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# The Humbling Philip Roth

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*I Married a Communist* Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Philip Roth's fictional alter-ego returns in Zuckerman Unbound, "...masterful, sure in every touch." (The New York Times) The sensationalizing sixties are coming to an end, and even writing a novel can make you a star. The writer Nathan Zuckerman publishes his fourth book, an aggressive, abrasive, and comically erotic novel entitled Carnovsky, and all at once he is on the cover of Life, one of the decade's most notorious celebrities. This is the same Nathan Zuckerman who in Philip Roth's much praised The Ghost Writer was the dedicated young apprentice drawing sustenance from the great books and the integrity of their authors. Now in his mid-thirties, Zuckerman, a would-be recluse despite his fame, ventures out on the streets of Manhattan, and not only is he assumed to be his own fictional satyr, Gilbert Carnovsky ("Hey, you do all that

stuff in that book?"), but he also finds himself the target of admirers, admonishers, advisers, and would-be literary critics. The recent murders of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., lead an unsettled Nathan Zuckerman to wonder if "target" may be more than a figure of speech. Yet, streetcorner recognition and media notoriety are the least disturbing consequences of writing Carnovsky. Against his best interests, the newly renowned novelist retreats from his oldest friends, breaks his marriage to a virtuous woman, and damages, perhaps irreparably, his affectionate connection to his younger brother and his family. Even when finally he lives out the fantasies of his fans and enjoys an exhilarating night with the beautiful and worldly film star Caesara O'Shea (a rather more capable celebrity), he is dismayed the following morning by the caliber of the competition up in the erotic big leagues. In some of Zuckerman Unbound's funniest episodes Zuckerman endures the blandishments of another New Jersey boy who has briefly achieved his own moment of stardom. He is the broken and resentful fan Alvin Pepler, in the fifties a national celebrity on the TV quiz show "Smart Money." Thrust back into obscurity when headlined scandals forced the quiz

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show off the air, Pepler now attaches himself to Zuckerman and won't let go--an "Angel of Manic Delights" to the amused novelist (who momentarily sees him as his "pop self"), and yet also the likely source of a demonic threat. But the surprise that fate finally delivers is more devilish than any cooked up by Alvin Pepler, or even by Zuckerman's imagination. In the coronary-care unit of a Miami Hospital, Nathan's father bestows upon his older son not a blessing but what seems to be a curse. And, in an astonishingly bitter final turn, a confrontation with his brother opens the way for the novelist's deep and painful understanding of the deathblow that Carnovsky has dealt to his own past.

The Breast Vintage

Motivated to write this autobiography by a mental/physical breakdown he suffered in 1987, Roth gives a candid portrait of his life's events.

Shop Talk National Geographic Books

In Spring a Young Man's Fancy Lightly turns to thoughts of guilt ... especially if that man is Alexander Portnoy. Hailed as one of the two or three funniest works in American fiction (Chicago Sun-Times), this scalpel-sharp satire dissects the modern American Jewish family with no mercy, as the tortured title character delivers his complaint in the form of a confession to his psychiatrist.

Patrimony Farrar, Straus and Giroux  
Finalist for the National Jewish Book Award A deeply felt, beautifully crafted meditation on friendship and loss in the vein of A Year of Magical Thinking, and a touching portrait of Philip Roth from his closest friend. I had a baseball question on the tip of my tongue: What was the name of "the natural," the player shot by a stalker in a Chicago hotel room? He gave me an amused look that darkened in-to puzzlement, then fear. Then he pitched forward into the soup, unconscious. When I entered the examining room

twenty minutes after our arrival at Charlotte Hungerford Hospital, Philip said, "No more books." Thus he announced his retirement. So begins Benjamin Taylor's Here We Are, the unvarnished portrait of his best friend and one of America's greatest writers. Needless to say, Philip Roth's place in the canon is secure, but what is less clear is what the man himself was like. In Here We Are, Benjamin Taylor's beautifully constructed memoir, we see him as a mortal man, experiencing the joys and sorrows of aging, reflecting on his own writing, and doing something we all love to do: passing the time in the company of his closest friend. Here We Are is an ode to friendship and its wondrous ability to brighten our lives in unexpected ways. Benjamin Taylor is one of the most talented writers working today, and this new memoir pays tribute to his friend, in the way that only a writer can. Roth encouraged him to write this book, giving Taylor explicit instructions not to sugarcoat anything and not to publish it until after his death. Unvarnished and affectionately true to life, Taylor's memoir will be the definitive account of Philip Roth as he lived for years to come.

