“I was overcome” – Philip Roth, 2011

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

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

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

If you are interested in seeing the entire interview with Taylor, you can access it on YouTube here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_QeIJ_xO7ns.

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

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

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

Minutes of the Annual Business Meeting of the Philip Roth Society

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

President’s Report – Aimee Pozorski

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

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

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

Richard Sheehan
Officers of the Society

Derek Parker Royal University of Nebraska at Kearney

President

Aimee Pozorski
Central Connecticut State University

Program Chair

David Brauner
The University of Reading

Reading, UK

Treasurer

Jessica G. Rabin
Anne Arundel Community College

Philip Roth Society web page: http://www.rothsociety.org

(From Page 1)}


Dissertations (with significant portions devoted to Roth)


• Allied Status: We had one special session approved; this year’s entitled, “Roth and Music” was rejected; we can revise and resubmit for 2013. We need to have one more special session approved in order to apply for allied status.

• The first year of the Siegel/McDaniel year was a success: We gave $500 to graduate student Tony Wong, who presented at last year’s ALA. This year, we have decided to open up the field to all those graduate student members who have worked extensively on Roth. We will put out the new call soon.

• The website is much improved, thanks to Derek Royal and artist Julie Phillipps! It is now set up as a wordpress blog, so it is easy to update news related to conferences, members’ publications, and Roth’s awards.

• We have organized a conference committee composed of David Brauner, Miriam Jaffe-Foger, Derek Royal, Jim Bloom, and Aimee Pozorski. We will begin planning this week (!) so we can have everything in place for Roth’s 80th birthday in 2013 in Newark, NJ.

• We have managed to nurture interested graduate students through free memberships, conference participation, publication in the book review section of PRS and commissioning essays for collections. This takes a lot of energy and time so, unfortunately, few students are reaping many rewards. Is this the model we wish to continue?

Secretary’s/ Treasurer’s Report – Jessica Rabin


Total members 2011 YTD (November 2009-May 2010): 49
Society only: 12
Society and journal: 37

Total members at this time in 2010: 55
Total members 2010: 64
Total members 2009: 73
Total members 2008: 51
Total members 2007: 53
Total members 2006: 79
Total members 2005: 71
Total members 2004: 81
Total members 2002-2003: 42

Number of past members who renewed in 2011: 30 (61%)
New members in 2011: 19
2011 members with US addresses: 29, representing 12 states and the District of Columbia
2011 members with international addresses: 20 (41%)

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

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

Current balance: $6667.05
Debts: start-up costs incurred by Derek Royal ($121.43); to be reimbursed as a perpetual membership.

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

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

Journal Articles

- *Maurer, Yael. “If I didn’t see it with my own eyes, I’d think I was having a hallucination’: Re-Imagining Jewish History in Philip Roth’s The Plot Against America.”* Philip Roth Studies 7.1 (2011): 51-63. Print.

Interviews

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
*Brauner, David. “‘What was not supposed to happen had happened and what was supposed to happen had not happened’: Subverting History in American Pastoral.”* Shostak 19-32. Print.
*Kauvar, Elaine M. “My Life as a Boy: The Plot Against America.”* Shostak 130-44. Print.
*Parrish, Timothy. “Autobiography and History in Roth’s The Plot Against America, or What Happened When Hitler Came to New Jersey.”* Shostak 145-60. Print.

Membership trends:

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*Nov-May

Program Chair’s Report – David Brauner

This year the Society sponsored panels at the following conferences:

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

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

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

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

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

The other item that we agreed to discuss, of course, is the 'Roth at 80' conference.
A closer look at Roth’s early writing reveals the path for his future work. Roth picks up the ideas exposed in these early stories in order to examine them more fully in his later novels, and the significance of these early works can only be fully realised when looking back at Philip Roth’s work as a whole.

The Mistaken

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

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

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

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

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

“Even loved ones mistook good for evil, evil for good. You told them the truth, and that hurt. You hid the truth, that hurt too.” He finishes by considering that he is just a man and that however much he tries to avoid mistakes, he will make them. Indeed he will have already made many, and the results of some of these will be borne by his children.

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

Report from the Executive Editor of Philip Roth Studies:

• Since the last business meeting in May 2010 (ALA Conference in San Francisco), the executive editor has overseen the publication of two completed issues of Philip Roth Studies, volume 6 number 2, and volume 7 number 1.
  • Vol 6 No 2 included four essays, two book reviews, the 2010 annual bibliography, and a memoir to former editorial consultant John McDaniel.
  • Vol 7 No 1 included five essays and five book reviews.

