ABSTRACT. On 24 May 2008, the Philip Roth Society held a roundtable discussion on Exit Ghost (2007) at the nineteenth annual American Literature Association Conference in San Francisco. The various panelists and audience members discussed, among other things, the links between Exit Ghost and previous Zuckerman novels, the nature of biography, the autobiographical links found within Roth’s fiction, and Exit Ghost’s place within Roth’s oeuvre.

At the nineteenth annual American Literature Association Conference in 2008, the Philip Roth Society sponsored a roundtable discussion on Roth’s latest novel at the time, Exit Ghost (2007). This event was held on 24 May 2008, and what follows is an edited transcript of the conversation that took place among the various panelists and the attending audience members. The roundtable participants included Alan Cooper, professor emeritus in English at York College of CUNY and the author of Philip Roth and the Jews (1996); Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr., the Emily H. Fisher Chair in Literature at Bard College at Simon’s Rock as well as author of Philip Roth (1978), Philip Roth: A Bibliography (1984), and Voices and Visions: Selected Essays (2002); Michael Rothberg, professor of English and director of the Holocaust, Genocide, and Memory Studies Initiative at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, author of Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization (2009) and Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation (2000), and co-editor of The Holocaust: Theoretical Readings (2003); Debra Shostak, professor of English at the College of Wooster and the author of Philip Roth—Countertexts, Counterlives (2004); and Ruth Knafo Setton, writer in residence at the Philip and Muriel Berman Center for Jewish Studies and professor of practice in the Department of English at Lehigh University as well as the author of The Road to Fez (2001) and the soon-to-be-published novel, The Zigzag Girl. Moderating the panel was Derek Parker Royal, associate professor of English.
Derek Parker Royal: Welcome to our roundtable discussion on Exit Ghost. I’m Derek Parker Royal and I’ll be moderating today’s dialogue among our participants and the audience. Let me start by saying that this will be a roundtable discussion in the fullest sense. No one will read anything prepared. We want this to be a discussion among readers and scholars, and not only regarding those of us sitting here at the panel, but also with you in the audience. And we want to see where this discussion goes. We have no idea where this will end up, but it could be exciting.

I want to begin by considering my own experience in reading the novel. When it came out last year I didn’t know what to make of it and think that many of my questions stemmed from the fact that Exit Ghost seemed different from the Zuckerman narratives we’ve had in the past several years, especially Zuckerman in the American Trilogy. It seemed to me something more reminiscent of the earlier Zuckerman novels, beginning in 1979 with The Ghost Writers and the ones immediately following that. I guess I want to ask the rest of you on the panel if you had a similar experience in your reading or what your thoughts are on the place of Exit Ghost in Roth’s overall work.
**Alan Cooper:** I saw it as the other bookend, of which *The Ghost Writer* was the first. That was a coming of age novel, and this is a going of age novel. It is very much involved in the whole question of age that Roth has been involved in with the last number of works. We sometimes miss the fact that Zuckerman has been impotent and incontinent for the last four novels. Mickey Sabbath was also looking at aging with great fear.

**Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr.:** I was thinking of that too. There’s a line in *American Pastoral* where Zuckerman is still speaking in his own voice, and he says “Let us speak further of death and desire.” If you think about it, all three Trilogy novels are recounting the life and death of a figure, and Zuckerman is impotent and incontinent. And then we have the latest series of novels that have been so much about death, so it seems to me that it actually fits in both ways. Zuckerman has had death on his mind even before Roth started writing books like *Everyman* (2006) or *The Dying Animal* (2001), or the new one *Indignation* (2008). I think it’s connected, of course, to *The Ghost Writer* but I also think it picks up on a theme he’s been thinking about for a while now.

**Debra Shostak:** I was asking the question of myself in a different way. It’s true that we see Nathan Zuckerman in the American Trilogy as a sort of frame, and we see his position as narrator. But in some sense we don’t need any of the American Trilogy to get from the first trilogy to this point, and it almost seems to me that it’s appropriate to think of Nathan’s own movement through time. It’s the implication of death and mortality that we see through all of that.

**Royal:** I agree that this theme of death is something that links *Exit Ghost* solidly with the immediately earlier novels. Perhaps this is too simplistic, but we could see the novel as something like *Zuckerman Unbound* (1981) filtered through the later death-themed novels. So we have a Nathan Zuckerman having come through, metaphorically at least, *Sabbath’s Theater* (1995) or *The Dying Animal*. And one of the things that struck me in terms of the difference with the American Trilogy texts is that we don’t have a historical novel here, we don’t have a historicized text in the way that *American Pastoral* or *I Married a Communist* (1998) or *The Human Stain* (2000) was. This is a much more personal text like *The Ghost Writer* or *Zuckerman Unbound*.

**Michael Rothberg:** I think that’s a question. I’m not sure I disagree, but I’m not sure I agree, because it is, in some ways, a post-9/11 novel, it’s a novel of the Bush era, it’s a novel of the Iraq War. I’m not sure how far to go with that, but it’s certainly part of the framing of the novel, which is important, and I
think we should talk about that. I don’t have the answer to how seriously we should push it, though. It’s certainly, as Alan said, a kind of bookend to the *The Ghost Writer*, that seems obvious. But I find a really big gap between the *Zuckerman Bound* trilogy and epilogue and *Exit Ghost*, if only in terms of tone. It’s so tonally different. The first ones are so funny and outrageous in so many ways and ironic and satiric. *Exit Ghost*, in contrast, is much more somber, much less funny, and much less outrageous than some of the other novels.

**Ruth Knafo Setton:** I would agree with that, and I think that it’s not just that the tone is different, but for the first time in reading Roth I actually felt that he was tone deaf. In a sense, he keeps talking about being an exile, and he’s exiled not just from his body, but I think also from his present moment in a way I’ve never seen Zuckerman or Roth in any of the novels. He’s in New York, it’s post-9/11, it’s the Bush era, it’s election time, he tries to do a seduction, but everything is a little off. He can’t hear the cell phone conversation. He hits the wrong note when he tries his seduction. The election seems at a distance. I keep thinking that, in a sense, this is a man who’s walking out of history, literally as well as metaphorically. He’s a ghost.

**Royal:** So this would be a thematic shift from the previous Zuckerman novels in the American Trilogy. There the protagonists were, in Roth’s own words, hostages of history. But of course, Zuckerman, who narrates their stories, seemed to be removed from those events.

