

Philip
Roth
Personal
Library

The Pitch

NEWSLETTER OF THE PRPL



"My Newark"

On Friday, March 17, at 9pm, the NJ Performing Arts Center, is hosting "[My Newark](#)," to celebrate the creative voices of the city as part of the Philip Roth Festival, Roth Unbound.

In our last issue, you were informed about the youth writing contest hosted by the Philip Roth Personal Library and the NJ Performing Arts Center for high school-age youth living in Newark, New Jersey. Final judging was completed at the end of January.

The two first place winners, Olamide Adekoya and Naomi Jeffries, will read their winning pieces aloud as part of the "My Newark" program on March 17th. Additional participants include playwrights Chisa Hutchinson, Richard Wesley, poets Jasmine Mans and Dimitri Reyes and author Mikki Taylor. We encourage you to attend if you are able. Tickets are just \$10.

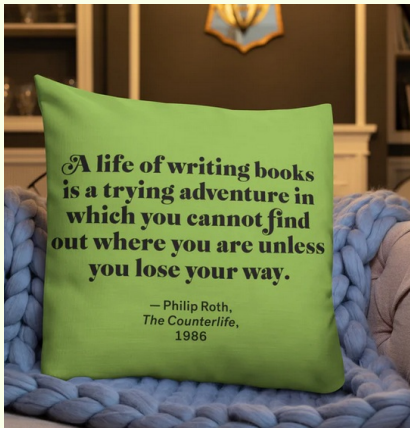
-Nadine Giron

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

March 15-17, 2023, Newark, NJ

Roth@90: Philip Roth Society
Conference at the Newark Public
Library

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Visit shop.npl.org for PRPL and NPL merchandise, including notebooks, caps, and more. Our store features a nice selection of gifts for any Roth fan. Selected merchandise will also be available for purchase during the Philip Roth Festival March 15-17.



"Philip World"

In addition to books, awards, and diplomas, the author's bequest included personal effects, including some artwork.

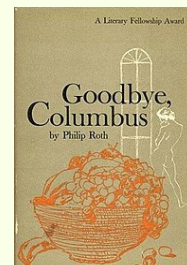
One watercolor in the collection is identified on the verso as "Philip World" by artist Judith Hudson. Curious to know more, I reached out to Judith for additional details. To my delight, the artist responded right away. She wrote:

I am thrilled this has ended up at the library. I was living with Philip at his Connecticut home in the summer of 2009 and made the watercolor for him. It shows the nature we were enjoying at his house, the birds, the bear, the turkey, and the flowers.

One day, I got some lobsters for dinner, and it was amusing because he kept checking on them every half hour to see if they were okay. So I put them in. We attentively listened to music, which was also a lot of fun, hearing his take on everything. There was a Sunday Jazz/ Frank Sinatra type radio program he never missed, and we also listened to classical music, a favorite being Mahler. That's why the notes are there.

-Nadine Giron

My Kind of Club



Philip Roth is "one of the most elusive literary biographical figures one could possibly write about," says Stanford Professor Steven Zipperstein, who by his own account, knows what he's talking about.

Zipperstein is writing a biography on Roth and was the latest host of the Philip Roth Book Club, this time discussing the novella *Goodbye, Columbus*, in late January. It is that elusiveness, perhaps, that is one of the challenges that has bonded so many Roth scholars and biographers in their research. At the same time, their work to figure out Roth has allowed our book club, now coming up on its one-year anniversary, to have access to esteemed college professors and scholars – six so far-- to spend 60 to 90 minutes hosting a Saturday session. Nadine Giron, Supervising Librarian of the Philip Roth Personal Library administers the club, gets the hosts on board in the first place and guides us to get our questions to the scholars.

“Tough crowd, Nadine,” Zipperstein said with some humor when the two early questions were why he thought Roth didn’t win the Nobel Prize and if he thought Roth was a misogynist. The professor discussed both but didn’t have a definitive answer on the Nobel. On the criticism of Roth’s attitude toward women, however, Zipperstein said it is a lingering issue, but his own interest is not to use that term because it’s too reductive.

And so along with the 90th birthday celebration in March when readers and Roth followers will come to Newark for the Philip Roth Unbound Festival at the NJ Performing Arts Center March 17-19, and to the Philip Roth Society Conference at Newark Public Library March 15-17, the book club can acknowledge that it’s been a good year since Roth biographer Ira Nadel helped launch the first session in March 2022 presenting *The Ghost Writer* on Roth’s 89th birthday.

When Roth died in May, 2018, he was heralded in the headline of his *New York Times* obituary as a “towering novelist who wrote about lust and Jewish and American life.” Our book club meetings focus on that writing and life with the talks woven and layered so beautifully through each scholar’s research and findings. The details let us feel like we’re on the inside, at least just a little, and when you’re reading Roth, he makes you want to be on the inside.

“Roth is menacingly, immensely complicated as a writer, and as a man, and is constantly contradictory with what he’s trying to say,” Zipperstein told us. “He’s wrestling his entire life with what it means to be attached to human beings...” Our other professors and writers who headed up the sessions after the first gathering included: James Bloom on *Indignation* in May, Matthew Shipe on *The Counterlife* in June, Aimee Pozorski on *American Pastoral* in September, Jesse Tisch on *Patrimony* in November, and Zipperstein in January.

Our next meeting will be at 1 p.m. EST on May 20 with a discussion of *Nemesis* hosted by Jon Curley, the NJ Institute of Technology Senior Lecturer in Humanities and Social Sciences. Curley has brought his Newark Narratives classes to Philip Roth Personal Library, as part of visits to be engaged with Newark’s art and culture.

The book club meetings are recorded on the Newark Public Library's [Facebook page](#) and are accessible on the Philip Roth Personal Library [website](#). No scholar claims to have all the answers, just pieces they’re building on together.

For Zipperstein’s part, he discussed the connection between life and art and made the point that “Roth drew from life far more promiscuously than he would acknowledge.”

Roth’s *Goodbye, Columbus*, his first novella, is a love story to Newark “built by a capacity to say goodbye to Newark but then he wrote about it the rest of his life,” Zipperstein said.

Roth discovered that Newark is a treasure house for him, Zipperstein added. “What remains is a sense of surprise, not only that he could do as much as he did. He’s all the more surprised he could do what he did as a boy from Newark... It’s a sense of astonishment that never leaves him.”

-Nancy Shields

Newsletter Issue #4 contributors: Nadine Giron and Nancy Shields

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