• The editorial staff is just beginning to copyedit material for the Fall 2011 issue, volume 7 number 2. Plans are to include three regular essays, a transcript of the 2010 ALA multi-author roundtable (on which the Roth Society participated), and a photo essay surrounding the work of Robert Peterson, who followed Roth in 1969 for Life magazine, on the cusp of the publication of Portnoy’s Complaint.
Uncollected Roth
By Richard Sheehan

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

(Philip Roth in 1962, Copyright: Getty Images)

Novotny’s Pain

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Philip Roth himself, through his agent at the Wylie Agency, has provided commentary and context for many of Peterson’s images.

• Submissions to the journal over the past year have picked up slightly from that of the past several years.
  * The journal has received 22 submissions since May 2010. Of those 22 submissions, 9 essays were rejected or rejected with an invitation to resubmit, 7 were accepted pending final revisions, and 6 are still under consideration.

• Personnel changes on the editorial board:
  * Victoria Aarons has stepped down as book review editor and has been replaced by Aimee Pozorski.
  * Pozorski has been building upon Aaron’s previous efforts with plans to increase the size and scope of the book review section of the journal.
  * Victoria Aarons will remain with the journal as a consulting editor. Aimee Pozorski will retain her duties as consulting editor, in addition to her work as the new book review editor.
  * Miriam Jaffe-Foger joined the journal as its new editorial assistant.

• Future plans:
  * The next special issue will be guest edited by David Gooblar, and it has the tentative title, “Roth and Women.” It was originally slated for the Fall 2011 issue, but due to low initial submissions, it has been pushed back to the Spring 2012 issue.
  * The Fall 2012 issue will be a regular issue.
• Plans are in the works for the next special issue, “International Roth,” which will reflect one of the panels sponsored by the society at the 2011 ALA Conference. As of now, and due to the unique nature of this special issue (primarily invitation only, and mainly with non-US and non-UK scholars), the executive editor will serve as that issue’s editor.

Respectfully submitted,
Derek Parker Royal

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

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

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

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

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

The meeting adjourned at 5:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Miriam Jaffe Foger & Aimee Pozorski

Unlikely Heroes - Roth on Broadway

By Richard Sheehan

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

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

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

The performances can be broken down as follows;

Preview: Oct 18, 1971 Total Previews: 9
Opening: Oct 26, 1971 Closing: Nov 13, 1971
Total Performances: 23

Cast

Defender of the Faith

David Ackroyd - Sgt. Nathan Marx
George Bartenieff - Maj. Leo Ben Ezra
Dori Brenner - Cpl. Shulman
Jon Korkes - Pvt. Sheldon Grossbart
Alvin Kupperman - Pvt. Michael Halpern
Josh Mostel - Pvt. Larry Fishbein
Tom Rosqui - Capt. Paul Barrett
Stephen Van Benschoten - LaHill, Sgt. Wright

Epstein

Lou Jacobi - Epstein
Dori Brenner - Sheila
Rose Arrick - Ida
Lucille Patton - Mrs. Katz
Jon Korkes - Doctor

Eli, the Fanatic

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

Lou Jacobi - Tzuref
Rose Arrick - Miriam
Dori Brenner - Nurse
Lucille Patton - Shirley
Josh Mostel - 1st Intern
Roth, Kepesh and Zuckerman in the Other Europe: Czechoslovakia as a Symbol in Philip Roth’s writing

Martyna Bryla*, Universidad de Málaga, Spain

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

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

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

Film and Literature
Organized by The Film and Literature Society

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

Andrew Gordon, University of Florida

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

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

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**Philip Roth News**

**Philip Roth receives National Humanities Medal**

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

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

**Philip Roth wins Man Booker International Prize 2011**

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

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

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

New Publications

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

By Pia Masiero, Cambria Press,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Encountering an Elsewhere: Roth and Kundera Read One Another**

