



# Goodbye, Columbus and Five Short Stories

*Philip Roth*

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## Goodbye, Columbus and Five Short Stories Philip Roth

Winner of the National Book Award

Roth's award-winning first book--about Neil Klugman, Brenda Patimkin, and their relationship which tests the boundaries of suspicion, social class, and love--instantly established its author's reputation as a writer of explosive wit, merciless insight, and a fierce compassion for even the most self-deluding of characters.

## Goodbye, Columbus and Five Short Stories Details

Date : Published May 2nd 1995 by Modern Library (first published 1959)

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Author : Philip Roth

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# From Reader Review Goodbye, Columbus and Five Short Stories for online ebook

## Nuno Simões says

foi o primeiro livro de Philip Roth e a estreia não podia ter sido mais auspiciosa. muitíssimo bom, deliciosamente irónico. a classificação que lhe dei é um bocado irrelevante para mim. dei 4 mas poderia ter dado 5.

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## Scott Rhee says

The first-ever book by Philip Roth that I read, in college, for a course in Literature & Film, "Goodbye, Columbus" is a semi-autobiographical story about young love/lust. The movie version of this novella, by the way, kind of sucks. I fell in love with the book and Roth's prose style immediately. I understand why he has been accused of being misogynistic in his writing, and I don't totally disagree, but I am inclined to say that he strikes me more as someone who is simply being honest about his libido, and he doesn't seem to care if people find him offensive. I found that shocking and extremely titillating as a 20-year-old. I still find it bold and admirable. For a long period (involving most of my 20s and the early years of my 30s), I voraciously read anything and everything Roth wrote. Within the past six or seven years, though, I have basically taken a hiatus from Roth, not because I found his more recent books to be the ramblings of an aging curmudgeon (although that thought had crossed my mind in some of them), but because my literary interests had evolved and my desires in regards to what I look for in a good book have evolved. I still have the utmost respect for Roth, and I still consider him one of my personal favorite writers, but "Goodbye, Columbus" is forever a part of my confused 20-something cache of memories to which I can no longer return.

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## Charles Clymer says

This is my second Philip Roth book. My first was "Portnoy's Complaint", which, in retrospect, was a mistake to read first.

Don't get me wrong: "Portnoy's Complaint" is a classic, but it's not a masterpiece. "Goodbye, Columbus" is absolutely a masterpiece, and I was completely struck by the difference in tone and structure between the two.

"Goodbye, Columbus", at its heart, is a novella and collection of short stories that address the Jewish Diaspora. When the book premiered, Roth--who is Jewish himself--encountered heavy criticism from perceived self-hating-Jew aspects of the book. Not being Jewish myself, I have no doubt there were countless references I missed, but on the whole, I felt the book was a warm and perhaps honest commentary on Jewish culture from the perspective of a young Jewish man. I would even call it a love letter.

What's most startling about Roth's writing here is the authenticity. The dialogue among his characters feels so completely real that there were moments I forgot I was reading fiction. Ranging from the flirtatious exchanges between Neil and Brenda to the absolutely brilliant monologue of Uncle Leo at the wedding, there's an abundance of humor and heart and cringe-inducing familial dynamics to get the blood pumping.

However, my favorite part of the entire book was the "The Conversion of the Jews" short story about a child who brings his small community to their knees by threatening to jump off a roof. When the story hit its climax, I had tears of laughter pouring from my eyes. It was brilliant.

This book has made me want to devour the rest of Roth's work, and if that's not a compliment, I don't know what is.

