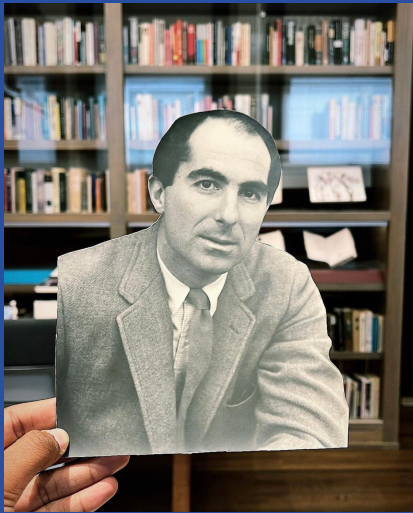
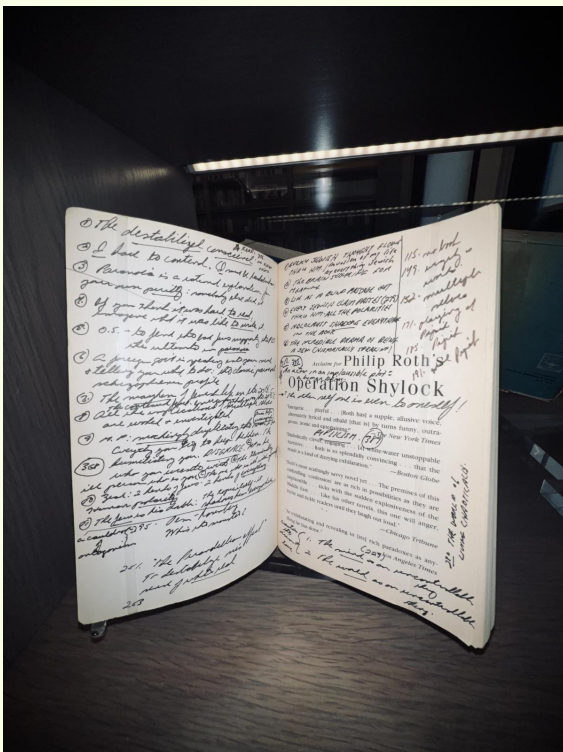


# The pitch

NEWSLETTER OF THE PRPL



Would you like to learn more about the items located in the Philip Roth Personal Library? Be sure to follow our social media accounts! You can find us on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), [TikTok](#), and [Twitter](#) by searching: Philip Roth Personal Library (omit the spaces). Be sure to click the social media handles located at the end of this newsletter for easy access to our accounts!



Roth's annotated copy of *Operation Shylock* (1993).



Photo courtesy of C&G Partners

## What Would Philip Roth Say?

One can't help thinking upon entering the Philip Roth Personal Library that the gifted novelist would have been delighted upon his own first steps into the personal library he bequeathed to be created in his hometown Newark Public Library.

For a first-time visitor, a feeling of joy, almost awe, is immediate at the sight of more than 3,000 of the 7,000 books Roth donated from his rural Connecticut home and New York apartment now arranged in a sophisticated floor to near-ceiling design of wooden shelves. The books' acclaimed owner, himself the author of 31 books, died in 2018. Now In their new home, Roth's beloved and huge collection of books have established a certain understanding that no matter what else one finds in the Philip Roth

## The Philip Roth Book Club

The book club launched on March 19, 2022 in honor of Roth's 89th birthday. We've had three great discussions so far (*The Ghost*

Writer with Ira Nadel; *Indignation* with Jim Bloom; and *The Counterlife* with Matthew Shipe). Save the date for our next virtual discussion: Saturday, September 10th, *American Pastoral* with Aimee Pozorski. To view recordings of our past events, visit: <https://www.prpl.npl.org/programs>. To become a member of the book club, register [here](#).

