Goodbye, Columbus Study Guide

Goodbye, Columbus by Philip Roth

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Introduction

The novella "Goodbye, Columbus" was first published in Roth's 1959 collection, *Goodbye, Columbus, and Five Short Stories*, which won the National Book Award. Other stories in the collection include "The Conversion of the Jews," "Epstein," "Defender of the Faith," "You Can't Tell a Man by the Song He Sings," and "Eli, the Fanatic." "Goodbye, Columbus" was adapted to the screen in the 1969 movie by the same title, produced by Paramount, directed by Larry Peerce and starring Ali McGraw and Richard Benjamin.

"Goodbye, Columbus" is narrated from the point of view of Neil Klugman, a twenty-threeyear- old Jewish man who lives with his aunt and uncle in a lower-middle-class neighborhood in Newark, New Jersey, and works at a public library. It concerns his relationship over the course of one summer with Brenda Patimkin, an upper-middleclass Jewish college student staying with her family in the suburbs. Their relationship is characterized by the stark contrast of their socioeconomic differences, despite the fact that they are both Jewish. The summer ends with Brenda's brother Ron's wedding, after which Brenda returns to Radcliffe College in Massachusetts. When the two arrange to meet at a hotel over the Jewish holidays, she tells him that her parents have discovered her diaphragm and have both written her letters expressing their dismay *and* their disdain for Neil as a result. As Brenda feels she can no longer continue the relationship, Neil leaves the hotel, ultimately achieving a new sense of self-knowledge, which is expressed by the dawning of the Jewish New Year as he arrives back in Newark.

"Goodbye, Columbus" explores themes of Jewish identity, class divisions within the Jewish community, spiritual crisis over Judaism, love, sex and relationships, and the struggle for self-knowledge in a young man. Despite its serious subject matter and themes, the novella is characterized by humor, as expressed through the narrator's finely tuned sense of irony in his observations of both his own and his girlfriend's families.

Author Biography

Philip Roth was born on March 19, 1933, in Newark, New Jersey, into a lower-middle-class Jewish family. He attended Rutgers University in Newark from 1950 to 1951, then transferred to Bucknell University, from which he graduated Phi Beta Kappa and magna cum laud, with a major in English, in 1954. Roth earned a Master of Arts from the University of Chicago in 1955, and from 1955 to 1956 he served in the U.S. Army, from which he was honorably discharged due to a back injury. He briefly enrolled in a Ph.D. program in English at the University of Chicago, but left in 1957 to pursue a career in writing. Roth has worked as an instructor at University of Chicago (1956-1958), University of Iowa (1960-1962), State University of New York at Stony Brook (1967-1968), and Hunter City College University of New York (1989-1992). He was writer-in-residence at Princeton University from 1962 to 1964 and at University of Pennsylvania from 1965 to 1980. Roth has been married twice, to Margaret Martinson, from 1959 until her death in 1968, and then to Claire Bloom, the noted British Shakespearean actress, from 1990 until their divorce in 1994. Roth's 1998 novel, *I Married a Communist*, is based on the aftermath of this messy divorce, perhaps in response to Bloom's 1996 memoir, *Leaving a Doll's House*, which focuses on their relationship, depicting Roth in an unflattering light.

Because his protagonists and their experiences usually closely resemble Roth and his experiences, Roth's fiction is generally considered to be based largely on his own life, although the author himself remains equivocal on this matter. His first major literary publication was the collection *Goodbye, Columbus, and Five Short Stories* in 1959, for which, at the age of twenty-six, he received the National Book Award. His third novel, *Portnoy's Complaint*, which became a bestseller, is his most well-known, as well as his most controversial. This novel is written in a stream-of-consciousness style narrated by Alexander Portnoy, the protagonist, who speaks to his silent psychoanalyst. Subsequent novels have followed the character of Nathan Zuckerman, a Jewish writer generally regarded as an autobiographical stand-in for Roth himself. Roth's actual autobiography, *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography*, was published in 1988.

Plot Summary

Neil Klugman is twenty-three and Jewish. He works at a public library and lives with his Aunt Gladys and Uncle Max, as his parents have moved to Arizona because of their asthma. Neil first meets Brenda Patimkin, also Jewish, a student at Radcliffe College in Boston, Massachusetts, at a country club swimming pool, to which he has been invited by his cousin. Brenda asks him to hold her glasses while she dives into the pool. He later calls her, and they arrange to meet at the tennis courts. She invites him to dinner with her parents the next day. Neil meets Brenda's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Patimkin, her brother Ron, and her ten-year-old sister Julie. Neil lives in a working class section of Newark, New Jersey, whereas the Patimkins live in a large home in an upper-middle-class suburb. Except for Mrs. Patimkin, every member of the family is almost constantly preoccupied with sports, such as golf, basketball, ping pong, and so on. Neil and Brenda go out every night together for two weeks, and she later invites him to stay at her house for a week during his summer vacation. Whereas Neil officially stays in the guest room, he and Brenda secretly sleep together every night in her bedroom. Brenda invites Neil to stay a second week, during which the family is preoccupied with making plans for her brother Ron's imminent wedding. One day, Neil suggests to Brenda that she get a diaphragm. She does not want to, but eventually agrees. At the end of the second week, Neil attends the wedding, where he meets Mr. Patimkin's half-brother, Leo, who drunkenly talks to Neil about his family and their financial situation. Soon after the wedding, Neil drives Brenda to the train station to go back to college in Boston. For several weeks, they communicate by letter and phone, until she invites him up to Boston for the Jewish holiday of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. Neil's Aunt Gladys cries at the news that he will not be with his family for the holiday. Neil meets up with Brenda, and the two check into a hotel under the names "Mr. and Mrs. Klugman." But, as soon as they enter the hotel room, Brenda tells Neil that her mother has found her diaphragm in a drawer under a pile of sweaters. She shows Neil two letters she has received, one from her father and one from her mother, expressing their dismay at this discovery. Brenda insists that she can barely face her parents after this, let alone continue to see Neil. Neil picks up his bag and leaves the hotel. He wanders around the Harvard campus and stops outside the library, where he contemplates his own image in the mirror of the darkened window. He catches the train back to Newark, "just as the sun was rising on the first day of the Jewish New Year," and in time to make it to work.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The relationship between Brenda Patimkin and Neil Klugman centers on lust, money, and their different social classes. She is in a higher class than he is, since her family has made a lot of money and no longer lives in Newark, New Jersey, where Neil lives with his aunt and uncle. The Patimkin's are very much aware of social class. Because Neil has traveled, served in the army, attended college, and is still exposed to many different types of people in the Newark Public Library, he is much less class conscious than they are. However, he is proud of his relationship with Brenda, since she is in the Jewish upper class. This short story centers around Brenda and Neil's brief time together one summer and their ultimate separation.

Brenda Patimkin asks Neil Klugman to hold her glasses while she dives into the pool at the Green Lane Country Club. He thinks she is beautiful, and this is how the two meet.

Neil lives in Newark, New Jersey, with his Aunt Gladys, who prepares dinner for herself, Neil's cousin Susan, Neil, and his uncle, though they all eat separately. That evening, he wants to call Brenda in Short Hills, New Jersey. Aunt Gladys admits she uses the Short Hills phone book to hold up a dresser. He retrieves it and calls Brenda's house. A woman answers and tells him Brenda is having dinner at the club and will be home later. Aunt Gladys feeds Neil a hot dinner of pot roast, gravy, boiled potatoes, peas and carrots, and rye bread on a hot summer night. Aunt Gladys' joys are taking out the garbage, emptying her pantry, and making threadbare bundles for the "Poor Jews in Palestine".