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## LW says

### La spuma che somigliava all'amore

*Ogni tanto tornavamo alle nostre sedie a intonare esitanti,ingegnosi,nervosi ,gentili ditirambi su quello che stavamo cominciando a provare l'uno per l'altra. In realtà non avevamo i sentimenti che dicevamo di avere finchè non riuscivamo ad esprimerli:io,per lo meno ;enunciarli era inventarli e possederli.*

*Montavamo la nostra estraneità e la nostra inesperienza in una spuma che somigliava all'amore,e non avevamo il coraggio di giocare troppo a lungo,di parlarne troppo ,per timore che si afflosciasse e finisse in niente.*

*Così facevamo la spola tra le sedie e l'acqua della piscina,tra le chiacchiere e il silenzio, e considerando l'incrollabile nervosismo in cui mi precipitava la compagnia di Brenda, e le alte mura di egocentrismo che si ergevano,contrafforti e tutto,tra lei e la sua conoscenza di se stessa, ce la cavammo piuttosto bene.*

Questo è l'esordio di P.Roth...e direi che se l'è cavata piuttosto bene, il giovane Philip, altrochè! :)  
è una chicca succulenta ,davvero !

Per iniziare la conoscenza oppure

per chi già conosce la sua scrittura, per sorridere sotto i baffi individuando i primi tratteggi di certe tematiche o similitudini con personaggi poi sviluppati in romanzi successivi :)

4 stelle e mezzo

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## Iris says

What's yr take on P-Roth? During the hubbub around the recent awarding of a Man Booker prize to Philip Roth, I was moved to revisit him by reading this novella, published when he was 26. "Goodbye, Columbus" was sensitive and fine, complicating my reaction to his prize. I initially sided with Carmen Calil, the Booker judge who abandoned the committee when the two-to-one vote favored Roth. Like Calil, I just can't take a writer seriously if he cannot and will not consider the lives of non-alter-egos. Though I admire some of his work, I question whether he's in the right métier; for example, his awkward disdain for writing about women tarnished "American Pastoral," a novel that should have been an easy A.

But not so in this delicate story, which has the feel of "The Graduate" and J.D. Salinger: a young man's summer with his girlfriend, her family, and his job at the New York Public Library. Roth writes about a version of himself while displaying generosity towards all kinds of characters: Brenda's father was especially fascinating, but so was Brenda herself and the little boy infatuated with Gauguin.

This was the perfect read for a Sunday afternoon. If you have some spare summer moments, pick up this book and reflect on the Roth Question, which was hot last week, upon his acceptance of the prize, and which comes up every time he publishes a creaky Zuckerman novel.

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## **Mac says**

This is his first book. Screw him.

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## **Evan says**

"Curiously, the darkness seemed to have something to do with Harriet, Ron's intended, and I thought for a time that it was simply the reality of Harriet's arrival that had dramatized the passing of time: we had been talking about it and now suddenly it was here — just as Brenda's departure would be here before we knew it." -Goodbye, Columbus

How often do I think of the passing of time in this way, as Roth describes it in this poignant, wistful and utterly beautiful book. "Goodbye, Columbus" already shows a master's hand in his debut. It's not about a love affair or class and social differences so much as it is about the passing of time. The love affair, which is supposed to be so ecstatic, is tinged constantly with the sad realization of its ending. The whole story is pervaded by a sense of inevitability and loss. That the outcome can be nothing but loss. It's as if the loss has already happened.

The sense of place, of the arid stasis of dependency, the outsider, the fish out of water...all captured so perfectly.

Some will likely fixate, wrongheadedly IMO, on the dated elements (eg., the "colored boy", the diaphragm, the parental shock over premarital sex)... So be it.

The part that really brought tears to my eyes was when Brenda's brother, Ron, the clueless athlete being seemingly ushered into a marriage to please all parties, listens to a record album of his glory days as a basketball star. Again, the sense of something bygone, the glory days behind one already at such a young age. Now hustled into the banal mandates of social expectation. Ron laying on the bed, drinking in the last of his youth for the last time. This moved me so much. I could hear the record album; Roth describes it so perfectly. Like everything else in the novella, it flies off the page for me.

But I initially delved into this svelte volume of early works by first reading one of the five additional short stories, "Defender of the Faith," on recommendation of a young reading pal. As I read it I wondered if this piece was where all the charges of Roth being a "self-hating Jew" had begun, and as I read on Wikipedia, it apparently was.

So, Roth dares to look at things with more complexity than black and white and eschews neat and childish political boundaries and simplistic feel-good categories. All the more reason to show the man some respect.

The story was superb.

The man writes like an angel, as a friend once put it.

