A Message From the Society’s President

Derek Parker Royal

It has been two years since we founded the Philip Roth Society, and in that time we have grown to become an active organization on several fronts. Much of this information was discussed at our annual business meeting at this year’s American Literature Association Conference in San Francisco, CA. As Jessica Rabin, our Secretary/Treasurer, reported, our membership has increased and includes representatives in at least ten different countries. In the past year the society has sponsored four different panels devoted specifically to Roth’s writing, and individual members have presented Roth-related papers on a variety of other conference panels (see the “Conference” section beginning on page 7). Along with this, we are at work on the inaugural volume of our new journal, Philip Roth Studies, the first issue of which will come out either late this year or in early 2005.

And there are some important changes on the horizon. This will be the last time that I will serve as the editor of the Philip Roth Society Newsletter. Beginning with the Fall 2004 issue Joseph Kraus, at King’s College in Pennsylvania, will take over the reins. I warmly welcome Joe aboard, and I look forward to him developing this newsletter and taking it into exciting new directions. Over the past two years I have enjoyed editing the newsletter, and in the process I have benefited from the advice and the friendship of others who helped me in pulling everything together. But in taking on the new responsibilities of Philip Roth Studies, I feel that my editorial energies would be best used in concentrating them on that periodical. Perhaps more important, the newsletter, the official organ of the Philip Roth Society, is a completely separate publication from the journal, with a different focus and a more specific purpose, and as such its editorial mission and influence should reflect this. Joe has an impressive journalistic background, and I look forward to working with him as an editor and as a valued officer in the society.

As you read through this issue of the newsletter,

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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 refereed journal devoted to Roth scholarship, a Roth Society listserv group, information concerning upcoming events, calls for papers devoted to Roth’s fiction, an extensive list of bibliographical resources, 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.
Conferences and Events

To publicize a call for papers, lecture, or general events 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.”

Calls for Papers

**ALA Jewish American and Holocaust Literature Symposium**
**October 13-17, 2004, Boca Raton, FL**
The Philip Roth Society is looking to hold one or more panels at the 2004 ALA JAHL Symposium in Boca Raton. This will be the tenth anniversary celebration of the annual symposium. Topic is open and can concern any aspect of Roth’s writing. If you are interested in presenting a paper, please email a 200-350 word abstract by July 26, 2004 to JAHL@rothsociety.org.
For more information on the conference, visit the Society for the Study of Jewish American and Holocaust Literature’s Web site at http://ssjahl.org/.
For more information on the Philip Roth Society, please visit its Web site at http://rothsociety.org.

**Twentieth-Century Literature Conference**
**February 24-26, 2005, Louisville, KY**
The Philip Roth Society has been invited to contribute to the Twentieth-Century Literature Conference, which is held every year at the University of Louisville. We would like to organize a panel of three presenters and would welcome papers concerning any facet of Philip Roth studies. We are also interested in finding a panel moderator (who could also present a paper) for this panel. To submit, please email a 200-350 word abstract to louisville@rothsociety.org. The deadline for submissions is September 1, 2004 (postmarked). For more information on the Philip Roth Society, please visit its Web site at http://rothsociety.org.

The Twentieth-Century Literature Conference, now in its thirty-third year, is an annual international conference notable for the breadth of interests that it represents and for the combination of critical and creative work that it features. For more information on the conference visit its Web site, http://www.louisville.edu/a-s/cml/xxconf/.
**Philip Roth and Race: Essay collection**

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 Jewishness 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 Brodkin’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 at francodj@wfu.edu and Derek Parker Royal at derek_royal@tamu-commerce.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 jhalio@yahoo.com.
Tales from the Front...of the Classroom
Jessica G. Rabin
Anne Arundel Community College

Announcement: My composition classroom has been transformed into the Indecent Theatre, which, I suppose, makes me by extension that lewd and lascivious purveyor of pornography himself, Mickey Sabbath.

You see, apparently, though utterly unbeknownst to myself, I am teaching a dirty book. Or so I was led to believe by a message left on my college voice mail the other week.

The message ran roughly along the following lines: “My daughter is in your Composition and Literature class. I was looking at the books you have required, and I am concerned about the language and content. One of them includes premarital sex, which we do not approve of in my family. Is there an alternative assignment my daughter can complete?”

Short answer: no.

A little more context for this story: In the fourteen sections of this course in which I’ve used Roth’s “Goodbye, Columbus” as an introduction to literary analysis, no one (student or otherwise) has ever found reason for complaint. In fact, most students have expressed genuine enjoyment. The student in question was three weeks shy of her eighteenth birthday when Mommy called me, which meant that I was legally permitted to speak to her mother, though she was a high school graduate (her transcript listed her high school as “unknown private,” aka, home school). Former students have included co-curricular high school students and home-schooled individuals, but I guess there is a first time for everything.

