stage of Rothian preoccupation, from the comedy and seriousness to the Judaism and psychoanalysis. This refreshing study is not intent on locating a single unifying theme.

Featuring fresh readings of now-canonical texts and a new telling of post-war American cultural narratives, David Gooblar reveals the changing face of liberalism, the rise of the New York Intellectuals and the legacies of the Holocaust.

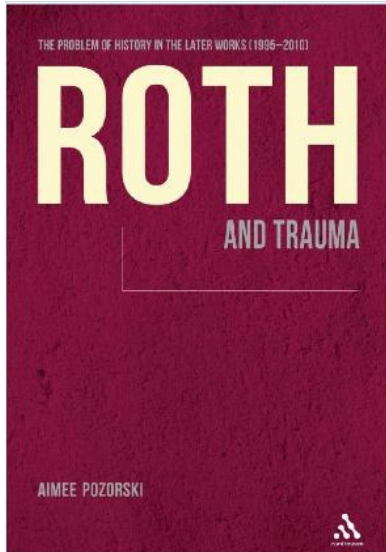
By accounting for Roth's multiplicity, his alternation between opposing modes and his stubborn commitment to counter-intuition, Gooblar explains what it is that makes Roth so rewarding, so central to post-war American literary cultural narratives and so reflective of America itself.

June 2011, 9781441169709, PB 208 pages, £17.99 / \$29.95



## Roth and Trauma: The Problem of History in the Later Works (1995-2010)

By Aimee Pozorski, Continuum Press

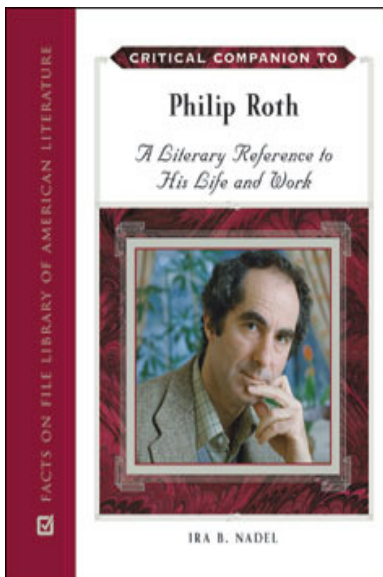


Roth and Trauma: The Problem of History in the Later Works (1995-2010) moves beyond a critical reception of Philip Roth's recent fiction that has focused primarily on an interest in post WWII America. By contrast, Aimee Pozorski argues that these novels grapple more comprehensively with US history in their fascination with America's "traumatic beginnings" and the legacy of the American Revolution. Drawing on close readings and trauma theory, Roth and Trauma reveals the problem of history in Roth's later works to be the unexpected and repeated appearance of historical trauma that links the still-unfinished American dream with the nightmarish quality of our recent history.

July 2011, 9781441185112 , HB 192 pages, £55.00 / \$100.00

## Critical Companion to Philip Roth

By Ira B. Nadel, Facts On File



Philip Roth is one of the greatest and most controversial American authors alive. A literary sensation since the publication of *Goodbye, Columbus* in 1959, Roth has continued to produce striking and original works of fiction, from *Portnoy's Complaint* in 1969 and his masterful American trilogy in the 1990s to *Everyman*, which won the PEN/Faulkner Award in 2006. *Critical Companion to Philip Roth* is a comprehensive reference to this talented writer's life and works.

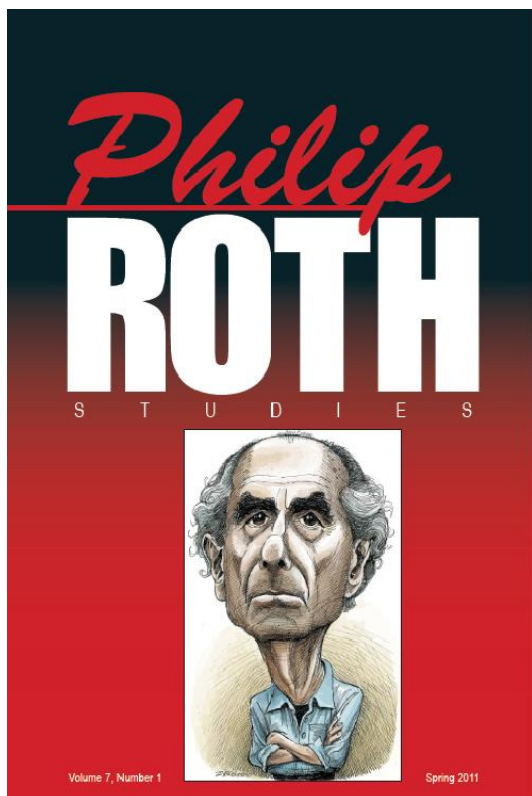
### Coverage includes:

- A concise but thorough biography of Roth
- Entries on all of Roth's works, including *American Pastoral*, *The Ghost Writer*, *Sabbath's Theater*, *The Human Stain*, *Zuckerman Unbound*, the stories collected in *Goodbye, Columbus*, *The Plot Against America*, his nonfiction works, and more. Each entry on a fictional work contains subentries on the work's main characters (including Nathan Zuckerman, Alexander Portnoy, "Swede" Levov, and more)
- Entries on related people, places, and topics, such as anti-Semitism, Claire Bloom, Newark, satire, and many more
- Appendixes, including a chronology, a bibliography of Roth's works, and a secondary-source bibliography.