**Rodgers:** Zuckerman has now become Lonoff, which to me is one of the main points. But I want to make one other point before I pursue that. To pick up on Debra’s work, it’s worth remembering that from *Goodbye, Columbus* (1959) to the present, one of the obsessions in Roth’s work, one of the fundamental premises, has been examining the subject of self-invention and reinvention—counterlives, if you wish—and that that’s true of all of these Zuckerman books from the very beginning. The fact that the characters in the Trilogy each try to reinvent themselves in one way or another is a part of this. Zuckerman has also tried to reinvent himself, and he’s reinvented himself as Lonoff in *Exit Ghost*. He doesn’t live, he writes. What does Lonoff say?—“My life as you call it doesn’t exist”—and I think that’s the case here with Zuckerman. When young Zuckerman said in *The Ghost Writer*, looking at the living room of Lonoff, “This is how I will live,” he really didn’t realize that it was the way that he would live, in fact taking it to an even greater extreme. So I think that the fact that he’s so cut off is part of this subject of reinvention. He gets drawn back into the world in this novel in a way that is uncomfortable,
because it has overthrown what he has tried to balance as his life. Now that may work or not work for you, but I think that’s part of why it’s connected to The Ghost Writer. In a sense Roth was both Lonoff and Zuckerman in the first book, and now he’s become Lonoff.

**Audience Member:** Can I throw a quick thought into this. Roth is sick mentally and physically, he is exiled….

**Shostak and Setton:** You mean Zuckerman. [audience laughs]

**Royal:** See, it’s easy to get the creator and the creation mixed up.

**Audience Member:** But they are the same…

**Rodgers:** How do you know?

**Audience Member:** …and all of these kinds of things are going on with both.

**Cooper:** Well this is a great testament to Roth’s art, because here we’re talking about all of the failings of Zuckerman and ascribing them to Roth. But Roth is writing this. Roth is telling us about Zuckerman’s failings, seeing them, trying to assess them. And as I said before, it’s a novel about going of age, and one of the differences between this and the Zuckerman in the American Trilogy—and the middle two of the first four Zuckerman books [Zuckerman Unbound and The Anatomy Lesson]—is that again we’re back to the first-person narration. And we have the first-person narration doubly compounded because we have the narration of a fiction writer who’s aware that he’s writing fiction and can make us from time to time forget that he’s writing fiction. So one of the questions I want to ask is, at the end of Zuckerman’s career, how many of his works—because he is the great fiction writer that Jamie seems to be in awe of—do we know of beyond Carnovsky?

**Royal:** That’s a good question, because there are several mentionings in Exit Ghost of Zuckerman’s many works…but we don’t know of them.
Rodgers: Maybe he stopped titling them.

Audience Member: A question that everybody is taking for granted: is it possible that he’ll bring back Zuckerman?

Cooper: Anything is possible. He’s done this before. Remember what he did in *The Counterlife*?

Royal: I take Roth at his word, which may be a mistake, but I have a feeling that this indeed is the last Zuckerman novel, but who knows?

Cooper: Can I read a sentence? Remember very early in the book on page 41, Zuckerman is considering what he has just done about an apartment in New York, and he’s called his caretakers back in the country and now he says,

> I needed to satisfy my interests, and an environment in which I could best maintain my equilibrium and keep myself fit to work for as long as I could. All the city would add was everything I’d determined I no longer had any use for: Here and Now.

Then and Now.

The Beginning and the End of Now.

These were the lines that I jotted onto the scrap of paper where I’d previously written Amy’s name and the phone number of my new New York apartment. Titles for something. Perhaps this. What’s the “this”? In Shakespeare, you know, “So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.” So he is telling us, as reader, that he is writing this novel, which he has done before. Therefore, how do we separate out the Roth from the Zuckerman?

Rodgers: And Zuckerman’s writing this in roughly 2006, two years after the events have occurred, is my sense of it. I think mourning Zuckerman is premature, myself.
**Rothberg:** But doesn’t that imply, in a sense, that what Zuckerman’s writing is actually autobiography? This was one of the strange things about the way that he talks about his writing within the novel; it appears almost as if it were autobiography. So, on the one hand, Zuckerman is telling us over and over again not to commit the intentional fallacy, not to assume that the fictional figure is the biographical figure. At the same time that seems ultimately too easy, because, on the other hand, he’s also tempting us and teasing us and complicating things further in order to open up the question of autobiography.

**Shostak:** And I think that some of the weight of the evidence that he provides is actually against that very assertion that he’s been making for years, which is the biographical. Because you have Amy Bellette who talks about how she is still a child because she couldn’t grow past the past. And we have the whole question of the Faulknerian incest, where at least it’s plausible to argue that the reason that Lonoff might not have been able to circumvent is that he couldn’t get beyond that question with his half sister. And so there’s at least evidence that sort of undermines the assertions against reading like that. And once again we’re in the past.

**Royal:** Right. This is an author, after all, who in 1993 in an interview with the *New York Times* upon the publication of *Operation Shylock* said that the events in the book happened, *this actually happened.* People won’t believe me, he said, but what occurs in *Operation Shylock* is actually autobiography.

**Rothberg:** And to make another small connection to *Operation Shylock.* The subtitle of *The Shadow-Line,* which is the Conrad book that he keeps coming back to again and again, is “A Confession.” So there’s a discussion here, is this a novel masquerading as a confession or a confession masquerading as a novel? There’s the reference back to *Shylock.* So he’s playing with us very clearly.

**Shostak:** But I guess the question is, is he still playing the game, now you see me now you don’t, or is there a shift that’s happened in this novel where, in fact, he’s giving us an opening to read it more autobiographically and to do what others have done, to call the protagonist Roth?

**Rodgers:** Remember that *The Ghost Writer* was a novel cast, in part, as a biography. There, Zuckerman was the young hotspot biographer who writes about it all twenty years later. He says in *Exit Ghost* that Kliman reminds him of himself when he was younger, but he doesn’t acknowledge this reality—
which is that both of them choose to tell Lonoff’s stories from their points of view, and both of them want to reveal sexual secrets about Lonoff. I think it’s really interesting when he talks to Amy and she asks, who is this young man who thinks he can write the story of Lonoff? And she asks this of Zuckerman, who started all of this by writing a story of Lonoff.

Cooper: But that’s the question, does Amy know that? Has Amy read The Ghost Writer?

Rodgers: Probably not.

Royal: Or she can’t remember because of her brain condition.

