

UNDERSTANDING

Philip
ROTH

by MURRAY BAUMGARTEN
and BARBARA GOTTFRIED

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Understanding Contemporary
American Literature

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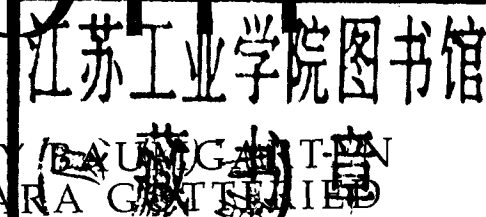
American Science Fiction

by Thomas Clareson

UNDERSTANDING

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

Understanding Contemporary American Literature has been planned as a series of guides or companions for students as well as good nonacademic readers. The editor and publisher perceive a need for these volumes because much of the influential contemporary literature makes special demands. Uninitiated readers encounter difficulty in approaching works that depart from the traditional forms and techniques of prose and poetry. Literature relies on conventions, but the conventions keep evolving; new writers form their own conventions—which in time may become familiar. Put simply, *UCAL* provides instruction in how to read certain contemporary writers—identifying and explicating their material, themes, use of language, point of view, structures, symbolism, and responses to experience.

The word *understanding* in the series title was deliberately chosen. Many willing readers lack an adequate understanding of how contemporary literature works; that is, what the author is attempting to express and the means by which it is conveyed. Although the criticism and analysis in the series have been aimed at a level of general accessibility, these introductory volumes are meant to be applied in conjunction with the works they cover. Thus they do not provide a substitute for the works and authors they introduce, but rather prepare the reader for more profitable literary experiences.

M. J. B

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UNDERSTANDING

PHILIP ROTH

CHAPTER ONE

Understanding Philip Roth

Career

Philip Roth was born in Newark, New Jersey, on 19 March 1933 to Herman and Bess Finkel Roth. In his autobiography Roth notes that his father, after several low-paying jobs and the bankruptcy of a family shoe store, felt fortunate to have gotten a job as an insurance salesman for Metropolitan Life in the era of narrowing boundaries and limited possibilities ushered in by the Depression. He was one of the very few Jews hired by the corporation. Like most of his generation he "worked a six-day week, evenings included," and was grateful for the steady, if modest, living the insurance work provided. His mother, Roth recalls, nurtured him, running an orderly and calm household amid the patriotic fervor occasioned by World War II. The graphic evidence of the Holocaust, featured in newsreels and stark photographs in magazines and newspapers, reinforced the Roth family's pride in their American haven. Later, the Cold War and its propaganda mills made Roth aware

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of how vulnerable he and his contemporaries had become to the rhetoric of an ideological patriotism.

From 1946 to 1950 Roth attended Weequahic High School, played baseball, clowning with his friends, read avidly in the Newark Public Library, and discovered the diverse neighborhoods of his city, then an intense if less sophisticated outpost of European immigrant culture than New York City, its enormous counterpart across the Hudson. In 1950 he enrolled at Newark College of Rutgers University, but in 1951 he transferred to Bucknell University in Pennsylvania to escape the "provincialism" of Newark and discover the "rest of America."¹

At Bucknell he published his first story, "Philosophy," in the literary magazine, *Et Cetera*, which he helped to establish and edit. He graduated magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa with a BA in English in 1954. In 1955 he received his MA in English from the University of Chicago. That same year he entered the army, but due to a back injury he suffered during basic training he was quickly discharged. He returned to study for the PhD in English at the University of Chicago, but dropped out of the program in 1957. By this time he had published four stories in literary magazines, two of which won awards and were reprinted. With the help of grants from the National Institute of Arts and Letters, the Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship, and a Guggenheim Fellowship, he began work on a collection of stories. In 1959, just as *Goodbye, Columbus* was about to be published, he married Margaret Martinson Williams.

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The marriage proved disastrous, and they separated three years later.