August 2011, 9780816077953 , HB 368 pages, \$75.00

## Philip Roth Studies

Volume 7, Number 1, Spring 2011



### Contents

Editor's Column  
Derek Parker Royal

*What Can Happen Here?: Philip Roth, Sinclair Lewis, and the Lessons of Fascism in the American Liberal Imagination*  
Christopher Vials

*Written, Unwritten, and Vastly Rewritten: Meyer Levin's In Search and Philip Roth's "Defender of the Faith," The Plot Against America, and Indignation*  
James Duban

*"If I didn't see it with my own eyes, I'd think I was having a hallucination": Re-Imagining Jewish History in Philip Roth's The Plot Against America*  
Yael Maurer

*Erasing Race in Philip Roth's The Human Stain*  
Larry Schwartz

*The Fighting Life: Boxing and Identity in Novels by Philip Roth and Norman Mailer*  
John G. Rodwan Jr.

### Book Reviews

*Nemesis*  
Richard Sheehan

*Philip Roth: Novels 1993-1995*  
Christopher Gonzalez

*The Early Fiction of Philip Roth*  
Gurumurthy Neelakantan

*Kontrafaktische Geschichtsdarstellung. Untersuchungen an Romanen von Günter Grass, Thomas Pynchon, Thomas Brussig, Miachel Kleeberg, Philip Roth und Christoph Ransmayr*  
Curtis Swope

*Partial Faiths: Postsecular Fiction in the Age of Pynchon and Morrison*  
Andrew Hoogheem

## Abstracts from Papers Delivered at Recent Conferences

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

### ***16th Annual American Literature Association's Jewish American & Holocaust Literature Symposium Nov. 7-10, 2010, The Betsy Hotel, South Beach, Florida***

#### **Traumatic Realism and "Afterwardsness" in *Plot Against America***

**Aimee Pozorski\***, Central Connecticut State University

In *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (2000), Michael Rothberg worries that the three modes of representation available to twentieth century writers – realism, modernism, and postmodernism – fail effectively to convey the horrors of the traumatic experiences of our century, using art about the Holocaust to illuminate the problem. Rather than having to choose between the documentary style of realism or the alienating style of postmodernism to reflect traumatic experience – and risking failure at both – Rothberg argues: "Instead of abandoning the need either for documentation or for recognition of the Holocaust's specific challenge to representation, I propose that a reading of realism under the sign of trauma may be the most productive way out of the current dilemma" (107-108).

Philip Roth's 2004 "counter-history," *The Plot Against America* heeds such a call, as its reception has hovered uneasily between the social realism that describes Roth's American Trilogy of the late 1990s and the experimentation of what is now referred to as "middle Roth" that preceded it. *The Plot Against America* tells a horrifying tale of the U.S. under the fascist leadership of Charles Lindbergh through the eyes of a small child who just happens to be named Philip Roth. While Paul Berman praised the novel for balancing political anger with the representation of childhood fears, Michiko Kakutani criticized it as "a novel that can be read, in the current Bush era, as either a warning about the dangers of isolationism or a warning about the dangers of the Patriot Act and the threat to civil liberties. Yet it is also a novel that can be read as a not-altogether-successful attempt to mesh two incompatible genres: the political-historical thriller and the coming-of-age tale."

I would argue, however, that Roth's use of these incompatible genres follows Rothberg's demand that we consider what it means to interpret realism under the sign of trauma. The historical thriller aspect of the novel, I propose, not only requires readers to look back to the effects of anti-Semitism globally; it also requires readers to consider the present moment, particularly in 2004 in America, especially when Roth's correspondent, Walter Winchell, asks such poignant questions to refer to Roth's fictive 1930s as: "And how long will the American people stand for this treachery perpetrated by their elected president? How long will Americans remain asleep while their cherished Constitution is torn to shreds by the fascist fifth column of the Republican right marching under the sign of the cross and the flag?" (Roth 230). While my work is compelled by the way in which the novel looks back to the 1930s and the rise of Fascism, I would also suggest that the novel looks to – and defamiliarizes – the present time of the novel: 2004, in the heart of the Bush years, when the American people remained asleep while the Constitution was torn to shreds, thereby skewing readers' understanding of "real" time. As psychoanalysts perplexed by these ideas of skewed time, Jean LaPlanche and J.-B. Pontalis rely on *Nachträglichkeit* to articulate this effect. For them, *Nachträglichkeit* (or "Afterwardsness") is a term Freud "frequently used in connection with his view of psychical temporality and causality," indicating how traumatic experience is often told or lived repeatedly, cyclically, as if to arrive at a new understanding of an event that was not fully experienced in the first place. I contend here that Roth's novel does just that: it, in its own provocative way, re-imagines the Holocaust as a figure to tell the story of a America that has lost its way in the 2000s, derailed as it was by a disregard for its founding ideals.

