

Philip Roth

(1) Hannah Gold's report on the New Jersey Performing Arts Center's Philip Roth festival ["Your Mind's in the Hands of Everything," Letter from Newark, December] deftly captures the thrills, and occasional discomforts, that Roth's fiction continues to provoke. As president of the Philip Roth Society, I helped to plan the three-day academic conference that directly preceded the festival. That week in Newark was a welcome opportunity to reflect on how much the field of Roth studies has grown in the two decades since the Society's founding, and to consider new ways to approach Roth's immense oeuvre.

(2) At the festival, Steven Zipperstein and Claudia Roth Pierpont offered a smart take informed by their keen insights into Roth's person and their deep appreciation of his work, while the panel featuring Ayad Akhtar, Susan Choi, Ottessa Moshfegh, and Gary Shteyngart posited that Roth's capacity to outrage his readers remains one of the most compelling aspects of his fiction. 30, the handful of sessions that I attended returned consistently to *Portnoy's Complaint*, the scandalous 1969 novel that made Roth a literary celebrity (though we academics tend to focus on his later novels, which secured Roth the bulk of his literary prizes). I was reminded of how much of Roth's public image remains deeply defined by *Portnoy*.

(3) When I taught Roth's 2008 novel *Indignation* this past spring, I was struck by how much it resonated with my undergraduate students. One of Roth's most brutal novels, it centers on a promising college sophomore who, by the whims of historical circumstance, dies in the Korean War. Like much of Roth's later work, the novel explores how easily our individual lives can be consumed by the contingencies of history. Nothing is assured in Roth's later works, and it was this 31 that my students responded to. That Roth's fiction continues to inspire such a robust response not only from young students but from critics and writers of fiction alike is an encouraging sign for those of us invested in his work.

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