**Philip Roth: Fiction about Fiction**

**JCIV 350**

**Professor Jacques Berlinerblau**

**Spring 2017**

**Monday and Wednesday 11:00am-12:15pm**

**Office Hours: M-F 8-9 and by appointment**

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**Syllabus — Philip Roth: Fiction about Fiction**

The Jewish-American writer Philip Roth is reckoned as one of the most important novelists in the American post-War literary canon. The historical, comic, pornographic, and scatological dimensions of his work are well chronicled. Less has been said, however, about Roth’s enduring commitment to exploring genres of post-modern, metafictional and autofictional storytelling.

In this course, we will read Roth’s “greatest hits” (e.g. *Goodbye, Columbus, Portnoy’s Complaint, American Pastoral*) with an eye towards understanding how he explored the question of (Jewish) identity by recourse to a fiction about fiction. This inquiry will require that we study his self- reflexive masterpieces such as *My Life As a Man, The Ghost Writer,* and *The Counterlife*, among others. When all is said and done, students will not only learn about Roth’s bold secular Jewish vision, his views on sexuality, and American history, but they will also familiarize themselves with some of the late 20th century’s most intriguing forms of narrative experimentation.

What will emerge is a meditation on the role of fiction itself, its curious rivalry with “reality,” and its almost cocky insistence that it retains privileged insight into what is commonly referred to as “the truth.”

**Learning Objectives:**

* To familiarize ourselves with the major novels and intellectual biography of Philip Roth
* To analyze Roth’s works through the prism of peer-reviewed literary scholarship
* To understand the import of, and differences between, postmodern fiction, autofiction, and metafiction
* To pay careful attention to, and improve, our own analytical writing with an emphasis on literary style

**Course Requirements, Assignments, and Grading**

This class requires a great degree of commitment on the student’s part. Everything starts with the weekly reading assignments. The student is expected to walk into class prepared to discuss, elaborate upon, and criticize that which she or he has read. It is this combination of reading and class participation that comprises an overarching “preparedness” grade. When I calculate a student’s grade my first impulse is to reflect on their preparedness. More objective criteria, of course, are also employed.

**Class Grade Breakdown**

Attendance/Participation: 10%

Blog Posts: 15%

Paper 1: 15%

Paper 2: 15%

Paper 3: 15%

Final Paper: 30%

**Schedule of Readings/Classes**

1.**Wednesday, January 11th**: Welcome to Philip Roth: Fiction about Fiction

Monday, January 16th: MLK Day

2. **Wednesday, January 18th**: a. “Eli the Fanatic,” in *Goodbye, Columbus*

b. “Do We Know Philip Roth?” by Jacques Berlinerblau at *the Chronicle of Higher Education*: <http://chronicle.com/article/Do-We-Know-Philip-Roth-/145671/>

3. **Monday, January 23rd**: “Goodbye, Columbus,” Pp. 1-136 in *Goodbye, Columbus*

4. **Wednesday, January 25th**: *Portnoy’s Complaint* 1

5. **Monday, January 30th**: *Portnoy’s Complaint* 2

6. **Wednesday, February 1st**: *My Life as a Man* 1: pp. 1-96

PAPER 1 DUE

7. **Monday, February 6th**: a. *My Life as a Man* 2: pp. 99-203

b. Patricia Waugh. “What is Metafiction and Why are They Saying Such Awful Things About it?”pp. 39-68 in *Metafiction* edited by Mark Currie (New York: Longman Group 1995).

8. **Wednesday, February 8th**: *My Life as a Man* 3: pp. 203-334

9. **Monday, February 13th**: a. *The Ghostwriter* 1

b. Jacques Berlinerblau. “‘Imagine That!’: Philip Roth’s Threshold Scenes: The Case of ‘Femme Fatale,’” *Philip Roth Studies* 10: 35-58.

10. **Wednesday, February 15th**: a. *The Ghostwriter* 2

b. Brian Stonehill, *The Self-Conscious Novel: Artifice in Fiction from Joyce to Pynchon*(Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988): 1-18.

Monday, February 20th: President’s Day

11. **Wednesday, February 22nd**: *The Anatomy Lesson* 1

12. **Monday, February 27th**: a. *The Anatomy Lesson* 2

b. Jacques Berlinerblau. “Philip Roth and the Profanity Loop,” in *Profane: Sacrilegious Expression and the Challenge of Modernity,* Eds. Christopher S. Grenda, Chris Beneke, and David Nash (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

13. **Wednesday, March 1st**: a. Counterlife 1

Alan Cooper. “Zuckerroth,” in *Philip Roth and the Jews* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press 1996). Pp. 210-251

PAPER 2 DUE

Monday, March 6th: Spring Break

Wednesday, March 8th: Spring Break

14. **Monday, March 13th**: a. *Counterlife* 2

b. Debra Shostak. “Fictions of Self-Exposure,” in *Philip Roth-Countertexts, Counterlives* (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press 2004) pp. 158-185.