In 1960 Roth began teaching in the Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa, and two years later became writer-in-residence at Princeton University. During this time Roth wrote his first full-length novel, *Letting Go* (1962), and began work on *When She Was Good* (1967). Though both were satiric, neither was humorous; both novels focused on frustration and suppressed rage, and received only lukewarm critical praise. In both novels the protagonists attempt to rebel against the limitations of their time and place. Their rebellion fails because they are isolated and directionless, without effective means to channel their dissatisfactions. There are comic moments in each novel, but their overall effect is of unrelieved, grim, and hopeless lives. In the early works Roth's "young man," like Stephen Dedalus, Joyce's hero, comes of age in a time, place, and family he both hates and loves. The novels explore the negotiations and compromises of that youth, of love and of marriage, which are complicated by the protagonist's pursuit of an artistic vocation or an intellectual life. But unlike Joyce's Stephen Dedalus the censor is not so much the protagonist's parents, or even his environment, as it is the inner workings of his own psyche. At this time Roth began to publish excerpts from his novels in progress, a pattern he was to follow for many years. In 1968 his wife, from whom he had been separated for six years, was killed in an automobile

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accident. A year later, in 1969, Paramount released the film version of *Goodbye, Columbus*, just as *Portnoy's Complaint* was completed. That same year Roth was elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters. In 1972 the film of *Portnoy* was released by Warner Brothers, coinciding with the publication of his ambiguous and troubling novella, *The Breast*.

Roth has been a controversial figure since he published his first collection of short stories and a novella, *Goodbye, Columbus*, in 1959. Critical response was overwhelmingly positive. The volume was hailed as fresh and original—a gritty, realistic departure from the cool, terse, arch, and artful stories of the reigning modernist writers Flaubert, Joyce, Hemingway, and Katherine Mansfield. In Roth, Leslie Fiedler noted, Newark had at last found its poet laureate—a writer as “vulgar, comical, subtle, pathetic and dirty” as the city itself.² *Goodbye, Columbus* won both the National Book Award and the Jewish Book Council's Daroff Award. But at the same time that Roth was praised by critics, he was condemned by Jewish community leaders as an anti-Semite who portrayed Jews as “depraved and lecherous.” His work, they asserted, could only lead readers to conclude “that this country—nay that the world—would be a much better and happier place without Jews.”³ This pattern of praise for the literary qualities of his work, coupled with criticism of his complex portraits of Jews, has continued throughout Roth's career. All his fiction, published between 1959 and 1987, has received mixed

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reviews. For every critic who has praised Roth's work, there has been one who has found his work lacking in depth or moral seriousness. Nevertheless, Roth's double-edged portraits of Jews, writers, and American family life have found a worldwide audience. Many have appreciated the deft balance of his satire, and he has become a popular and important writer both in the United States and abroad.

Roth's early novels and tales contain the potential for the comic explosiveness of his best-known novel, *Portnoy's Complaint*. Published in 1969 at the height of the political and racial unrest that led to the burning of whole sections of Roth's Newark and other American cities, strident student protests against the Vietnam war, and the beginning of the women's liberation movement in America, *Portnoy's* sexual explicitness and political rebellion capture the era's destruction of political and social boundaries, as well as its greater freedom and opening of new possibilities for both women and men. Echoing many of the themes of *Goodbye, Columbus*, *Portnoy's Complaint* balanced and completed Roth's study of the American family. In *Letting Go* Roth had explored the relationship of confused Jewish fathers and their perplexing, disappointing sons, while in *When She Was Good* he had focused on the obedient Christian daughter and her abusive, alcoholic father; now in *Portnoy*, Roth extended his analysis to the relationship of the Jewish son and his overbearing mother. What Roth was to call the “Bacchus of Hometown, U.S.A.”

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was now complemented by the "Cleopatra of the kitchen."⁴

After *Portnoy*, Roth turned to political satire. In keeping with the tenor of the early 1970s he published the sardonic "On the Air" (1970) in the *New American Review* and the savage *Our Gang* (1971). *The Great American Novel*, published in 1973, intertwines politics and baseball. A complex and self-conscious parody of American literary traditions, it is also an attack on the political legacy of McCarthyism and the deformation of the American dream of success during the era of Vietnam. In 1974 he continued his experiments with voice and narrative strategy, publishing *My Life as a Man*.