When Uncle Max comes home, Neil calls Brenda's house again and speaks with her. She remembers his Aunt Doris, who is always at the Green Lane Country Club reading *War and Peace.* Neil says he was the one who held her glasses earlier that day. He asks if he can come over to her house. She replies that she is playing tennis tonight and will be sweaty afterwards, but he can come. She gives him her address, and he tells her that he will be driving a Plymouth.

Neil drives from Newark into the higher altitudes of the suburbs, past long lawns with sprinklers and large houses. He is early, so he drives up and down the streets that are named after eastern colleges. The township's designers had plotted the destinies of its children. Neil goes to Brenda's house, which has its own tennis courts. He parks, and finds Brenda playing against "Simp", whose real name is Laura Simpson Stolowitch. "Simp" is her Bennington name. Brenda is ahead five games to four. Neil thinks Brenda plays tennis with beauty and grace, and they talk after the game is over. Brenda attends Radcliffe in Boston. Neil had attended Newark Colleges of Rutgers Universities, a lesser institution. Neil thinks she has two wet triangles on the back of her white polo shirt where wings would have been if she had been an angel. They sit on the grass together.

Brenda asks what Neil's cousin Doris looks like. He says she has freckles, dark hair, and is very tall. She goes to school at Northampton. The family moved to Livingston a couple of years ago. Neil admits he lives in Newark, where Brenda lived as a baby. Neil asks why Brenda rushes the tennis net after dark. She says she does not like to be too close and risk injuring her bobbed nose. Brenda says she had been pretty, but now she is even prettier. Her brother is having his nose fixed too. The procedure costs $1,000. As they kiss passionately, he feels a stirring in her breasts.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Newark, New Jersey is one of the eastern cities settled by recent immigrants to the United States, including the Jewish population that fled Europe, Poland, and the Russian Pale before, during, and after World Wars I and II. The downtown area is set up for small shops and businesses. As the Jewish population had accumulated wealth, they moved to the suburbs and the poorer Jews and the next wave of immigrants flowed into the city. The Patimkin family now lives in the suburbs. Brenda and her friends attend select eastern colleges, Bennington and Radcliffe, and they have proper friends as well as country club memberships. Wealth and status are important character traits within this story. Neil is an ordinary, nice Jewish man, who has completed some college, served in the Army, and works in a library. It becomes obvious that Brenda's concerns are with appearance and status. She has had her nose bobbed to reduce whatever inherited hump or lump she had so she can blend in with her classmates. The questions arise throughout this story whether Brenda really loves Neil or if she is toying with him for the pleasure involved with forbidden excitement.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Neil holds Brenda's glasses the next afternoon as a guest at the Country Club. Brenda wears a black tank suit and is barefooted, contrasting with other women who are wearing Cuban heels, knuckle-sized rings, and large straw hats bought in Barbados. Brenda lays her thick glasses on the pool's deck. Neil dives in and surfaces like a dolphin beside Brenda, sliding her legs on his. They play together in the pool, and she lets him touch her breasts. Brenda says she feels pursued by Neil, even though she invited him. They spend the rest of the afternoon in the water of the large, eight-lane pool. Brenda's brother Ron joins them around four o'clock. Brenda introduces him to Neil and invites Neil to dinner. Ron repeatedly swims the length of the pool.

They eat around the dining room table, served by the African-American maid, Carlota. Brenda wears shorts and white polo shirt. Her sister Julie, who is ten years old, sits across from them. Mr. Patimkin reminds Neil of Neil's father. He is tall, strong, plainspoken, and a ferocious eater. Mrs. Patimkin is polite to Neil. She has dark hair and a large, voluptuous frame. Neil sees the oak trees behind the house adorned with the family's sporting goods and equipment. He feels physically inadequate among the large builds of the Patimkin family. As they talk sparsely during dinner, Ron says Harriet will be calling at five o'clock. Then they talk about sports, and Harriet calls. Neil feels Brenda's fingers tease his calf.

They sit under the biggest oak tree while Mr. Patimkin and Julie play basketball. Ron asks that someone move the Chrysler from behind his Volkswagen. Neil is behind the Chrysler. Neil and Brenda back the cars out so Ron can go to his game. Then, Neil and Brenda return to where they were previously sitting and talk. Neil remarks that Mrs. Patimkin is beautiful. Brenda thinks her mother hates Brenda and is jealous of her. Mrs. Patimkin had been the best tennis player in the state at one time. Brenda has pictures of her from that time. Even though they are rich and no longer live in Newark, Mrs. Patimkin does not want to waste money. Brenda's father is not too smart, but he is sweet, and he treats Brenda and her brother alike. The remark that her "mom still thinks we live in Newark" stings Neil, since that is where he lives. Mr. Patimkin asks Neil to play basketball with him, Brenda, and Julie. The rule is that Julie gets to win.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Obviously, Neil and Brenda are lusting after each other. Their class differences become obvious because of Mrs. Patimkin's comments about Newark, where Neil lives and works. Mr. Patimkin has his store in the middle of the African-American section of Newark. While the reader later learns Mr. Patimkin's first name, one never learns his wife's first name. While this is never explained, the reader can suppose that Mrs. Patimkin's identity is derived directly from her husband's wealth and upwards mobility

and from being Brenda's mother. Again, in this chapter, wealth and class differences are underscored by the characters' actions and conversations.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

The next morning, Neil parks across from the library where he works. He sees the Newark Museum and the bank building that now are an extension of Rutgers University. When the library opens at nine o'clock, he wonders if Brenda is awake. A small African-American boy stands in front of one of the cement lions that guard the library steps. The boy growls at the lions. From his desk on the main floor, Neil watches teen-age girls walk up the wide flight of stairs to the main reading room. He is supposed to be put in charge of the Reference Room, which is a currently a vacant position. The African-American boy enters just before lunch and asks for the heart section. Neil does not understand his dialect or question. The boy wants to look at art books. The head librarian distrusts the boy being with all those expensive books and suspects the boy is either touching himself inappropriately or planning to steal a book.

Neil finds the boy in Stack Three I seated on the brick floor with a big open book in his lap. He is looking at a book of Gauguin reproductions and asks where the people are. Neil tells him that they are in Tahiti, an island in the Pacific Ocean. Gauguin, a Frenchman, painted the pictures. While looking at the paintings, Neil dreams of Brenda, as Short Hills appears rose-colored, like a Gauguin stream. That evening, the Patimkin family is waiting for Neil on the front steps. Brenda is wearing a dress and high heels. They eat dinner and take Ron to the airport while Neil stays behind with Julie, who watches television. Neil wants to return to Newark. He studies the family pictures in the hall and goes through the kitchen to the basement. He turns on the light and sees pine paneling, bamboo furniture, a ping-pong table, and the stocked, mirrored bar of a man who entertains others. Neil counts twenty-three bottles of Jack Daniels.

There are more photos, including Ron with a basketball and Brenda on a horse. There is a mounting board with Brenda's ribbons for whatever she did on the horse. There are no pictures of either parent, though. The rest of the basement is comprised of gray cement walls, linoleum floor, and innumerable ancient electrical appliances whose presence is a reminder of the Patimkin roots in Newark. He opens the still-functioning old refrigerator. It is heaped with fruit. He takes a few cherries. Julie, ever the snitch, catches him and says that the fruit is not washed yet and he should put it down.

Neil asks where Ron is going. Julie tattles that he is going to Milwaukee to see Harriett. They play ping-pong, and Neil enjoys beating Julie. She accuses him of cheating, throws her racket across the room at the bar, and says she hates Neil.