Philip Roth: Nemeses (LOA #237)  
Vintage

Letting Go is Roth's first full-length novel, published just after Goodbye, Columbus, when he was twenty-nine. Set in 1950s Chicago, New York, and Iowa city, Letting Go presents as brilliant a fictional portrait as we have of a mid-century America defined by social and ethical constraints and by moral compulsions

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conspicuously different from those of today. Newly discharged from the Korean War army, reeling from his mother's recent death, freed from old attachments and hungrily seeking others, Gabe Wallach is drawn to Paul Herz, a fellow graduate student in literature, and to Libby, Paul's moody, intense wife. Gabe's desire to be connected to the ordered "world of feeling" that he finds in books is first tested vicariously by the anarchy of the Herzes' struggles with responsible adulthood and then by his own eager love affairs. Driven by the desire to live seriously and act generously, Gabe meets an impassable test in the person of Martha Reganhart, a spirited, outspoken, divorced mother of two, a formidable woman who, according to critic James Atlas, is masterfully portrayed with "depth and resonance." The complex liason between Gabe and Martha and Gabe's moral enthusiasm for the trials of others are at the heart of this tragically comic work.

**The Facts** Vintage

NATIONAL BOOK CRITICS CIRCLE AWARD WINNER • "A tough-minded, beautifully written memoir" (San Francisco Chronicle) about a son watching his elderly father battle with the brain tumor that will kill him—from the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *American Pastoral*. *Patrimony*, a true story, touches the emotions as strongly as anything Philip Roth has ever written. Roth watches as his

eighty-six-year-old father—famous for his vigor, charm, and his repertoire of Newark recollections—fights the brain tumor that will kill him. The son, full of love, anxiety, and dread, accompanies his father through each fearful stage of his final ordeal, and, as he does so, discloses the survivalist tenacity that has distinguished his father's long, stubborn engagement with life.

*Roth Unbound* Vintage

Het leven van een man komt steeds meer te staan in het teken van zijn ouderdomskwalen.

*The Humbling* Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

In a style richly accessible to the general reader, this book presents Roth's secular Jewishness, with its own mysteries and humor, as most representative of the American Jewish experience. Thirty years into his career as a writer, Philip Roth remains known to most readers as a self-hating Jew or a flawed would be comic. *Philip Roth and the Jews* shows Roth the ironist, the master of absurdity, for whom twentieth-century America and modern Jewish history resonate with each other's signal accomplishments and anxieties. Roth's "egoism" is a persona, an abashed moralist discomfited by the world. Cooper shows that in the "Jewish" works Roth has taken the pulse of America and read the pressures of the world. Modernism, the universal tug for individual sovereignty and against tribal definition,

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is an issue everywhere. Roth's own odyssey of betrayal, loss, and return - the pattern of the Jewish writer in the last 200 years - is so shaped by his origins that Roth has carried his home and neighborhood into the corners of the earth and thus never left them.

**When She was Good** National Geographic Books

Everything is over for Simon Axler, the protagonist of the history. One of the leading American stage actors of his generation, now in his sixties, he has lost his magic, his talent and his assurance. His Falstaff and Peer Gynt and Vanya, all his great roles, 'are melted into air, into thin air'. When he goes on stage he feels like a lunatic and looks like an idiot. His confidence in his powers has drained away; he imagines people laughing at him; he can no longer pretend to be someone else. His wife has gone, his audience has left him, his agent can't persuade him to make a comeback. Into this shattering account of inexplicable and terrifying self-evacuation bursts a counterplot of unusual erotic desire, a consolation for the bereft life so risky and aberrant that it points not towards comfort and gratification but to a yet darker and more shocking end. In this long day's journey into night, told with Roth's inimitable urgency, bravura and gravity, all the ways that we persuade ourselves of our solidity, all our life's performances - talent, love, sex, hope, energy, reputation - are stripped off.

**The Anatomy Lesson** SUNY Press  
Simon Axler is one of

America's leading classical stage actors, but his talent - his magic - has deserted him. All the spontaneity and unthinking impulsiveness that made him great has been replaced by a paralysing self-consciousness. Overwhelmed, Axler's wife promptly leaves him, and Axler checks into a psychiatric hospital. It is only when he begins an affair with Pegeen - formerly a lesbian of 17 years - that Axler's regeneration (and then his final catastrophe) can begin.

*The Facts* New York, Random House [1967]

Philip Roth's *The Breast* is a funny, fantastical story and a bizarre yet daring exploration of sex and subjectivity. David Kepesh wakes up one morning in the hospital, mysteriously altered. Through an endocrinopathic catastrophe of unprecedented proportions, he has been transformed into a 155-pound human female breast. Railing at the incomprehensible, he uses his intelligence to deny and resist the thing he has become. Ultimately, he must accept his fate.

