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REFERENCES

1 Roth studies is now a crowded field. There are a biannual journal – Philip Roth Studies – hundreds of articles and more than thirty books devoted to the works of the man who is, by common consent, the best living American novelist. In this context it is difficult to make an original scholarly contribution, but Masiero succeeds admirably, in two respects: firstly, hers is the first monograph to focus on what she calls ‘the Zuckerman books’; secondly, she is the first Roth critic to produce a book-length narratological analysis of his work. Systematically tracing the evolution of what she calls the “complete narrative microcosm” that comprises the fictional biography of Zuckerman (237), Masiero’s book is divided into eight chapters that follow Zuckerman’s progress from his first appearance in Roth’s oeuvre – in My Life as a Man (1974) – to his swansong in Exit Ghost (2008).

2 Much criticism has been published on Nathan Zuckerman, or rather on a number of apparently different Zuckermans: the self-obsessed, carnally hyperactive protagonist and, sometimes, narrator of the four fictions that comprise the Zuckerman Bound series; the postmodernist trickster of The Counterlife (1978); and the impotent, ascetic teller of other people’s stories in the ‘American Trilogy.’ Not much has been written on what Masiero calls the ‘provisional and unstable incarnations’ (39) of Zuckerman in the ‘useful fictions’ of another of Roth’s fictional authors, Peter Tarnopol, in My Life as a Man, or on the Zuckerman who appears as addressee and respondent in the correspondence with his other creator, Roth himself, which bookends The Facts (1988), or on the Zuckerman
referred to at several junctures in *Deception* (1990). Masiero helpfully redresses this neglect, giving careful attention to these relatively neglected books; she also argues that the Zuckerman who emerges after Tarnopol’s initial experiments is not simply a convenient fictional construction, or an alter-ego of, or fictional surrogate of Roth, but rather a consistent persona with ‘an (almost) definite shape,’ with his own corresponding, coherent fictionalised biography. Her focus on the role of Zuckerman’s notebooks – ‘one of the key elements functioning as a bridge between the Zuckerman books’ (100) – is one of the most interesting aspects of her argument, and again engages with a phenomenon that has received very little attention until now. Whereas, as Masiero points out, Zuckerman’s finished fictions – *Higher Education*, *Mixed Emotions*, *Reversed Intentions* and *Carnovsky* – are only referred to by name in Roth’s fiction, excerpts from the notebooks are frequently reproduced, whether in the form of the complete novella *The Prague Orgy* or the snippets that appear in ‘Basel’ and ‘Gloucestershire’ in *The Counterlife*. Whether these notebooks are actually, even within Roth’s ‘storyworld,’ the ‘textually raw place untouched by imagination’ (101), that Masiero claims, is, I think, debatable, but they are certainly (yet another) example of the countertexts and counterlives that Debra Shostak, Masiero’s most important precursor, places at the centre of her book on Roth. Masiero’s is also the first major study of Roth not only to use the Library of America editions of Roth’s work as her standard editions but also to analyse the ways in which they repackage – and arguably distort – his corpus.

Masiero’s great strength as a critic is to reveal both the subtleties of Roth’s narrative art and the possibilities it offers to the attentive reader, and re-reader, of his work. Repeatedly, Masiero sensitively teases out the tensions and affinities between different versions of Zuckerman’s biography, within and across books, emphasising how, in the hands of Roth and his fictional counterpart, narration becomes not just a way of relating events and representing characters but of making and remaking the fictional reality – what she calls the ‘storyworld’ – that he inhabits. Demonstrating both what a narratological approach can bring to Roth’s texts and what Roth’s work can offer to narratology, Masiero’s meticulous unpicking of the different narrative layers of the novels, and unpacking of the ambiguities of particular episodes in the novels (invariably well-chosen), produce a compelling and persuasive account both of Zuckerman’s development as a fictional author and of Roth’s development as a novelist. Lucidly written and thoroughly researched, this is one of the finest books to have been written on Roth and will be invaluable to scholars, students and general readers.

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