Later that night, Neil and Brenda make love on the sofa in the TV room. Julie has gone to bed, and Neil has flushed the stolen cherries down the toilet. They sit for a while and Neil begins to unbutton Brenda's dress. She resists him, but he loves her. When he gets home, he calls her from his aunt's house. She wants to know what kind of phone calls he makes at one o'clock in the morning, but he cannot wait to see Brenda again.

Chapter 3 Analysis

In this chapter, Neil's character is further developed, and the reader learns that Neil is a hot-blooded young man. He is kind and respectful of others, helping an African-American boy look through an expensive collection of Gauguin paintings. Neil dreams of Brenda but gets stuck baby-sitting Julie while the family takes son Ron to the airport so that he can visit Harriet in Milwaukee. Julie is obviously very spoiled as seen by the temper tantrum she throws when Neil beats her at ping-pong. She is supposed to win every game the family plays, and she has never learned how to lose.

Neil and Brenda make love for the first time, which is ironic, since he had spent the evening baby-sitting Julie instead of courting Brenda. The Patimkin family seems to think of Neil as someone who is nice to have around, since he will be a reliable and responsible person to look after the child. However, one must wonder why they don't invite him along on their trip to the airport. Clearly, this chapter again reflects the class differences between Brenda's family and Neil.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Neil has only two people in his life, Brenda and the African-American kid who likes Gauguin. The boy always waits at the library for Neil. On this particular day, he asks to check out the Gauguin book, but Neil avoids the issue by telling him there is a hold on it for someone else. The boy has to read the book in the library. Neil sees Brenda every evening and they make love as often as possible, in between Mr. Patimkin's late night games on television and Mrs. Patimkin's Hadassah parties from which she returns at unpredictable hours. Brenda and Neil go swimming at the Club. When Neil tries to pull her suit straps down, Brenda asks him where his parents are. Neil answers that they are in Tucson. He is staying with his aunt and uncle because they are not his parents. They are worse than his parents, but their apartment is convenient to his job. He tells her his history; that he works at the library, that he had gone to Newark Colleges of Rutgers University and majored in philosophy, and he is twenty-three years old, with no career plans at least for the past year since he has been out of the army.

Brenda asks Neil if he loves her. When he does not answer, she says she will sleep with him anyway but Neil says that he does love her. They take turns diving into the dark pool and then cling to each other. As the summer goes on, they go for walks, rides up through the mountains, go out to eat, and to see Ron play basketball in the semi-pro league. Mrs. Patimkin continues to smile at Neil. Brenda asks her dad if, at the end of August, if Neil may spend a week of his vacation at their house. He agrees eagerly. Neil's Aunt Gladys asks where Neil is going. Aunt Gladys is impressed that the Patimkin's have that much room in their house. Neil replies that they do not live over the store. Aunt Gladys says she was not ashamed when they lived over the store. They put his cousin Susan through college. Neil says he is just taking a vacation, because he deserves one. Aunt Gladys requests that he leave the Patimkins' telephone number. She does not believe real Jews live in Short Hills.

The head librarian tells Neil that after his vacation he will become reference librarian and receive a small raise. An old man wants to check out the Gauguin book. Neil promises to find it. The African-American boy comes in after lunch to look at the book. Neil asks why he does not check it out. The boy does not have a library card. Neil offers him one, since he goes to school, but the boy says someone at his home will destroy the book if he brings it home. Neil goes to the Patimkin house after work.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Hadassah activities are important to Mrs. Patimkin. This is a way of raising money for Israel. One of their projects was the State of the Art Medical Center called Mount Scopus. It is the best in the Middle East. Any doctor of any nationality can practice there and receive help from other doctors and medical assistants. Mrs. Patimkin's work on

lists and luncheons were not frivolous activities, although they are not discussed in detail in this story.

Aunt Gladys, like Brenda, is extremely class and money conscious, even though Neil is not. All of Jewish families in this story started out in Newark "living over the store" for economy and convenience. Brenda's motives in asking Neil to stay with the family for a vacation are not clear. As the reader learns later, Brenda is toying with Neil and lusts for him, but she cannot say with sincerity that she loves him.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Julie tattles that Ron is marrying Harriet on Labor Day. Harriet is flying to Short Hills next week for a huge wedding. Her parents don't have much time to arrange everything. Mr. Patimkin is taking Ron into the business so he can support his and Harriet's expected son. Neil stays in the guest room, across from Ron's room and down the hall from Brenda's. Brenda does not know if Neil will be allowed to stay overnight. If he does, her mother will have a fit. Neil unpacks his clothes in the guest room. Ron comes in, and Neil congratulates him. He asks Neil if he wants to listen to his phonograph. He can even hear his Columbus record.

There is commotion downstairs. Mrs. Patimkin is angry that Neil is staying over while she is planning Ron and Harriet's wedding. She thinks Brenda is lazy and believes the world owes her a living. She also thinks Brenda should get a job. Brenda replies that they could live off the stocks alone. Her mother keeps nagging Brenda until Brenda begins to cry. Brenda tells her mom to yell at Neil, too. Julie tattles that Brenda is crying, and Brenda chases her up the stairs. The scene is too much for Neil, who dresses and says his own name out loud. Brenda goes to Neil's room. Everybody has now left the house but the two of them. She says Ron's upcoming wedding has caused her mother to behave out of control. With goody-goody Harriet around, Brenda thinks her mother will forget Brenda exists.

Brenda walks across the guest room to a door at the far end, which she opens. Neil thought that was a closet. Instead, it holds old furniture from when they lived in Newark. Brenda gets filthy as she looks for the three hundred-dollar bills her father hid there. She guesses her father decided that she did not need it and removed it. Brenda is in tight clothes, shorts and a shirt. She is crying because she wants to find the money, tear it up, and put the pieces in her mom's purse. She asks Neil to make love to her on the cruddy Newark sofa.

In the morning, Brenda makes breakfast for the two of them. Ron has gone off to work at the Patimkin sink works in Newark. Mrs. Patimkin has gone to the Temple to talk with the Rabbi about the wedding. Julie is in the back yard helping the maid hang the washed clothes on the line. They drive to the high school and run on the track until they collapse onto the grass. Brenda wants to train Neil in track. The next morning, they return with Ron's stopwatch. When he finishes running, Brenda is standing up and waiting for him. This time she says she loves him.

At night, they both read in their rooms until Ron goes to sleep. He follows a routine. He stomps around the room and goes into the bathroom, where he urinates loudly and brushes his teeth. He washes out his jock straps and hangs them to dry on the shower knobs. One night Neil hears the record player going in his room. Normally, Ron calls Harriet and locks himself in his room with magazines and records. This night he plays

his Columbus record. Neil hears bells moaning evenly with soft, patriotic music behind them, with a gloomy male voice reciting, "And so goodbye, Columbus, goodbye Columbus... goodbye..." Then there is silence. Ron almost catches Neil sneaking out of Brenda's room one morning.

Chapter 5 Analysis

The reader learns several early 1950s issues in this chapter. The double standard is one. It is acceptable for a boy to get a girl pregnant and marry her. It is not acceptable for Brenda to be having sex with Neil, especially under her parents' roof. Neil and Brenda are having unprotected sex, which is beginning to disturb Neil.

Ron graduated from Ohio State University, not one of the big eastern universities. He continues to listen to his "Goodbye, Columbus" University record of his senior year activities, when he was a basketball star. He has no visible occupation but is obviously still a sports addict. He has developed unusual bedtime activities.

