

# The Pitch

NEWSLETTER OF THE PRPL



## DESTINATION: NEWARK

We're delighted to share how many tourists include the Philip Roth Personal Library in their travel plans. Most recently, a Roth fan from Paris visited and shared why he admires Roth. We also learned that he attended Tiphaine Raffier's production of *Nemesis* at the Odéon-Théâtre in Paris this past spring and he was quite descriptive in his summary of his observations, particularly all of the special effects.

Sometimes, people who aren't fans are asked by their friends abroad to please visit in order to snap some photos for them. This happened recently and the obliging friend could only spend a few minutes with us, but we hope her images turned out amazing.

Visitors also came from Nova Scotia, several from England, and Mexico. Local visitors have included playwrights, professors, librarians, and a movie set designer. We like to converse with our visitors if possible in order to ask them where they live, how they found out about the PRPL, and when and how they were introduced to Roth's work.

We had a lovely conversation with another recent tourist, a flight attendant from Chicago who was staying in Newark between her shifts. While she usually spends time resting in a hotel near the airport, this time she decided that she would book a hotel in downtown Newark and venture out and explore the city's cultural sights. We're so glad she dropped in! She hopes to bring her brother next time.

-Nadine Giron

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**MARK YOUR CALENDARS!**

**September 9, 1pm EST**

**OUR NEW [YouTube CHANNEL!](#)**

We've now organized our content so it's easier to find. We've created playlists for recordings of our book club sessions, past

## Philip Roth Book Club

A discussion of *Portnoy's Complaint* with host Steven Sampson. Zoom link to come.

### September 12, 6pm

Poetry workshop with Ameerah Shabazz-Bilal

### October 10, 6pm

Poetry workshop with Marina Carreira

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### Summer Hours June 26 - September 5

Exhibition Hours:

Monday, Tuesday 9am - 5:15pm

Wednesday 9am - 8:15pm

Thursday, Friday 9am - 5:15pm

Saturday 9:30am - 1:15pm

Reading room open by appointment

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Visit [shop.npl.org](http://shop.npl.org) for PRPL and NPL merchandise, including notebooks, caps, and more.

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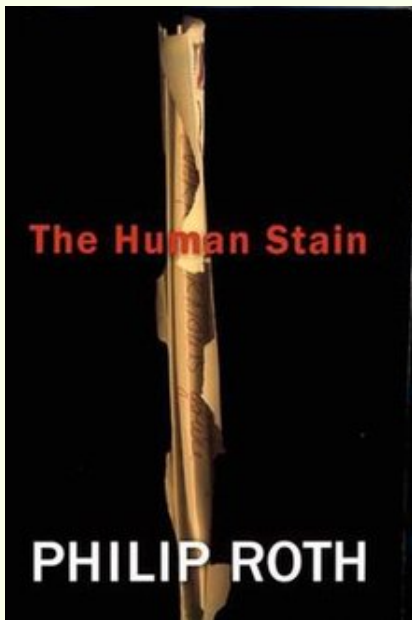
discussions, and some of our virtual programs. We even have a few subscribers now!

Our newest [content](#) includes "Ask the Librarian" series where we take questions on our social media accounts from around the world (links to our accounts are located at the bottom of this issue). For example, did Roth own any books translated from Arabic? What books did Roth own the most copies of? What were some of the most recent novels we found in the collection? Questions are addressed in the order in which they are received. While the questions are straightforward, the responses usually are not. We try to provide the most thorough answers possible.

We've posted three episodes so far and we hope you find them interesting. Do you have a question about the collection you'd like us to answer? Send us an [email](#) and your inquiry might be addressed in our next episode!

-Nadine Giron

## "This Is What I'm Getting At"



In September, 2012, a determined Philip Roth wrote an *Open Letter to Wikipedia* in the *The New Yorker* requesting the removal of a misstatement about who inspired creation of the Coleman Silk professor in Roth's highly praised 2000 novel *The Human Stain*.