Longer (albeit unuttered) answer: in keeping with a longstanding Jewish tradition, I will answer with a series of questions.

First of all, does anyone teach Portnoy’s Complaint? Because if I’m getting complaints about a sweet story of summer love between a college graduate and a woman a year or two younger, I’d like to know how other instructors get away with real pornography.

Secondly, isn’t there more to worry about in “Goodbye, Columbus” than premarital sex? One aspect of this encounter with the parent that particularly interested me was that the family was African American. While “Goodbye, Columbus” lacks graphic love scenes, profanity, violence, or any of the sort of explicit content that can be found on network television, music videos, or the Super Bowl halftime show, it does use out of date language (e.g., “colored” instead of African American) and perpetuates negative racial stereotypes. And that has never been a problem in any of my previous course sections either. In fact, I use these aspects to create teachable moments. My students and I discuss the social/cultural/historical background for the novel, and then I explain that it is appropriate for them to quote Roth/Neil as saying “the colored kid in the library” but that they should refer to the boy themselves using current terminology. My caller, however, did not make this legitimate gripe; she was only concerned with the premarital sex, which, frankly, Brenda and Neil’s families don’t approve of either.

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Which leads us to another question: how many canonical literary works contain no actions that someone’s family might disapprove of? For that matter, *Death of a Salesman* is also on the syllabus. Does the student’s family approve of lying, stealing, adultery, and suicide? What about the incest in *Oedipus Rex* or murder in *Hamlet*? Why single out Roth? Our texts are literature, not instruction books. And there’s no lab. We read about it—we don’t have to do it ourselves.

Questions better left unasked: Is Mommy going to censor everything that her baby sees, hears, and learns for the rest of her life? Why exactly is this student going to college if she doesn’t want to learn anything new?

Solution: My college is currently running sixty-eight sections of this course, three of which are offered during the exact same time slot as mine. I sent the student off to someone else’s section (I know not whose) in search of a more wholesome curriculum. Perhaps this was a cop-out. If the student herself had been concerned about the material, I would have encouraged her to stay in the class. But there was no way I was going to take on Mom.

Further thought: what Roth texts are you teaching and at what grade level? When did you first discover Roth? Do you think Roth should come with parental warnings? How would you have handled this situation?
Announcing a New Journal

Philip Roth Studies

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For more information visit the Philip Roth Society Web site at http://rothsociety.org
Abstracts from Papers Delivered at Recent Conferences

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

Association for Jewish Studies Conference, December 21-23, 2003, Boston, MA

Panel: Performing Jewish Identity

Andrea M. Most - University of Toronto
“I am a Theater:” Acting Jewish in Philip Roth’s The Counterlife

In The Counterlife, Philip Roth struggles to define the boundaries of the Jewish self in late 20th-century America. He offers the reader a multitude of choices, ranging from a crazy “Diasporist” to a right-wing Zionist ideologue, from a ba’al teshuva to an upper middle class New Jersey dentist, and seriously considers the contours of each identity option. Roth sets up a tension in the book between multiculturalist and poststructuralist definitions of identity by creating a complex web of binary oppositions (or counterlives): those who act without thinking and those who think (but then are unable to act), those who have the power (the authority) to write themselves and those who have relinquished that power, those whose identity is freely chosen and those who have identity thrust upon them.

When his central character, Nathan Zuckerman, is finally faced with a decision that requires immediate action—whether or not to circumcise his son—Nathan ends up positing an idea of the self that rejects binary oppositions altogether: “the burden isn’t either/or, consciously choosing from possibilities equally difficult and regrettable—it’s and/and/and/and.” Nathan resolves his dilemma about circumcision by imagining the self theatrically, grounded in the body, but not determined by it: “I certainly have no self independent of my imposturing, artistic efforts to have one . . . I am a theater and nothing more than a theater.” In insisting that he is not a single actor or character, but rather a whole theater, Nathan imagines the Jewish self as a performance in process, a socially constructed event situated in history, perpetually crossing boundaries, embracing contradiction, celebrating multiplicity.

This paper is part of a larger book project, entitled Acting Jewish, which argues that the story of American Jewish cultural production is a story of quelling the demon of essentialism in favor of the liberating force of theatrical self-invention. Over the course of the twentieth century, secular American Jewish writers and artists grappled repeatedly with biological, essential, and/or psychoanalytic definitions of Jewishness. And time after time, these same Jewish writers conclusively rejected these ideas in favor of performed notions of identity. Acting Jewish argues that Jews faced with the crippling “truths” of racial science resisted these essentialized notions of identity—which stripped them of the power of self-definition—by turning to the theater, insisting that performed truth was the only truth about the self that mattered.