Brian Goodman*, Harvard University

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

In this paper, I examine how these two writers have read one another over the years, paying particular attention to the ways in which they appear in each other’s non-fiction writing. Building on Ross Posnock’s work, which traces Kundera’s influences in Roth’s fiction, I explore the abundant sources that exist outside of their novels: reviews and introductions that Roth and Kundera have written on each other’s work, published conversations and interviews between the writers, and their unpublished correspondence collected at the Library of Congress. What emerges, instead of Roth’s divergent counterworlds, is a shared creative and aesthetic space predicated on serious laughter, erotic play, and anti-pastoralism. By searching for the ironic connections between these two writers, who hail from very different worlds, I will show how their creative encounter leads them to both arrive at an “elsewhere.”
American Literature Association
22nd Annual Conference, May 26-29, 2011, Boston, MA

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

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

Philip Roth's (Second) Italian Renaissance
Prof. Elena Mortara*, University of Rome

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

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

Conversations with Volker Hage
Daniel Medin*, American University of Paris

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

A Reluctant Public Intellectual: Seeing America through Philip Roth
Claudia Franziska Brühwiler*, Amherst College/University of St. Gallen, Switzerland

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


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

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

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

The Major Phases of Philip Roth confronts his remarkable diversity by accounting for each stage of Rothian preoccupation, from the comedy and seriousness, or a hyphenless American, commentator of American experience? Is he the faithful defender of the realist tradition, a citizen of the world, or the playful postmodernist?

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By Aimee Pozorski, Continuum Press

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

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

Critical Companion to Philip Roth
By Ira B. Nadel, Facts On File

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

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- Entries on related people, places, and topics, such as anti-Semitism, Claire Bloom, Newark, satire, and many more
- Appendixes, including a chronology, a bibliography of Roth's works, and a secondary-source bibliography.

August 2011, 9780816077953, HB 368 pages, $75.00
"'the stars are indispensable': Celebrity, Trauma and Patriotism in *I Married a Communist*  
Aimee Pozorski*, Central Connecticut State University,

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

"'Into Thin Air': Celebrity Selfhood in *I Married a Communist*, Exit Ghost, and *The Humbling*  
Debra Shostak*, The College of Wooster,

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

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

Traumatic Realism and “Afterwardsness” in Plot Against America
Aimee Pozorski*, Central Connecticut State University

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

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

I would argue, however, that Roth’s use of these incompatible genres follows Rothberg’s demand that we consider what it means to interpret realism under the sign of trauma. The historical thriller aspect of the novel, I propose, not only requires readers to look back to the effects of anti-Semitism globally; it also requires readers to consider the present moment, particularly in 2004 in America, especially when Roth’s correspondent, Walter Winchell, asks such poignant questions to refer to Roth’s fictive 1930s as: “And how long will the American people stand for this treachery perpetrated by their elected president? How long will Americans remain asleep while their cherished Constitution is torn to shreds by the fascist fifth column of the novel? 2004, in the heart of the Bush years, when the American people remained asleep while the Constitution was torn to shreds, thereby skewing readers’ understanding of the “written and unwritten world[s],” using his texts as a way to both distance himself from as well as engage his public façade.  Referencing both public events and key texts, Royal demonstrates how the various representations—many of them orchestrated by the author himself—underlying Roth’s public exposure are analogous to the ambiguously constructed selves found in the author’s fictions.
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Roth’s Fiction

Maggie McKinley
Marquette University

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

Maggie McKinley, Marquette University

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

Modern Language Association Convention, Saturday, January 8 2011

Los Angeles, CA

A Special Session Organized by the Philip Roth Society

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

Derek Parker Royal*, Editor, Philip Roth Studies,

In considering the complications of celebrity in Roth’s career, Derek Parker Royal’s paper explores Roth’s increasing exposure and proposes that celebrity, while appearing anathema to the persona of Roth as a writer, is actually a constructed—if conflicted—paratextual strategy employed by the author. Royal goes on to argue that, in true Rothian fashion, the novelist has approached his popularity in an ambivalent manner. More significantly, Royal illustrates how Roth has used his fiction as a way to map out the dynamics involved in celebrity and—in ways similar to Woody Allen’s film by that title—travels back and forth between what he calls the “written and unwritten world[s],” using his texts as a way to both distance himself from as well as engage his public façade. Referencing both public events and key texts, Royal demonstrates how the various representations—many of them orchestrated by the author himself—underlying Roth’s public exposure are analogous to the ambiguously constructed selves found in the author’s fictions.
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International Roth
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For many years now, Philip Roth has enjoyed the global reputation of being the greatest living American novelist. This panel explores some of the ways in which Roth has been translated, read and received outside the United States.