Convinced that American reality outdoes the imagination and inventiveness of American writers—a central theme of *Reading Myself and Others* (1975)—Roth from this point on in his career focuses on the career of the artist and the process of fiction-making. In his next novel, *The Professor of Desire*, published in 1977, the adventures of the protagonist, David Kepesh, a teacher of literature, illuminate the relationship between what one reads and what one is. Kepesh alternately embraces the intellectual, moral life, and an unsublimated life of desire and debauchery as he lives out the conflict suggested by the title of the novel. In the Zuckerman trilogy—*The Ghost Writer* (1979), *Zuckerman Unbound* (1981), and *The Anatomy Lesson* (1983)—as well as his latest novel in which Nathan Zuckerman continues to fulfill the hero's role, *The Counterlife* (1987), Roth carries

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forward his exploration of the fictions of self-consciousness and maps new regions of the game of fiction-making with which to tease his readers. These are among Roth's most sophisticated novels, and his most elegiac.

Despite the difficulties Jewish children and parents have in dealing with each other in his fiction, in real life Roth has been close to his parents, providing for them financially with the proceeds of his best-sellers and dedicating his most recent novel, *The Counterlife*, to his father on his eighty-fifth birthday, and his autobiography to his brother. Although he has not been a recluse like J. D. Salinger or Thomas Pynchon, Roth has guarded his privacy. Since 1970 he has taught occasionally at the University of Pennsylvania, serving as an adjunct professor of English, and most recently has been appointed to the faculty at Hunter College of the City University of New York. For more than a decade now Roth and the British actress Claire Bloom have been together, with Roth tending to divide his time between England and the United States.

Overview

Philip Roth's comic novels explore the moral complexities of modern experience. The enormous changes that have characterized recent decades form one of the recurring themes of his fictional world, as he analyzes

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the ways in which desire, art, and the moral imagination intertwine and together shape the ability of characters and social groups to deal with the tumultuous, cruel, and violent twentieth century. In its imaginative re-creation of the new possibilities offered Americans and Jews by modern culture, his writing engages and interrogates modern history. Creatures of blood and imagination, his protagonists must deal with a comic world of serious consequences. Much of Roth's work satirizes the obsessions and delusions of neurotics, yet his deft comic touch tempers the sharpness of the criticism. His characters inhabit a comic world always on the verge of spinning out of control. Nevertheless, the moral dimension of their choices is paramount. In Roth's satiric universe the comic moment reveals the underlying seriousness of contemporary life.

Roth's early satires focus on the complacency of second-generation suburban Jews, who on the one hand deny their cultural heritage and on the other consciously limit the range of their participation in American political life. They also explore the role and influence of the American artist/intellectual. Each tale grows out of a sharp perception of the necessity to assert the self, despite the pressure to conform, and make a responsible moral choice. Individuality and integrity are at stake, so parents and inherited loyalties must be confronted, renewed, or sometimes sacrificed. Roth gives these traditional literary themes of the novel of education—the *Bildungsroman*—a special flavor by locat-

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ing them in the lives of lower-middle-class Jews of Newark and New York City as they embark on the American adventure of upward social mobility and suburbanization. The historical context is always clear, and the traumatic events of Western culture since World War II press insistently upon Roth's characters. The great Depression of the 1930s, World War II, the Holocaust, the Cold War, McCarthyism, the Vietnam war, the protests and demonstrations of the 1960s and 1970s, and the women's movement form the boundaries of their worlds. Roth's eye for telling comic detail and his brilliant ear for the varieties of American speech, as well as the vivid and gritty sources of his characters, make his work original, sociologically accurate, and controversial.

The Jewish tales, most notably *Goodbye, Columbus* and *Portnoy's Complaint*, do not center on traditional Jewish holidays but on weekend adventures, weekday work experiences, and hurried, reluctant encounters with older relatives over elaborate meals. Immigrant values of not wasting something as precious as food become the obsessive remnants of a neglected religious tradition. As well, the fashionable American clothing of these characters—elegant suits and Brooks Brothers shirts, tuxedos, tennis outfits—reveal what has changed in their lives. Arrayed in these outfits, these characters have joined the American world of individual choice, where shopping in the great supermarket of endless possibility is the only option. The intimacies of religious

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communal life—of the *communion* of bed and board, of sacredness created out of the mundane everyday world—have been forgotten. The public world of traditional Jewish life in which the values of the community are enacted in public and publicly scrutinized—what Eli Peck in “Eli, the Fanatic” embodies in donning identifiable Jewish clothing at highly charged moments—has been replaced by private sexual encounters like Neil and Brenda’s in “Goodbye, Columbus.” Such very modern relationships do not lead to family ties and communal consequences; instead, they remain personal adventures. And in this contrasting of the fuller possibilities of public life with the realities of suburban conformism, Roth reveals the hidden poverty of spirit beneath the surface opulence of 1950s individualism, and delineates his satiric values much as the sociologist David Riesman, also a University of Chicago man, had done a decade earlier in *The Lonely Crowd*. What the suburbs have are the sexual secrets of Epstein and the political conspiracies of Tricky E. Dixon, glimpsed like film images in the dark. What they lack is the fullness of communal life suggested in “Goodbye, Columbus” by Aunt Gladys and Uncle Max.