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## **“Submerged, Emerging, Disappearing, Unforgotten”: Holocaust Memory and Masculine Identity in Roth’s Fiction**

**Maggie McKinley**, Marquette University

In this paper, I explore the ways in which Giorgio Agamben’s discussion of witness and shame after Auschwitz, when examined alongside Marianne Hirsch’s discussion of postmemory, informs our reading of the Holocaust in *Portnoy’s Complaint* and *The Ghost Writer*. While Agamben and Hirsch’s respective studies of Holocaust memory diverge in approach (the former being predicated on the notion of biopolitics and the latter on the idea of second-hand memory), I would argue that when placed side by side these theories help to illuminate Roth’s engagement with the Holocaust as it is represented in his fiction. Specifically, what Hirsch and Agamben help us to see is that each novel’s protagonist, in his journey *away* from an image of what Portnoy calls the “suffering Jew,” actually comes to realize the ways in which he cannot disengage from his latent history. Portnoy and Zuckerman both seek to “forget” the Holocaust, rebelling against a notion of identity derived through tragedy and victimization, but both are unable to escape the impulse to remember, even when this remembrance manifests itself in the act of bearing witness through negation of this history. Thus, while each work addresses the impact of the Holocaust in a different fashion and degree, both novels nevertheless reflect the literary manifestation of Agamben’s remark that the Holocaust “*in truth... has never ceased to take place; it is always already repeating itself.*” In this light, we might read these texts as ongoing testimonies to and about the Holocaust, in which each protagonist experiences both self-loss and self-possession within the struggle to reconcile his passivity before a collective Jewish past with his desire for sovereignty in the present.

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## ***Modern Language Association Convention, Saturday, January 8 2011 Los Angeles, CA***

A Special Session Organized by the Philip Roth Society  
“Philip Roth and Celebrity”

### **“Paying Attention to the Man behind the Curtain: Philip Roth and the Dynamics of Written and Unwritten Celebrity”**

**Derek Parker Royal\***, Editor, *Philip Roth Studies*,

In considering the complications of celebrity in Roth’s career, Derek Parker Royal’s paper explores Roth’s increasing exposure and proposes that celebrity, while appearing anathema to the persona of Roth as a writer, is actually a constructed—if conflicted—paratextual strategy employed by the author. Royal goes on to argue

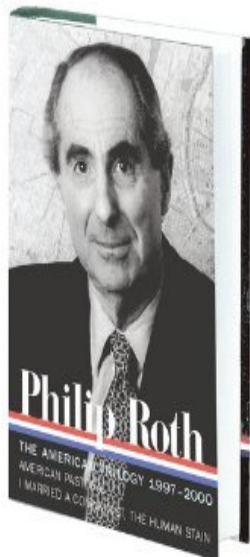
that, in true Rothian fashion, the novelist has approached his popularity in an ambivalent manner. More significantly, Royal illustrates how Roth has used his fiction as a way to map out the dynamics involved in celebrity and—in ways similar to Woody Allen’s film by that title—travels back and forth between what he calls the “written and unwritten world[s],” using his texts as a way to both distance himself from as well as engage his public façade. Referencing both public events and key texts, Royal demonstrates how the various representations—many of them orchestrated by the author himself—underlying Roth’s public exposure are analogous to the ambiguously constructed selves found in the author’s fictions.

**“‘the stars are indispensable’: Celebrity, Trauma and Patriotism in *I Married a Communist*”****Aimee Pozorski\***, Central Connecticut State University,

Aimee Pozorski also considers the problematic relationship between representation and celebrity in her paper, which reads closely the double meanings of signature phrases that characterize Roth’s later work. She argues, for example, that in ending with the single-paragraph sentence, “The stars are indispensable,” Roth’s *I Married a Communist* simultaneously refers to the stars in the night sky, the stars that epitomize the democratic work of the nation on the U.S. flag, and the celebrities that come and go through the novel. This linguistic doubling, she argues, betrays the aftershocks of traumatic history, especially as it becomes inextricably bound up with the life of the celebrity. Pozorski proposes that, in representing the heart of the McCarthy Era, but also looking back to the ambivalent celebrity status of Thomas Paine during the Revolutionary Era, *I Married a Communist*, like *Plot Against America*, depicts the uncomfortable, and often ambivalent, relationship between trauma, celebrity, and patriotic revolution.

