In this issue:

**Message from the Society President**

**Philip Roth, editor of the “Writers from the Other Europe” series** by Velichka Ivanova

**Abstracts** from recent conference presentations

**Call for Papers** for the 23rd annual ALA conference

**Bibliographic update**

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

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

Upcoming Events

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


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

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

Abstracts from Papers Delivered at Recent Conferences

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

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

Philip Roth’s Patrimony: Ethics and Elegy after the Holocaust
Aimee Pozorski*, Central Connecticut State University

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

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

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

Philip Roth and the Holocaust
Jane Statlander*, Miami International University of Art and Design

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

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

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

Paperback release of Nemesis

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

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

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

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

Philip Roth: Pain and Perversity in the American Berserk
Chair: Holli Levitsky, Loyola Marymount University

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

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

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 hhttp://rothsociety.org. An asterisk * indicates that the scholar is a current member of the Philip Roth Society.

Books: Monographs

Books: Edited Collections

Book Chapters


Galioto, Erica D. “‘Every word she spoke was a bomb’: Merry Levov’s Anamorphotic Stut-ter.” *Ivanova* 127-36.


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

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

Sources:


\(\text{(Continued …)}\)
power, a rite which fails, for blood flowing from Old Testament sources cannot be pasteurized in the baptismal font, returning instead to its incestuous cesspool.

Merry Levov shall not grow up to bear Merry Christmas tidings. At the age of eleven, half of Mother Mary's Rita Cohen, the pearl-Pharisee. On Times Square, time stops momentarily as the High Priestess of Jerusalem of Holies, its naked tulip petals. Should he insert himself à la American Pastoral. Cutting leather for fabricating gloves is a religious act; the Son, following in the footsteps of the Father, is a cut above the rest.

Irony in American Pastoral
Velichka Ivanova*, University Paris 3-Sorbonne Nouvelle

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

What is Wrong with their Life?"
Virginia Ricard, Michel-de-Montaigne-Université de Bordeaux 3

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

Essay

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

by Velichka Ivanova

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

“Writers from the Other Europe”
Philip Roth, general editor


New Books on the works of Philip Roth

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

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

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

Contributors:

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

Philip Roth: American Pastoral
French publisher, Atlande, has just released Philip Roth: American Pastoral, written by Patrick Badonnel, Derek Parker Royal, and Daniel Royot.
The Philip Roth Society Turns Ten!

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

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

Notes for My Gullibility

Derek Parker Royal

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

A week later, December 22nd, I got emails from others who had read the blog posting, wondering where I got the information. When I mentioned Amazon.com and Barnes & Noble, they told me that they couldn’t find anything. Needless to say, I found this odd, so I went back and searched again on both major online booksellers—and lo and behold, there was nothing on Notes for My Biographer (other than some obscure, out-of-print 1926 text by an E. W. Howe that came up on Amazon.com). Still, several other online booksellers, such as Powell’s, The Book Depository, and Buy.com, still listed the book in their preorder inventory. In the meantime, I still hadn’t heard back from either Roth’s agent or his publisher, so I was at a loss as to what to think. Had the major booksellers jumped the gun in listing the book? May 2012 really wasn’t that far away, and I had doubted that they would post anything unsubstantiated that close to the actual publication date. In doing another advanced Google search, I found that references to Notes for My Biographer were still out there. But they were now mostly found on individual blogs, websites, and Facebook postings—and most of those linked back to the Roth Society’s original blog posting of the week before. Not wanting the Society to be the hub of any potential rumor, but at the same time not wanting to admit any culpability in creating anything out of thin air—remember, this information was out there and widely available from reputable booksellers the week before—I created a follow-up posting for our blog, stating that the book was no longer listed in most major bookstores’ inventory, that no response or explanation was ever forthcoming from either Houghton Mifflin Harcourt or the Wylie Agency, and that perhaps there was some possible error in communication between Roth’s publisher and the online booksellers. (Although the latter struck me as highly unlikely, given the prominence of Roth and the gratitas accompanying each new publication by the novelist.) And just to make light of the situation—for, indeed, it already appeared to be approaching the fringes of absurdity—I speculated on the fact that perhaps mischievous forces were behind the earlier information. Perhaps merchants were jumping the gun on any announcement of any such book by Philip Roth—if indeed any such book is in the works. One finds it difficult to imagine that such august and responsible booksellers as Barnes & Noble or Amazon.com could have been duped. On the other hand, there has always been a certain amount of playful-ness that surrounds Roth’s writings. Perhaps this is just an example of that impish doppelgänger, Moishe Folkman, playing with all of us once again. And that, I thought, was that.