The reader learns that the Patimkin's once lived in Newark and kept some of the furniture used there, when they lived over the store. It is now old and cruddy, shameful. Brenda hunts for the money her dad stashed in the furniture, which perhaps she would have used to run away with Neil. With the money gone, though, she is upset, and Neil consoles her.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Brenda extends Neil's stay another week, until Labor Day, when Ron gets married. Neil will be her escort. The day after the wedding, Brenda will leave for school and Neil will return to work. The Patimkin family picks up Harriet at the airport. Neil ponders life without Brenda when she returns to Radcliffe, even though she has not hinted at ending their affair. He calls his Aunt Gladys to tell her he will be staying until Labor Day. She asks if he has clean underwear. Aunt Gladys is also concerned that he will stay too long and become too good for his family in Newark.

Carlota is cooking dinner in the kitchen and nibbles on the grapes. Neil shoots baskets on the lawn and practices golf swings. Nothing diverts him from his loneliness. He is sensing the hollowness that will come when Brenda is away. Ron and Harriet are getting married, but he and Brenda are not. They have not mentioned marriage, except for that night at the pool when she said, "When you love me, everything will be all right". He believes they love each other, but things do not seem all right at all. Brenda returns alone, since Harriet's plane is late. The rest of the family is going to wait for her and have dinner at the airport. She must tell Carlota.

Brenda appears on the porch in a yellow dress revealing tanned flesh above her breasts. Neil wants to ask her something. She yanks the blanket with a big "O" on it over to them and they sit. Neil asks Brenda to go to a doctor and get a diaphragm. Brenda says they are being careful. Brenda resists, saying it is silly and selfish of Neil, who is being unreasonable. She changes into shorts and a blouse and practices her golf swing. Neil asks her to sit by him again. Brenda reveals that she does not feel old enough to use equipment. It would change their relationship. They argue more and she accuses him of nagging her just as her mother does. She starts crying and runs into the house, hiding for the afternoon.

Harriet Ehrlich arrives. Neil sees her as a perfect match for Ron, since she is totally devoted to surface appearances. Mrs. Patimkin takes Harriet under her wing and begins to ignore Brenda. Harriet calls her "Mother". Neil goes to Brenda's room and tells her to forget about the diaphragm if it upsets her that much. He thinks Brenda is angry with him rather than his suggestion, so he leaves her alone for the night.

The next morning there is a lot of activity. Harriet and Brenda are going to New York to buy a dress for the wedding and one for after the wedding. Brenda will buy her own maid of honor dress. If she goes with Harriet, they can go to Bergdorf's without Mrs. Patimkin. After they leave, Neil is alone in the house with Carlota and Mrs. Patimkin, who is working on a Hadassah project. Neil admits his mother was active in Hadassah when his parents lived in Newark. He does not know whether or not she still is. Mrs. Patimkin says that Hadassah exists wherever there are Jewish women. Neil's Aunt Sylvia is working against some disease. Mrs. Patimkin asks Neil if he would like to join

B'nai Brith (a men's Jewish fraternal organization), which Ron is joining after the marriage. Neil asks if she is active in the Temple. Mrs. Patimkin asks Neil which Temple he belongs to. He belongs to Hudson Street Synagogue, but he has not been active. The family is going to Temple on Friday, and she invites Neil, asking if he is orthodox or conservative, a question to which Neil does not know the answer. Mrs. Patimkin resumes her Hadassah work until Neil interrupts and asks if she had read any of philosopher Martin Buber's work.

Mrs. Patimkin asks if Martin Buber is a reformed Jew. Neil replies that Buber is Orthodox. They decide that since Hudson Street Synagogue is Orthodox, Neil must be too. Mrs. Patimkin is Orthodox. Her husband is conservative. Brenda, the best Hebrew student ever, is nothing. The phone rings and rescues Neil from the conversation. Mrs. Patimkin tells the caller she cannot do something because she has all the Hadassah calls to make. Her husband has silver patterns to review. Since she cannot go herself, she sends Neil to Newark.

Patimkin Kitchen and Bathroom Sinks is in the middle of Newark's African-American section, which was once the Jewish section with little stores and delicatessens. This is where Neil's grandparents shopped and bathed at the beginning of the century. In addition to these stores there are now auto wrecking shops, a brewery, and a leather factory. The offspring of the original Jews have prospered and moved west, towards the edge of Newark, then out of Newark and up the Orange Mountains and down the other side. Neil wonders if he will see the kid from the library. He wonders what migratory race will follow.

Neil pulls up in front of a huge garage door that says across the front, "Patimkin Kitchen and Bathroom Sinks - Any Size, Any Shape". The office is in the center of an immense warehouse. Mr. Patimkin is shouting at his son Ron, who is wearing a white T-shirt that says Ohio State Athletic Association across the front. Ron is taller than his dad and almost as stout. Six African-Americans are loading one of the trunks feverishly, tossing sink bowls at each other. Ron directs the men and appears confused. He is not concerned when someone drops a sink. Neil would not permit such sloppiness and shattering of the enamel sinks.

Mr. Patimkin goes to the fish bowl office to answer the phone. Neil goes inside and hears Ron tell the loaders they cannot all go to lunch at the same time. Mr. Patimkin sits in the only chair in his office. He has pornographic calendars hanging from filing cabinets. Mr. Patimkin is upset that after four years of college, his son cannot unload a truck. Neil admits he could not either. Mr. Patimkin muses that a man works hard to get something. Success is not easy. Neil knows that this is not all to the life he has managed to create for self and family. Mr. Patimkin says that his kids do not understand hard work and all he has been through. When Ron enters, Mr. Patimkin sends Ron to get the silver patterns for his wife to see.

Neil drives to the mountains in his own car that afternoon. He stands at the wire fence, watching deer prance and feed behind a sign that reads "Do Not Feed the Deer". Kids are at the fence feeding the deer popcorn from their hands. Their squeals of excitement

scare the fawns back to their mothers. Neil and Brenda have been there before. The children's moms are identical goddesses with microscopic differences. Neil thinks Brenda has not yet become one of them. When he returns to the Patimkin house, Brenda is modeling her bridesmaid dress for Harriet and her mother. Even Mrs. Patimkin is happy by the sight of her and has relaxed the Brenda-hating muscle around her eyes and mouth. Brenda models without glasses and is gorgeous. Harriet tells Brenda that she is beautiful and should be the bride. There is an uncomfortable silence as all wonder who should be the groom.

Brenda talks to Neil about being the bride. She called a clinic while she was in New York. A woman who sounded like her mother asked if she were married. Brenda hung up the phone after this question. Neil offers to go with Brenda to a nice doctor's office, but Brenda thinks about it and decides to ask her mother if she wants them to take Harriet.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Brenda reacts badly to Neil's suggestion that she get a diaphragm so they are no longer having unprotected sex. Does Brenda really want to become pregnant? Does this mean that she and Neil will never get married if she does not become pregnant? Brenda is a surface person, just as Harriet appears to be, and she will not marry below her existing class, even if only a few years ago the Patimkins lived and worked in Newark.

When Mrs. Patimkin and Neil are alone, she questions him as a mother would talk to her daughter's prospective husband. She determines that both are Orthodox Jews. They supposedly both believe in a strict interpretation of the Torah and the Talmud (basic Old Testament books and Jewish writings), God's covenant with the people of Israel, and the promise of a Messiah to come. A Conservative or modern, reform Jew believes in conserving Jewish tradition while updating the religion. Obviously, this will not do for a Patimkin, even though Brenda is not especially religious.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Neil and Brenda go to New York on a hot, muggy day three days before Ron's wedding. She goes to a doctor across from Bergdorf Goodman's store while Neil waits in Central Park. Neil walks towards St. Patrick's Cathedral where a model is being photographed on the steps. He enters the church to cool off, but it is still hot inside the church. He asks God if being married to Brenda is best for him. He is ashamed and walks outside. The noise of Fifth Avenue answers him. He is seeking God in the material goods of Patimkin Sink and Bonwit Teller. God becomes a laughing clown.