Audience Member: You’ve been talking about the life of Lonoff, or at least the Lonoff that Zuckerman, Amy, and Kliman see. That he’s perhaps changed in some ways, or at least the perceptions of him have changed. I’m wondering what kind personal changes we see in Nathan Zuckerman as he’s gotten older. He may not be the kind of man Lonoff was when the younger Nathan first visited him. Perhaps he’s mellowed in his old age.

Royal: That’s a good observation. I don’t know if “mellowed” is the appropriate word for Zuckerman, but he’s someone who has changed, someone who is constantly on the brink of doing something that is spontaneous. But he always catches himself. Unlike the younger Zuckerman, the narrator of Exit Ghost counters his initial intentions by pulling back. Even in the last chapter, “Rash Moments.” It’s rather ironic that his final “rash moment” is almost a refusal of the kind of rash moments he experienced as a younger man.

Audience Member: You were talking earlier about Zuckerman and his ability to reenter life. That’s very much the rhetoric of the novel and it fits in with your point, Derek, about the temptation to reenter life. But Zuckerman is very well able to resist temptation, and everything that he goes through really isn’t that much of a temptation for him. But these are simply material. He doesn’t have his affair; he simply imagines it. He has this series of Deception-like moments, Deception-like conversations. And in fact, perhaps more than any other Roth novel, Exit Ghost advertises consistently all of its intertexts. Not just the older Roth books. So I’m not sure that he really succumbs that much to temptation that seems to be presented as so powerful.
**Audience Member:** We’ve been assuming that behind Zuckerman is an author. In other words, we keep thinking that this is a character who is being developed over time. Maybe he is simply a series of concepts the same way we find him in *The Counterlife*.

**Royal:** He’s definitely a creation of Peter Tarnopol as well as Philip Roth.

**Audience Member:** Are you sure?

**Royal:** You see, that’s the “joy” of reading Roth, you’re never on steady ground when discussing his fiction.

**Cooper:** All of his books suggest that his characters are uncertain. We find this in *My Life as a Man*, chapters like “My True Story” make it one of Roth’s upside-down books.

**Rodgers:** I just think if Roth didn’t want Zuckerman to be Zuckerman, he would do what he does in his other books and give his protagonist one of the other names. I think that, setting aside *My Life as a Man*, clearly Roth sees Zuckerman as a figure who has developed over these books. I don’t have any question about that. I’m sort of resisting this fundamental premise that this Zuckerman has nothing to do with earlier ones.

**Audience Member:** But that very taxonomy is a late reorganization. It’s not something that began there. It’s only a figure who developed later. Again, I think we have to be a bit skeptical about how reliable that categorization of Zuckerman really is, and how we ought to read Roth’s fiction. In many places we seem to have a different Zuckerman here. It’s as if the author is redrawing those boundaries.

**Audience Member:** There are contradictions between the Zuckerman in *Exit Ghost* and the Zuckerman we see in other works. How do you handle them?

**Royal:** Well there are contradictions in David Kepesh as well. I think the contradictions and the inconsistencies are what open up these texts, and in many ways that’s what they’re all about. And this gets us back to a point that
Bernie raised earlier about Debra’s book, and that is these reinventions, the countertexts and the counterlives. I see nothing wrong with that. If we want character consistency, I think we have to look elsewhere.

**Rodgers:** If we take this Zuckerman as different from the Zuckerman of *The Ghost Writer*, I think we’re missing a lot of what this book is about, which is echoing and turning around *The Ghost Writer*. That’s another fantasy about another young woman, for example. And you can make a long list of the connections between the two books. I think we’re really missing the point about this novel if we go against what I think is the fundamental premise, which is that this is the same Zuckerman he wrote about in *The Ghost Writer*. He may or may not be exiting at this point.

**Audience Member:** But he doesn’t necessarily mean he is the same figure we see earlier, and I want to argue against this notion that he consistently develops over time.

**Rodgers:** I’d like to know what details you have to support the argument that Zuckerman is not consistent after *My Life as a Man*.

**Audience Member:** To change the subject a bit: what I would like to discuss is the Shakespearean references in *Exit Ghost*. It seems that the title refers to *Hamlet*, but I’m wondering if maybe there are tones of *Macbeth* in there as well.

**Cooper:** Hermione Lee in her interview with Roth says the title comes from *Macbeth*, and he didn’t correct her or challenge her. I think you’re right. I think that it makes much more sense for it to be the exit of Hamlet’s father, because the ghost of Hamlet’s father is looking upon the bedroom scene where Hamlet’s mother is still a woman of sexual possibilities and achievements. He has exited the scene. We don’t have to say that he has exited with the limp piece of flesh that Zuckerman describes for himself. But it’s a loss, a sorrow over among other things, the loss of what Roth over and over again equates with manhood, which is sexual prowess.

**Setton:** It’s also the father figure.
Royal: Michael, you had a comment on this topic, I think.

Rothberg: We’ve gone in so many different directions here. In terms of Hamlet, to me, the reason that Hamlet seems important goes back to this question of the present, because Hamlet is about time out of joint. And Exit Ghost is about the present out of joint, and there’s an interesting irony because in some way, time is telescoped in this novel compared to the earlier ones. Here we have a novel that appears three years after it takes place, where we start with a novel, The Ghost Writer, that is written more than twenty years after it takes place, and we have a narrowing in of time. But at the moment that we arrive at the present, the present is out of joint, Zuckerman can’t actually occupy time, he’s exiled from the present in a certain way. And I also think there’s an incest theme that comes in with Gertrude and Claudius, and I’d like to talk more about that eventually. But to get back to an earlier point: perhaps Zuckerman is discontinuous in the ways you were indicating, I wouldn’t deny that. At the same time, you’d have to say also he emphasizes continuity just as much, or even more. One of the places where there’s consistency is the date of birth, which never changes, the age never changes. It’s 1933, and it’s Roth’s birthday. So again we’re sucked back into that autobiographical loop, but it’s precisely the loop that is being thematized by the book. This doesn’t mean we have easy access to the answer to the autobiographical question, but it is the problem that the Zuckerman books pose over and over again.

Royal: I find this interesting, because it poses a question that Ruth, more than anyone else on the panel, can speak to, that’s this issue of the relationship between the author and her creation, and the author and the way that she represents the real world and the dynamics and possibilities involved in that.

