

The Pitch

NEWSLETTER OF THE PRPL



Philip Roth Unbound & The Philip Roth Personal Library

The Philip Roth Personal Library welcomed hundreds of guests during the Roth Festival in March. Thank you to everyone for visiting and for sharing your impressions.

Members of the Philip Roth Society had already been at the Newark Public Library in the days prior to the Roth Festival, during which time they attended panel discussions and listened to keynote speakers and also watched *Mentiras*, a literary performance by Felipe Franco Munhoz. Many of the society members, who hailed from Europe, South America, North America, and Asia stayed a few extra days to attend Roth Unbound programs at the NJ Performing Arts Center or to partake in the sold-out bus tours.

Those who spent time in the Philip Roth Personal Library in order to experience the new audio tour, narrated by Morgan Spector, found the experience insightful and educational. "Fantastic," and "delightful" and "history, literature, and their beautiful intersections have never felt so alive" are just a few of the many comments that kept pouring in.

Many visitors asked about specific books in the collection, talked about when they met Roth or wanted to know how the sophisticated design of bookshelves was created in the first place. Some enjoyed a sneak peek into the adjoining storage room which holds the "overflow" books. One scholar from London sat reading two or three requested Roth library books with amazing concentration and a general friendliness at the long Roth table as the crush of Saturday's crowd seemed to envelop him. Many visitors were either coming to the Newark Public Library for the first time or had not been back in decades. We are so glad you enjoyed

the experience. If you're interested in perusing selected media coverage of the event, please click [here](#).

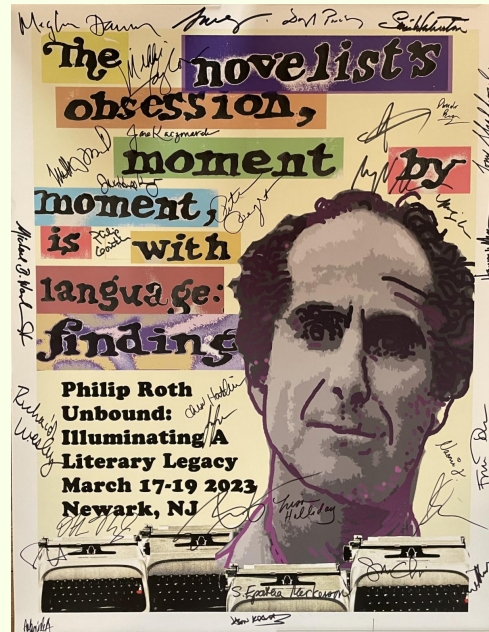
-Nadine Giron

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

May 20, 1pm EST
Philip Roth Book Club

A discussion of *Nemesis* with host Jon Curley

Visit shop.npl.org for PRPL and NPL merchandise, including notebooks, caps, and more.



Thank you to the NJ Performing Arts Center for this unique poster, designed by Nell Painter and signed by the actors and authors who participated in Philip Roth Unbound!



Olamide Adekoya, First Place, Grades 9-10



Update: *My Newark Story*

The two first place winners of our youth writing contest, Olamide Adekoya (Grades 9-10) and Naomi Jeffries (Grades 11-12), both from Science Park High School, read their pieces at the NJ Performing Arts Center during the Roth Festival on the evening of March 17, 2023 as part of the My Newark program. The event received wonderful coverage in an [article](#) written by *TAP Into Newark* editor, Mark Bonamo. Olamide and Naomi shared the podium with Richard Wesley, Chisa Hutchinson, Mikki Taylor, Dimitri Reyes, and Jasmine Mans.

Subsequently, on March 30, 2023, we held an awards ceremony at the Newark Public Library, to which all who entered the contest, nearly 200 students, were invited. The 6 winners, along with 8 honorable mentions, were given the opportunity to read their work aloud. All were proud of their achievement and we heard so many wonderful, heartfelt stories.

But that's not all! The Newark Public Library also published a striking anthology of the top 14 submissions. Copies of

-Nadine Giron

Bring It On

"I was introduced by a friend of many decades, the great Irish novelist Edna O'Brien, who may have surprised some in the audience but didn't surprise me when she said "The defining influences on him are his parents, his father Herman, the hard-working Jew in a Gentile insurance colossus, and the mother's faithful husbandry'."

-----Philip Roth quoting O'Brien from his 80th birthday celebration in Newark in a preface to his collected nonfiction 2017 book *Why Write?*

That must be Philip Roth and his father, Herman, standing so close together on Elizabeth Avenue looking pretty serious in the late afternoon chill of approaching winter on a Sunday in the 1950s across from Weequahic Park.

But wait, it's not Roth but his fictional protagonist and novelist Nathan Zuckerman who is describing a scene that took place 20 years earlier standing with his own father, Victor Zuckerman, in the 1979 novel *The Ghost Writer*. The young 23-year-old Nathan is waiting for a bus to get back to New York where he lives and is beginning to get his short stories published. He had just sent a new manuscript to his father and very much needs parental approval. His father is about to tell Nathan why that approval isn't going to come this afternoon.