Philip Roth's (Second) Italian Renaissance
Prof. Elèna Mortara*, University of Rome

A quick look at the dates of publication of Philip Roth’s books in Italian shows that the Jewish American author received an immediate acknowledgement in Italy. Starting with the translation of Goodbye, Columbus (1960, passing through Portnoy’s Complaint (1970) up to Zuckerman Unbound (1981), Deception (1991) and The Humbling (2010), Roth has been steadily and punctually translated. This paper aims at presenting and exploring what may be termed Philip Roth’s second Italian Renaissance: in the year 1998 the publishing house Einaudi begins to reprint (and at times translate again) Philip Roth’s first books giving rise to a veritable revival. Whereas the attention to Roth’s work in the sixties and seventies was a much larger interest in Jewish American authors, Roth has now become a solist. The project of Mondadori, a prestigious Italian publishing house, to publish a critical edition of (almost) the entire Rothian corpus is an unmistakable sign that the Italian audience has learnt to recognize Roth as a classic.

Conversations with Volker Hage
Daniel Medin*, American University of Paris

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

A Reluctant Public Intellectual: Seeing America through Philip Roth
Claudia Franziska Brühwiler*, Amherst College/University of St. Gallen, Switzerland

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

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

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

The Major Phases of Philip Roth confronts his remarkable diversity by accounting for each stage of Rothian preoccupation, from the comedy and seriousness of his earliest works (Portnoy’s Complaint (1965) and The Great American Novel (1967)) to the more deceptively light tone of Deception (1991) and The Humbling (2010). By accounting for Roth’s multiplicity, his alternation between opposing modes of collective identity, and his stubborn commitment to counter-intuition, Gooblar explains what it is that makes Roth so rewarding, so central to post-war American literary cultural narratives and so reflective of America itself.
Al Pacino and director Berry Levinson to bring *The Humbling* to the screen.

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

New Publications

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

*By Pia Masiero, Cambria Press,*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Encountering an Elsewhere: Roth and Kundera Read One Another*

*Brian Goodman*, Harvard University

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

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

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

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

Martyna Bryla*, Universidad de Málaga, Spain

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

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

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

Film and Literature
Organized by The Film and Literature Society

Philip Roth’s Novel The Dying Animal and Isabel Coixet’s Film Adaptation Elegy
Andrew Gordon, University of Florida

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

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

Philip Roth News

Philip Roth receives National Humanities Medal

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

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

Philip Roth wins Man Booker International Prize 2011

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

Roth commented, “I would like to thank the judges of the Man Booker Prize for awarding me this esteemed prize. One of the particular pleasures I've had as a writer is to have my work read internationally despite all the heartaches of translation that that entails. I hope the prize will bring me to the attention of readers around the world who are not familiar with my work. This is a great honour and I'm delighted to receive it.”
• Plans are in the works for the next special issue, “International Roth,” which will reflect one of the panels sponsored by the society at the 2011 ALA Conference. As of now, and due to the unique nature of this special issue (primarily invitation only, and mainly with non-US and non-UK scholars), the executive editor will serve as that issue’s editor.

Respectfully submitted,
Derek Parker Royal

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

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

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

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

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

The meeting adjourned at 5:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Miriam Jaffe Foger & Aimee Pozorski

Unlikely Heroes - Roth on Broadway
By Richard Sheehan

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

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

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

The performances can be broken down as follows;

**Preview:** Oct 18, 1971  **Total Previews:** 9
**Opening:** Oct 26, 1971  **Closing:** Nov 13, 1971
**Total Performances:** 23

**Cast**

**Defender of the Faith**

David Ackroyd - Sgt. Nathan Marx  
Alvin Kupperman - Pvt. Michael Halpern

George Barteneff - Maj. Leo Ben Ezra  
Josh Mostel - Ptv. Michael Halpern

Dori Brenner - Cpl. Shulman  
Tom Rosqui - Capt. Paul Barrett

Jon Korkes - Pvt. Sheldon Grossbart  
Stephen Van Benschoten - LaHill, Sgt. Wright