Brenda comes out of the building wearing the diaphragm. Neil says he loves her. They sleep together that night, even though they are nervous about it. They hardly see each other the next day with all the last-minute wedding preparations. Ron and Harriet are at the center of the storm. By Sunday night, all are exhausted and fall into beds. Ron invites Neil to listen to records. He extracts his Columbus record from its case, places it on the phonograph, and leans back on his bed. They give the record to all seniors with the yearbook. Neil listens to a kind of documentary about the year 1956, fall season, Ohio State University. It is a recording of their basketball homecoming game against Minnesota, the last game for some seniors, including Ron Patimkin, Number 11, from Short Hills, New Jersey. The crowd applauds mightily as his name is called.

The record changes to graduation day, June 7, 1957. This will be the last glimpse of Ohio State and of Columbus, Ohio, for many years. The OSU band plays the Alma Mater and bells chime the last hour. As the deep narrator's voice continues, Neil sees goose bumps on Ron's arms. The record ends, "goodbye, Ohio State, goodbye, red and white, goodbye, Columbus, goodbye, Columbus... goodbye." Neil tiptoes from the room and closes his door. He opens it again and looks back at Ron-still humming on his bed.

Eccentrics from both families attend Ron and Harriet's wedding. At the reception, Mr. Patimkin gets drunk and appears to accept Neil as Brenda's boyfriend. Everyone eats and drinks too much until finally the musicians stop playing, pack up, and leave. As Neil waits for Brenda, the men talk about how much money they are making. Mr. Patimkin is now going by his first name of Ben. His brother Leo brags about how far he has come with one semester of accounting at City College night school. Neil finds Brenda asleep on a couch in the lobby at four o'clock. She is pale and wilted and has been sick. They drive to the Patimkin home. Neil drives Brenda to her train back to school at noon.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Brenda and Neil go to New York where Brenda is fitted for a diaphragm. Since they are both nervous, this act appears to change the nature of their relationship, even though Neil continually tells Brenda he loves her. Brenda returns to school and leaves her

diaphragm behind. The reader must decide what this means she is leaving behind as she returns to Boston and her peers. The diaphragm is symbolic of her relationship status with Neil. By leaving it behind, she is leaving him behind as well. On the other hand, this may be a way to show that she intends to be loyal to him while she is away at school.

Ron's bedtime ritual of listening to the record from his senior year at college symbolizes his lack of maturity. He is still stuck emotionally and mentally in his college days, and he is not yet ready to accept his future as a husband and a father.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

It is cold in New Jersey in the fall, as Neil drives back to see the deer. Everything reminds him of Brenda. Neil becomes reference librarian. He never sees the African-American kid again. Some man checks out the Gauguin book. Neil admits to himself that the kid is better off not carrying dreams of Tahiti in his head if he could not afford to fly there. The same is true of Neil's relationship with Brenda. Brenda writes that she will be coming in for the Jewish holidays a week away. Neil's Aunt Gladys is having ten people as guests for Rosh Hashanah. Brenda calls Neil to tell him she is not coming for Rosh Hashanah. She has a test Saturday and a paper due. He cannot take off any time from work, because he just got a raise. Brenda invites him to stay in a hotel room through Sunday night. Neil still cannot go because Tuesdays and Sundays are his days off. Neil decides to go to New York for the weekend anyway and convinces his boss he is anti-Semitic if he does not agree. Neil does not recognize Brenda at first because she is letting her hair grow. She is wearing a fake gold wedding ring, and they sign the hotel register as Mr. and Mrs. Neil Klugman.

Brenda goes to the window as Neil puts away their coats and suitcases. Neil goes to Brenda, puts his hands around her body, and holds her breasts. There is a problem. Mrs. Patimkin was straightening up Brenda's clothing and found the diaphragm. Her father wrote her first not to pay attention to her mother's letter. She is hysterical because of the shock and all of her work for Hadassah. He has faith that since Brenda is away at school and from Neil and their involvement, she will do the right thing. He will pray for her at Temple. He wants her to buy a new coat.

Mrs. Patimkin's letter comes via airmail. She has been crying all morning and had to skip her Hadassah board meeting. She is upset because they have always given Brenda everything and she has betrayed them by having a relationship with a boy from another social class. Brenda has broken her parents' hearts. Neil wants to know why Brenda left the diaphragm at home for her mother to find. He thinks she wanted her mother to find it. Brenda does not know if she can bring Neil to her parents' house again. They talk, describing their relationship in the past tense. Neil leaves, as Brenda remains behind, crying. Neil knows he loves Brenda, but he can no longer do so. He will not be as passionate with anyone else for a long time as he has been with Brenda. He returns to Newark in time for the Jewish New Year and a new beginning.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Rosh Hashanah is a Jewish Holiday in mid-September celebrating the arrival of the New Year in the Judaic tradition. Brenda, not being especially religious, prefers to stay in Boston to take her test and write a paper. These must not be too challenging, since

she also makes time for Neil. Later, it becomes obvious that Brenda wants to avoid going home to face her parents, but she truly wants to see Neil at least once more.

Neil does not recognize Brenda at first because she is letting her hair grow, signifying change, since hair cannot grow much in two weeks. She intentionally left the diaphragm at home where her mother, straightening out her clothing, could find it. Now both parents are upset about Brenda and Neil's relationship since they want her to marry within class. The social class difference upsets Mr. and Mrs. Patimkin tremendously, even though they were once part of the same one. Brenda breaks off their relationship. Neil loves her and is still not class conscious. The reader is left to ponder whether or not they are making a mistake.

Characters

Carlota

Carlotta is the Patimkin's maid. That the Patimkins have a maid is an indication of their wealth.

Harriet Ehrlich

Harriet Ehrlich is the fiancée of Brenda's brother Ron. Harriet arrives at the Patimkin household several days before the wedding. Neil describes her as "a young lady singularly unconscious of a motive in others or herself. All was all surfaces, and she seemed a perfect match for Ron, and too for the Patimkins."

Aunt Gladys

Gladys is Neil's aunt, and Neil lives at her house. She is indirectly critical of his relationship with Brenda, based on her awareness of the vast socioeconomic class differences between the families.

Doris Klugman

Doris Klugman is Neil's cousin, who first invited him to the country club swimming pool where he met Brenda.

Neil Klugman

Neil Klugman is the protagonist and narrator of the story. Neil's first-person narration tells the story of his relationship with Brenda from his own perspective. The story is one of self-discovery for Neil, as their relationship is characterized by their difference in socioeconomic status. Neil, who is twentythree, lives with his Aunt Gladys and Uncle Max in Newark, New Jersey, and works at a library. He first meets Brenda at a country club swimming pool, to which his cousin Doris has invited him. He later calls Brenda and meets her at a tennis court. The next day, he is invited to dinner at her parents' house. Brenda's upper-middle-class suburban Jewish family is in stark contrast to the Neil's lowermiddle- class Jewish family. After several weeks of dating, Brenda invites Neil to stay a week at her parents' house. While he is there, he and Brenda secretly spend the night together in her room. She invites him to stay another week, at the end of which she goes back to college for the fall. After several weeks without seeing one another, they arrange to spend a weekend together at a hotel, but, when they meet, Brenda tells him that her parents have discovered the diaphragm she had been using

with him. As Brenda feels that, because of her parents' reaction, they cannot continue their relationship, Neil leaves the hotel and heads back home and to his job.