Roth said the inspiration came from the life of his late friend and Princeton professor Melvin Tumin, not the deceased literary critic Anatole Broyard, mentioned as a possibility in reviews when the book came out. Roth carefully laid out his case to the online encyclopedia, concluding with a paragraph on how he creates fictional characters in the first place.

*"Novel writing is for the novelist a game of let's pretend. Like most every other novelist I know, once I had what Henry James called 'the germ'—in this case, Mel Tumin's story of muddleheadedness at Princeton – I proceeded to pretend and to invent Faunia Farley; Les Farley; Coleman Silk; Coleman's family background; the girlfriends of his youth; his brief professional career as a boxer; the college where he rises to be a*

*dean; his colleagues both hostile and sympathetic; his field of study; his bedeviled wife; his children both hostile and sympathetic; his schoolteacher sister, Ernestine, who is his strongest judge at the conclusion of the book; his angry, disapproving brother; and five thousand more of those biographical bits and pieces that taken together form the fictional character at the center of a novel.”*

Philip Roth was brilliant in creating stories that allowed him to pursue what he saw as true to the humanity of our lives. It is part of his legacy. Here at the Newark Public Library, the Philip Roth Personal Library has been open two years this month and we do not take lightly the trust our hometown author placed in us to ensure public access to information that is true and right the best way we know how.

Roth bequeathed his personal library of 7,000 books and a \$2 million endowment to help support the Newark Public Library’s mission to be here into the future for the city’s people and families, for scholars and public everywhere. Our library is part of today’s City of Newark contributing to education, to growth, mending together different neighborhoods and cultural communities. We want to keep that feeling of wonderment that Roth describes from the early 1950s when he spent his hours between classes at nearby Rutgers Newark sitting on the library floor in the open stacks and finding there “in front of you and behind you, above and below you, not only the book you were looking for but dozens more on the same subject that you had never heard of.”

Our Philip Roth library tells of the author’s life, his love of his family upbringing in the Jewish section of Weequahic, the people and places of Newark and New Jersey and elsewhere that readers find themselves attached to in the novelist’s books. We stay with Roth through the rest of his life, and to today, five years after his death. We’re advocates to keep his voice alive on so many themes and subjects that mattered to him and matter today---freedom to publish, antisemitism, racism, public access, war, death, love, isolation are only a few.

We thank Roth for his devotion to bringing his fictional characters so much to life that he gives us that opportunity to try to understand when we otherwise might not. That is the case with Lester Farley, the Vietnam veteran suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder in *The Human Stain* who causes the murder of his ex-wife and professor Coleman Silk in a car crash. At the end of the novel, narrator Nathan Zuckerman meets up with Farley who is ice fishing in a hauntingly serene and isolated lake. In the course of their conversation, Farley tells of being on his second tour as a door gunner on a helicopter when his gunship went into North Vietnam to pick up a pilot and copilot who had been hit on an air strike. Farley says his crew wasn’t a rescue helicopter and didn’t get permission, but acted on instinct to try and save the pilots.

*“We figure, okay, we’re gonna die, we’re gonna die. So we went up there and we homed in on their signals, we saw one parachute, and we went down in the clearing, and we picked that guy up with no trouble at all,” Farley says.*

*“... We went over a little farther looking for the other parachute and all freakin’ hell broke loose. I’m telling you, it was unbelievable. We never picked up the other guy. The helicopter was getting’ hit like you wouldn’t believe it. Ting ping ping boom. Machine guns. Ground fire. We just had to turn around and get the hell out of there as fast as we could. And I remember the guy we picked up started to cry. This is what I’m getting at. He was a navy pilot. They were off the Forrestal. And he knew the other guy was either killed or captured, and he started to bawl. It was horrible for him. His buddy. But we couldn’t go back. We couldn’t risk the chopper and five guys.”*

-Nancy Shields

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