*Conversations with Philip Roth* HarperCollins

A critical evaluation of Philip Roth—the first of its kind—that takes on the man, the myth, and

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the work Philip Roth is one of the most renowned writers of our time. From his debut, *Goodbye, Columbus*, which won the National Book Award in 1960, and the explosion of Portnoy's Complaint in 1969 to his haunting reimagining of Anne Frank's story in *The Ghost Writer* ten years later and the series of masterworks starting in the mid-eighties—*The Counterlife*, *Patrimony*, *Operation Shylock*, *Sabbath's Theater*, *American Pastoral*, *The Human Stain*—Roth has produced some of the great American literature of the modern era. And yet there has been no major critical work about him until now. Here, at last, is the story of Roth's creative life. *Roth Unbound* is not a biography—though it contains a wealth of previously undisclosed biographical details and unpublished material—but something ultimately more rewarding: the exploration of a great writer through his art. Claudia Roth Pierpont, a staff writer for *The New Yorker*, has known Roth for nearly a decade. Her carefully researched and gracefully written account is filled with remarks from Roth himself, drawn from their ongoing conversations. Here are insights and anecdotes that will change the way many readers perceive this most controversial and galvanizing writer: a young and unhappily married Roth struggling to write; a wildly successful Roth, after the uproar over Portnoy, working to help writers from Eastern Europe and to get their books known in the West; Roth responding to the early, Jewish—and the later, feminist—attacks on his work. Here are Roth's family, his inspirations, his critics, the full range of his fiction, and his friendships with such figures as Saul Bellow and John Updike. Here is Roth at work and at play. *Roth Unbound* is a major achievement—a highly readable story that helps us make sense of one of the most vital literary careers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

**Philip Roth** HarperCollins

The unforgettable story of an affair between a star lecturer at a New York college and the beautiful daughter of Cuban exiles—and the quagmire of sexual jealousy and loss that ensues—from the renowned Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *American Pastoral*. "[A] disturbing masterpiece." —*The New York Review of Books* No matter how much you know, no matter how much you think, no matter how much you plot and you connive and you plan, you're not superior to sex. With these words our most unflinchingly energetic and morally serious novelist launches perhaps his fiercest book. The speaker is David Kepesh, white-haired and over sixty, an eminent cultural critic and star lecturer at a New York college—as well as an articulate propagandist of the sexual revolution. For years he has made a practice of sleeping with adventurous female students while maintaining an aesthete's critical distance. But now that

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distance has been annihilated. The agency of Kepesh's undoing is Consuela Castillo, the decorous and humbly beautiful 24-year-old daughter of Cuban exiles. When he becomes involved with her, Kepesh finds himself dragged—helplessly, bitterly, furiously—into jealousy and loss. In chronicling this descent, Philip Roth performs a breathtaking set of variations on the themes of eros and mortality, license and repression, selfishness and sacrifice. *The Dying Animal* is a burning coal of a book, filled with intellectual heat and not a little danger.

Nemesis Knopf Canada

Everything is over for Simon Axler, the protagonist of Philip Roth's startling new book. One of the leading American stage actors of his generation, now in his sixties, he has lost his magic, his talent, and his assurance. His Falstaff and Peer Gynt and Vanya, all his great roles, "are melted into air, into thin air." When he goes onstage he feels like a lunatic and looks like an idiot. His confidence in his powers has drained away; he imagines people laughing at him; he can no longer pretend to be someone else.

"Something fundamental has vanished." His wife has gone, his audience has left him, his agent can't persuade him to make a comeback. Into this shattering account of inexplicable and terrifying self-evacuation bursts a counterplot of unusual erotic desire, a consolation for a bereft life so risky and aberrant that it points not toward comfort and gratification but to a yet darker and more shocking end. In this long day's journey into night, told with Roth's inimitable

urgency, bravura, and gravity, all the ways that we convince ourselves of our solidity, all our life's performances—talent, love, sex, hope, energy, reputation—are stripped off. *The Humbling* is Roth's thirtieth book.

*The Dying Animal* Vintage  
NATIONAL BESTSELLER • Set in a close-knit Newark neighborhood during a terrifying polio outbreak in 1944, a "book [that] has the elegance of a fable and the tragic inevitability of a Greek drama" (*The New Yorker*)—from the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *American Pastoral*. Bucky Cantor is a vigorous, dutiful twenty-three-year-old playground director during the summer of 1944. A javelin thrower and weightlifter, he is disappointed with himself because his weak eyes have excluded him from serving in the war alongside his contemporaries. As the devastating disease begins to ravage Bucky's playground, Roth leads us through every inch of emotion such a pestilence can breed: fear, panic, anger, bewilderment, suffering, and pain. Moving between the streets of Newark and a pristine summer camp high in the Poconos, *Nemesis* tenderly and startlingly depicts Cantor's passage into personal disaster, the condition of childhood, and the painful effect that the wartime polio epidemic has on a closely-knit, family-oriented Newark community and its children.