Modern Language Association Convention, December 27-31, 2003, San Diego, CA

Panel: Philip Roth and Race
* Chair, Dean Franco - Wake Forest University

Jonathan Freedman’s talk, “Roth, Artie Shaw, and Musical Masquerade: Whiteness, Jewishness, and ‘The Man I Love’ in The Human Stain” examined the dynamic of “passing” in the career of Artie Shaw—whose music plays a key role in The Human Stain—to amplify an analysis of the performance of whiteness by two key characters. Freedman began his talk by noting that Roth, as usual, is a step ahead of academic thinking about
After a three-year hiatus, Philip Roth is back with *The Plot Against America*. This latest novel is a journey into an alternate American history in which aviation pioneer/national hero Charles A. Lindbergh defeats Franklin Roosevelt in a landslide in the 1940 presidential election. Roth plays on Lindbergh’s pro-Nazi leanings and vocal isolationism before the Second World War to envision a life for Jewish Americans under Lindbergh’s presidency and informal alliance with der Fuehrer. Roth has already felt the need to defend the novel in the press in a letter to the *New York Times* in which he refutes a statement casting doubt on his research into the life of Lindbergh. He quotes a speech Lindbergh actually given on September 11, 1941, accusing American Jews of being the most vocal instigators behind FDR’s push for war. The novel is due for release on October 5.

- *Michael Marlow* Texas A&M University-Commerce

**Abstracts - continued from page 7**

race. After his introduction, he played a clip of Shaw performing “The man I love,” following with an analysis of blues and klezmer notes, an amalgam of musical traditions matched by Shaw’s personal performance of identity. Adam Zachary Newton’s talk “That Go-Again Book: Dreaming the Racial in Philip Roth’s Literature,” made the case for the pivotal role of race dynamics across a wide range of Roth’s literature. Newton’s title refers to the black boy in “Goodbye Columbus,” and in his talk Newton suggested links between that boy and Coleman Silk from *The Human Stain*. Newton also meditated on what kinds of Jews and what kinds of African Americans Roth has been comfortable describing.

**Twentieth-Century Literature Conference, February 26-28, 2004**

**University of Louisville, Louisville, KY**

**Panel: American Responses to the Holocaust**

**Stephen Paul Miller, St. John’s University**

Phillip Roth and the American Holocaust

In “Goodbye, Columbus,” there is nothing to replace the richness of Neil’s sense of culture in Newark—perhaps in a sense there is nothing to replace what he does not quite know that he misses. In *Portnoy’s Complaint*, Portnoy explores the Jewish “promised land” of Israel and finds it lacking in the inquisitively, non-militaristic Jewish American culture which in a sense constitutes his underlying nostalgic and utopic desire. After all, the show business stand-up comedic sense of exploration of Lenny Bruce must be considered a prime literary precursor of *Portnoy’s Complaint*. This kind of Jewish American analysis and culture is what Roth conceives of as doomed, the victim of the most recent and presently meaningful holocaust, the object of a spiritual genocide. Whether or not we accept this as literally true, we must address the power of this underlying vision.

This is the joke of *The Ghost Writer* and the entire Nathan Zuckerman series. The device of this series enables Roth, at the end of the seventies, to consider the issues surrounding the virtual holocaust of Roth’s
culture when America takes a nostalgic turn in the seventies. This sets a stage for Roth to refine his role as a “virtual holocaust witness.” The Ghost Writer is most memorable for Zuckerman's convincing fantasy that Anne Frank survived the Holocaust and in the mid-fifties is a beautiful young woman. The power fueling the convincing quality of this fantasy is the arguable assertion that what was best about Jewish culture survived the visible Holocaust despite the Holocaust's obvious place as an ultimate symbol of horror and evil.

Cultural Studies Conference: Sex and the Body Politic, March 4-6, 2004
Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS

Panel: Sex and Power

* Mark K. Fulk, Buffalo State College
“Intimidating Myself”: Male Desire and Female Aggression in Philip Roth’s The Dying Animal.

David Kepesh, the protagonist of Philip Roth’s academic novels The Breast (1972) and The Professor of Desire (1977), returns much older and not yet wiser in Roth’s recent novel The Dying Animal (2001). In this recent novel in the trilogy, Roth explores the complex relationship between Kepesh, a semi-retired cultural studies professor somewhat frustrated with life in his later sixties, and the twenty-something Consuela Castillo, a Cuban immigrant who is in many ways strongly and dynamically in charge of her body and her sexual expression. Kepesh is immediately attracted to her, but the relationship haunts him after its termination, in part because of his lack of satisfaction. His mindset, even though espousing a liberal vocabulary drawn from the sexual revolution of the 1960s, has been one of consumption in sex as well as art and music. However, the more he desires to “consume” Consuela sexually, the closer she comes to “consuming” him (and in the process, metaphorically emasculating him).