Setton: I think that one of the things that struck me during the reading of this novel is something someone in the audience alluded to, and that’s about how writerly a novel this is. I started making a list of the writers who populate this novel: Conrad, Ibsen, Longfellow, Lonoff (of course), Chekhov, Hemingway, Faulkner, Thomas Hardy, Primo Levy, Hawthorne, Mailer, Plimpton, Dylan Thomas, Eliot, Shakespeare. You could go on and on. And there was one writer he didn’t mention, and I kept feeling his ghost, and that was Kafka and “The Hunger Artist.” I kept thinking while I was reading this of a quote by Lonoff in the book: “Reading/writing people, we are finished, we are ghosts witnessing the end of the literary era.” And as I was reading this, I kept picturing the hunger artist. He’s made an art of his hunger, just as Roth, Zuckerman, or whatever we want to call him right now has made an art
of his desire and his hunger. And nobody cares to watch it anymore, it’s the end of an era. He could starve now, and nobody really cares. I just felt a real despair in this novel that I hadn’t felt before, even in Everyman. There was just a heartbreak almost, an era’s over, that we are ghosts. And ironically, the most three-dimensional characters in this novel are the writers. George Plimpton comes off more of a character than some.

Royal: Actually, he’s one of those absent or “ghost” writers.

Rodgers: And there are two other absent writers as well. One is Henry Roth, who is most obviously in this book, in the background. And the other that struck me who wasn’t mentioned was Saul Bellow. Particularly at the moment when Kliman in his jogging outfit confronts Zuckerman and screams to him, “You smell, you smell, old man.” That’s straight out of Mr. Sammler’s Planet. Those two echoes were ones that he didn’t mention by name, but they really struck me.

Royal: Well, these are two of the many ghosts that appear in this novel, there are many candidates for ghosts. I read it the same way that you did, Ruth, that one of the ghosts is us, those who read books, those who write texts. Roth has bemoaned or mourned in several interviews the fact that people don’t read anymore, that we’re a nation who doesn’t know its writers. They, or we, are the ghosts as well.

Shostak: Right, the novel is dead premise. And we have a novelist here who says this is the last book he’s going to write because he doesn’t remember anymore. He’s losing his memory. It’s like Beethoven going deaf. What can a writer do when the words and the memories start slipping away? I think that’s some of the poignancy that you’re talking about.

Rodgers: But he writes this book…. 

Shostak: Roth?

Rodgers: …no, Zuckerman writes this book. A couple of years after he says he had submitted his last book—which he thought was a bad book—to the publisher. Which brings up late Hemingway and Faulkner, and what you do
with a bad book. And this raises the question: is this a “bad” book? How has Zuckerman done in this book? Because some critic—I can’t remember who—made the point that the He/She sections, in particular, lead him to believe that this was meant to be seen as a bad book to show that Zuckerman can’t write a good book anymore. I don’t agree, but someone said that. But the fact is that he wrote this book afterward.

Audience Member: Can we take seriously, though, this suggestion that you’re both making, that Zuckerman is veering toward Lonoff? And if he is, is Lonoff about to enter a Malamudian phase?

Cooper: It depends on how much of Lonoff you see as Malamud. As has been said, there’s a lot of Roth in Lonoff already. Remember, Roth is writing the first Lonoff book around 1976, and he has by that time, in a sense, remade his life. But I think, though, we have an interesting series of threads in this discussion. One is continuity. I would address this almost as a rhetorical question for those of us who have more grey hair than others. Is there any possibility that you don’t see your life as a discontinuing? This is a book about aging, and it’s a book very much about time. Time is the enemy. It wasn’t so for young Zuckerman, going to visiting Lonoff early on. Zuckerman here is aware of all that. But when we speak about the ghosts, he says on page 169, he’s talking about Eliot,

where the poet, walking the streets before dawn, meets the “compound ghost,” who tells him what pain he will encounter. “For last year’s words belong to last year’s language / And next year’s words await another voice.” How does Eliot’s ghost begin? Sardonically. “Let me disclose the gifts reserved for age.”

Then Roth comments in little sentences, “Reserved for age. Reserved for age. Beyond that I cannot go. A frightful prophecy follows that I don’t remember. I’ll look it up when I get home.” And Roth continues...no Zuckerman continues it through Zuckerman. [audience laughter] That this is a book about age, it says more than most others about the inevitability of mortality and that all great literature faces this mortality. This is, necessarily, a different book from the earlier ones. It’s also, remember, a first-person novel like The Ghost Writer was, like The Prague Orgy was, as in several different ways like The Counterlife was. But that was not true of Zuckerman Unbound or The Anatomy Lesson, and it wasn’t true really in the American Trilogy, because author Zuckerman is the narrator of those books, he’s not telling his story, he’s the observer.
Royal: Well, I think that he *is* telling his story, indirectly, but your point is well taken.

Rothberg: To pick up on Alan’s point, I think Roth is engaging with “late style” in this book, which is a concept that Theodor W. Adorno first talked about in relationship to Beethoven, and then Edward Said at the very end of his life was developing in a series of essays and lectures that were published in a book called *On Late Style*. There are remarkable correspondences between what Said is talking about and what Roth is doing, really remarkable. I just want to read a couple of sentences. Said writes,

> Each of us can readily supply evidence of how it is that late works crown a lifetime of aesthetic endeavor. Rembrandt and Matisse, Bach and Wagner. But what of artistic lateness, not as harmony and resolution, but as intransigence, difficulty, and unresolved contraction. What if age and ill health don’t produce the serenity of “ripeness is all.”

And that seems to me really what these books are about, they’re about the refusal to reconcile oneself, to resolve contradiction, to overcome and transcend the problems of aging, the difficulties of ill health, the fallenness of the world. Just as further evidence that he’s actually engaging with this stuff: the music that is playing when he walks into the apartment of Billy and Jamie is Strauss’s four last pieces, and there’s a whole chapter on Strauss in Said’s book. Strauss is his primary example of late style. So I think there’s an interesting dialogue going on with Said. I think the implications of that would go beyond what we could talk about here, but I think they are really important for thinking about Roth as a certain kind of public intellectual. In any case, I think this notion of late style as a way of talking about this problem of aging is really key.

Audience Member: If all of this contradiction is paradoxically the product of foreseeing your own death, also I would say it’s a refusal and resistance to death. In other words, serenity is the end. That’s how *Sabbath’s Theater* ends, right, with the thought, how could he kill himself, everything he hated was here?

Audience Member: It’s this idea that by refusing to resolve the contradictions, and the antagonisms, and the uncertainties he’s confronting his life still.