The Little Boy

This is the little African-American boy, described by the outdated term "colored," who daily visits the library to look at the book of Gauguin paintings of native women in Tahiti. He appears in Neil's dream, as they both drift away from Tahiti on a ship. Neil identifies with the boy because they are both preoccupied with a fantasy of inhabiting a paradise which in reality they cannot reach—for the boy it's Tahiti, for Neil it is the upper-middle-class world of Brenda's family.

Uncle Max

Max is Neil's uncle, and Neil lives at his house. Uncle Max does not appear in the story, except as Neil and Neil's aunt refer to him.

John McKee

John McKee is Neil's co-worker at the library, whom Neil doesn't like. Neil also refers to him as John McRubberhands.

Ben Patimkin

Ben Patimkin is Brenda Patimkin's father. Described as "tall, strong and ungrammatical," Mr. Patimkin is a wealthy businessman, who owns Patimkin Kitchen and Bathroom Sinks. Mr. Patimkin is a man of few words, and who spends his time with his family primarily in playing various sports in their yard. He comments that Neil "eats like a sparrow," which Neil interprets as a slight against his masculinity. Toward the end of the story, Mr. Patimkin seems willing to accept Neil as a potential son-in-law, hinting that there would be room for him in the family business. After Brenda's mother, Mrs. Patimkin, discovers Brenda's diaphragm, Mr. Patimkin writes Brenda a letter, intended to soften the impact of her mother's harsher letter. His primary response to the situation is to insist that he buy her a new coat, which reflects his ability to treat family matters mostly in terms of business and material possessions.

Brenda Patimkin

Brenda is Neil's lover. Neil first meets Brenda at a country club swimming pool, where she asks him to hold her glasses while she dives into the pool. Neil later calls her, and she invites him to meet her at the tennis court. The next day, she invites him to dinner with her family, and, eventually, to spend two weeks at their house, during which the two secretly spend the night together. Neil's relationship with Brenda is characterized by

their socioeconomic class differences. Although they are both Jewish, everything about their family lives is in stark contrast. Brenda, like the rest of her family, is preoccupied with sports, competition, and athletics. She attends Radcliffe College in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to which she returns at the end of the summer. She and Neil do not see each other again until they check into a hotel together for a weekend. When they arrive at the hotel room, however, Brenda tells him that her parents have discovered the diaphragm she had been using with Neil over the summer. Her mother and father have written her separate letters, expressing their dismay at this discovery. She makes it clear to Neil that, due to her family's disapproval, she cannot continue their relationship.

Julie Patimkin

Julie Patimkin is Brenda's little sister. Described as "ten, round-faced, bright," Julie is as preoccupied with sports and competition as the rest of the Patimkin family. After Neil insists on beating her at a game of ping pong one day when he is left to baby sit her, Julie becomes upset and cools toward him from then on.

Leo Patimkin

Leo Patimkin is Mr. Patimkin's half-brother, whom Neil meets at the wedding. Leo Patimkin gets drunk and talks extensively to Neil about his family and financial circumstances.

Mrs. Patimkin

Mrs. Patimkin is Brenda's mother. Neil describes her in the following way: "with her purple eyes, her dark hair, and large, persuasive frame, she gave me the feeling of some captive beauty, some wild princess, who has been tamed and made the servant to the king's daughter—who was Brenda." Mrs. Patimkin is cold toward Brenda, her own daughter, and clearly skeptical of Neil, based on his humble class origins. When, toward the end of the story, Mrs. Patimkin finds Brenda's diaphragm under a pile of sweaters in a drawer, she writes a distraught letter, which she sends via air mail to Brenda at college. It is primarily Mrs. Patimkin's response to the situation which seems to influence Brenda to end the relationship with Neil.

Ron Patimkin

Ron Patimkin is Brenda's brother. Ron was an athlete at Ohio State University, in Columbus, Ohio, and shares the Patimkin family preoccupation with sports, competition, and athletic activities. He marries Harriet in a big wedding, which Neil attends. Ron invites Neil to listen to his "Columbus" record, which is a sort of college yearbook narrated through such events as the last basketball game of the season, in which Ron played. The record ends with the singing of "Goodbye, Columbus . . . ," a nostalgic farewell to college life for graduating seniors. It is this line from which the story takes its

title, and which expresses Neil's eventual sense of nostalgia for his brief relationship with Brenda.

Mr. Scapello

Mr. Scapello is Neil's boss at the library. He gives Neil a promotion, with the implication that Neil can expect to work his way up the library hierarchy, should he continue his job there.

Laura Simpson Stolowitch

Laura Stolowitch is Brenda's friend, with whom Brenda plays tennis the first time she and Neil arrange to meet. Brenda calls her "Simp."

Susan

Susan is Neil's cousin, the daughter of his Aunt Gladys and Uncle Max, with whom Neil lives.

Themes

Love, Sex and Relationships

The story centers around the development of Neil's relationship with Brenda, from their first meeting to their final breakup. The first person narration portrays the relationship from Neil's perspective, highlighting the class differences between the two of them. A significant element of their relationship is their sexual encounters, first in her family TV room, and later, while he is staying at her house, in her bedroom at night. Neil describes his first sexual encounter with Brenda in terms of "winning," using the metaphor of the competitive game to describe the experience of making love to her; due to their class differences, having Brenda as a girlfriend represents a symbolic socioeconomic rise for him. Their first quarrel revolves around his suggestion that she get a diaphragm, her initial negative response to the idea, and eventual conciliation. For Neil, the issue of the diaphragm represents a gesture of commitment on Brenda's part. It also becomes a nexus of the power dynamics between the two of them: Neil, in part, wants her to take his suggestion because he feels that she has all the power in the relationship; he wants her to do what he says for once, rather than their usual dynamic, in which he does everything she tells him to do. The diaphragm becomes a key element of their relationship after her parents find it and are dismayed at the discovery. As a result, Brenda chooses loyalty to her family over her commitment to Neil.

Families

Family dynamics are a central focus of this story. Neil's working class family is portrayed in stark contrast to Brenda's wealthy family. Much of the narration is taken up with Neil's perceptions of Brenda's family members, her household, and their family dynamics. His own family situation, living with his aunt and uncle, since his parents have moved to Arizona, serves as a backdrop for the foreignness of Brenda's household. Neil gains further insight into Brenda's father's perceptions of his work and family when he sees Mr. Patimkin at his place of business. Brenda's brother Ron's wedding to Harriet Ehrlich is described in terms of a characterization of the relatives and Neil's interactions with some of them. Throughout these interactions and observations, Neil attempts both to compensate for his "lower" class standing and to envision himself becoming a member of the Patimkin family.

Class Divisions

The central dynamic of Neil's relationship with Brenda is based on their differences in socioeconomic class. Although they are both Jewish, the fact that Brenda's family is wealthy and Neil's is not means that they come from completely different worlds. Brenda's family started out in Newark, New Jersey, where Neil currently resides, thus indicating the Patimkins' rise in class as they moved out of Newark. Neil's insecurity in

the presence of Brenda's family is primarily due to his painful awareness of his "lower" class standing. This class division is central to the power dynamic in his relationship with Brenda, as she seems to determine almost everything they do together. Neil's interactions with Brenda's uncle Leo, at the wedding, further expand upon the class dynamic between them; Leo blatantly congratulates Neil on his luck in the prospect of marrying "up" into the financial abundance of the Patimkin family. Ultimately, the class divisions between Neil and Brenda contribute to tearing them apart, but it is left unclear if it is primarily Neil's insecurities about their differences which negatively affect their relationship, or if Brenda genuinely looks down on him.