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

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

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Moishe Pipik, indeed!
New Books on the works of Philip Roth

**Fiction, utopie, histoire: Essai sur Philip Roth et Milan Kundera**

by Velichka Ivanova


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**Reading Philip Roth’s American Pastoral**

By Velichka Ivanova

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

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

**Contributors**


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**Corpus Rothi: Une lecture de Philip Roth**

By Steven Sampson

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

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**Philip Roth: American Pastoral**

French publisher, Atlande, has just released *Philip Roth: American Pastoral*, written by Patrick Badonnel, Derek Parker Royal, and Daniel Royot.
power, a rite which fails, for blood flowing from Old Testament sources cannot be pasteurized in the baptismal font, returning instead to its incestuous cesspool.

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

Irony in American Pastoral

Velichka Ivanova*, University Paris 3-Sorbonne Nouvelle

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

What is Wrong with their Life?

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

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

Essay

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

by Velichka Ivanova

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

“Writers from the Other Europe”

Philip Roth, general editor


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

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

Sources:


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

*American Pastoral* picks up where *Sabbath’s Theater* left off: with the covering and uncovering of fingers. Whereas Mickey Sabbath’s weekly labor consisted of penetrating his virginal girlfriend’s finger puppets, Swede Levov, no less a puppeteer, manipulates and cloaks the hands of female clients for whom his enterprise has been named: Newark Maid. The prettiest Newark Maid of all is Mary Dawn Dwyer, Miss New Jersey 1949, twenty-two years old and as pure as her namesake. But problems arise in “introducing” the Old Testament into the New. For men who follow the former must sacrifice their “glove”, losing their right to remain neutral. What worked for Sweden does not for the Swede, who can’t avoid the bombs.

The play-within-the-play provides the text’s crux. The Father directs the Virgin to bear a child, negotiating with Her, as did Nathan Zuckerman in *The Counterlife*, to obtain his circumcision. But what results from this unholy union is the baptism of its female offspring, performed in secret to avoid the wrath of the local Jewish (Continued …)
In this paper, I explore meaning behind the proliferation of blood imagery in Philip Roth’s *Indignation*, with a particular focus on its symbolic role in the novel’s central themes of morality and historical responsibility. Throughout the narrative, the novel’s protagonist, Marcus Messner, is surrounded by blood: it covers the floor of the family butcher shop where he works, it punctuates nearly all of his childhood memories, and it infiltrates his nightmares about being killed in Korea. It is blood that Messner also seeks to escape by traveling from New Jersey to Ohio for college, with the goal of becoming a lawyer—primarily because he believes that the profession “was as far as you could get from spending your working life in a stinking apron covered with blood” (37). Yet even at Winesburg College, blood finds its way into Messner’s life: it defines his girlfriend’s suicide attempt, it spatters the snow on campus during a winterriot, and in the end, it marks Messner’s own bayonet wounds in Korea. What, then, is Roth’s goal in punctuating these disparate scenes of Marcus’s life with blood? What I hope to argue here is that Roth uses this imagery to identify various manifestations of ritual throughout the novel, and that its repetition across time and place allows him to comment on the ways in which rituals become distorted: by restrictive moral codes, by fear, by a misguided sense of duty, and even by Marcus himself.

**Expelled Once Again: The Fantasy of Living the Counterlife in Roth’s Nemesis**

Victoria Aarons*, Trinity University

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

**Philip Roth: Pain and Perversity in the American Berserk**

Chair: Holli Levitsky, Loyola Marymount University

**Pain Studies in Philip Roth’s The Anatomy Lesson**

Joshua Zajdman, Independent Scholar

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

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**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**


**Books: Edited Collections**


**Book Chapters**

Abbott, Philip.  “‘Defeat of my dream’: Democratic Theory, Populism and Philip Roth’s American Tril-ogy.” Ivanova  89-103.


Galioto, Erica D.  “‘Every word she spoke was a bomb’: Merry Levov’s Anamorphotic Stut-ter.” Ivanova  127-36.


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


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

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

At next year's 23rd annual ALA conference (to be held at the Hyatt Regency in San Francisco, May 24-7), the Philip Roth Society will be sponsoring a panel entitled 'Philip Roth's Influences'. We welcome proposals for papers on any aspects of this topic, for example papers that explore the relationship between writers/artists who have influenced Roth, and/or been influenced by him, and the work of Roth himself. Proposals/abstracts for 15-20 minute papers, not exceeding 300 words, should be titled Roth Society Proposal and emailed by January 27 to me at d.brauner@reading.ac.uk.

Upcoming Events

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

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

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

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

In this issue:

Message from the Society President
Philip Roth, editor of the “Writers from the Other Europe” series by Velichka Ivanova
Abstracts from recent conference presentations
Bibliographic update