**“‘Into Thin Air’: Celebrity Selfhood in *I Married a Communist*, *Exit Ghost*, and *The Humbling*”****Debra Shostak\***, The College of Wooster,

Debra Shostak has argued in *Philip Roth—Countertexts, Counterlives* (2004) that Roth has been strikingly ambivalent—and thus in accord with contemporary intellectual history—over the matter of the “self” and proposes that Roth’s interest in celebrity offers a new angle on the paradoxes of late modern selfhood. In her paper, Shostak argues that in three recent novels, *I Married a Communist* (1998), *Exit Ghost* (2007), and *The Humbling* (2009), Roth explores the public/private opposition, inherent to the notion of celebrity, as it disrupts the attempts of a protagonist, an artist or actor, to locate or perform a coherent subjectivity. In these celebrity figures, Roth externalizes the destabilizing self-alienation of the public/private dichotomy. Drawing on Baudrillard’s account of the sign, Shostak argues that, in depicting the overlapping and/or conflicting public and private worlds of the celebrity, Roth underscores the contradictions between performance of a public “self”—the image of an identity, a commodity ready for consumption—and the possibilities for an “authentic” selfhood that is the alleged referent for the sign.

**Coming Soon****Philip Roth: The American Trilogy  
(Library of America)**

The latest Library of America volume includes the much celebrated ‘American Trilogy’ series of *American Pastoral*, *I Married a Communist* and *The Human Stain*.

Released 29th September 2011.



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**Louisville Conference on Literature & Culture since 1900**

 39th annual, University of Louisville, February 24-26, 2011
 

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Panel sponsored by the Philip Roth Society—The Two Tetralogies, chaired by David Brauner, University of Reading

**“The Other Way Around: *Zuckerman Bound* and the Violence of Reading”**
**Elizabeth Twitchell\***, Connecticut College

In a 1985 interview, Philip Roth airily dismissed confession-seeking readers of his *Zuckerman Bound* series, stating that “If all these subtle readers can see in my work is my biography, then they are simply numb to fiction...End of lecture.” In my paper, I argue that Roth’s unequivocal, chastening retort belies a very real anxiety brought to light by—but rarely discussed in relation to—*Zuckerman Bound*: namely, the destructive, oppositional power lodged in even the most sensitive, well-intentioned of readers. By tracing the various acts of reading and misreading we see in the trilogy and epilogue—including E.I. Lonoff’s self-promoting (and hence author-effacing) marginalia, Alvin Pepler’s insistence that *Carnovsky* is his stolen life story, and Milton Appel’s Zuckerman-debilitating criticism—it will become clear that readers, in *Zuckerman Bound*, are always necessarily misreaders. And, as such, they are capable of inflicting much greater harm than even the most narcissistic of novelists. Although Zuckerman is frequently accused (and accuses himself) of feeding off of the lives of others for his fictional material, the reader consumes the story and person of the author with an almost vampiric rapacity—but, crucially, with zero accountability. Unlike the author, the reader is never held responsible for her own act of self-insertion, her underlining, like Caesara O’Shea, of “everything that says ‘me.’” Ultimately, what an attention to the position of readers in *Zuckerman Bound* makes clear is that it is not, as Don DeLillo’s Bill Gray might have us believe, the writer who wields the power of the terrorist, but the reader. Zuckerman, wary of Pepler’s latent violence, gives voice to exactly this apprehension: “The writers...are supposed to move the readers to pity and fear, not the other way around!”

**History and the Aging Artist: Late Style and History in Philip Roth’s *Nemesis***
**Matthew Shipe\***, Washington University

In *Nemesis* (2010), Philip Roth’s thirty-first book, Roth chronicles a polio outbreak that strikes Newark during the summer of 1944. Not surprisingly, *Nemesis* ranks among Roth’s bleakest works as the novel continues the obsession with death and fate that has characterized so much of his recent fiction, most notably *Everyman* (2006), *Indignation* (2008), and *The Humbling* (2009). These recent efforts, a tetralogy of sorts, have been notable not only for their fixation with death, but also for their brief, often elliptical, narrative shape. There is something purposefully difficult about these late works as characters and whole plot lines are introduced only to disappear, with little explanation, later in the text. Such narrative disruptions often make for unpleasant reading—indeed, there is little pleasure to be found in Roth’s recent work—but they suggest something of the self-conscious difficulty that has come to define his late style. The power of subjectivity in the late works of art is the irascible gesture with which it takes leave of the works themselves,” Theodor Adorno observed in his consideration of Beethoven’s late symphonies. “Of the works themselves it leaves only fragments behind, and communicates itself, like a cipher, only through the blank spaces from which it has disengaged itself. Touched by death, the hand of the master sets free the masses of material he used to form; its tears and fissures, witness to the finite powerlessness of the I confronted with Being, are its final work” (566). Such “tears and fissures” have typified Roth’s fiction since *Everyman*, and they appear central to his sense of himself as a writer entering the last stage of his career. In my paper, I plan to explore how we might read *Nemesis* as a culmination of Roth’s late style and the historical perspective that has emerged alongside that style. I am particularly interested in exploring how we might understand Roth’s late style in relationship to the more direct mode of historical representation that has characterized his fiction since *The Plot Against America* (2004).