Shostak: And that’s back to the Dylan Thomas epigraph, too.
Rodgers: I thought this late style thing was really interesting, and I was struck by the Strauss because, this is on page 124, in one of the He/She dialogues he makes sort of a comment on what is going on:

MUSIC: Strauss's Four Last Songs. For the profundity that is achieved not by complexity but by clarity and simplicity. For the purity of the sentiment about death and parting and loss. For the long melodic line spinning out and the female voice soaring and soaring. For the repose and composure and gracefulness and the intense beauty of the soaring. For the ways one is drawn into the tremendous arc of heartbreak. The composer drops all masks and, at the age of eighty-two, stands before you naked. And you dissolve.

I read this, and I thought, you have such nerve! He has such nerve. Because what he's really doing is asking us to compare what he's doing in this book to what he's just described as what Strauss is able to accomplish in his music—which is quite a bit. I just felt that, because he says this twice, he's calling our attention to it. It seems a typical Rothian challenge to the reader.

Setton: I think that ties in also with naming all of the other authors. That's where the continuity is. Time is out of joint. His character is out of joint. He's enraged, he's in despair, he's furious, he's challenging Kliman, and doing everything else. But the continuity is, I think, the tapestry of great art through time. Zuckerman wants to put himself in that tapestry. He wants you, dares you, to see him as Strauss, dares us to see him with Hawthorne, and all of the great writers to give himself a place in time.


Setton: Yes, starting in The Ghost Writer. Now he is a ghost writer, writing in the place and in time, and in the shadow of all of these great authors who came before him. He wants to make sure we see him there, where he belongs. And I think that's one of the greatest signs of the late style. You are putting yourself in perspective. You're in a sense saying, here is where I belong in history. I want to be judged there.

Cooper: Do you mean Roth?

Royal: That's the autobiographical question we keep coming to.
Setton: I do honestly, I do think it’s Roth speaking here.

Cooper: In that case, the only way to judge it would be a couple of centuries from now. Remember that Dante does this in the *Inferno*. He talks about the greats of the past, and he says, I’m included. And then at one point, in the section on the thieves, when he has them combining and changing of forms, he says if you think that this is impossible, just listen to this. Watch how I do it.

Audience Member: Roth has been doing this so much that I wonder if it’s a challenge anymore. I remember when he was called, as he writes in *Portnoy’s Complaint*, “the Raskolnikov of jerking off.” Going back to that point, and doing this again and again….

Setton: I’m not sure he’d still want to be known as the writer of jerking off. [Audience laughter] I think he wants to go beyond that.

Audience Member: …but you have to have that for parody.

Audience Member: Going back to the idea of a late style. I was thinking of Yeats, and we know that Roth is an avid reader of Yeats. And Yeats had a late style, not the kind of late style that leads to serenity and harmony and resignation, but a late style that is raging against the dying of the light. Dylan Thomas is there too, most obviously. But if you’re thinking about the question of late style, I think Yeats is one fruitful place where it might lead you.

Shostak: It’s at least worth noting that what Bernie read a moment ago is actually within one of the He/She dialogues, so it’s already a sort of fantasy of Zuckerman as opposed to a direct voice.

Rodgers: There’s no way that Roth stands naked before us.

Rothberg: And again, he’s tempting and teasing us with that possibility, but it’s also impossible to say that that’s what he’s doing.
Rodgers: Can I pick up one other ghost idea from what Ruth said? Remember in *The Ghost Writer* Zuckerman says that he’s comparing himself and Lonoff and Abravanel to Isaac Babel? And what he says is that Babel described the writer as someone “with autumn in his heart and spectacles on his nose,” and Zuckerman adds, “and blood in his penis.” The irony of that, at this point in *this* book, really struck me too.

Cooper: Remember what Mickey Sabbath says, that a prick doesn’t come with a lifetime guarantee.

Audience Member: One meaning of the phrase, “ghost writer,” is someone who writes for somebody else. And then, let’s say, that the exit of the ghost is the loss of this other person, and the writer is left standing. And I’m really compelled by Roth as one who isn’t too fascinated with his own identity. So all of his surrogate figures, whether the fictionalized ones or the historicized ones, they’re all writers who have that intimacy of writing and who are infatuated with experience, per se, whether it is a fading away or the widening of sexuality. There’s kind of a generic quality to this particular “exit ghost” in the latest novel.

Setton: I want to go back to all of this discussion of writers. Someone mentioned Yeats. It reminds me of the quote, “That is no country for old men.” This really goes back to the idea of time being out of joint for Zuckerman. He’s realizing that maybe life at the present moment, in New York definitely, is not a country for old men. And there is the rage and despair in this realization as well.

Cooper: His needs are different.

Rothberg: There’s something about this despair that you mentioned, Ruth, that seems to be part of the tone-deafness also. Here’s a guy who is one of the few living writers in the Library of America, as we’re reminded every time we read his author blurb. I just noticed in my rereading of *Exit Ghost* the other night that in the “About the Author” page at the end of the novel it says “Roth is the only living American writer to have his work published in a comprehensive, definitive edition by the Library of America. The last of the eight volumes is scheduled for publication in 2013.” Well, what does that mean? [Audience laughter] That’s kind of interesting.
Royal: If he continues publishing at the pace he currently is, it will certainly be more than eight volumes.

Rothberg: But how does he know when he’s going to die?

Cooper: It’s like Kliman saying he wants to put Lonoff into that category.

Audience Member: I’m interested in this discussion of timing, and whether Zuckerman might be too immature or premature. I think that what all of you are pointing out in your reading of this novel is that Zuckerman is in mourning here. The definition of mourning is when time is lost, when one is not in time. And this is how this new novel differs from The Ghost Writer. Zuckerman is in mourning in Exit Ghost, he is a mourning man. As all of you were talking about the loss of time, spirit, hope, and history, I realized that Zuckerman has lost so much.

Shostak: Actually, I wanted to address a different question that’s sort of the reverse of what we’ve been talking about. It may be unimportant and trivial, but as I think about this novel, I wonder, can anybody read this novel who hasn’t read all of the other Zuckerman books? I mean, would this just be utterly meaningless? My guess is that there’s nobody in this room that I could ask, because presumably you’re here because you’ve followed Zuckerman. And this goes back to what Roth has often been accused of, the self-indulgence. I have very mixed feelings about this novel. I find some wonderful passages, for instance, when Zuckerman visits Amy in her apartment and she shows him Lonoff’s shoes, and there are just some incredibly moving things in this novel. But there are other times when I’m thinking, we’ve heard it all before.