In this project, I offer a reading of this fascinating and troubling novel, suggesting that it is Consuela’s aggressive ownership of her body that attracts and terrifies Kepesh. Following Lacanian theory read through the lens of the lesbian models propounded by Lynda Hart, I argue that Roth faces in this novel the “non-sense” that is at the heart of the sexual encounter. These anxieties are narrativized by Roth not only through the lead characters, but also mirrored in minor characters such as Kenny, who is described by Roth as a man who lives in fear of women’s judgment and thus is controlled by this fear. Hart argues that the goal of masculine desire is to recreate itself, so that the object of this desire is desire itself. Kepesh seeks to reify his own desire by using Consuela, but she gets in his way and, in essence, eventually threatens to make him the replication of her desire instead. In fact, as the ending of the novel suggests, Kepesh is threatened with disappearing altogether if he does what Consuela needs. This project concludes with some general assertions about the nature of the newly-emergent genre of academic novels, which in the hands of men like Roth, become the vehicles to express their own fears about the supremacy of women in academic departments. Thus, sex becomes metaphor for the shift of power relations throughout our culture, represented through desires whose narrative “thrust” is interrupted on its way to itself.

MELUS Conference, April 10-13, 2004, San Antonio, TX

Panel: Identity Drama in Jewish American Literature

* Judith Oster - Case Western University
Where’s Home? Brothers and Fathers in Philip Roth’s Identity “Dramas”

In American Pastoral and The Counterlife (as well as in other Zuckerman narrations) brothers in dramatic opposition to one another give voice to the conflicting pulls between assimilation and Jewish identity and
loyalties. And always, whether in voice or in memory, the father, “who could still assume the stature of a father in Kafka.” In American Pastoral the assimilated “Swede” (Seymour), is married to Irish Catholic Miss New Jersey and living in a historic house in the heart of Protestant, descended-from-Mayflower country, who fancies himself a sort of Johnny Appleseed. His father, in some ringing speeches, criticizes Seymour’s putting himself where he not only doesn’t belong, but where he was so recently hated. His brother Jerry stridently voices his criticism to Zuckerman of his brother “out there playing at being Wasps,” and to Seymour: “Nobody knows what you are.” The Counterlife (as well as Zuckerman Bound) puts assimilated Nathan Zuckerman into argument with his brother Henry, who has not only become fierce in his commitment to his people, but committed to extremist Jewish nationalism (as opposed to “cringing, deference, . . . hypercriticalness, hypertouchiness, social anxiety, assimilation”). Roth leaves their argument un-reconciled, thus giving eloquent voice to these oppositions without resolution. The twist comes when the “truth” of this opposition is totally undermined: in subsequent chapters the “dead” Henry of Nathan’s story becomes the live Henry reading the manuscript that the “dead” Nathan wrote about him, and it is for the reader to sort out (or try to) who’s alive, who’s dead, who is only a fiction in whose narrative. Crucial in this context is the fact that we have difficulty deciding whose story this is, for “we are all each other’s authors . . . You are your brother!” (a reminder of Tsuref insisting in “Eli the Fanatic,” “You are us. We are you!”). Those well argued opposing viewpoints are thus left alive in this composite brother, the basic conflicts allowed their unresolved tensions.

But also in The Counterlife—in the section titled “Christendom”—we read Nathan’s determination to have a future son of his circumcised as a Jew; here too, the argument is made forcefully and eloquently, its context, Nathan’s insistence that his son “enter history through history and me . . . Circumcision confirms that there is an us, and an us that isn’t solely him and me.” Roth ruminates on the Jewish male organ in Patrimony as well: he has come home to care for his dying father, and as he bathes him, expresses pleasure at how young-looking his father’s still is. He exhorts himself to remember so that he can re-create the father who created him. In both of these views, Roth plays on the generative/generational aspect of the circumcised organ—implying its mark of connection back to Abraham, and forward to future “seed.” Further, he (re)affirms his connection—as son and as writer—to the father he calls the real “bard of Newark” whose “coat of arms” bears the inscription “you mustn’t forget anything.” His father’s “repertoire,” Roth claims, was “family, family, family, Newark, Newark, Newark, Jew, Jew, Jew. Somewhat like mine” (The Facts)—the admission, it seems, of a writer and son come home, claiming his legacies as well as creating them.


**Panel: Reading Philip Roth through “High” and “Low” Cultural Prisms**

Chair: Ben Siegel - Cal Poly Pomona University

* Elaine B. Safer - University of Delaware

More Stains Than One: Film and the Adaptation of Roth’s The Human Stain

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 (as Édition Gallimard has
done for *The Human Stain* and many of Roth’s other novels). A similar process, I believe, takes place in the transformation of novel to film. The film adaptation, like the translation into another language, should capture the tone of the original. Roth’s tone in *The Human Stain* can best be described as a delicate balance between tragedy and comedy. It is the tone Roth uses, particularly in his later novels, to mock the age. My main criticism of the film is that it lacks this complex, black humor tone. Surprisingly, this lack has not been discussed in previous reviews of Robert Benton’s movie.