Self-knowledge

This is a story of self-examination and selfdiscovery for Neil. In his involvement with Brenda, Neil attempts to fit into her upper-middle-class Jewish family, remaining continually aware that it is not an easy or a comfortable fit. At the end of the story, after he and Brenda have in effect broken up, Neil experiences a symbolic epiphany in his sense of self and personal identity. This renewed sense of self, in the wake of his breakup with Brenda, is further symbolized by the dawning of the Jewish New Year, which implies a new beginning for Neil.

Nostalgia

The title of the story refers to Brenda's brother Ron's yearbook record album, which ends with the song lyrics, "Goodbye, Columbus." The lyric literally refers to the nostalgia of the graduating college senior who must say "goodbye" to his college years spent at Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. But this "truckload of nostalgia" symbolically represents the sense of nostalgia Neil feels for his relationship with Brenda, which lasted only half a summer. Like the years spent in college, Neil, as narrator of the story, knows that his time spent with Brenda can never be recaptured. As Neil tells the story of their relationship in retrospect, it is infused with this sense of nostalgia for a bittersweet youthful experience.

Fantasy

Neil ultimately comes to identify with the little boy who comes to the library every day to look at the book of Gauguin paintings of Tahiti. The boy's preoccupation with these images of a foreign land functions as a form of fantasy, in which the locations in the paintings seem to him a sort of paradise, compared to his own life. The world of wealth and abundance in which Brenda lives functions for Neil as a similar fantasy life. He comes to realize that his own foray into her world is similar to engaging in a fantasy life through looking at pictures in a book. It seems to be a paradise of abundance that he can never realistically inhabit. The fact that the book is finally taken off the shelf and borrowed by another library patron symbolizes Neil's realization that Brenda could never really be "his," but only a temporary excursion into a fantasy world.

Competition and Games

Brenda's family is completely preoccupied with sports, athletics, games, and competition. Neil carries these themes throughout the narrative as metaphors for his relationship with Brenda and his interactions with her family. Neil continually feels that he is being challenged to compete with Brenda and her family, which symbolizes his feelings of inadequacy in the face of their upper-middle-class lifestyle.

Style

Point of View and Narration

This story is narrated from the first person restricted point of view. Neil Klugman is both the narrator and the protagonist and everything is portrayed from his perspective. This is effective because this is a story about identity and self-discovery; what is important is how Neil perceives himself and his relationships with others, particularly Brenda, and how these perceptions change over the course of the story.

Setting

This story is set during the 1950s in Newark, New Jersey, the New York City metropolitan area, and Cambridge, Massachusetts. The settings are important in establishing the class divisions between Neil's family and Brenda's family. The geography of the city becomes a map of socioeconomic divisions. For instance, Brenda's family used to live in Newark, where Neil now lives with his aunt and uncle. This information indicates that the Patimkins once shared the socioeconomic standing that Neil's family holds but moved their way up the socioeconomic ladder, as indicated by their current residence in the suburbs. Areas of New Jersey and New York are also described in terms of the flow of particular ethnic populations throughout the century in and out of particular neighborhoods and socioeconomic strata within the city.

Yiddish

Roth's story is smattered with Yiddish words and expressions, which capture the flavor of Jewish culture. The use or non-use of Yiddish words by various characters in the story is significant in indicating their relationship to Jewish identity. For instance, Mr. Patimkin uses the Yiddish word "gonif," which Neil knows means "thief." Mr. Patimkin comments that his own children do not know Yiddish; they are so assimilated into mainstream American society that he refers to them as "goyim"—a Yiddish term which is a derogatory expression for non-Jewish people. Other Yiddish words that appear in the story are "jahrzeit," "schmuck," "mazel tov," "shtarke," "poilishehs," and "schmaltz."

Allegory and Symbolism

An allegory is a use of figurative language in which the literal elements are meant to be interpreted symbolically. A central allegory of this story is indicated by the title "Goodbye, Columbus," which refers to the *Columbus* album which Brenda's brother Ron plays for Neil. The album is a narrated yearbook account of Ron's senior year in college at Ohio State in Columbus, Ohio, which ends with the nostalgic song lyric, "Goodbye, Columbus." Although the song and the album narration are about the nostalgia of the

college graduate for his alma mater, it takes on an allegorical meaning in speaking to Neil's sense of loss and nostalgia at the ending of his relationship with Brenda.

The Novella

This story is in the form of the novella— sometimes referred to as a novelette—meaning that it is shorter than a novel but longer than a short story. The form of the novella originated in medieval Italy, where it was characterized by tales based on local occurrences. In England, Geoffrey Chaucer is credited with having introduced the novella form through his *Canterbury Tales*. The novella is often characterized by a "frame narrative," in which the narrator is a character who is telling the story or series of stories. The development of both the modern novel and the modern short story was in part influenced by the novella form.

Historical Context

Jewish Holidays

Toward the end of the story, Neil and Brenda agree to spend the weekend of the Jewish holidays together. Specifically, it is during the Jewish High Holy Day of Rosh Hashanah, which is the Jewish New Year and usually occurs in mid to late September. As the end of summer had indicated the end of their relationship, the story's end on the dawn of the Jewish New Year indicates a sense of rebirth and a fresh, new beginning for Neil.

Movie: Ma and Pa Kettle in the City

Neil mentions that he and Brenda sneak into the drive-in movies to see the last fifteen minutes of whatever show is playing that night. They agree that their favorite last fifteen minutes of a movie is *Ma and Pa Kettle in the City*. This refers to a series of movies released between 1949 and 1955, featuring Ma and Pa Kettle, "hillbillies" from Washington state, in various encounters with more urban, sophisticated elements of American culture. The series is similar in theme to the later TV series, *The Beverly Hillbillies*, which is about members of a poor, rural family who move to Beverly Hills, California, after discovering oil on their land. The earlier series included *Ma and Pa Kettle* (1949), *Ma and Pa Kettle Go to Town* (1950), *Ma and Pa Kettle at the Fair* (1951), *Ma and Pa Kettle Back on the Farm* (1951), *Ma and Pa Kettle on Vacation* (1953), *Ma and Pa Kettle at Home* (1954), and *Ma and Pa Kettle at Waikiki* (1955). The mention of this series in the story is significant in that it emphasizes the theme of encounter between two socioeconomic classes, such as the one between Neil and Brenda.

Mary McCarthy

When Neil first asks Brenda to get a diaphragm, her response is negative. After he suggests she go to "Margaret Sanger, in New York" to get fitted for one, Brenda asks if this is something he's done before. Neil responds, "'I read Mary McCarthy.'" When, toward the end of the story, they check into a hotel room together, and Neil asks if she's done this before, she responds, "'I read Mary McCarthy.'" Mary McCarthy (1912-1989) was a novelist, critic, and editor, known, as stated in *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, for "bitingly satiric commentaries on marriage, sexual expression, the impotence of intellectuals, and the role of women in contemporary urban America." At the time of this story's publication in 1959, McCarthy had published three novels: *The Company She Keeps* (1942), *The Oasis* (1949), and *The Groves of the Academe* (1952). Her first autobiography, *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood*, was published in 1957.

Paul Gauguin

At his job in the library, Neil encounters a little boy who comes in every day to look at a large book of paintings by Paul Gauguin. Gauguin (1848- 1903) was a French artist known for his colorful paintings of native women in Tahiti, an island in the Pacific Ocean where he lived from 1891 to 1893 and from 1895 to 1901. Gauguin was influential in the art world for breaking with the impressionist movement and becoming a master of the symbolist movement in artistic style. His most famous painting, one of his masterpieces, is entitled *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* Gauguin valued what he saw as "primitive" life among the native Tahitians above the bourgeois materialism of Western culture. His paintings in the story represent an escapist fantasy in a "resort"- like foreign paradise for the little boy, just as Brenda's upper-middle-class world represents an escapist fantasy for Neil, as remote and unreachable as Tahiti is for the little boy.

