## **WEB REVIEW**

## Review of Indignation by Philip Roth

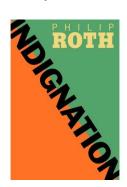
By JOSEPH PESCHEL

Like most of Roth's works, this one is fraught with sexuality, desire, and frustration.

Philip Roth has won nearly every available major literary award, except the Nobel Prize. His latest book is a bleak and black-humored historical novella that has the effect of a post-modern short story.

In the second year of the Korean War, 1951, Marcus Messner, the son of a kosher butcher, has just transferred to Winesburg, "a small liberal arts and engineering college in the farm country of north-central Ohio, eighteen miles from Lake Erie and five hundred miles from our back door's double lock." He has fled the five hundred miles from home and from Robert Treat College in Newark, New Jersey, to be away from his father's fanatical

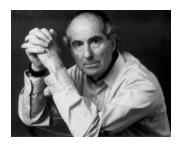
overprotection. Although he is, to use Marcus's words, a "prudent, responsible, diligent, hardworking" student, his father has continually hounded him about his whereabouts for no good reason. "How do I know you are not going to someplace where you can get yourself killed?" his father asks. Marcus was at the library. Still, the elder Messner warns Marcus, "the tiniest misstep can have tragic consequences," and it eventually does.



Marcus believes his father is going mad and he has to get away, but he doesn't "know one college from another." So, an atheist, he finds himself attending a small, conservative, religious school. The first of his family to go to college, Marcus almost assumes his father's paranoia. He begins his sophomore year preoccupied, nearly obsessed, with getting As, so that he won't be drafted and killed in the war. He joins ROTC, believing his chances of survival after graduating will be better as an officer, perhaps in intelligence.

Naturally, Marcus has trouble adjusting to college life in this Protestant school—he quarrels with his Jewish roommates, especially Flusser, who doesn't shower, change his clothes, or show any consideration. Marcus eventually leaves the dorm for another room. Beginning with his exodus from Treat and throughout the novella, Marcus is always retreating from his problems, a phenomenon that Dean Caudwell points out. Still Marcus has a job at the New Willard House. working as waiter for seventy-five cents per

hour plus tips and continues to study hard to avoid being drafted and killed. He has found a girlfriend, the neurotic and promiscuous Olivia, whose fellatory advances have confused him.



And it is here, while he is contemplating the

"mores that reigned over that campus" that Marcus, our narrator, believes he is dead: "and even dead as I am, and have been for I don't know how long....Is that what eternity is for, to muck over a lifetime's minutiae?" Marcus (despite what you might have read from other critics) is not narrating from the grave, but has been hallucinating "Under Morphine," the title of the first chapter, and he is dying as he tells his story. Roth's Indignation is a grotesque in the manner

Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio. Even the New Willard House where Marcus works is straight out of Anderson's novel, and Marcus, like old Wing Biddlebuam, three decades earlier, is the town mystery. As with most Roth works, sexuality, desire, and frustration permeate this story, and though Roth spices it with humorous Portnoyian masturbation episodes, the story is quite dark.

**Indignation** by Philip Roth, (256 pages; Houghton Mifflin; \$26.00)

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