The short stories:

Each is splendid in its way. All dealing with Jewish assimilation in post-war (WWII) USA.

"Defender of the Faith" and "Eli, the Fanatic" are the two longest ones, about 40-50pp. each. The latter is an interesting tale with some tinge of magical realism about assimilation vs. tradition; Jews in postwar America not wanting to upset the apple cart in the land that has treated them best of all the places on earth in their long struggle for peace; feeling shame about their orthodox past being out in the open in small-town America. Eli is a lawyer sent by his own assimilated colleagues to send the old-school Jews packing; but he tries to affect a compromise, sensing the injustice and feeling guilty about his own role in the process. The impending birth of his son elicits issues of continuity, tradition and self-identity as a Jew. The idea of a suit, not just as an outer piece of cloth than can be exchanged or replaced, but as an external manifestation of one's inner identity, etc.... Good stuff.

"Epstein," another of the longer stories, tells of the mid-life crisis of a hardworking Jewish breadwinner; seemingly disrespected at home and tortured by a sense of life passing him by all around him. The inevitable lure of an affair,...

"You Can't Tell a Man by the Song He Sings." This one, honestly didn't do much for me, but it was fun.

"Conversion of the Jews." A cute story about magical revelations stemming from a boy's act of questioning and rebellion. Violence should not be a part of imparting faith on children, etc.

In all of the stories, Roth's characters are not heroic, they are human and contradictory. Some people have trouble wrapping their heads around this.

All the stories in this book should be read, not just "Goodbye, Columbus."

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## **Robin Friedman says**

### Newark In Short Hills

I turned to Philip Roth's first novel, the National Book Award winner "Goodbye Columbus" (1959) after reading a late book of Roth, the short novel "Nemesis" (2010). I wanted to compare the themes and writing of this great American storyteller over the long years of his writing career. This was my first reading of Roth's early masterpiece. While an excellent book, "Nemesis" does not have the verve of Roth in his rambunctious, iconoclastic youth.

Both the early and the late Roth novels feature a 23-year old male Jewish protagonist from the lower middle class of Newark, New Jersey. In "Goodbye Columbus", the chief character and narrator is Neil Klugman, a graduate in philosophy from a local public university who has served in the army and is working in the local public library until he determines what he wants to do with his life. Neil is living with his aunt and uncle to save on the rent; his parents have relocated for health reasons to Tuscon. Roth has a remarkable ear for colloquialism and for the rhythmic speech patterns of Newark Jews.

The story centers on a summer romance between Neil and Brenda Patimkin of the suburb of Short Hills. Brenda's family had its origins in Newark, but with the economic success of the father's business in kitchen and bathroom sinks, the Patimkin's have relocated to a wealthy suburban home with all the amenities. Brenda is a student at Radcliffe and is spending the summer at home. Roth's "Nemesis", set earlier in the 1940s has a somewhat similar pairing of wealthy and poor Jews. Its protagonist is a young man, nicknamed "Bucky" (and Brenda Patimkin goes by the nickname of "Buck") who is in love with a wealthier girl, Miriam, the daughter of a physician from the near suburbs, and who visits her, at her invitation, at a summer camp in the Poconos far from sweltering Newark.

Roth's Jewish characters frequently have a passion for sports and athletic activity, probably to counter stereotypes of over-intellectualized individuals. In "Nemesis" young Bucky is a physical education instructor who is gifted at hurling the javelin and at diving. In "Goodbye Columbus" as well, the story turns in part on Brenda's prowess at tennis and on Neil's ability to run. Equally important Brenda's older brother is a recent graduate of the University of Ohio, Columbus, where he starred on the basketball team. Much of "Goodbye Columbus" centers upon the brother's garish wedding to a young woman from the midwest.