Setton: And better.

Shostak: Exactly. And from my perspective, Roth will never do death and dying and the body any better than he did it with Sabbath’s Theater. I can’t imagine that he can do it better. I’m not sure if this is a question, really, but it’s one of my responses to the new novel.

Audience Member: I want to ask you, is there something different about the
way that Roth writes this novel as compared to his other ones, such as *The Great American Novel* or any other?

**Rodgers:** I had the same exact question when I was reading *Exit Ghost*. It seems the most hermetic of his books. “Hermetic” is probably not the right word, but you get what I’m trying to say. It’s the sense that it’s not as accessible to a general reader as, let’s say, the books in *Zuckerman Bound*. If you’ve read them separately you could get most of what was going on in each of those books. But this one is so dependent, in terms of what seems to be its affect, on the knowledge of the previous books and the knowledge of Zuckerman in the previous books. Not to mention the knowledge of all of the literary references, which has been true all along. I really wonder about it. I don’t have an answer to that, but I did have it as a question that I didn’t have with the previous books, and I wonder if other people agreed with this or felt this too.

**Setton:** I did notice that in the beginning there were a few places where he does offer a series of expositions, such as with Amy.

**Rodgers:** He has to do this with Amy to get the effect.

**Setton:** And those were pretty heavy-handed. They were clunky passages, and I was sort of cringing as I read them. I don’t know if his editor wanted them—I don’t even know if his editor can dare say anything to him at this point—or he felt that he had to fill in those little blanks, just to make sure that someone coming to this new knows who Lonoff is, who Amy is. I would never, for example, recommend this novel as a first Roth novel, and maybe not even a second or third.

**Cooper:** What would you recommend?

**Setton:** I don’t know, but I’ve just finished teaching *American Pastoral*, the last book I taught this semester. And I read *Exit Ghost* after reading that, and it’s almost not fair to read it right after that. That would be my first recommendation.

**Cooper:** I think you’re right. This is a book that is not accessible to most
readers. Roth does “clunk in” the background in order to help the reader. And many of us who have had to write reviews of it have had to give back-story material. It also explains perhaps why it never got on the bestseller list. You wonder what his “enemies” would have said, if he still has to listen to his enemies. May I bring in an analogy?

Setton: Sure.

Cooper: I had an interview once with Manny Azenburg, the producer of Neil Simon’s work, and he talked about some of Simon’s clunkers. And I asked him, why didn’t you tell him they were bad? He replied, because you don’t do that. Simon had to get them out of the way so that he could get to the next one. As a producer, you’re just obligated to let him do it even though you know it’s going to fail.

Audience Member: We can talk about this with great pleasure because we know the rest of Roth’s works. But I think we need to recognize that this is a minor novel. If you look at all of Roth’s books, this is a footnote, and ultimately it’s not going to stand as one of the great works.

Shostak: But then it becomes a weird self-fulfilling prophecy because the ghost is mourning the fact that nobody reads anymore. Well, he’s writing a book that nobody’s going to want to read. It’s a curious thing.

Audience Member: I had this sense in reading Exit Ghost that it’s not really a good novel. Some of the characters seem fabricated, they really don’t come to life, such as the young couple he becomes involved with. I didn’t believe them.

Rothberg: But some have said today that Zuckerman was fabricated. So why is that a problem?

Audience Member: No, I’m talking about Zuckerman’s fabricating from one novel to the next. It’s like it is with Roth. You can believe when he’s writing it, even as he shuffles the deck and changes circumstances, as he does in The Counterlife. Each one is convincing on its own terms. But I didn’t find the characters in this new novel convincing on their own terms.
Royal: This gets back to the point that Debra made earlier, one less intellectual and more visceral, and that concerns our feelings about this novel. How do we feel after having read this? I agree with Debra when she says that she had mixed feelings. She and I were talking about this the other day, in fact. Both of us had the experience that when we re-read this novel in preparation for the roundtable discussion, we didn’t remember much of it the first time around when we read it last year. And I think that’s rather telling. There are other novels of his—like The Dying Animal, like Sabbath’s Theater, like the American Trilogy, and there are so many others I could include here—and they stick with you. They remain in your head no matter what. With this one, it’s in and out. I don’t know if this was my fault, if I was an inattentive or unappreciative reader when I read Exit Ghost.

Audience Member: Well that’s the problem. And when I read the book, I was deeply uncomfortable with the way he handles death and dying.

Royal: But I didn’t have that experience with Everyman, the novel that came out before this one. That novel was much more poignant and that has even more overtly to do with death.

Rodgers: One thing that we talked about on the Everyman roundtable [at the American Literature Association Conference in 2006]1 was Roth being a transgressor. If once he was transgressive about sex, now he’s transgressive in writing about death and about the body and about getting old. I think that’s true again in this book. I think that’s part of what puts people off. How many books can you think of whose second paragraph discusses the details of urology? He’s putting it right in front of you and insisting that you look at something that’s very uncomfortable.

But I wanted to start another subject if I could. I wanted to raise the subject of biography in the book itself and just make a couple of points and see what people think about them. First of all, I’ve been thinking about the way in which Roth has been portrayed fictionally, first of all. Which is to say, if you look at Janet Hobhouse’s The Furies, in which he is portrayed as Jack the writer, or Alan Lelchuk’s Ziff: A Life?, where he is presented as Arthur Ziff. Or, to talk about another fiction, Claire Bloom’s autobiography, which I will just assume is not totally accurate without knowing one way or the other. They all portray a writer who is very, very careful about what is known about him publicly and personally, and who is very private. Roth talked about himself at the beginning of The Facts—when he said that in the spectrum between Mailerish exposure and Salingeresque reclusiveness he tries to walk a middle
line. In *The Facts* he has Zuckerman’s letter telling him he shouldn’t write this autobiography. And right now he’s being biographed by Ross Miller.

So one of the things that struck me was that the whole subject of biography is really on his mind. I also just recently read and wrote about the Kazin and Malamud biographies that came out a while ago... And by the way, a footnote: Malamud actually had on a bulletin board at his desk the quotation from Henry James that Roth puts on the bulletin board in Lonoff’s study: “We work in the dark—we do what we can...The rest is the madness of art.” I was blown away when I read this in the Malamud biography. Anyway, both of the biographers clearly tried to speak to Philip Roth who must have refused to talk to them, since all they do is quote from his published writings, and they do not acknowledge him. I think the same thing was true about James Atlas’s biography of Bellow.