## **American Literature Association**

22nd Annual Conference, May 26-29, 2011, Boston, MA

### **International Roth**

Organized by the Philip Roth Society, Chair: David Brauner\*, The University of Reading

For many years now, Philip Roth has enjoyed the global reputation of being the greatest living American novelist. This panel explores some of the ways in which Roth has been translated, read and received outside the United States.

### **Philip Roth's (Second) Italian Renaissance**

**Prof. Elèna Mortara\***, University of Rome

A quick look at the dates of publication of Philip Roth's books in Italian shows that the Jewish American author received an immediate acknowledgement in Italy. Starting with the translation of *Goodbye, Columbus and Five Short Stories* in 1960, passing through *Portnoy's Complaint* (1970) up to *Zuckerman Unbound* (1981), *Deception* (1991) and *The Humbling* (2010), Roth has been steadily and punctually translated.

This paper aims at presenting and exploring what may be termed Philip Roth's second Italian Renaissance: in the year 1998 the publishing house Einaudi begins to reprint (and at times translate again) Philip Roth's first books giving rise to a veritable revival. Whereas the attention to Roth's work in the sixties and seventies was part of a much larger interest in Jewish American authors, Roth has now become a soloist. The project of Mondadori, a prestigious Italian publishing house, to publish a critical edition of (almost) the entire Rothian corpus is an unmistakable sign that the Italian audience has learnt to recognize Roth as a classic.

### **Conversations with Volker Hage**

**Daniel Medin\***, American University of Paris

As a young writer, Philip Roth saw Thomas Mann speak at Princeton and admired the distinguished man's blend of moral earnestness and ironic humor. In recent decades, Germany has returned him the favor; Roth's novels are bestsellers in German, and all of his recent books have been greeted with extensive press coverage and attentive reviews. (In fact, complaints about the Swedish Academy's reluctance to award him a Nobel are often louder in Frankfurt than in New York.) This paper focuses on *Philip Roth: Bücher und Begegnungen* - literally, "Books and Encounters" --, a gathering of 20-plus years of reviews on and conversations with Roth by a prominent German critic and journalist. Published in 2008, Volker Hage's collection offers a compelling portrait of Roth as an author of global importance -- even when their conversation homes in on topics in post-war American history and letters. In addition to tracing significant patterns that appear over the course of their exchanges, my presentation includes a profile of Hage, now editor of *Der Spiegel's* cultural pages, and a brief consideration of Roth's reception in Germany from the appearance of *American Pastoral* to the present.

### **A Reluctant Public Intellectual: Seeing America through Philip Roth**

**Claudia Franziska Brühwiler\***, Amherst College/University of St. Gallen, Switzerland

Philip Roth frequently stressed, both in his novels and in interviews, that he did not believe in literature's transformative powers, beyond its turning people into better readers. For instance, he shows in *I Married A Communist* (1998) how Nathan Zuckerman first perceives literature as a means of political persuasion, until he is taught to recognize the antagonistic relationship between art and politics. Moreover, Roth has repeatedly

fought attempts by critics to read parts of his oeuvre as political allegories, most notably in the case of his novel *The Plot Against America* (2004). At the same time, however, he never withholds his own political opinions.

Roth's frankness combined with the politically pertinent questions raised by his novels makes him, (in) voluntarily, a sought-after observer and critic of American life. Particularly in the German speaking world, where critical literary voices such as Günter Grass or Adolf Muschg are perceived as important public intellectuals, Philip Roth is often presented as a messenger, an interpreter of American reality whose views are not only quoted in the culture pages of the newspaper, but sometimes even in the sports section. This paper shall explore what American German and Swiss media as well as German scholarly works believe to recognize through their readings of and interviews with Philip Roth. It will in a first step show the extent of the media coverage and of the scholarly work on Roth's novels, and then discuss in a second step how he is cast as a public intellectual, who explains the transatlantic "Other" to the German speaking reader.