"Goodbye, Columbus" tells the story of the relationship between Neil and Brenda, which begins by chance, and quickly over a summer becomes intense and sexual. Brenda, pampered, wealthy, and spoiled and the rough around the edges Neil are attracted to and seem to want to love each other. But their relationship teeters upon their differences in economic background which led to suspicions and jealousy and backbiting. Neither family trusts the other, and ultimately the two young people cannot find a place for one another. Roth portrays masterfully these different social classes in American Judaism of the 1950's and the strong tensions between people of essentially the same background. He writes with genuine sadness about the failed relationship and with, in light of the criticism Roth's early work sometimes received, sympathy for both his flawed protagonists and their families. And in "Nemesis", Roth's late novel, he writes with nostalgia and affection for the Jewish community of his youth, both those of the poor inner city and those who had managed through education to reach the suburbs. In addition to showing the difference in class and wealth, Roth's novel turns upon the sexually repressive mores of the 1950s, a theme which also finds its place in "Nemesis" and in many of Roth's other novels.

The short early novel of about 135 pages is masterfully written for a young writer as Roth develops both character and location. He is more at home with Newark than with the suburbs, writing, for example, "Once I'd driven out of Newark, past Irvington and the packed-in tangle of railroad crossings, switchment, shacks, lumberyards, Dairy Queens, and used car lots, the night grew cooler." (p8) The plot develops with an inner logic and with tension. Every step tells and contributes to the story. To take one example, Neil describes his encounter with a young African American boy at the Newark library who escapes into the stacks to look at art books of Gaughin's portraits of Tahitans. (At that time many young boys looked at art books to see nude human bodies. Roth's young child seems to have a larger-based interest). There are parallels between Neil's relationship to the young boy on the one hand and his relationship to Brenda on the other. And the child's fascination with the far-away Tahiti suggests Neil's longing for the seemingly unattainable world of Short Hills and Brenda.

In addition to "Goodbye, Columbus" this edition also includes five stories Roth wrote as a fledgling author. These stories seem to be the basis for stories that Roth attributed to the young writer, Nathan Zuckerman, in his book, "The Ghost Writer" The Ghost Writer which received criticism, in Roth's telling, for their claimed negative portrayal of American Jews. The best of these five stories is "The Conversion of the Jews" which shows Roth's fascination with and skepticism about theological questions. Both "Goodbye, Columbus" and "Nemesis" share this preoccupation with religion which ends, in both early and late Roth, in secularism.

An astonishing early effort, "Goodbye, Columbus" remains one of Roth's best works and is an excellent introduction to this author who has recently passed away. This is a book I would have liked to have read when younger.

Robin Friedman

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### **Peter says**

If Truman Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's* is the New York novella about flirting with the city's upper crust, then Philip Roth's *Goodbye, Columbus* is the suburban story for the rest of us.

A coming-of-age story about a summer romance, it plumbs tensions from class, generational, religious, and educational differences, and it does so in a way that is instinctive and visceral. While not the most self-aware, sensitive, or rational, the story's characters—Neil Klugman, a twenty-three year-old man from the poor neighborhoods of Newark, and Brenda Patimkin, the privileged and pretty young woman from Short Hills—are caught in the throes of imminent adulthood, and their flailing pulls Roth's readers further and further into the personal tensions that drive the story.

The result is that *Goodbye, Columbus* is about as human a novella as I know—human in the character's confusion about their feelings and human in their often-irrational responses to these feelings.

*Do I recommend it?* Yes. A complex but natural read.

*Would I teach it?* Yes, but it would have to be to the right group. The writing is rich with meaning and ripe for discussion, but some of the content (though a remarkably small amount of it) might seem dated or awkward.

*Lasting impression:* Tightly and creatively constructed, *Goodbye, Columbus* offers sharp insight into and humor about the vicissitudes of burgeoning adult romance.

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### **Conor says**

Finished this en route to the Women's March in D.C., in the post-industrial N. New Jersey leg of that trip as a matter of fact.

I knew that this was Roth's first book, but I didn't know he was 26 when it came out! Jesus, what a talent. It's probably a stronger debut than that other 20th C. American wunderkind Fitzgerald's (younger!) debut book, *This Side of Paradise*, but I think this book does more for setting expectations about themes and voices for Roth's career than *Paradise* did for soggy old F. Scott. And if there is a more distilled, earlier version of what came to be known as the stereotypical Jewish-American voice, I have not yet seen it--I've got to imagine that Roth's influence on our culture is extensive.

