

The Pitch

NEWSLETTER OF THE PRPL

"The Atmosphere...Which Is a Real Treasure"

When you think of a research repository, what do you imagine? For some, the Library of Congress comes to mind, the Firestone Library at Princeton, or the NY Historical Society. Well, the reading room of the Philip Roth Personal Library (PRPL) does not embody the kind of archive which might come to mind immediately. Yes, we ask researchers to schedule appointments and to sign in when they arrive, and then we do proceed to explain the rules (photography of marginalia not permitted, please use pencil, no food allowed, etc.). However, who knows what might ensue after he or she gets situated with their piles of books. I probably shouldn't mention that during our last class tour in early December we served powdery beignets to the high school students in the reading room to thank them for their participation and attentiveness.



Image above: One of two groups of students from American History High School who visited the PRPL in early December and participated in a Newark narratives activity.

Roth's collection of annotated books is housed within a public library, one of the largest libraries in New Jersey in the most populated city in the state. The room is located on the second floor of the building, facing the grand atrium where exhibits are on display. Chairs and tables are lined up against the outer wall of the PRPL and Centennial Hall, the room where

many programs are held, is situated adjacent to the PRPL facing Washington Street.

On any given day, there might be visitors walking in, perhaps very enthusiastic and chatty fans, or, frequently, a patron who becomes lost when trying to find the general reference area, which is also on the second floor. Those seeking a quiet place where one gets a dirty look for coughing, typing too loud, or receiving a text message might be disappointed or even dismayed. There may be students stampeding up the marble staircase, their sneakers squeaking as they go up; a father and his crying baby sitting outside of the PRPL; a musical performance or large gathering taking place in Centennial Hall; someone pushing the elevator alarm button; and the sound of children resonating from the first floor. But those examples are the hustle and bustle limited to the interior of the library. Now, let's consider the outside. The institution faces very busy Broad Street, and the Newark Light Rail trains run along a part of the thoroughfare in front of the library. Hence, bells and horns. Then the occasional fire truck siren. A driver listening to their music at maximum volume. Or summer concerts in Harriet Tubman Square. These are the sounds of our great city.

By no means am I suggesting these are negative observations. They influence what makes the PRPL what it is, an incredible collection stewarded by Roth's favorite library. And there are other contributors to this unique atmosphere—friendly staff who come in to say hello and linger to chat, a trustee or two who visit or work in the room as well, and the PRPL staff and volunteer who on occasion might get a little too enthusiastic and garrulous about an idea, project, or new discovery. Our researchers become our friends, we learn about them and their customs (if they live abroad) and we connect them with other Roth scholars, in turn introducing new colleagues who can share and discuss ideas with one another.

Although one might prefer a completely silent environment in another research library, one might not always have the chance to experience, firsthand, what Roth loved about Newark so much. One might not receive suggestions about transportation, or the best coffee shops and restaurants, and one might not be privy to upcoming endeavors before they are made public, have the chance to ask for help reading Roth's handwriting, or just converse with staff about their impressions of Newark. As one recent scholar wrote to me, "the atmosphere at your place which is a real treasure." What a delightful reflection!

-Nadine Giron

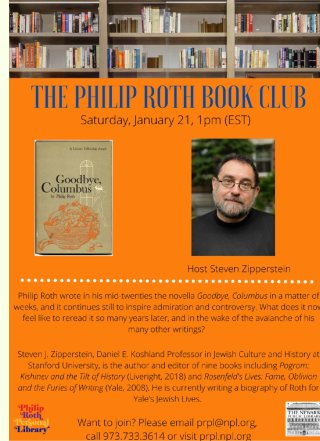
MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

January 21, 1pm (EST) on Zoom
The Philip Roth Book Club: A Discussion of *Goodbye, Columbus* with host Steven Zipperstein

"Share Your Newark Story" Writing Contest

The Philip Roth Personal Library and the NJ Performing Arts Center are hosting a city-wide [writing competition](#) for high school-age youth living in Newark, New Jersey. The prompt is: "If someone who had never visited Newark asked what it's like to live here, what's a story only you could tell? Write that story in the form of a real memory, personal essay, or fictional short story." The prompt's heavy focus on locale is directly connected to Philip Roth's place-based writing.

In preparation for the contest, Drs. Paula Neves and Lionel Wynter from Rutgers-Newark, led writing workshops in October



and November in order to support contestants with their writing. The workshops were held at the Main Library, Van Buren, North End, and Springfield branches. Drs. Neves and Wynter assisted participants with drafts of their submissions and provided writing exercises that encouraged compelling and detailed writing. I conducted short, semi-structured interviews with participants who shared their opinions of the workshops. Please click on the video below to watch three short interviews.