15. **Wednesday, March 15th**: a. *Counterlife* 3

16. **Monday, March 20nd**: a. *The Facts 1*

17. **Wednesday, March 22nd**: a. *The Facts* 2

b. Hana Wirth-Nesher. “Roth’s Autobiographical Writings,” in *Philip Roth* edited by Timothy Parrish (UK: Cambridge University Press 2007) pp. 158-172.

18. **Monday, March 27th**: a. *Patrimony 1*

19. **Wednesday, March 29th**: a. *Patrimony 2*

b. Roth, Claudia Pierpont. “You Mustn’t Forget Anything,” in *Roth Unbound: A Writer and his Books* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2013) pp. 158-174.

20. **Monday, April 3rd**: *The Dying Animal 1*

21. **Wednesday, April 5th**: *The Dying Animal* 2

22. **Monday, April 10th**: *The Plot Against America* 1

PAPER 3 DUE

**Wednesday, April 12th**: NO CLASS, EASTER BREAK

**Monday, April 17th:** EASTER BREAK

24. **Wednesday, April 19th**: *The Plot Against America* 2

25. **Monday, April 24th**:The Plot Against America 3

26. **Wednesday, April 26th**: *Indignation 1*

27. **Monday, May 1st**: *Indignation* 2

**TBA: FINAL PAPER DUE**

**LIST OF ASSIGNMENTS**

Wednesday, February 1st: Paper 1 due (4 pages)

Wednesday, March 1st: Paper 2 due (4 pages)

Wednesday, April 12th: Paper 3 due (4 pages)

TBA: Paper 4 (Final Paper) (10-12 pages)

**Blog Posts:**

In an effort to promote dialogue and a sense of intellectual community, we are asking all students to blog about the readings. Anyone in the course will be able to see your post with your name attached (though this is a private website so no one who is not in our course will be able to see your post). This assignment involves identifying one central component of an author’s argument and linking that to your own critical and original interpretation. These posts are meant to be short but tight (No fewer than 150 words, no longer than 250). Our website is set up so that you can view others’ blog posts and respond.

You will be required to blog weekly, as well as respond to another student’s blog at least once each week. Though the days you will blog will differ depending on the class.

If your last name begins with A-K, you will be required to blog by Sunday night at 8 p.m. on the readings for Monday’s class.

If your last name begins with L-Z, you will be required to blog by Tuesday night at 8 p.m. on the readings for Wednesday’s class.

Students with last names A-K are required to respond to at least one student’s blog by the beginning of class on Wednesday.

Students with last names L-Z are required to respond to at least one student’s blog by the beginning of class on Monday.

Everyone writes the “Getting to Know You” Blog Post (Due Tuesday, January 13 at 8 pm)

These blogs constitute 15% of your grade. Posts will be evaluated by the professor individually for quality, originality and felicity of style. Please note that late blogs will not be accepted.

Course Website: blogs.commons.georgetown.edu/philiproth2016

**Secondary Articles**

One student each class will be required to present one secondary article pertaining to that week’s reading as part of the class discussion. Student will do this three times throughout the semester and this will be a part of the student’s attendance/participation grade.

List of Books to be Purchased at the Bookstore:

All other readings are on blackboard. Please bring your book to every class.

*Goodbye, Columbus*

*Portnoy's Complaint*

*The Ghost Writer*

*The Anatomy Lesson*

*The Counterlife*

*Patrimony*

*My Life As A Man*

*The Facts*

*The Dying Animal*

*Indignation*

*The Plot Against America*

**All Works byPhilip Roth**

* ***Goodbye, Colombus* 1959**
  + **Eli, the Fanatic**
* *Letting Go* 1962
* *When She Was Good* 1967
* ***Portnoy’s Complaint* 1969**
* *Our Gang* 1971
* *The Breast* 1972
* *The Great American Novel* 1973
* ***My Life as a Man*****1974**
* *The Professor of Desire* 1977
* ***The Ghost Writer*****1979**
* *Zuckerman Unbound* 1981
* ***The Anatomy Lesson***1983
* *The Prague Orgy* 1985
* ***The Counterlife* 1986**
* ***The Facts* 1988**
* *Deception* 1990
* *Patrimony* 1991
* *Operation Shylock* 1993
* *Sabbath’s Theater* 1995
* *American Pastoral* 1997
* *I Married a Communist* 1998
* *The Human Stain* 2000
* ***The Dying Animal*****2001**
* ***The Plot Against America* 2004**
* *Everyman* 2006
* *Exit Ghost* 2007
* ***Indignation* 2008**
* *The Humbling* 2009
* *Nemesis* 2010