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### **MARK YOUR CALENDARS!**

#### **November 5, 1pm (EST)**

The Philip Roth Book Club: A Discussion of *Patrimony* with host Jesse Tisch

#### **November 18, 7 - 9pm (EST)**

The Philip Roth Lecture: A Conversation with Nikole Hannah-Jones and Jelani Cobb at NJPAC

#### **January 21, 1pm (EST)**

The Philip Roth Book Club: A Discussion of *Goodbye, Columbus* with host Steven Zipperstein

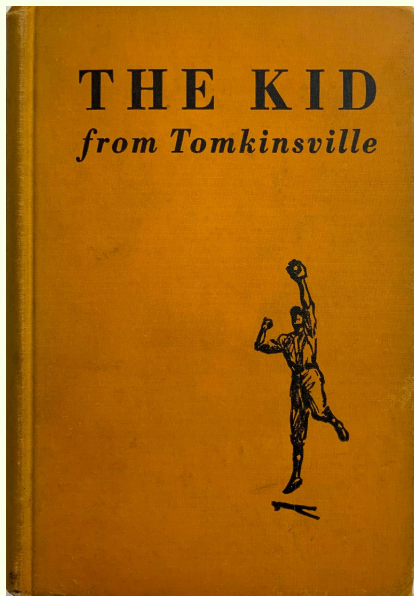
#### **March 17-19, 2023:**

Philip Roth Festival in Newark

Personal Library, the books are running the show.

It is Roth's life and the words he used to live in that life that help to set the tone in the new library with the writer's quotes on bright swaths of blue and green and purple and yellow against the walls. That first room has the library's opening exhibit of Roth's annotated books, letters and photos of family and friends, scrapbooks and high honors, his schools and sports and summer camp, his very close friendships with other writers, his standing writer's desk and Olivetti typewriter. Perhaps most important to Roth, the exhibits punctuate his deep feelings for his family—his father Herman, his mother Bess and his older brother Sandy in his cherished Weequahic neighborhood that upon growing up, Roth left, yet never could really leave.

A second room, the reading room, is where one can research and work sitting at a long wooden table from Roth's CT home. Perhaps even before one's visit but certainly afterward, the library's [website](#) offers information on all aspects of the Philip Roth Personal Library to be alive for today's Newark residents and the public as a whole. The site features the library's history and an ongoing blog on all things having to do with Roth, information about upcoming programs and recordings of past events, and how to make appointments to look at the books and materials during your visit.



### **Forever Baseball**

By all accounts, and especially his own, Philip Roth loved the game of baseball. Like children everywhere, on urban streets or rural farms, Roth kept his bat, ball and glove close at hand for the pickup games that consumed his days growing up in his Jewish Weequahic neighborhood. And like so many teenagers, when he didn't make that high school baseball team in the 1940s, twice-cut on his tryouts at Weequahic High School, his youthful fervor for the sport never waned. His team was the Brooklyn Dodgers. And when the Dodgers left Ebbets Field in 1957 for the West Coast, Roth's team became the Yankees.

In his oft-cited 1973 *New York Times* piece "My Baseball Years," Roth described one of baseball's great gifts to an American boy "(particularly one whose grandparents hardly spoke English)."

"For someone whose roots in America were strong but only inches deep, and who had no experience, such as a Catholic child might, of an awesome hierarchy that was real and felt, baseball was a kind of secular church that reached into every class and region of the nation and bound us together in common concerns, loyalties, rituals, enthusiasms, and antagonisms. Baseball made me understand what patriotism was about, at its best."

Baseball also showed up with some of life's harsh realities to a young Philip Roth whose favorite author was John R. Tunis. In the first pages of Roth's Pulitzer Prize winning novel *American Pastoral*, narrator Nathan Zuckerman talks of his awe and respect for Tunis' 1940 novel, *The Kid From Tomkinsville*, which Zuckerman first sees among other Tunis baseball novels in the bedroom of legendary Weequahic High athlete Swede Levov. As the Swede's story is about to unfold in the novel, Zuckerman talks of "The Kid" story disclosing real life setbacks that a Brooklyn Dodger rookie must find the will and strength to overcome.