(L-R David Brauner\*, Martyna Bryla\*, Elèna Mortara \*, Daniel Medin \*, Brian Goodman\*, Claudia Franziska Bruhwiler \*)

### **Encountering an Elsewhere: Roth and Kundera Read One Another** **Brian Goodman\***, Harvard University

In an interview with the Czech writer Ivan Klíma, Roth famously remarked of the contrast between the American and Czech literary cultures, "There nothing goes and everything matters; here everything goes and nothing matters." It is worth interrogating exactly what Roth means by this provocative statement. By reading Roth dialogically with another writer born in Czechoslovakia, Milan Kundera, I explore the ways that Roth constructed America and Czechoslovakia as counterworlds, and the ways that Kundera's exilic perspective disrupts that construction. I will seek to define a third possibility, an "elsewhere" that Kundera advocates in his newest collection of essays, *Encounter*.

In this paper, I examine how these two writers have read one another over the years, paying particular attention to the ways in which they appear in each other's non-fiction writing. Building on Ross Posnock's work, which traces Kundera's influences in Roth's fiction, I explore the abundant sources that exist outside of their novels: reviews and introductions that Roth and Kundera have written on each other's work, published conversations and interviews between the writers, and their unpublished correspondence collected at the Library of Congress. What emerges, instead of Roth's divergent counterworlds, is a shared creative and aesthetic space predicated on serious laughter, erotic play, and anti-pastoralism. By searching for the ironic connections between these two writers, who hail from very different worlds, I will show how their creative encounter leads them to both arrive at an "elsewhere."

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## **Roth, Kepesh and Zuckerman in the Other Europe: Czechoslovakia as a Symbol in Philip Roth's writing**

**Martyna Bryla\***, Universidad de Málaga, Spain

The aim of my paper is to discuss the significance and representation of Czechoslovakia in the fiction of Philip Roth.

In the early 1970s Roth frequently travelled to the communist Prague. These visits resulted in long-lasting interest in his fellow writers living behind the Iron Curtain, or to use Roth's own words, in "the Other Europe," and served as inspiration for his own writing. Kafka's hometown is the locale of *The Prague Orgy* (1985) and one of Kepesh and Claire's stops on their summer tour of Europe in *The Professor of Desire* (1978). It also features prominently in Roth's conversations with two banned Czech authors; the celebrated writer-philosopher Milan Kundera and less known Ivan Klíma, included in the 2001 collection of interviews, *Shop Talk: A Writer and His Colleagues and Their Work*.

This paper looks at Czechoslovakia in the context of Roth's *The Prague Orgy* and *The Professor of Desire*, as well as his own reflections of the place and significance of the writer under totalitarianism. It confronts the idea of "the muse of censorship" addressed by Roth in one of the interviews, which has it that only those oppressed by the system are capable of creating worthy and relevant literature, with allegedly trivial fiction produced by writers in freedom-rich countries like America. Following the above-mentioned novels and the author's conversations with Klíma and Kundera, my paper also attempts to show what Czechoslovakia and Prague in particular comes to symbolize for Roth himself and his literary creations: David Kepesh and Nathan Zuckerman.

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## **Film and Literature**

Organized by The Film and Literature Society

### **Philip Roth's Novel *The Dying Animal* and Isabel Coixet's Film Adaptation *Elegy***

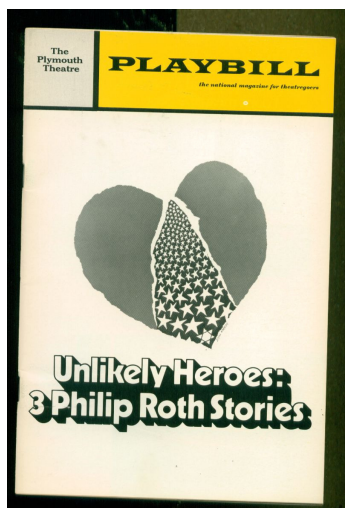
**Andrew Gordon**, University of Florida

Philip Roth is the fictional chronicler in his time of male desire, of the lunacy, comedy, and pain of lust, and sometimes of the possibility or impossibility of love. For over fifty years he has traced with great candor and exquisite insight the quirks of masculine desire, the longing, the follies of the chase, the difficulty of getting what you want and the even greater difficulty of obtaining it and then of living with the consequences, and finally the acute pain of losing the object of your desire. As Roth has aged, he has often focused on the bitter comedy of sexual desire in the older man, as the brain lusts but the body wanes, or as lovers fall by the wayside.

Roth anatomizes another bittersweet May-December romance in *The Dying Animal* (2000), adapted by director Isabel Coixet into the film *Elegy* (2008). Coixet accurately calls it a story of "love, loss, jealousy, and age." If I didn't know Roth's novel, I would be able to enjoy *Elegy* on its own terms, as a touching adult drama about a love affair: well cast, very well acted and directed, well edited, with fine cinematography and classical music that frames the moods. But the movie goes a familiar Hollywood route and tries to resolve everything happily, softening and sentimentalizing Roth's acerbic tale. Roth's novel is about the uncertainties of relationships, and about things that can never be easily resolved.