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### **Shane says**

Roth's earlier books are fresh, humorous and vibrant compared to his recent work that is self-obsessed with



aging, potency and dying. *Goodbye Columbus* is just such a vibrant collection that portrays, with humour, the angst of the Jews in New Jersey, transplanted from the recent Holocaust, and trying to find their place in the New World, hindered by a Socialist past, yet striving to become part of the Capitalist ideal.

In the title story—a poor-boy-meets-rich-girl (who was once poor but can't remember it) novella, a coming of age story and a bidding goodbye to the protected world of university days—the innocence of growing up in the '50's comes out. A young couple driving in the Lincoln Tunnel on a secret mission are doing nothing more serious than having a diaphragm fitted, unknown to their parents; whereas contemporary literature would insinuate a more diabolical purpose involving drugs, bombs or homicide. The Jewish family structure is placed under the microscope when the brother of the rich girl is forced to marry and join the family home renovation business in order to earn a living, just because he has knocked up his girlfriend. When the extended family assembles for the wedding party, the dysfunction of an upwardly mobile family is laid bare. Uncle Leo Patimkin is by far the most interesting character, a travelling salesman, who has been left behind in the social climbing and has a lot to say about it, especially after a few bottles of champagne.

In the following five shorter pieces, themes of guilt, separatism, survival, assimilation and neuroticism—typical challenges facing the newcomer—play out. In the “Conversion of the Jews,” a young Jew exploits his Rabbi and mother's guilt over being responsible for his impending suicide by getting them to accept that divine births are possible if they believe in an omnipotent God. In “Defender of the Faith,” a Jewish army recruit cloyingly inveigles special privileges from his (also Jewish) sergeant and uses strategic lies to gain advantage. In “Epstein,” we see the classic immigrant who built himself up from scratch, now in middle age, trying to boost his sex life with a bit on the side and falling outside the norms established for his people, with disastrous consequences. “You Can Tell a Man by the Song He Sings” pits the incumbent ex-con American schoolboy against a brainy Jewish kid, where the moral of the story is that those who have been “in the can” know how to wreak their revenge and yet stay out of trouble compared to those naive ones who play by the rule book. The final story, “Eli the Fanatic,” is the most powerful, for it deals with the issue of assimilation and posits the question that it is the responsibility of both the incumbent and the outsider to make inclusion work. Eli's plunge into neurosis and nervous breakdown signals to us that in 1950's America this assimilation was still a long way off.

For a book released in the 1950's this collection must have been a rather candid piece of literature, and I'm sure as much as Roth caught America's attention with it, he must have lost some fans among the Jewish diaspora. The mourning of one's woes in public, at the expense of patient listeners, the fact that Jewish men at 23 were expected to live at home with their parents, that pre-marital sex even with a diaphragm was considered grounds for family upheaval, and that even the military had to accommodate for Kosher food, must have been uncomfortable skeletons to be aired for upwardly mobile Jews trying to make it in the New World and become part of the mainstream. And yet, these practices may be considered quite normal today, given that: we have public social media to reveal our most intimate gripes, unemployed young people are returning to parental homes in droves, sexual abstinence is making a comeback, and the military is bending over backwards to accommodate diversity in its ranks.

I found the typical stylistic flaws of the writer in the early stages of his career; some scenes and situations are difficult to visualize and the narrative is unwieldy in places. Roth's later work is more polished, but he seems to have acquired that polish at the expense of sacrificing that “in your face” humour that oozes out of *Goodbye Columbus*, making it an excellent read.

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## Fernando says

Este es el noveno libro de Roth que me leo. Hasta ahora siempre me había quejado de lo mismo, me daba la impresión de que no sabía cerrar bien las historias, de que sus finales nunca eran redondos. Goodbye Columbus, el relato que da nombre al libro, me ha hecho replantearme mi opinión. La historia termina de una manera incluso más abrupta que de costumbre. No se si Roth lo hace aposta o no, pero me doy cuenta ahora de que sus historias suelen empezar también de manera abrupta. Entramos en ellas como el que llega tarde a un cine y se ha perdido los primeros 10 minutos de la película. Empiezo a pensar que esa falta de pulcritud a la hora de contar sus historias es precisamente lo que más me gusta de Roth, porque contribuye a que estas sean más realistas. En la vida real no existen los principios ni los finales redondos, las historias empiezan antes de que uno nazca y siguen su curso cuando uno se muere. Cualquier punto que elijamos para empezar o terminar la narración será forzosamente artificial.