Roth is a writer who focuses on contradictions. His world is filled with a surplus of meanings; excess abounds, and things turn into their opposites. A novelist of ideas, he dramatizes the process of thinking about this dynamic world. Whatever the setting, the place in

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which the action occurs is also one that includes the history of parallel events explored in the classics of Western literature. Thus Prague is full of meaning for David Kepesh in *The Professor of Desire* precisely because it is Kafka’s city—the Prague of Gregor Samsa in “The Metamorphosis” and of Kafka’s own familial and personal tragedy, as well as the site of the Soviet stifling of Czech liberty since the invasion of 1968. As an American satirist Roth shares many of the liberal social, political, and cultural concerns of other contemporary novelists. He was among the first American writers to bring into his fiction an awareness of how the murder of six million Jews by the Nazis has shaped the modern world. Roth also shares with his Eastern European colleagues, Milan Kundera and Josef Skvorecky, a sense, evident in their art, of the links between the obsessive eroticism of modern life and its totalitarian political dilemmas.

The central ideal of American culture Roth confronts and subverts in his work is that of character. There are few heroes in his fiction; most of his protagonists have the obverse qualities of the all-American boy or girl. Characters in all of Roth’s tales suffer from unnamed afflictions against which they struggle. Their desperation grows as they find themselves, despite strenuous efforts, unable to channel their dissatisfaction and change their situations. Yet when they embrace their suffering as their destiny, they only make their

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predicament worse. Though excess is their condition, sainthood and martyrdom are not available in Roth's comic universe.

In Roth's work individual events become representative of the experiences of the group, for his subject is not one character's life but the life experiences of a generation. Roth's personal knowledge of the American army after World War II informs many of his tales; yet it would be a mistake to take any of them as autobiographical statements. Rather, his work is part of an American tradition of "fictionalized recall"; that is, Roth does not, despite what some readers believe, write autobiographical novels, though he draws upon personal knowledge which he transforms into fiction.⁵ The resulting characters stand for a generation's experience and do not function individually as role models. The moral accounting of character central to the great realistic writers is transformed by Roth into the process of charting the relationships of a minority and its enveloping majority culture. Roth is aware that ethnicity depends upon politics for its definition, for what defines a given ethnic group is the result of implicit and sometimes explicit negotiation with the majority. This realization of the interdependence of politics and ethnicity allows him to map the history of a characteristic American group. Roth's characters do not embody the ethos of individualism; rather, the status of the individual is the central problem in his work. Focusing on individual figures, he writes about them as particular and specific

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embodiments of the general experience of a characteristic American group.

This group is most clearly designated in the Yiddish/German roots of many characters' names, which often reveal by an ironic twist the condition from which they suffer. Paul Herz is despite his name not all heart; Neil Klugman is smart enough to be cynical yet not smart enough to keep from sexual entanglement; Nathan Zuckerman, entranced by literature, is, in one of the ironic possibilities always present in Yiddish, not sweet and winsome despite the sugar his name refers to; Dr. Spielvogel is a bird at play; and Jimmy Lustig lusts and glitters. Roth makes the reader pay attention as well to the political implications of names like Nathan Marx and Roland Agni, whose name echoes both the lamb of God and Spiro Agnew, the disgraced vice-president of Nixon's first term in office, and Sheldon Grossbart, who is gross in his wheedling. The sounds of their names add meanings: Dr. Klinger rings a bell; Claire Ovington is clear-sighted and nurturing; David Kepesh is the beloved son, as his first name suggests, while his last name perhaps echoes the Yiddish word for head, smart, an intellectual. Helen Baird, whose beauty like Helen of Troy's is destructive, reveals/bares all, and Mordecai Lippman gives everyone lots of lip.