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## **The Humbling** HMH

Fascinating interviews, essays, and articles spanning a quarter century on writing, baseball, American fiction, and American Jews—from the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *American Pastoral* and one of the greatest writers of the 20th century. "An illuminating...glimpse of the theory and practice that have made Roth a major figure in American fiction." —Chicago Daily News Here is Philip Roth on himself and his work and the controversies it's engendered. Here too are Roth's writings on the Eastern European writers he has always championed, and so much more. The essential collection of nonfiction by a true American master, *Reading Myself and Others* features his famed long interview with the *Paris Review*.

### Writers & Company Macmillan

At forty, the writer Nathan Zuckerman comes down with a mysterious affliction—pure pain, beginning in his neck and shoulders, invading his torso, and taking possession of his spirit. Zuckerman, whose work was his life, is unable to write a line. Now his work is trekking from one doctor to another, but none can find a cause for the pain and nobody can assuage it. Zuckerman himself wonders if the pain can have been caused by his own books. And while he is wondering, his dependence on painkillers grows into an addiction to vodka,

marijuana, and Percodan. The *Anatomy Lesson* is a great comedy of illness written in what the English critic Hermione Lee has described as "a manner at once ... brash and thoughtful ... lyrical and wry, which projects through comic expostulations and confessions...a knowing, humane authority." The third volume of the trilogy and epilogue *Zuckerman Bound*, *The Anatomy Lesson* provides some of the funniest scenes in all of Roth's fiction as well as some of the fiercest.

### **Here We Are** Vintage

What kind of choices fatally shape a life? How does the individual withstand the onslaught of circumstance? These are the dark questions that animate *Nemeses*, the quartet of thematically related short novels that are published here together for the first time in this final volume of *The Library of America's* definitive edition of Philip Roth's collected works. *Everyman* (2006) is the sparse and affecting story of one man's lifelong skirmish with mortality. Set against the backdrop of the Korean War, *Indignation* (2008) is the extraordinary narrative of a young man struggling against the conformity of McCarthy-era America and his father's overwhelming fear. In *The Humbling* (2009), aging actor Simon Axler embarks on a risky and aberrant affair in a desperate attempt to recoup his lost artistic gifts. And in *Nemesis* (2010), Roth offers an exacting portrait of the emotions—fear and anger, bewilderment and grief—bred by a polio epidemic in Newark in the summer of 1944. Philip Roth is the only living American novelist to

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have his work published in a comprehensive, definitive edition by The Library of America. He has received the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award twice, the PEN/Faulkner Award three times, the National Medal of Arts, and the Gold Medal in Fiction, the highest award of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

LIBRARY OF AMERICA is an independent nonprofit cultural organization founded in 1979 to preserve our nation's literary heritage by publishing, and keeping permanently in print, America's best and most significant writing. The Library of America series includes more than 300 volumes to date, authoritative editions that average 1,000 pages in length, feature cloth covers, sewn bindings, and ribbon markers, and are printed on premium acid-free paper that will last for centuries. Everyman Random House

From the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *American Pastoral*—"a thoughtful...elegant" (The New York Times Book Review) and often hilarious novel about the dilemma of pleasure: where we seek it; why we flee it; and how we struggle to make a truce between dignity and desire. As a student in college, David Kepesh styles himself "a rake among scholars, a scholar among rakes." Little does he realize how prophetic this motto will be—or how damning. For as Philip Roth follows Kepesh from the domesticity of childhood into the vast wilderness of erotic possibility, from a ménage à trois in London to the throes of loneliness in New York, he creates a novel that "ranks among the major achievements in the

literature of our time" (Village Voice).

The Humbling Vintage

The legendary author's essays and interviews explore how fellow writers from Milan Kundera to Edna O'Brien are influenced by time, place, and politics. Writers are often deeply influenced by the time and place in which they live and write. In *Shop Talk*, Philip Roth, winner of a National Book Award, a Pulitzer Prize, and numerous other literary honors, explores the intimate relationship a writer's experience has with his or her work. In a series of essays, Roth recounts his intellectual encounters with writers, discussing with them the diverse regions from which they hail and pondering the influence of locale, politics, and history on their work. Featuring luminaries such as Milan Kundera discussing Czechoslovakia; Primo Levi talking about Auschwitz; Edna O'Brien reflecting on Ireland; Isaac Bashevis Singer tackling Warsaw; Aharon Appelfeld on Bukovina; and Ivan Klíma on Prague, Roth's conversations touch on the conditions that inspire great art, with artists as attuned to the subtleties of their societies as they are the nuances of words. Also including a portrait of Bernard Malamud, a written exchange with Mary McCarthy about Roth's *The Counterlife*, and the essay "Rereading Saul Bellow," *Shop Talk* is a "fascinating [glimpse] of some of the deans of postwar literature" (Los Angeles Times Book Review).