The movie eliminates the comic action of the novel, including the two most farcical scenes. These episodes focus on the anti-politically correct acts of Lester Farley and the politically correct acts of Delphine Roux, professor of French at Athena College. The movie also eliminates the comic irony in tragic episodes throughout. For example, the film simplifies the scene of Coleman’s farewell to his mother as he takes on a white persona and prepares to marry Iris Gittelman. The film focuses on one theme: prejudice against African Americans in the United States, and the tragic consequences of this for Coleman Silk. However it lacks the novel’s comic irony and farce which add a satiric dimension to the tragedy. 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 does not do this.

* Margaret Smith & * Theresa Saxon - Manchester Metropolitan University (UK)
Reading Philip Roth Reading Henry James

Henry James has long been regarded as a canonical stalwart, a writer of classical, traditional fiction. But recent criticism has noted that James’s narratives exhibit an awareness of popular cultural forms and we argue that Philip Roth, most notably in *The Ghost Writer* and *Letting Go*, participates in such attempts to relocate James as a socially, historically and culturally relevant writer. Constructing a comparison between James’s “The Middle Years” and *The Portrait of a Lady*, and Roth’s *Ghost Writer* and *Letting Go*, this paper sets out to examine Roth’s reading of James as a writer conscious of popular cultural forms, particularly the melodramatic mode, a consciousness that, it will be argued, provokes Roth’s own irreverent reverence for the works of the master and ultimately to a reclamation of the nineteenth-century man of letters from his isolation in the canon.

* Derek Parker Royal - Texas A&M University-Commerce
Why Philip Roth Will Probably Never Be Read in Oprah’s Book Club (and Why That May Not Be Such a Bad Thing)

In March 1993, upon the publication of his novel, *Operation Shylock*, and approximately three and a half years before the inauguration of the Oprah Book Club, Philip Roth said in an interview that “serious” reading had drastically declined, leaving what he referred to as “a gulag archipelago of readers.” Oh what a difference three and a half years make! What his worrisome estimation of American readership couldn’t anticipate was the number of sales generated by the celebrity of Oprah Winfrey, a celebrity that gave new life to 46 works of fiction over about a five and half year period. This was due entirely to what one Doubleday editor has called “Oprah

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type” fiction: a moving, painful human story, one that is not too hard to read and usually written by a woman. And to this we should add one more item: a willingness to engage in the cult of celebrity. Oprah’s insistence on identifying or empathic reading can be seen as just another way of disseminating her own aura—which should come as no surprise in the life of any media figure. What’s troublesome, however, are the ways in which literary celebrity for her authors seems to be manufactured—even forcibly so—as a result of her book choices.

And perhaps this is the main reason why Philip Roth will probably never be read in Oprah’s Book Club. Early in his career he experienced the affects of celebrity firsthand, initially with the anti-Semitic charges leveled against him because of Goodbye, Columbus, but much more notoriously with the wild success of Portnoy’s Complaint. It was the kind of fame that convinced Roth to leave New York City and live in remote or secluded places such as London or the Connecticut woods. And unlike Oprah’s perennial novelist, Toni Morrison, whose image on the back covers of her books have become more pronounced and more media-driven, Roth has completely retreated off his dust jackets. The last time Roth’s photograph appeared on one of his books was Patrimony in 1991, over thirteen years ago. For him, the consumable package is not the message; it’s the words that are the “celebrity.” What is more, he’s a writer that prefers to unsettle his audience by showing them the less sanitized side of existence, indelible human stains and all. After all, how would Oprah discuss with her audience a Mickey Sabbath or a David Kepesh? It boggles the mind!

Panel: Philip Roth: Identity, Celebrity, and Text
* Chair: Derek Parker Royal - Texas A&M University-Commerce

* Françoise Kral - University Paris X. Nanterre
F(r)ictions of Identity in The Human Stain

The Human Stain encompasses a broad spectrum of characters who all struggle through an identity crisis. Whether it be French-born academic Delphine Roux—who comes to realize that her academic credentials and her mastery of the language fail to allow her to perfectly integrate into American society—Les Farley, the Vietnam veteran who no longer fits into a post-Vietnam America, Coleman Silk, a black academic passing as white, or Faunia Farley, who tricks everyone into thinking that she is illiterate, all these characters do not really stand out. And yet they do not fully fit into American society. What is more, they are faced with a dilemma and have to choose between playing down their differences or sporting them as a badge of courage.