## Unlikely Heroes - Roth on Broadway

By Richard Sheehan



In the far-off days of Fall 1971, Philip Roth had become the *enfant terrible* of American letters. *Portnoy's Complaint* had created scandal as well as a big name for its author. It was due to Roth's pulling power that Larry Arrick, most recently the Artistic Director of the John Drew Repertory Theatre in East Hampton, Long Island, decided to adapt three of Roth's short stories from his *Goodbye Columbus* debut of twelve years earlier. The three stories chosen were *Defender of the Faith*, *Epstein* and *Eli, the Fanatic*.

They were performed at The Plymouth Theatre, since 2005 the Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre (right), between 10/26/1971 - 11/13/1971

Reviews are difficult to find online but the shows don't seem to have been that successful.

The performances can be broken down as follows;

**Preview:** Oct 18, 1971 **Total Previews:** 9

**Opening:** Oct 26, 1971 **Closing:** Nov 13, 1971

**Total Performances:** 23

Cast

### Defender of the Faith

David Ackroyd - Sgt. Nathan Marx  
George Bartenieff - Maj. Leo Ben Ezra  
Dori Brenner - Cpl. Shulman  
Jon Korkes - Pvt. Sheldon Grossbart

Alvin Kupperman - Pvt. Michael Halpern  
Josh Mostel - Pvt. Larry Fishbein  
Tom Rosqui - Capt. Paul Barrett  
Stephen Van Benschoten - LaHill, Sgt. Wright

### Epstein

Lou Jacobi - Epstein  
Dori Brenner - Sheila  
Rose Arrick - Ida  
Lucille Patton - Mrs. Katz  
Stephen Van Benschoten - Ambulance Driver

Josh Mostel - Folk Singer  
Alvin Kupperman - Michael  
Anna Berger - Goldie  
Jon Korkes - Doctor

### Eli, the Fanatic

Michael Tolan - Eli  
David Ackroyd - The Man  
George Bartenieff - Artie  
Lee Wallace - Ted  
Alvin Kupperman - Deliveryman  
Tom Rosqui - Harry  
Stephen Van Benschoten - 2nd Intern

Lou Jacobi - Tzuref  
Rose Arrick - Miriam  
Dori Brenner - Nurse  
Lucille Patton - Shirley  
Josh Mostel - 1st Intern



## Uncollected Roth

By Richard Sheehan

*These articles are about the works of Philip Roth that, to date, are uncollected and are quite likely to remain so. A bibliography of these works can be found on the Philip Roth Society website at [www.rothsociety.org.]*



(Philip Roth in 1962, Copyright: Getty Images)

### Novotny's Pain

"Novotny's Pain" marked Philip Roth's third excursion into the pages of the *New Yorker* (27 Oct. 1962). It has been reprinted since, in *A Philip Roth Reader*, and as a standalone limited edition of 300 numbered copies, all signed by the author, published by Sylvester & Orphanos, both in 1980.

The story tells the tale of Novotny, a typical Roth character: an individual who is somewhat of a loner, at odds with authority, and seemingly out of sorts with both himself and his place in the world. He's working as a printer but, dissatisfied with this, he begins studying to be a television cameraman at night-school when he gets called up for service at the start of the Korean War. Early in his draft he experiences a pain in his lower back, and the story goes on to describe the Kafkaesque travails of poor Novotny as he balances the treatment of his back against the doubts of his superiors and the rigours of Army life.

A conspicuous aspect of this story is that of Roth's own experience in the Army in 1955 when, in basic training, he suffered a back injury and was discharged within the year. He has since mined the army experience in stories as diverse as "Defender of the Faith" and the more recent novel *Indignation*.

The story's primary theme, one that Roth went on to pursue in later works, is that of the relationship between mind and body. As the story progresses, the antagonists, in the guise of his superiors and the army medical staff, begin to cast doubt on his symptoms, suggesting that the pain may be psychosomatic rather than genuine, ultimately claiming that his real goal is a release from the army. Eventually, Novotny himself begins believing that his pain may be all in his mind even though every attempt he makes to resist the pain results in failure. As he's discharged from the service, a Colonel describes him thus in a stinging tirade:

"You are a God-damned passive-aggressive ... You think life owes you something. You think something's coming to you ... Haven't you ever heard of self-sacrifice? ... People like you make me sick. Go ahead, join the bed-wetters and the queers. Get the hell out of here."

On his release, he's led to believe that he'll be haunted by the shame of it for the rest of his life. In truth, however, many years later his only sacrifice is that he can't take part in Friday night bowling with his friends. His discharge has been long forgotten.