The new story in question is based on a heated and rather mean-spirited family fight on Herman Roth's side over a trust left by a great aunt to a son and daughter. The money was first to pay for the daughter's two sons to go to college with the remainder to go to her brother. But trouble started when the daughter invaded the trust to send the two sons on to medical school resulting in the brother filing a law suit to secure his inheritance with a plan to buy a downtown Newark parking lot.

"You make everybody seem awfully greedy," Nathan's dad says, as the two are waiting for the bus that runs on the half-hour.

"But everybody was," Nathan answers.

"That's one way of looking at it, of course."

"That's the way you looked at it yourself," Nathan says. "That's why you were so upset that they wouldn't compromise."

"And do you fully understand what a story like this story, when it's published, will mean to people who don't know us?" Victor asks.

Nathan Zuckerman understands the angst and fear of his parents' generation of giving ammunition to anti-Semitic individuals who would misuse a writer's freedom and artistry to portray Jewish characters the same as any the author chooses. Nathan, who remembers as a child wishing that there hadn't been quotas so that his father would have become a physician instead of a podiatrist, understands but needs his father at this point to support him by agreeing to disagree.

"But from a lifetime of experience I happen to know what ordinary people will think when they read something like this story," Victor Zuckerman is saying. "And you don't. You can't. You have been sheltered from it all your life. You were raised here in this neighborhood where you went to school with Jewish children. When we went to the

shore and had the house with the Edelmans, you were always among Jews, even in the summertime. At Chicago your best friends who you brought home were Jewish boys, always. It's not your fault that you don't know what Gentiles think when they read something like this. But I can tell you. They don't think about how it's a great work of art..."

"I wonder if you fully understand just how very little love there is in this world for Jewish people" he continues. "I don't mean in Germany, either, under the Nazis. I mean in run-of-the-mill Americans, Mr. and Mrs. Nice Guy, who otherwise you and I consider perfectly harmless, Nathan, it is there. I guarantee you it is there. I *know* it is there. I have seen it. I have felt it, even when they do not express it in so many words."

"Oh look, we're not getting anywhere," Nathan says as the talk continues. "Please, it's getting dark, it's going to snow—*go home*."

"It won't hurt if I wait with you. I don't like you waiting out here by yourself."

"I can manage perfectly well out here by myself. I have for years now."

Nathan sees the bus coming down the avenue and takes leave of his father to get home and pack up to leave the next morning for a rural artist colony upstate for the winter months.

At the same time, his father is not about to give up and will go to a highly esteemed Jewish judge in Newark to help turn Nathan around. The judge sends a list of questions to help determine Nathan's understanding of --and standing on-- antisemitism. And when some weeks pass and Nathan hasn't answered the judge's letter, Nathan's mother gets in on the effort, making an emergency call to the writing colony to plead to Nathan to answer the judge.

Nathan in turn, goes on his own quest --an overnight visit to an eminent Jewish fiction writer not far from where he's living for the winter in hopes of finding the approval he needs but this time from an *artistic* father. The novelist's home in the Berkshires is the setting for much of *The Ghost Writer* novel and will see Nathan dream up an additional outcome in which a young woman he meets at the famed writer's home turns out to be Anne Frank whom Nathan imagines did not die in the Holocaust but is now there to marry him, tamping down any concerns about antisemitism from his parents...and the judge!

In his 1988 book, *The Facts*, Philip Roth gives us some of his thinking on what may have created his generation's "bring it on" attitude toward antisemitism. Roth writes that as a young person growing up in the 1930s and 40s, being Jewish and American was "indistinguishable" in part because there was not a Jewish homeland that could foster "the pride, the love, the anxiety, the chauvinism, the philanthropy, the chagrin and shame" that had "complicated anew the issue of Jewish self-definition."

His generation's grandparents hadn't "torn themselves away from their shtetl families, had not left behind parents who they would never see again, because back home everybody had gone around the village singing show tunes that brought tears to your eyes," he says.

"They'd left because life was awful, so awful, in fact, so menacing or impoverished or hopelessly obstructed, that it was best forgotten," Roth writes. "The willful amnesia that I generally came up against whenever I tried as a child to establish the details of our pre-American existence was not unique to our family."

That silence about what had happened in the past left a vacuum of emotional ties but a freedom open to gaining confidence in their American identity going forward.

“I would think that much of the exuberance with which I and others of my generation of Jewish children seized our opportunities after the war—that wonderful feeling that one was entitled to no less than anyone else, that one could do anything and could be excluded from nothing—came from our belief in the boundlessness of the democracy in which we lived and to which we belonged.

“It’s hard to imagine that anyone of intelligence growing up in America since the Vietnam War can have had our unambiguous sense, as young adolescents immediately after the victory over Nazi fascism and Japanese militarism, of belonging to the greatest nation on earth.”

-Nancy Shields

Newsletter Issue #5 contributors: 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

[Unsubscribe kgiardi@npl.org](mailto:kgiardi@npl.org)

[Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)

Sent by prpl@npl.org in collaboration with



Try email marketing for free today!