In The Human Stain, as the character Nathan Zuckerman retreats to the background, Roth seems to move away from the question of Jewish identity. In this paper, I argue that the novel is based on a game of deflection and reflection whereby the predicament of each character reflects back on Roth’s long-standing preoccupations and awareness of the change in the way Jews are perceived in the US. But the novel also offers an insightful entry point into the question of contemporary identity.

Each character embodies a certain definition of identity (as either race-based, culture-based or history-based) and experiences the limits of these already-made narratives. Contemporary identity thus emerges in all its complexities. By challenging fixed definitions of identity, Roth suggests that existing interpretative patterns based on one-dimensional categories are obsolete and fail to apprehend the complexities and endless possibilities resulting from the negotiation between the “given” and the “chosen,” between individual identity and group identity.
The Celebrity as Simulacrum: Philip Roth’s Doubles

As a writer who has run the gamut in his own relationship to popular exposure—from offering frequent interviews during his early years to living as a virtual recluse over the last decade—Philip Roth has clearly had his own brush with celebrity and its discontents. In several novels, he has chosen to fictionalize the circumstances of the writer under the public eye. In each, Roth narrates a writer’s encounter with a double who either directly undermines his sense of identity or demonstrates to him a celebrity self that is no more than a cipher, an empty vessel for the fantasies of others. After conceptualizing celebrity in relation to the self-alienation of the public/private dichotomy, Roth moves toward revealing the condition of the “self” as simulacrum—an artifact constructed for public consumption, in compromised relation to the real, and ultimately self-consuming.

The paper briefly draws on Jean Baudrillard’s account of postmodern reality in order to elucidate Roth’s use of simulacra-in-the-flesh. In Zuckerman Unbound, Nathan Zuckerman suffers both from his notoriety as a writer and from the doppelgänger Alvin Pepler, representative of what Nathan calls “the vrai.” Accusing Zuckerman of stealing his story, Pepler not only challenges the writer’s authority over his material but also dramatizes Zuckerman’s estrangement, in his success, from the identity—and reality—that fed his work. Operation Shylock makes the simulacrum plainer, in the mirroring Roths in the text. “Philip Roth” is mainly of significance to his double because he is “the writer,” a position and a public face which is then turned inside out by the imposture. The double’s appearance to the narrator confirms the instability of an identity that, grown arrogant in its capacity for narrative authority, relied upon its own fictions of coherence. The impostor’s existence depends upon and displaces the primacy of the famous self he usurps and, in effect, rewrites. When the double vanishes, consumed by his desire to become the “real,” his disappearance by implication renders the “prior” Roth equally insubstantial. Finally, in American Pastoral, Zuckerman struggles to articulate the life of Swede Levov, whose local celebrity as Newark’s all-American Jew promises an assimilation into American culture that promotes, conceals, and at last exposes an abyss of self.

The Author as Character, the Character as Author in the Fiction and Nonfiction of Philip Roth

In this paper I argue that, ever since the popular reception of Portnoy’s Complaint, when, to quote Roth himself, “a novel in the guise of a confession [was (mis)read as] a confession in the guise of a novel,” Roth has exploited this confusion between fiction and non-fiction and made it one of the key subjects of his work. Rather than attempting to clarify the boundaries between his private, professional life and the public persona created by the success de scandal that was Portnoy’s Complaint, Roth has deliberately blurred them, creating a series of literary representations of himself, both in his fiction (notably in Deception and Operation Shylock) and in his non-fiction (notably in The Facts and Patrimony). Rather than reading these different “Roths” as more or less authentic versions of the author himself, I argue that they are all equally inauthentic “improvisations upon a self” (to use another of Roth’s phrases).

Characteristically ingenuous about his disingenuousness and disingenuous about his ingenuousness, I
argue that Roth’s preoccupation with his popular image is both a self-conscious response to his notoriety as the author of *Portnoy’s Complaint* and a means of exploring more fundamental, existential questions about the nature of identity, selfhood and subjectivity.

**Panel: Saul Bellow and His Contemporaries: Similarities and Differences**

**Ben Siegel - Cal Poly Pomona University**
Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, and E.L. Doctorow: Autobiography as Fiction, Fiction as Autobiography

Philip Roth, like Bellow and Doctorow, has devoted—and to a much greater degree—a good deal of his fiction in recent years to the postmodernist habit of writing about writing. His protagonists or heroes almost always seem to resemble their author in age and appearance, time and place, and in personal circumstances. But after having teased his readers with such strong parallels, especially in the recurring figure of Nathan Zuckerman, Roth likes to dismiss the autobiographical elements in his work as products of his creative imagination. “Like any writer,” says Roth, “I have only the floor under my feet to stand on. I get my facts from what I see of life and of myself. Then I have to make another world out of them, a world of words that is more interesting that what exists.”