So we have a writer here who actually is very concerned about this subject of biography, and he spends a good time talking about it in *Exit Ghost*, which is part of what makes it less interesting to a general reader. But I think it may be one of the impulses behind the book, which is the impulse to think about this subject of biography and what happens to writers in the hands of biographers. Zuckerman says at the end of the book that after Kliman finishes Lonoff he’s going to turn to me, and what is my secret? In other words, I just thought that one element here that had an autobiographical basis, although I’m not suggesting any explicit connections, is the fact that Roth is thinking about this subject right now because he is being biographed and he has always resisted this kind of thing. I find it an interesting sidelight to the book. It may not be a major point, but there’s a lot of talk about it.

**Royal:** I don’t even think it’s so much of a sidelight. I think it’s more front and center. As soon as I finished reading this last year, I contacted Ross Miller to ask him, “So, what are your thoughts on this?” He had just finished the book as well, and he said that he really didn’t know what to think right now. He said he had to let it digest. Maybe it is important here to bring up a point that you touched upon earlier, Bernie, but we didn’t follow up on, and that’s the Henry Roth connection. It hadn’t been that long—what, two or three years?—since the Henry Roth biography was published. And here we have someone who, like Lonoff, is not around anymore.

**Rodgers:** But the point is that Henry Roth wrote the novel that’s being described here—about a writer who has hidden for his whole life his incest with his sister. It became the subject of a clearly autobiographical novel by Henry Roth, *Mercy of a Rude Stream*...
Rothberg: But after decades.

Rodgers: …after decades of being out of the mainstream and unknown and unread. So that’s why I brought up Henry Roth, not because of the biography of Henry Roth but because of the novel by Henry Roth.

Royal: But even then there was a piece that came out in the Chronicle of Higher Education about Steve Kellman’s biography on Henry Roth. And there was a reader of Exit Ghost who read Kellman as the inspiration of Kliman. I thought that was a curious turn as well. So even the act of biography becomes an interesting target in the context of Henry Roth.

Audience Member: Do we know about the criteria that went into choosing Ross Miller as Roth’s biographer? If I were a great writer I would want to choose someone who was going to protect me and tell it my way, and everything would be okay.

Royal: Ross Miller is his friend, and he’s also the editor of the Library of America volumes on Roth. Other than that, I have no clue about the choice. Does anyone else know?

Audience Member: I’ll offer something about biography. I’ve had my hand in that genre for a while. It seems to me that Roth could possibly create another counterlife. He approved of the selection of Ross Miller. I don’t know Ross Miller. And I don’t know Philip Roth. But if this becomes a so-called alter-life, and I use the term very skeptically, I think there’s a possibility that the narrative, the life that is going to be told, is going to have a certain kind of control, which wouldn’t occur if someone else not chosen by Philip Roth were to write the biography. All that I can hope for is that this will happen at a later time. It’s wonderful that Miller is going to do it, because I hope that he’ll have access to the material, which is always the biographer’s challenge, of Roth’s archive. Presumably there is one. Where is it? Is it accessible?

Royal: It’s at the Library of Congress. There are parts of Roth’s papers that are off limits to the general public, but apparently Ross Miller has free rein.
**Audience Member:** But is Ross Miller the only one? Because you’re going to have a repeat of Leon Edel and Henry James, where he had access to letters and all sorts of material that the estate would not permit others to look at. So I think that there are some red flags which have to be noted. I just worry about, and also I’d be fascinated by, the possibilities of Roth’s hands in the construction of his own life.

**Royal:** And that brings us back to a reference that Bernie made earlier, and that is Alan Lelchuk’s *Ziff: A Life*. There is that kind of playfulness behind *Ziff* possibly choosing his own biographer, and that becomes a highly problematic relationship.

**Shostak:** Well, certainly given the signs in *Exit Ghost*, I don’t think we can hope too much about the free hand that Miller might have.

**Rodgers:** I’m thinking, as you’re saying this, about the William Styron biography by James West. I was struck by what you [Audience Member] were just talking about. This was very much an authorized life. It was basically an autobiographical biography in which a large part of the description of Styron’s life was given in Styron’s own words and from Styron’s point of view. Now, this wasn’t useless. It laid out the basic facts of his life. But it is the danger in this kind of a biography, I think, that you end up with nothing that’s critical or that isn’t part of a narrative the author wants.

**Audience Member:** I wrote a biography, and the publisher asked me to ask the subject if we could use the word “authorized” just for the promotion of the book. With the subject, when I introduced the topic I said, “I have another question to ask you.” He said, “It’s business, isn’t it?” And I asked him how he could tell, and he said my tone changed. So I asked this question about authorization, and he said to me after a moment or two, “How about we say ‘tolerated’?” [Audience laughs] And then after a few seconds the subject said, “Alright, ‘benignly tolerated.’” [Audience laughs] This was Leonard Cohen, very characteristic of him. The publisher, though, chose not to use that phrase.

**Rothberg:** I wonder as a way of getting back to the novel, and maybe back to the earlier question about what kind of mourning is happening in the novel, if we could talk a little bit about the George Plimpton section. That, to me, is incredible and stands out…
Shostak: It doesn’t fit.

Rothberg: …and doesn’t fit, but it’s very fascinating. In some ways, it seemed to me that the whole novel was almost written to give him this opportunity to write this little thing about Plimpton, which reminded me in a strange way of Jamaica Kincaid’s *My Brother*, which at the end goes on about William Shawn, the editor of *The New Yorker*. Out of nowhere, all of a sudden, it becomes a book about William Shawn instead of her brother. But who is George Plimpton in this novel? Who is Plimpton for Roth or for Zuckerman? You have here the typical mixing of worlds, the fictional and the real, in a really sharp way at that moment in the Plimpton section. And Roth talks about Plimpton as his anti-doppelganger, which is also at the other end of the spectrum the kind of role that Aharon Appelfeld plays in *Operation Shylock*. Here is my twin who is really my opposite. That seems to be what Plimpton is standing for here. So here is a writer who wrote autobiographically, who created himself, but who created himself in his writing in a very different way from Roth—Plimpton, I mean. And here is someone he’s providing a little capsule biography of within the text. It’s this weird kind of loop, another loop, between the biography or autobiography and the fiction. I’m curious what other people thought about the Plimpton part.

