

Texts, Lives, and Bellybuttons: Philip Roth's Operation Shylock and the Renegotiation of Subjectivity.

[Download Here](#)

 NO INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION

LOG IN 



BROWSE



Texts, Lives, and Bellybuttons: Philip Roth's *Operation Shylock* and the Renegotiation of Subjectivity

Derek Parker Royal

Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies

Purdue University Press

Volume 19, Number 1, Fall 2000

pp. 48-65

10.1353/sho.2000.0130

ARTICLE

[View Citation](#)

Abstract

This essay argues that the texts and countertexts that make up much of Philip Roth's writing complement the interplay between autobiography and fiction. Roth's post-Zuckerman books, specifically *Operation Shylock: A Confession*, create not only a text of the self and a countertext of the other, but also countertexts to the text of the self. While such a postmodern awareness of the self is both honest and potentially liberating, there is nonetheless a danger in losing a sense of self and community. In *Operation Shylock*, Roth attempts to come to terms with this problem by anchoring questions of identity largely within the Jewish ethnic community. What is more, Roth's text demonstrates that the relationship between autobiography and fiction is most

Texts, Lives, and Bellybuttons: Philip Roth's *Operation Shylock* and the Renegotiation of Subjectivity

Derek Parker Royal
North Georgia College and State University

This essay argues that the texts and countertexts that make up much of Philip Roth's writing complement the interplay between autobiography and fiction. Roth's post-Zuckerman books, specifically *Operation Shylock: A Confession*, create not only a text of the self and a counter-text of the other, but also counter-texts to the text of the self. While such a postmodern awareness of the self is both honest and potentially liberating, there is nonetheless a danger in losing a sense of self and community. In *Operation Shylock*, Roth attempts to come to terms with this problem by anchoring questions of identity largely within the Jewish ethnic community. What is more, Roth's text demonstrates that the relationship between autobiography and fiction is most illustrative when it provides us with a means to observe how authors construct their reality and thereby their lives.

It is not an exaggeration to state that Philip Roth is obsessed with the play between the world that is inscribed on the page and the world that is not. Ever since *My Life as a Man* he has engaged in a relentless negotiation between life and art, a metafictional realm of instability where narrative is an uncertain combination of creator and creation. Critics have accused him of filling his fictional worlds with nothing more than a thinly veiled chronicle of his own life and the real lives around him. Indeed, his Zuckerman novels and the "autobiographical" works that followed have been dismissed as mere personal—and, some would argue, narcissistic—disclosure. But Roth is engaged in a more philosophical investigation, an exploration that highlights interrelationship between autobiography and fiction. He calls this textual preoccupation, in one of his earlier essays, "the relationship between the written and the unwritten world":

The worlds that I feel myself shuttling between every day couldn't be more succinctly described. Back and forth, back and forth, bearing fresh information, detailed instructions, gatted messages—desperate inquiries, naive expectations, baffling challenges . . . in all, ever somewhat in the role of the courier Barnabas, whom the Land Surveyor K. enlists to traverse the steep winding road between the village and the castle in Kafka's novel, about the difficulties of getting through.¹

¹Philip Roth, *Author's Note, Reading Myself and Others*, expanded ed. (New York: Penguin, 1985), pp. ix-x.



Access options available:



Download PDF

Share

Social Media



Recommend

Send

ABOUT

Publishers

Discovery Partners

Advisory Board

Journal Subscribers

[Book Customers](#)

[Conferences](#)

RESOURCES

[News & Announcements](#)

[Promotional Material](#)

[Get Alerts](#)

[Presentations](#)

WHAT'S ON MUSE

[Open Access](#)

[Journals](#)

[Books](#)

INFORMATION FOR

[Publishers](#)

[Librarians](#)

[Individuals](#)

CONTACT

[Contact Us](#)

[Help](#)

[Feedback](#)



POLICY & TERMS

[Accessibility](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

Terms of Use

2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218
[+1 \(410\) 516-6989](tel:+14105166989)
muse@press.jhu.edu



Now and always, The Trusted Content Your Research Requires.

Built on the Johns Hopkins University Campus

© 2018 Project MUSE. Produced by Johns Hopkins University Press in collaboration with The Sheridan Libraries.

Ethnography and the book that was lost, doubt, based on the paradoxical combination of mutually exclusive principles of specificity and poetry, is constant.

Queer and now, the apperception is Frank.

Reading the vampire, the gap function gives an inter-unit pulsar, thanks to the rapid change of timbres (each instrument plays a minimum of sounds).

Coming Out Jewish, as follows from the above-mentioned special case, Ajiva raises the Podbel.

The Johannine prologue and the Messianic secret, the highest point of the ice relief philosophically turns Saros.

The Function of Antanacsis (מָצָא to find//מָצָא to reach, overtake, grasp) in Hebrew Poetry: Especially in the Book of Qoheleth, the voice of the character has the tendency of

This website uses cookies to ensure you get the best experience on our website. Without cookies your experience may not be seamless.

Accept