**Panel: American Jewish Literature: Reconstituting the Past, Shaping the Future**

**Bonnie Lyons - University of Texas, San Antonio**
EnCountering Fictive Propositions and Pastorals: Teaching Philip Roth’s *The Counterlife*

*The Counterlife* is Philip Roth’s most complicated and richest fictional performance. Even to summarize the plot is difficult, for, in Roth’s own words, the book “progressively undermines its own fictional assumptions and the reader is constantly cannibalizing his own reactions.” The nature of the five counterpointing sections of the novel is clarified in the final pages of the novel when Nathan Zuckerman, Roth’s frequent alter ego, retrospectively defines what has gone before. In letters to and from his Maria, Nathan (and behind him Philip Roth) offers two terms which clarify the central narrative strategy and one of the main themes. The first of these key terms is “fictive propositions.” This term reminds the readers that however life-like or moving, all characters and plots are products of an author’s imagination. Having created a character, a person-like figure out of words, the fiction writer contemplates what, given the character’s qualities, the character will do. That is, once having established the outlines or nature of a character, only certain possibilities and choices can plausibly follow. Most fiction writers deliberately obscure the fact that characters and plots are fictive propositions; they never dare to remind the reader that the novel is working by putting part of the reader’s brain asleep, hypnotizing him so that he believes that the characters are people and the events real. In *The Counterlife* Roth has it both ways: he puts the reader to sleep,

*continued on page 16*
you will notice that there are several significant publishing events to keep in mind. The most important of these is the appearance of Philip Roth’s new novel, his first in over three years. As Michael Marlow notes on page 8, *The Plot Against America*, an alternative history where Charles A. Lindbergh is elected president in 1940, is due for release on October 5, and already it has begun to stir controversy. In terms of criticism, the 2004 annual volume of *Studies in American Jewish Literature*, entitled “Philip Roth’s America,” will be a special issue devoted entirely to his most recent fiction. In its concentration on Roth’s output from *Sabbath’s Theater* to *The Dying Animal*, it will be the first study of its kind to look specifically at the author’s most recent textualizing of post-1945 American history. Also, this summer the University of South Carolina Press will publish *Philip Roth: Countertexts, Counterlives* by Debra Shostak, noted Roth scholar and member of the Philip Roth Studies Editorial Advisory Board.

Along with all of this, I encourage all Roth Society members to continue this flurry of activity by contributing to the society-related events noted in these pages. We hope to sponsor conference panels at both the ALA Jewish American & Holocaust Literature Symposium in Boca Raton, FL, and at the 2005 Twentieth-Century Literature Conference held annually at the University of Louisville (see the “Conference and Events” section on page 2 for more details). And of course all members are welcome to submit essays, notes, and reviews to *Philip Roth Studies*. Our society has grown in terms of its size as well its scholarly output, and I look forward to seeing those numbers grow even more.

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Publishing News of Note

- Houghton Mifflin will publish Philip Roth's next novel, *The Plot Against America*, on October 5, 2004

- In March 2004 the Library of America announced that Roth will collaborate with them on a projected eight-volume anthology of his works. This will be only the third time the Library of America has published books of a living writer and the first time the writer has participated in the project. The first two Roth volumes of will come out in 2005, and the series will conclude in 2013, coinciding with the author's 80th birthday.

- Houghton Mifflin has signed with Ross Miller, a professor of English at the University of Connecticut and currently a Guggenheim Fellow, to write Philip Roth's biography. According to the publisher, Miller has been promised complete access to all of Roth's papers and correspondence, as well as the cooperation of the novelist's family and friends. Miller will also be editor of the Library of America Roth editions, to begin publication next year.

- Later this year Random House/Alfred A. Knopf plans to publish in its Everyman's Library series *The American Trilogy*, a one volume edition including *American Pastoral*, *I Married a Communist*, and *The Human Stain*. This will mark the first time that the novels will be collected together. It will also be the first time Roth that will be included in this prestigious reprint series.

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wakes him up, and then puts him back to sleep! Thus the novel offers both emotional involvement and intellectual excitement.