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## Katerina says

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## Fabian says

Roth is basically a cosmic anomaly.\* He wins Major Award #1 (out of like, a dozen TOTAL)--the National Book Award--for this, his freshman effort, thereby launching his oeuvre, his contributions to the zeitgeist, his Master's talent and CONFIDENCE. But does it deserve it?

For the future career of this literary cosmonaut, yes; but as a stand alone debut? Absolutely not!

It is a love story of a "I'm this type of Jew but you are this type of Jew" variety. Historically significant, yet overrated, overpraised. I suppose. "Know it exists," says me. "Don't read it." (i.e. "On the Road," "Under the Volcano," "Tropic of Cancer," "Mao II" et. al.)

As for the accompanying stories--well, this is Philip Roth. So although we do get the rotten novella out of the way in the beginning (\*\*), the short stories are very good (\*\*\*\*). Earlier Roth is way more playful here than anything that comes later (you hardly ever laugh in any of his dramatic American tragedies); dare I say, picaresque?

Two of the stories are even about childhood, which we NEVER really see in his beloved novels. (Kinda reminds me of another premiere writer, Mario Vargas Llosa. His own short story collection at the beginning of his career, "The Cubs and Other Stories," likewise portrays children and childhood--what it is to be green in something one day you will master! What it is to give up forays into shortstoryland for a titanic career as novelist!) Roth's five s.s. are all ambitious, topical, jarring (even funny--this is, again, like soooo rare for Roth\*)--important to the fabric of American history.

\*hyperbole, maybe

PS RIP

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## Michael Finocchiaro says

This collection of stories is splendid. Unbelievable that they were the very first ones Roth published as they are already so evocative and polished. If you were put off by Roth because you only read Portnoy's Complaint or Sabbath's Theater, you should read this book to see that there is a whole other side to Roth and a beautiful sensitivity as well.

RIP (1933-2018). One of America's literary giants has left us.

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## Elina says

1 νουβ?λα και 5 διηγ?ματα! Το πρ?το βιβλ?ο που ?γραψε ο Roth ?ταν ?ταν 26 χρον?v! Και μ?νο για αυτ? το λ?γο αξ?ζει τα 4 αστερ?κια!!!

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## Kathy Ahn says

I wasn't really sure where "Goodbye, Columbus" (the title piece of the collection) was going at first and didn't like any of the characters, but Roth has a special way of making seemingly inconsequential things become transformative and meaningful. I still vehemently disliked the characters at the end, but was somehow touched by them.

Many of the other stories in this collection are similar in this way. The people in the stories themselves aren't significant or even sometimes, likable, but they are moved by someone or something by some small drama of ordinary life and you feel the rawness of that as if it was affecting you personally.

There is the stingy boyfriend who refuses to lose to a little girl and forces his girlfriend (who he doesn't even really like that much) to get on birth control and then leaves her. There's also the old man with the saggy breasted wife who gets crotch rot and a heart attack from sleeping around, the elementary school boy with a permanent record he never got over, the lawyer who goes crazy but isn't crazy, and my favorite in the collection -- the 13 year old heretic who jumps off a roof after admonishing his mother, "You shouldn't hit me about God, Mamma. You should never hit anybody about God..." Amen!

