PREFACE

The astonishing range and variety of Philip Roth's fiction and a considerable literary output to match this range prompted me first to look at his works more closely. Covering some four decades, Roth's early writing reflects the "innocence" and the "seriousness" of the postwar generation of the 1950s in America. Likewise, the anti-establishment wave of the 60s finds its literary counterpart in Roth's subsequent works. In his 70s fiction Roth strikes a balance between the earlier earnestness and the later exuberance giving way to an art that is marked by maturity and control. From the 80s Roth's fiction has been taking on, on the one hand, an increasingly postmodern turn, while his autobiographical memoirs, on the other, are rendered in unembellished, reportorial narration.

An ambivalence at various levels running all through this variety further drew me to Roth. First, his fame as a novelist has been accompanied by as much ill-fame. His fiction exhibits crude, explicit images of bodily, sexual functions even while providing a perceptive rendering of emotional/intellectual issues. Downright earnestness and biting sarcasm, wild revelry and bitter invective, and a spirit of playfulness that pervades or at least laces his writing, are all part of the ambivalences that abound in his fiction. These dualities mark his approach to fiction as much as his prose style. Such dualities fascinated me and
challenged me to attempt a categorizing of every one of Roth's individual works.

Thanks to the critical concepts of Mikhail Bakhtin, I could take up the task of accounting for the range and variety of the Roth canon. The increasing application of Bakhtin's ideas in recent literary research and criticism first drew my attention to his works. His concepts provided me with tools of analysis besides answering the need I felt for a theoretical framework for my study of Roth. Though Bakhtin's writing dates back from the 1920s to the 40s, they address every critical/theoretical question posed since the New criticism of the 40s to the post-structuralist theories of the 80s. What particularly appealed to me in Bakhtin was a theoretical rigour that is characteristic of contemporary literary theory, combined with a humanist approach that marked traditional criticism.

A remarkable aspect of Bakhtin's scholarship is that he draws from the entire range of European literature from Graeco-Roman antiquity to the present day. More remarkable is the fact that he draws from forgotten writers, obscure works and neglected areas of the dim past. Just as Roth advises us to conquer our squeamishness, Bakhtin sets all squeamishness aside while studying aspects of literature and culture that are "low." What is more, he valorizes the elements of "low genres" in such a way that they undermine the prestige of high, "official" genres. The "discovery" of
Bakhtin's writings in the West and Bakhtin's discoveries on the novel have (I hope) helped me discover certain aspects of Roth's fiction.

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