What the reader knows about the names of their conditions these characters cannot. Alexander Portnoy, whose last name is Russian for tailor, gives his name to a psychological complex while dramatizing the effort to

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explore it by his complaint. Like Nathan Zuckerman and David Kepesh, he becomes obsessed with his affliction in order, as he explains in his monologue, to escape from it. The reader, however, knows that he is making things worse. Roth deploys a canny psychoanalytically oriented psychology that calls attention to the obsessive orality of his characters—or, by contrast, to their insistent silence. Trying to discover who they are, most of them talk too much. Libby Herz and Lucy Nelson cannot rid themselves of their insistent, scheming inner voices. Neither can Gabe Wallach's father, Alexander Portnoy, or Alvin Pepler shut up. It takes a broken jaw to silence Nathan Zuckerman. In their own ways each of these characters is an immigrant, whose verbal display in the language of the new land is an obsessive effort to gain acceptance. The right performance will prove he or she is indeed an American; their excess reveals the desperation of the excluded and the marginal.

Roth chooses the occupations of his characters carefully. Like David Kepesh in *The Professor of Desire*, they are what they *profess*, in the original meaning of the word, and thus reveal the values by which they live. Neil works in the Newark Public Library because he believes the accumulated wisdom of Western culture will make him a better person. David Kepesh is a teacher of literature because he believes books contain the secrets of desire. However, everyday life is full of surprises that test a character's values, and when Neil

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falls in love with Brenda, he has to rethink his priorities. Lucy Nelson does not want to marry Roy Bassart, but her pregnancy and the doctor's refusal to let her terminate it make her agree to become his wife. Possessions and money are less important to Roth's characters than moral relationships with other people. Even when Theresa agrees to sell her baby to Gabe in *Letting Go*, her decision emerges from a moral calculation.

Though character types recur in Roth's work, each character has a slightly different perspective which distinguishes him. Gabe Wallach in *Letting Go* resembles Neil Klugman of "Goodbye, Columbus"; however, Gabe is a more educated person than Neil and has financial advantages that Neil does not. As a result Gabe is not overwhelmed by suburban affluence but instead falls in love with the hard-working lower-middle-class Martha Regenhart. Often an outsider, the main character must chart his way to the center of the social situation. In most cases the males seek to conquer through the exercise of sexual and intellectual prowess. The upper-middle-class women are not tricked into permanent relationships by sexual pleasure, which they accept without ambivalence, as does Birgitta in *The Professor of Desire*; the lower-middle-class women are willing to exchange sexual favors for upward social mobility, as Maureen does in *My Life as a Man*. Yet neither class nor institutional connections fully determine a character's view. Each is presented as a blend of insider and outsider, two complicated parents, varied institutional

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links, and cultural views. The historical moment also offers as well as closes off possibilities. For this reason Peter Tarnopol discusses the nature of marriage in the 1950s, while Alexander Portnoy is obsessed by polio, Joe DiMaggio, and the Holocaust. What is determining is the attitude each character has toward her or his gender identity and that of the opposite sex.

Despite the presence of male narrators, women are central to Roth's work. The ways in which they affect the main character are presented ironically, for the males rarely see more than they desire. Their interactions reveal what these characters are about; Peter Tarnopol does not know much about Maureen Walker when he first meets her; Nathan Zuckerman is not sure why he rejects Sharon Shatsky for Lydia; David Kepesh cannot comprehend why he left Dina Dornbusch for Helen Baird; the meaning of their choices reflects upon their personal desires. The plots of these stories of education lead to discovery of the grounds of incompatibility. Though everyone must choose, the conditions of choice are blindness *and* insight, seeing and the impossibility of seeing, and the result is always fateful. There are few happy relationships in Roth's work; rather, he charts the different ways in which men and women can make each other miserable, as a way of understanding their partial and limited view of human life.

As a satirist Roth depends upon stereotypic characterization. The accuracy of his portraits draws the reader into the fictional process and encourages him to

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complete the sketches, at the same time that they mock the reader for accepting their validity. The deft and vivid description of the social surface of everyday life brings class, gender, and ethnicity into play. Most of Roth's middle-class male Jewish protagonists are narcissists; his often lower-class Gentile heroines are abused and battered. Roth plots a collision course for these conventional figures from different realms, for in this universe opposites attract, as both encounter the social and political barriers that confine them. The satire moves from visual presentation and the accurate rendering of dialogue into the exploration of psychology and self-consciousness, thereby deepening stereotypes into original and living characters.