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## Cosimo says

### Non ero altro che questo

Scrivere di Roth in questi giorni vuol dire perdersi in una foresta di parole e emozioni; bisogna cercare di ridursi all'essenziale, all'energia minima, al senso di assenza che è in continua formazione. Intanto, dico subito che questi racconti sono tutti bellissimi; due in particolare sono straordinari: quello che dà il titolo alla raccolta e l'ultimo, intitolato *Eli, il fanatico*. Già nel 1960 dopo aver pubblicato i racconti su riviste prestigiose e averli raccolti in volume, l'esordio letterario viene riconosciuto come altamente rilevante con il conferimento nel National Book Award, elogiato da Saul Bellow, incipit per una carriera arricchita di

innumerevoli premi. Roth scende sotto la soglia della percezione, per parlarci di amore e passione, del brivido dei corpi che si incontrano, dell'attrito tra le differenze personali e sociali, di come spesso la tristezza sia dolce e la nostalgia imprevedibile, quando davvero si provano sentimenti autentici. E soprattutto quando si è molto giovani: vivi, vivi, vivi, non ti distrarre mai, non rinunciare a nulla, sembra suggerire l'autore. Ecco come ci parla della fine di una relazione: *Feci tutto ciò che avevo fatto prima, ma ora ogni attività era come circondata da un recinto, esisteva isolatamente, e la mia vita consisteva nel saltare da un recinto all'altro. Non c'era un filo conduttore, perché Brenda era stata proprio questo*". Poi Roth racconta l'ebraismo, il dissidio tra ragione e fede, tra tradizione e modernità, ambientando le storie tra adolescenti, a scuola, nell'esercito, nello sport, nel matrimonio; critica le tensioni individuali e collettive, interroga le angosce comuni. Riesce a essere comico in modo irresistibile, senza privarci di uno sguardo umanista e tragico, anche nell'ironia e nel sarcasmo verso la morale conforme. Racconta di un ragazzo che perde la testa e sale sul tetto di una sinagoga osservando come in un cielo capovolto il rabbino, i compagni e i vigili del fuoco; descrive come un avvocato laico perda la ragione nel contatto con l'ortodossia e il sacro, narra l'infedeltà di un inguaribile romantico che spinge il desiderio fino ai limiti fisici e spirituali. Roth è artista nello scavare al di sotto delle cose e porre poi su di esse uno sguardo pieno di *pathos* e *pietas* insieme. E sempre sorride e si immedesima, senza giudizio, senza falsa ingenuità, con lo scarto di esistere e lavorare, nella felicità e nella vergogna, lottando riga dopo riga, frase per frase, immagine per immagine. Ritrae un mondo dove la ricerca del piacere è estenuante e i personaggi, indagati dentro e fuori, sono confusi per la perenne incertezza sul futuro. Trattando temi archetipici, Roth descrive un'umanità differente, magari non migliore, ma certamente aperta alla trasformazione e al suo rovesciamento.

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## Jenny says

This is probably the fourth time I've read this book and every time I do, it feels like I'm reliving falling in love for the first time all over again. I chose *Goodbye, Columbus* as a read aloud book to share with someone special and hearing or speaking Roth's words made me much more aware of the humor and the cadence of the New Jersey Jewish speech. Aunt Gladys is the Jewish aunt I never had and I want her to nag and fuss over me too.

It is a story about loss and longing, the ending of things, bottomless bowls of fruit, the public library, lust, love, and swimming pools. It's also about fitting in, not fitting in, fear of being trapped, outdated sexual mores, social climbing, and young adult angst. It definitely shows Roth as a skilled young writer.

Leo Patimkin, though only a side character, was one of the most memorable. And I will never forget Hannah Schreiber who, though she doesn't make a real appearance in the book, has one of the most memorable lines: "Leo Patimkin, I believe in oral love." Don't we all, Hannah Schreiber, don't we all.

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## Jessica says

Okay, so this is finally happening.

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I assumed I'd have some overpowering reaction to this now that I was finally reading it (I only read the novella, not the other stories), but I didn't. Now I guess I get why people like Philip Roth so much: he's a

terrific writer, and I enjoyed reading this book. I got a little bored halfway through, nothing serious, but I wasn't as crazy about it as I was at the start and didn't itch to pick it back up when I'd happened to set it down.

I feel embarrassed and bad about myself that I don't have anything urgent I need to say about this. Again, it was very good, though the only thing I think will really stick with me is how glad I am not to be female in the nineteen-fifties.

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