Zuckerman says that Tunis' black and white drawings "cannily pictorialize the hardness of the Kid's life, back before the game of baseball was illuminated with a million statistics, back when it was about the mysteries of earthly fate, when major leaguers looked less like big healthy kids and more like lean and hungry workmen."

In the Kid's case, Roy Tucker loses both parents by the time he is 16, becomes an outstanding rookie pitcher on the Brooklyn Dodgers but sees the veteran catcher who teaches him the league's ways cut overnight from the team. Roy suffers an accidental fall and elbow injury from "boisterous" teammates in the shower, is out as a pitcher, spends the off season

relearning his swing and come back as a terrific right fielder who makes a game winning catch, smashing against the right field wall and propelling the Dodgers into the World Series. Everyone celebrates on the fields as the Kid, who is not moving, is carried off field on a stretcher.

“I was ten and I had never read anything like it. The cruelty of life. The injustice of it. I could not believe it,” Zuckerman writes. Then back to Swede Levov, the author wonders “did it occur to him that if disaster could strike down the Kid from Tomkinsville, it could come and strike the great Swede down too?”

In more uplifting ways, Roth’s love of baseball comes to the fore in his seeking out the game for help three years before his father died from a brain tumor in 1989.

In his 1991 book *Patrimony*, Roth tells of getting Herman Roth to follow the NY Mets beginning in the spring of 1986 when the team was promising and his dad was suffering an illness for about a month. Roth wrote that it was the first time his dad was engaged in baseball since Roth’s childhood when Herman would take Philip and his older brother Sandy to Newark’s Ruppert Stadium to see the Triple A Newark Bears play a double header against the Jersey City Giants.

In 1986, the father and son watched Mets games as the team compiled an exceptional regular winning season of 108-54 and went into the playoffs against the Houston Astros for the National League pennant.

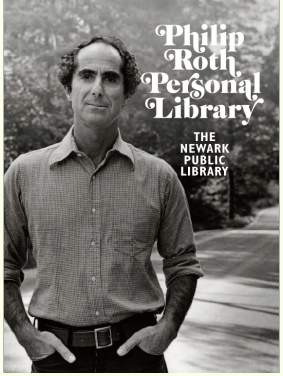
Roth, who was in London for the Astros games, writes that he would check in with his dad living in Elizabeth on how the latest playoff game had gone. When it came to the sixth game, it took three calls between them on the 16-inning contest.

Their banter back and forth provides some brilliant, touching moments in the *Patrimony* pages leading up to Herman telling his son what happened when the two sides were still tied in the 16<sup>th</sup>. The Mets went three runs ahead, 7 to 4, but then their pitcher Jesse Orosco whom Herman keeps calling Morosco, gives up two runs. The next Houston batter comes to the plate, and Herman tells his son on the phone what he read in the newspaper.

He says the Mets’ first baseman Keith Hernandez came over to Orosco and said: “if you throw another fastball, I’ll kill you.” Orosco threw a curveball, retired the side, and the Mets were in the World Series.

“I wonder if he would have,” Roth writes. “I would have,” my father said, laughing, and sounding as though whatever had floored him in the spring was a fluke and he was going to live a thousand years.”

*Philip Roth’s bonds with baseball are featured in the current exhibit in the PRPL.*

	<p><b>The Philip Roth Personal Library catalogue will be available for purchase soon!</b></p>
	<p>The catalogue will include previously unpublished personal essays from Roth's friends and colleagues.</p>

**Newsletter Issue #1 contributors: Jamisha Montague, Nadine Giron, and Nancy Shields**

### CALLING FOR PARTICIPANTS!

Did you grow up in Weequahic? Did you know Philip Roth? Or, maybe you have a family connection to the Roths in Newark? If so, we would love to hear from you! We are organizing a Weequahic Memories virtual program and would be delighted to hear your stories.

[Email](#) us if you would like to participate!



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