**Epstein**

Lou Jacobi - Epstein  
Alvin Kupperman - Ptv. Michael Halpern

Dorri Brenner - Sheila  
Josh Mostel - Folk Singer

Rose Arrick - Ida  
Alvin Kupperman - Michael

Lucille Patton - Mrs. Katz  
Anna Berger - Goldie

**Eli, the Fanatic**

Michael Tolan - Eli  
Jon Korkes - Doctor

David Ackroyd - The Man  
Stephen Van Benschoten - Ambulance Driver

George Barteneff - Artie  
Lou Jacobi - Tzuref

Lee Wallace - Ted  
Rose Arrick - Miriam

Alvin Kupperman - Deliverman  
Dori Brenner - Nurse

Tom Rosqui - Harry  
Lucille Patton - Shirley

Stephen Van Benschoten - 2nd Intern  
Josh Mostel - 1st Intern
Uncollected Roth
By Richard Sheehan

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

(Philip Roth in 1962, Copyright: Getty Images)

Novotny’s Pain

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Philip Roth himself, through his agent at the Wylie Agency, has provided commentary and context for many of Peterson’s images.

- Submissions to the journal over the past year have picked up slightly from that of the past several years. The journal has received 22 submissions since May 2010. Of those 22 submissions, 9 essays were rejected or rejected with an invitation to resubmit, 7 were accepted pending final reviews, and 6 are still under consideration.

- Personnel changes on the editorial board:
  - Victoria Aarons has stepped down as book review editor and has been replaced by Aimee Pozorski. Pozorski has been building upon Aaron’s previous efforts with plans to increase the size and scope of the book review section of the journal.
  - Victoria Aarons will remain with the journal as a consulting editor. Aimee Pozorski will retain her duties as consulting editor, in addition to her work as the new book review editor.
  - Miriam Jaffe-Foger joined the journal as its new editorial assistant.
  - James Bloom, Catherine Morley, and Gurumurthy Neelakantan come to the journal as new consulting editors.
  - Richard Tuerk has stepped down as a consulting editor.

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

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

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- Beginning in 2010, the journal began working with the society and its Siegel/McDaniel Award. The winner of the first annual competition, Tony Fong, will have his essay published in the Spring 2012 issue of the journal.

- Future plans:
  - The next special issue will be guest edited by David Gooblar, and it has the tentative title, “Roth and Women.” It was originally slated for the Fall 2011 issue, but due to low initial submissions, it has been pushed back to the Spring 2012 issue.
  - The Fall 2012 issue will be a regular issue.
A closer look at Roth’s early writing reveals the path for his future work. Roth picks up the ideas exposed in these early stories in order to examine them more fully in his later novels, and the significance of these early works can only be fully realised when looking back at Philip Roth’s work as a whole.

The Mistaken

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

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

He recalls one incident in particular which involves a much younger Murray Miller. He knows that confessing this to his mother would be pointless, that her reply would be that it was all in the past, something to be forgotten, but then, he wonders, did the victims of Murray Miller’s many crimes forgive and forget them with the passing of the years? He remembers how, as a child, he was protected from the ‘darker’ side of life – “Death didn’t exist in our house,” he recalls. “The troubles, the uglinesses, all the rotten things, were hidden behind a screen.” Even his father’s death was hidden from him and he wasn’t allowed to attend the funeral. As a youngster, he discovers the nature of death when he hears about Dorfman, the local grocer, who had died whilst on the toilet and he wondered whether his father might have suffered a similar fate. The following week, the narrator and Murray had been passing the grocer’s shop and witnessed his widow breaking down in despair. The narrator wanted to leave but Murray was enthralled at the scene and wanted to stay. This leads to a fight between the two, during which the narrator pushes Murray’s head into the snow until he can barely breathe, and he only stops when the two of them become separated by the intervention of Dorfman’s wife.

At this point the narrator runs out of ideas for his letter, re-reads it and decides to bin it. What purpose would it solve to tell his mother these things? He now appears to inherit his mother’s philosophy of letting the truth, that hurt too.” He finishes by considering that he is just a man and that however much he tries to avoid mistakes, he will make them. Indeed he will have already made many, and the results of some of these will be borne by his children:

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

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

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

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

Books: Monographs


Books: Edited Collections


Book Chapters

*Brauner, David. “‘What was not supposed to happen had happened and what was supposed to happen had not happened’: Subverting History in American Pastoral.” Shostak 19-32. Print.
Kauvar, Elaine M. “My Life as a Boy: The Plot Against America.” Shostak 130-44. Print.
Parrish, Timothy. “Autobiography and History in Roth’s The Plot Against America, or What Happened When Hitler Came to New Jersey.” Shostak 145-60. Print.