Shostak: There’s one line, this is on page 248, where he puts Plimpton into the Nathan Zuckerman position. He says, “‘Me’ is his self-mocking double—the working journalist—unburdened of the privileged George that he inescapably was, that he masterfully was and so enjoyed being.” So he sort of makes Plimpton into Zuckerman, at that moment.

Setton: Plimpton is also the anti-Lonoff. He is the person at one point who says, I forget the exact wording, that the writer draws from humanity. You have to be part of this world. And Zuckerman, like Lonoff, is not—he is no longer a part of this world, this teeming present moment. Plimpton is someone who reveled in the present moment, who has lived and written. He’s vibrant and alive, and Zuckerman is more of a ghost. So I think there’s a real contract here between the writer who is part of humanity and the writer who has chosen to, in a sense, exile himself from humanity for whatever reasons.

Royal: Yes, these are some of the many doppelgangers or mirror characters who litter this novel. I know this isn’t anything new in Roth’s work—we can see this going back to *Goodbye, Columbus*, with Neil and Brenda, or *Zuckerman Unbound*, with Nathan and Pepler, and certainly *Operation Shylock*.
which is all about doubling—but we have this with a vengeance in Exit Ghost: Plimpton and Zuckerman, Zuckerman and Kliman, Zuckerman and Lonoff, Lonoff and Plimpton, Lonoff and Amy, Amy and Jamie.

Audience Member: You’re absolutely right that there are all these doubles, and I think that Plimpton is the anti-Lonoff. And yet, of course, they inhabit different worlds. Again, this is something that Roth does in the earlier Zuckerman novels, and he’s doing it again here. He’s blurring that line between the written and the unwritten worlds. Plimpton is a creation in this novel, of course, he’s not the real George Plimpton, just a version of him. But he was also a real person, whereas Lonoff was never a real person. He’s drawn them into the same world so that you find yourself, as a critic, outlining the differences. And you’re trapped in that rhetoric where you start to confuse the boundaries between the two worlds. He is an anti-Lonoff, but he isn’t. Because he’s real and he’s not real.

FIGURE 1: From left: Michael Rothberg, Debra Shostak, Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr., and Alan Cooper.

Rothberg: I didn’t get through all of the Zuckerman Bound books in preparing for this discussion, but I went back to them, and I don’t remember another moment like this.

Audience Member: No, there aren’t. In the earlier books there’s one moment where Zuckerman talks about meeting other writers. But they are real writers. He talks about meeting, I don’t know if it’s Mailer or Updike, and he states explicitly that he, Nathan Zuckerman, exists the same world as real life American authors, as well as the ones he makes up, such as Abravanel and Lonoff.
So you’ve got this weird kind of schizophrenia with Abravanel, Lonoff, and Zuckerman apparently inhabiting the same space.

**Rodgers:** He’s hardly the first writer to do that.

**Setton:** Many writers do that. That’s not so unusual. And in this book, as I’ve said before, Plimpton isn’t the only author from real life.

**Rothberg:** I still think he occupies a weird and unique place in the Zuckerman series, because I can’t think of another situation that is so developed like that. Unless I’m forgetting something.

**Setton:** Remember that other eulogy that Zuckerman wrote for himself in *The Counterlife*? There’re so many echoes in this book of scenes that came before, another eulogy for a writer that is another deformation of himself.

**Rodgers:** I really like what the two of you are saying. There’s one other element that you might think about with the Plimpton section. If one of the things this book is doing is excoriating critics and biographers for not caring about literature—which we’ve heard before from Roth—then perhaps one of the things that the Plimpton section is supposed to be about is *how* you should write about a writer. I haven’t thought a lot about it—whether it does it very well or whether it meets his own strictures—but it might be interesting to think about the Plimpton section in that way.

**Cooper:** Roth is now publishing a book a year. *Everyman* came out in 2006, *Exit Ghost* in 2007, *Indignation* will come out later this year. We can assume, and we know from things Roth has said, that he has a number of different things on his back burner that he’ll bring forth. My feeling about the Plimpton section is that this is something that Roth wrote and then decided to bring into this novel. In *Operation Shylock* he does that with Applefeld, he has his interview from the *New York Times* printed completely. When I first read the Plimpton part I was put off…and also by Amy Bellette’s supposed letter that was dictated by Lonoff. But the second time you read it, when you no longer care about where the narrative is going because you already know, you find these kind of sections very rich. When Roth’s novel is essentially a narrative going toward some objective, that’s one kind of work. When they are reflections or memoirs in which he keeps doubling back upon himself, the wonder-
ful folding in and layering of stories that come right in the middle of other stories, that’s different. And Exit Ghost is more of the second kind. So there are different techniques for different types of novels. I think that Roth is guilty of putting in stuff that he just wants to say, and has said elsewhere, and then he’s not guilty because the second or third time around you get more out of it.

**Rodgers:** Debra has said in her book that when she looked at Roth’s manuscripts in the Library of Congress she saw how pieces of things got carried on at the same time, becoming parts of both My Life as a Man and The Counterlife…

**Shostak:** And became American Pastoral.

**Rodgers:** …yes exactly. The “exit ghost” line. I noticed in teaching and rereading Operation Shylock recently that one of the points there is about “exit Jew,” about the stage direction for Shylock. And that started echoing when I was reading the new novel. But I want to talk about the exits more if we can. Do we have the time?

**Royal:** I’m afraid we’ve run out of time. But perhaps given Bernie’s interests in the topic of exits, this would be an appropriate opportunity to wrap up our discussion. Let me end by alluding to what Alan was referring to as Roth’s reflexivity and an earlier topic of discussion, the George Plimpton section. In many ways Roth, or Zuckerman, becomes a mini-biographer of someone else, and in becoming so he does something that he himself is suspicious of: chronicling a life. Toward the very end of Exit Ghost, the narrator asks, who is Kliman’s target after Lonoff? Perhaps, Zuckerman thinks, he’s coming after me. But given the context of Roth’s metafictional gamesmanship—something that all of us have noted today, in one form or another—it would appear that he, through the now-exiting Zuckerman, is really having the last word. By laying bare the various traps inherent in literary biographies—and, as some here have suggested, with his own biography on the horizon—Roth may be making a preemptive narrative strike.

I want to thank the audience for participating in this conversation, and I especially want to thank all of the roundtable participants for sharing their thoughts with us today and making this a lively discussion.

**NOTES**