March 15-17, 2023, Newark, NJ
Roth@90: Philip Roth Society Conference at the Newark Public Library

March 17-19, 2023, Newark, NJ
Philip Roth Festival. Information will be made available in January.

The contest deadline is December 23, 2022. Winners of the contest will be given the opportunity to publicly share the work during the Philip Roth Festival in March 2023. We hope you all will join us in congratulating the winners next year!

-Jamisha Montague

A Tour of Philip Roth's Newark



Poetry for the Public



Our poetry club, which was formed in September of 2022, celebrated an "End of the Year Bash" on December 13, 2022. The well-attended event featured music by violist Reserve, poetry readings by eight featured poets, and an open mic.

Image on the right: Roth's copy of *The Jewish Boxers Hall of Fame* (1988).



It's a gift to us that so many of Philip Roth's stories connect the reader to an imaginative, yet often real world of people living through hope and certain loss in the author's hometown of Newark.

Add to that Roth's accomplished specialty – his love and use of books, building up a collection that fed his reading and intellect, scene setting and documenting, his teaching and, most of all, telling a story.

And so, here we are in Chapter I of Roth's 1998 novel, *I Married a Communist*, and there are the books loosely gathered in the bicycle basket of 15-year-old Nathan Zuckerman, returning them to the Osborne Terrace Branch of Newark Public Library in Weequahic. Some of the books topple out on to the pavement when Nathan stops and tips his bike to its side to talk to his high school teacher Murray Ringold who is taking down window screens for the coming winter at his home on Lehigh Avenue.

Young Zuckerman, Roth's alter-ego, soon finds himself sitting on the stoop not only with his teacher but Murray's brother, Ira Ringold, whom Nathan is meeting for the first time and who is the popular Iron Rimm radio actor, Abraham Lincoln impersonator, a Communist and supporter of the current Progressive Party presidential candidate Henry Wallace.

Ira is helping Murray with the window screens and is on his way to taking the lead in this Roth novel about a marriage and the horrendous anti-Communist scare tactics of America's postwar McCarthy Era.

But on this day of Oct. 12, 1948, the teenager and two brothers are talking about the Cleveland Indians winning the World Series over the Boston Braves the day before and their admiration for Larry Doby, the first Black player in the American League, breaking into Major League Baseball just three months after Jackie Robinson was the first to break the color barrier in his historic first game in April 1947 with the National League Brooklyn Dodgers.

Now the two brothers and teenager are talking about heavyweight boxer Joe Louis knocking out Joe Walcott and middleweight boxer Tony Zale winning back his title from Rocky Graziano at Newark's Ruppert Stadium the past June, only to lose it to Marcel Cerdan in Jersey City in September.

Then, with maybe a slight pause, Nathan's listening to Ira's fury at Winston Churchill's warning a few days earlier that the United States must not destroy the new nuclear weaponry because that atomic bomb reserve would keep Communist Russia from taking over the world. "He talked about Churchill as though Churchill ran the gas station out on Lyons Avenue," Nathan narrates, liking the mix of sports and politics and admiring that Ira is "not afraid to say anything."

Murray Ringold has stepped over by the bike to have a look at Nathan's library books,

bringing back *Citizen Tom Paine* by Howard Fast. That in turn sparks a tutorial with the brothers seeking out Nathan's views resulting in much back and forth and an agreement the revolutionary writer and activist had an audacity "in behalf of his convictions."

"Men who could talk about baseball and boxing, talking about books," Nathan says. "And talking about books as though something were at stake in a book. Not opening up a book to worship it or to be elevated by it or to lose yourself to the world around you. No, *boxing* with the book."

It is a certainty that Philip Roth *boxed* with his own books, his collection of books, his readers, his students, making notations, raising questions, challenging thinking. He bequeathed his personal library of 7,000 books, and a \$2 million endowment to support the Newark Public Library's quest to serve this city's people, its families and children, and to be open to all for research and learning. Roth's annotations are available to see upon request. His own 31 books beckon one to read. His collection as a whole makes one want to read what Roth was reading.

It's all here.

-Nancy Shields

Newsletter Issue #3 contributors: Jamisha Montague, Nadine Giron, and Nancy Shields

Philip Roth Personal Library @ The Newark Public Library
5 Washington St., Newark NJ 07102
prpl@npl.org | 973.733.3614
<https://prpl.npl.org>

Keep in Touch!



Newark Public Library | 5 Washington Street, Newark, NJ 07102

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