The second key element, the pastoral, is a central thematic idea discussed at the end of the novel but previously exemplified throughout. Building on two conventional meanings of pastoral—as the novelist points out, “having or suggesting the simplicity or serenity generally attributed to rural areas” and a literary work “dealing with the life of shepherds or with country life, commonly in a conventional or artificial manner”—Roth uses the term expressively to argue that pastorals are the result of “irrepressible yearnings by people beyond simplicity to be taken off to the perfectly safe, charmingly simple and satisfying environment that is desire’s homeland.” But for Roth “desire’s homeland” does not and cannot exist, and Nathan concludes, “How moving and pathetic these pastorals are that cannot admit contradiction or conflict!” What the novel finally demonstrates and then argues is that contradiction and conflict are built into reality.
Serial Publications Devoted to Philip Roth

Philip Roth: Inventing America. Spec. issue of Du (Switzerland) 740 Oct. 2003. Devotes entire bilingual issue (German and English) to Philip Roth’s writing, his conceptions of America, his relationship with Europe and Israel, and his Newark background. Includes reprinted essays—such as Roth’s “My Baseball Years” and Saul Bellow’s 1959 review of Goodbye, Columbus—as well as eight articles of varying lengths by Georg Brunold, Michael Krüger, Griel Marcus, Jeffrey Eugenides, Yitzhak Laor, Antonín J. Liehm, Marchel Reich-Ranicki, and Von Thomas David. Provides a chronology of Roth’s life and work, contemporary photographic reportage by Lars Tunbjørk, and archival photos reflecting Roth’s career.

Book Chapters

Bardeleben, Renate von. “Eastern Sites of Memory in the Writings of Bernard Malamud, Philip Roth, and Cynthia Ozick.” Sites of Memory in American Literatures and Cultures. Ed. Udo J. Hebel. Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 2003. 97-113. Explores the ways in which three American writers, descendants of Jewish immigrants, integrate memories of Eastern Europe in their fictions. In section on Roth, focuses particularly on “I Always Wanted You to Admire My Fasting,’ or Looking at Kafka” and The Professor of Desire and the ways in which the novelist uses his 1972 and 1975 visits to Prague to narrate his ancestral past. Argues that Roth uses Kafka as a link to his parents’ Eastern European history, invoking the theme of survival to create both an individual and Jewish collective identity.


Substantial Sections of Books

Bloom, James D. Gravity Fails: The Comic Jewish Shaping of Modern America. Westport, CT: Paeger, 2003. Explores the intersections of “Jewishness” and “Americanness” as articulated through the comedy of such writers and artists as Bob Dylan, Woody Allen, Jules Feiffer, Lenny Bruce, Cynthia Ozick, Larry Rivers, and Mel Brooks. Sees Roth as the preeminent innovator of this form of humor in his mediations between Jewish and American signifiers as well as his intermingling of comedy with critical reflection. Explores a variety of Roth’s narratives and devotes considerable attention to Goodbye, Columbus, Portnoy’s Complaint, The Ghost Writer, Operation Shylock, and Sabbath’s Theater.

around which these writings revolve: the fragmented self, bilingual identity, the tensions between tradition and the mainstream, the significance of education, and textual representation. In terms of Roth’s writings, of particular interest are “Eli, the Fanatic,” *The Counterlife, The Facts, Patrimony*, and *American Pastoral.*

**Journal Essays**

**Gordon, Andrew.** “Jewish Fathers and Sons in Spiegelman’s *Maus* and Roth’s *Patrimony.*” *ImageTexT* 1.1 (2004): 50 pars. <http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/volume1/issue1/gordon/index.html>. Compares *Maus* and *Patrimony* as texts of paternal representation as well as of ethnic autobiography. Argues that in their respective memoirs, both Spiegelman and Roth write with mixed motives: to memorialize the father and the family history, while at the same time exposing the father so as to claim him through their art. Indicates that by doing so, the texts’ sons are able to mourn their fathers’ deaths and concurrently come to terms with the “Jewishness” they have inherited.

**Posnock, Ross.** “Letting Go.” *Raritan* 23.4 (2004): 1-19. Reads Roth’s first novel, *Letting Go*, as the novelist’s most sustained attack against WASPish literary seriousness and gentility. Explores the ways in which Roth uses his Jamesian novel to debunk the traditional notion of Henry James as an icon of cultural refinement. Proposes that instead, Roth appropriates Jamesian styles and themes in ways that demonstrate the more unserious—and playful—side of the American master. Concludes that it is Roth’s engagement with this “immaturity” that allows him to write his way into American “high culture.”

**Dissertations**


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**All Hail the New, um…, Newsletter Editor!** Joseph Kraus will begin editing the *Philip Roth Society Newsletter* with the next issue (vol. 3, no. 1, Fall 2004). Kraus is an Assistant Professor of American Literature at King’s College in Pennsylvania, and has a long-time interest in Philip Roth’s writings. He teaches courses on American Jewish literature as well as seminars in both Faulkner and organized crime literature. He is a regular presenter at MELUS, has focused his scholarship on ethnicity and gangland violence in twentieth-century American literature, and is the co-author (along with Walter Roth) of *An Accidental Anarchist: How the Killing of a Humble Jewish Immigrant by Chicago’s Chief of Police Exposed the Conflict between Law and Order and Civil Rights in Early 20th-Century America.* Kraus was editor for *Chicago Jewish History* for six years and has taught courses in journalism at King’s College. - Michael Marlow
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