As I've mentioned, Roth has long used the tension between mind and body as a significant theme in his fiction. In *Portnoy's Complaint*, for example, the protagonist's sex drive is pitted against the conventions of the time. In *The Breast* David Kepesh is transformed into a giant breast and is driven nearly out of his mind as a result. Memorably, Nathan Zuckerman suffers from a mysterious pain in his neck and shoulders in *The Anatomy Lesson* and considers becoming a medical doctor. More recently in the novels since the turn of the millennium, we've seen a direct examination of the effects of aging on the mind and the body in novels such as *The Dying Animal*, *Everyman*, *Exit Ghost*, and *the Humbling*.

A closer look at Roth's early writing reveals the path for his future work. Roth picks up the ideas exposed in these early stories in order to examine them more fully in his later novels, and the significance of these early works can only be fully realised when looking back at Philip Roth's work as a whole.

## The Mistaken

"The Mistaken" is a short story published in *American Judaism* 10 (1960). It's a very short piece that takes up less than two magazine pages in total, but deals with the agonies of parenthood, inherited characteristics and the question of whether, sometimes, it's best to keep one's thoughts and opinions to oneself.

The story begins as a letter from the narrator to his mother describing the televised funeral of a mobster, Murray Miller, whom we later discover was a childhood friend of the narrator. He was killed when four men came crashing through the windows in his house and riddled him full of bullets. The narrator considers whether Miller, at the moment of his death, wondered which of his many crimes was coming back to wreak vengeance upon him. He wonders how he, and by implication we, would answer the same question: How many "crimes" could we all lay claim to that might come back to take their revenge on us?

He recalls one incident in particular which involves a much younger Murray Miller. He knows that confessing this to his mother would be pointless, that her reply would be that it was all in the past, something to be forgotten, but then, he wonders, did the victims of Murray Miller's many crimes forgive and forget them with the passing of the years? He remembers how, as a child, he was protected from the 'darker' side of life -- "Death didn't exist in our house," he recalls. "The troubles, the uglinesses, all the rotten things, were hidden behind a screen." Even his father's death was hidden from him and he wasn't allowed to attend the funeral.

As a youngster, he discovers the nature of death when he hears about Dorfman, the local grocer, who had died whilst on the toilet and he wondered whether his father might have suffered a similar fate. The following week, the narrator and Murray had been passing the grocer's shop and witnessed his widow breaking down in despair. The narrator wanted to leave but Murray was enthralled at the scene and wanted to stay. This leads to a fight between the two, during which the narrator pushes Murray's head into the snow until he can barely breathe, and he only stops when the two of them become separated by the intervention of Dorfman's wife.

At this point the narrator runs out of ideas for his letter, re-reads it and decides to bin it. What purpose would it solve to tell his mother these things? He now appears to inherit his mother's philosophy of letting sleeping dogs lie, and he wonders which of his characteristics, both physical and metaphysical will be inherited by his children:

"Even loved ones mistook good for evil, evil for good. You told them the truth, and that hurt. You hid the truth, that hurt too."

He finishes by considering that he is just a man and that however much he tries to avoid mistakes, he will make them. Indeed he will have already made many, and the results of some of these will be borne by his children.

This is an interesting story with ideas that hark back to several earlier stories -- "*The Day it Snowed*" (*Chicago Review* 8 [1954]), and "*The Contest for Aaron Gold*" (*Epoch* 5-6 [1955]) in particular, where adults attempt to protect children from the harsher side of life—but often with disastrous results. In later novels, the relationships between the father and the son emerge as a familiar theme in Roth's work. To see this, we only have to read *Portnoy's Complaint*, the early Zuckerman books, *The Human Stain*, *American Pastoral*, *The Plot against America*, *Indignation* and of course, from his non-fiction, *Patrimony: a true story*.



## BIBLIOGRAPHIC UPDATE - Compiled by Derek Parker Royal

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

### Books: Monographs

- \*Gooblar, David. *The Major Phases of Philip Roth*. New York: Continuum, 2011. Print.
- \*Masiero, Pia. *Philip Roth and the Zuckerman Books: The Making of a Storyworld*. Amherst, NY: Cambria P, 2011. Print.
- \*Nadel, Ira. *Critical Companion to Philip Roth*. New York: Facts on File, 2011. Print.
- \*Pozorski, Aimee L. *Roth and Trauma: The Problem of History in the Later Works (1995-2010)*. London: Continuum, 2011. Print.

Statlander, Jane. *Philip Roth's Postmodern American Romance*. New York: Peter Lang, 2010. Print.

### Books: Edited Collections

- \*Shostak, Debra, ed. *Philip Roth: American Pastoral, The Human Stain, The Plot Against America*. New York: Continuum, 2011. Print.

### Book Chapters

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# The Philip Roth Society Newsletter

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