Membership trends:

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*Nov-May

Program Chair’s Report – David Brauner

This year the Society sponsored panels at the following conferences:

American Literature Association 2011, Hyatt Regency, San Francisco, May 27-30 (‘Roth and Women’ and a Roundtable Discussion on The Humbling’)
American Literature Association 2010 Jewish American & Holocaust Literature Conference, Miami, South Beach, Florida, November 7-11, 2010 (‘Roth and the Holocaust’)
American Literature Association Symposium on American Fiction 1890 to the Present, Savannah, Georgia, October 8-9, 2010.

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

The other item that we agreed to discuss, of course, is the 'Roth at 80' conference.
2011 members with US addresses: 29, representing 12 states and the District of Columbia
2011 members with international addresses: 20 (41%)
- Canada: 1
- France: 2
- Germany: 1
- India: 1
- Israel: 1
- Italy: 2
- Portugal: 1
- South Africa: 1
- South Korea: 1
- Spain: 2
- Switzerland: 1
- United Kingdom: 6

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

Current balance: $6667.05
Debts: start-up costs incurred by Derek Royal ($121.43); to be reimbursed as a perpetual membership.

Tasks accomplished:
- maintained and updated membership spreadsheets
- transmitted Directory of Members information to our webmaster (Derek Royal) and our Newsletter editor (Richard Sheehan)
- deposited dues into our Amegy Bank account
- renewed CELJ membership and domain name
- sent out welcome emails to new members and confirmations of renewals to returning members
- solicited renewals (no rate increase)
- confirmed that contributors to conference panels and journal issues were current members of the Society

Communicated with Purdue University Press regarding the publication, printing, and mailing of Philip Roth Studies

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

Journal Articles


*Maurer, Yael. “‘If I didn’t see it with my own eyes, I’d think I was having a hallucination’: Re-Imagining Jewish History in Philip Roth’s The Plot Against America.” Philip Roth Studies 7.1 (2011): 51-63. Print.


Interviews


**Dissertations (with significant portions devoted to Roth)**


- Allied Status: We had one special session approved; this year’s entitled, “Roth and Music” was rejected; we can revise and resubmit for 2013. We need to have one more special session approved in order to apply for allied status.

- The first year of the Siegel/McDaniel year was a success: We gave $500 to graduate student Tony Wong, who presented at last year’s ALA. This year, we have decided to open up the field to all those graduate student members who have worked extensively on Roth. We will put out the new call soon.

- The website is much improved, thanks to Derek Royal and artist Julie Phillipps! It is now set up as a wordpress blog, so it is easy to update news related to conferences, members’ publications, and Roth’s awards.

- We have organized a conference committee composed of David Brauner, Miriam Jaffe-Foger, Derek Royal, Jim Bloom, and Aimee Pozorski. We will begin planning this week (!) so we can have everything in place for Roth’s 80th birthday in 2013 in Newark, NJ.

- We have managed to nurture interested graduate students through free memberships, conference participation, publication in the book review section of PRS and commissioning essays for collections. This takes a lot of energy and time so, unfortunately, few students are reaping many rewards. Is this the model we wish to continue?

**Secretary’s/ Treasurer’s Report – Jessica Rabin**


Total members 2011 YTD (November 2009-May 2010): 49
Society only: 12
Society and journal: 37

Total members at this time in 2010: 55
Total members 2010: 64
Total members 2009: 73
Total members 2008: 51
Total members 2007: 53
Total members 2006: 79
Total members 2005: 71
Total members 2004: 81
Total members 2002-2003: 42

Number of past members who renewed in 2011: 30 (61%)
New members in 2011: 19
As readers of Roth’s work, we might say that we, too, are overcome by his novels—not simply in terms of their often provocative content, but also, more importantly still, in terms of the craft of his sentences, the richness of his images. But we might go even further still to argue that Calill, in her own way, is also overcome; and although her statement, “It’s as though he is sitting on your face” was meant as the worst possible insult she could muster, it may likely be Roth’s most recent and greatest gift: If not validation of his ability to overcome, such a statement could certainly be fodder for his next book.

If you are interested in seeing the entire interview with Taylor, you can access it on YouTube here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_QeIJ_xO7ts.

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

Annual Business Meeting of the Philip Roth Society

Boston, MA : American Literature Association Conference
26 May 2011

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

Minutes of the Annual Business Meeting of the Philip Roth Society

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

President’s Report – Aimee Pozorski

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

Aimee Pozorski

“I was overcome” – Philip Roth, 2011

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

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

(Continued…)

About the Philip Roth Society

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