None of the writers with whom Roth is most often compared—Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, Mordecai Richler—evoke the surfaces of everyday life with his vivid visual fullness. Furthermore, Roth's work consistently depicts a more realistic social experience than theirs, even as he deploys more prominently than they do a complex psychology of familial motivation and immigrant hope in his work. Nevertheless, Roth's prose is not dominated by the overt Yiddishisms of Malamud and Richler or the cerebral aggression of Bellow's Jewish intellectuals. While Yiddish, the language of the immigrants, and the brilliant intellectual aggressiveness of the new generation of Jewish professionals play a significant part in his work, the linguistic quickness and agility of urban life is its primary quality, mirroring the

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nimbleness with which his characters move through the dynamic American suburb and cityscape. Writing in a supple, vivid American English, Roth stakes out a new area for Jewish writing. He defines the shape of a Jewish literature—that is, writing which charts the fateful experiences of the Jews—in a non-Jewish language accessible to all Americans. In their desperate quest for selfhood his Jewish characters echo the experiences of the classic American heroes, from Ishmael in Melville's *Moby-Dick*, to Huckleberry Finn and Jay Gatsby. The communal conditions of Roth's satiric art define the function of this new American literature: in exploring the Jewish experience of the suburbs that began in the 1950s, it articulates the importance of American memory.

As they embark on their voyage of self-discovery, Roth's heroes and heroines alike discover reservoirs of cultural and personal self-hatred. Their dynamic universe, however, does not stop for answers or resolutions, so these characters respond by renewing their quests and their questionings. Similarly, the literary masters so often cited in his work—Rilke, Kafka, Chekhov, Babel, Dickens, Shakespeare, and Swift—are all notable for the fluidity and change of their worlds and the power of their questioning of the accepted social order. Though not often directly named in Roth's work but frequently alluded to, biblical Job, who keeps on asking fundamental questions about the nature of the universe though constantly cautioned by his "com-

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forters" to be still, is an informing force throughout. And the bemused satisfaction Job attains at the outcome of his story, when he is rewarded for his faithful questioning with a double portion of all he had previously lost, resonates in the ironic endings of Roth's tales, as if the Book of Job were rewritten for the Marx brothers.

Two other figures have helped to shape Roth's literary work. He acknowledges the impact of Lionel Trilling's analysis of the relationship of manners, morals, and the modern novel. Roth also draws on Trilling's exploration of the connections between literature and politics in "The Liberal Imagination." The other influence is that of Cervantes, who transformed the picaresque tale and the pastoral romance, with its interpolated tales, into the profound comic satire of *Don Quixote*. Roth's fusing of the farcical and the picaresque echoes Cervantes; so too does Roth's use of the comic to reveal moral complexity. And he follows Cervantes's lead in bringing together dramatic and realistic modes to create a perspectival realm in which the comic imagination reigns supreme.

Notes

1. *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography* (New York: Farrar, Straus, 1988); excerpted in *The New York Times Book Review* 18 Oct. 1987.

2. Leslie Fiedler, "The Image of Newark and the Indignities of Love: Notes on Philip Roth," *Critical Essays on Philip Roth*, ed. Sanford Pinsker (Boston: Hall, 1982) 24.

3. Dan Isaac, "In Defense of Philip Roth," Pinsker 182.

4. Roth, *Reading Myself and Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus, 1975) 66.

5. See Tony Tanner, *City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970* (New York: Harper, 1971), ch. 13, "Fictionalized Recall."

The Suburbs of Forgetfulness: *Goodbye, Columbus* (1959)

"Goodbye, Columbus"

The Jewish immigrant past and American present, city and suburb, lower-middle and upper-middle class collide in this comic satire. "Goodbye, Columbus" encompasses the conflicts between two generations and two different ways of life. Its narrator, Neil Klugman, is a lower-middle-class Newark boy; Brenda, the girl he loves, is from Short Hills, an elegant suburb; they meet at the country-club swimming pool. Their encounter is the result of a mutual sexual attraction rather than the shared interest of communal life, family connections, or political action. Neil and Brenda define their relationship not in terms of classic Jewish values of family and religious tradition but the chivalric myth of knight and lady.

In its emphasis on seeing, "Goodbye, Columbus" has much of the visual impact of a film. Neil as narrator describes what happens as if he were a camera eye and the unfolding experiences in which he participates were