Margaret Sanger

When Neil first asks Brenda that she get fitted for a diaphragm, he suggests she go to "Margaret Sanger, in New York." Margaret Sanger (1879- 1966) is known as a pioneer in making birth control readily available to women in the United States and elsewhere. It was Sanger, a nurse, who first coined the term "birth control." She opened the first birth control clinic in the United States in Brooklyn in 1916, for which she was arrested in 1917. Sanger influenced legal changes that allowed physicians to give women advice about birth control and succeeded in altering the Comstock Act of 1873, according to which pamphlets on birth control and contraceptive devises were considered obscene materials and therefore illegal to distribute. Sanger founded the American Birth Control League in 1921, which became the Birth Control Federation of America, renamed the Planned Parenthood Organization of America in 1942.

Martin Buber

During a conversation with Mrs. Patimkin, in which she attempts to determine his Jewish affiliations, Neil asks if she is familiar with the work of Martin Buber, which she is clearly not. Martin Buber (1878-1965) was one of the most renowned, as well as controversial, modern Jewish philosophers. He was born in Vienna but eventually settled in Palestine, where he was influential in teaching and in establishing educational institutions. Buber was raised in a family of assimilated, secular Jews, but in adulthood he became interested in Judaism. The fundamental concept of Buber's modern Jewish philosophy is the I-Thou relationship, as explained in his most famous work, *I and Thou* (1923). Buber was less concerned with maintaining the observant practices of Judaism than with the relationship between the individual and God, nature, and other men.

Yiddish

The characters in Roth's story occasionally include Yiddish words in their dialogue. The Yiddish language, associated with Ashkenazie Jews, originated in the tenth century from Hebrew and Aramaic roots but later developed through the influence of Germanic and Slavic languages, although it is written in the Hebrew alphabet. Before World War II there were over ten million Yiddish-speaking people in the world, but some half of them perished in the Holocaust. Many Yiddish words are still used by English-speaking Jews; others have made their way into the mainstream of the English language.

Critical Overview

The novella "Goodbye, Columbus," was first published in the 1959 collection, *Goodbye, Columbus, and Five Short Stories*, by Philip Roth, for which he received the National Book Award. Other stories in the collection include "The Conversion of the Jews," "Epstein," "Defender of the Faith," "You Can't Tell a Man by the Song he Sings," and "Eli, the Fanatic." "Goodbye, Columbus" was adapted to the screen in the 1969 movie by the same title, produced by Paramount, directed by Larry Peerce and starring Ali McGraw as Brenda Patimkin and Richard Benjamin as Neil Klugman.

Upon its publication, *Goodbye, Columbus, and Five Short Stories* received immediate and vehement condemnation by rabbis across the country, who considered Roth's portrayal of Jews and Judaism to be anti-Semitic, a viewpoint which they expressed in letters and sermons. As stated in the Gale Group's *Contemporary Authors Online*, it was to be "the first of many Roth books to be castigated from the synagogue pulpits." John N. McDaniel explains Roth's point of view and his response to his critics:

Roth has repeatedly answered his critics from the Jewish community by insisting that as a writer he has no obligation to write Jewish "propaganda.". . . Jewish critics, Roth maintains, confuse the purpose of the writer with the purpose of the public relations man. Jews feel that Roth is "informing" on Jews when he should be providing a picture of the positive aspects of Jewish life; Roth argues that he is indeed an informer, but all that he has told the gentiles is that "the perils of human nature afflict the members of our minority."

McDaniel defends Roth's work against charges of anti-Semitism on the grounds that his stories address more generalized human concerns in the literary mode of "social realism":

If we would understand Roth's intentions and achievements as a writer of fiction, we must look at his central characters not as Jews in an ideological, traditional, or metaphysical sense, but as men yearning to discover themselves by swimming into dangerous waters beyond social and familial structures: beyond the last rope. Only by so approaching Roth's fiction are we likely to see what it is that the stories are really about.*Goodbye, Columbus, and Five Short Stories* remained popular despite censures from Jewish religious leaders. Its defenders praise the use of humor, the use of Jewish-American dialect, and the representation of the feelings of alienation of many post-War American Jews, caught between the guilt and trauma of the Holocaust and the forces of assimilation that came with post-War prosperity. Critics recognized Roth as a fresh, new voice in literature. As Irving Howe has observed, "His stories were immediately recognizable as his own, distinctive in voice, attitude, and subject. . . ." McDaniel describes the stories in *Goodbye, Columbus, and Five Short Stories* as "sharp-edged and well-crafted." Critics also praised Roth's use of humor. According to Joseph Epstein, this first volume by the young author demonstrated that "[Roth] is famously funny, dangerously funny, as Mel Brooks once characterized the kind of humor that can cause strokes from laughter." Roth is also noted for his portrayal and commentary on

American life. Categorizing Roth as a "social realist," McDaniel claims that his works "illustrate important insights into America's cultural predicament as Roth sees it from his own vantage point: up close and personal. . . . No other living writer has so rigorously and actively attempted to describe the destructive element of experience in American life. . . ."

Roth's third novel, *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969), is his most well known, most popular, and most controversial. The book immediately became highly controversial for its use of scatological language, bordering on the pornographic, and, as with *Goodbye, Columbus, and Five Short Stories*, for its depiction of Jews, for which it was also banned by rabbis across the country. However, the novel is also credited with catapulting Jewish-American literature into the realm of popular culture. *Portnoy's Complaint* was adapted to the screen in a 1972 Warner Brothers production, written and directed by Ernest Lehman.

Many subsequent novels by Roth feature the protagonist Nathan Zuckerman, a Jewish writer, generally considered to be a stand-in for Roth himself, in what critics assume to be autobiographical works disguised as fiction. The Zuckerman trilogy includes *The Ghost Writer*, *Zuckerman Unbound*, and *The Anatomy Lesson*, which were collected into one volume entitled *Zuckerman Bound: A Trilogy and Epilogue*, in 1984. Roth won the 1987 National Book Critics Circle Award for *The Counter Life*, a fourth installment in the Zuckerman series.

Criticism

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Critical Essay #1

Brent has a Ph.D. in American culture, specializing in cinema studies, from the University of Michigan. She is a freelance writer and teaches courses in American cinema. In the following essay, Brent discusses Neil's identity crisis.

"Goodbye, Columbus" is a coming-of-age story, in which the twenty-three-year-old protagonist, Neil Klugman, grapples with his sense of self, particularly in relation to his Jewish identity. The event that that precipitates this identity crisis is meeting Brenda Patimkin, with whom he has a relationship over the course of a summer. While Brenda and Neil are both Jewish, their differences in socioeconomic class create the central tensions of their relationship. Neil lives with his aunt and uncle in a lower-middle-class area of Newark, New Jersey, and works in a public library. Brenda is a college student at Radcliff College in Boston, Massachusetts, spending her summer vacation at her upper-middle-class family's house in the suburbs outside of New York City.

The class differences between Neil and Brenda are intertwined with their vast differences in Jewish identity. Brenda's family is assimilationist, in that their wealth leads them to de-emphasize their Jewish cultural heritage. For instance, Brenda tells Neil that she has gotten a "nose job," plastic surgery on her nose, in order to remove the "bump" in her nose structure, which is considered a Jewish facial characteristic. She tells him it cost a thousand dollars to have it done, a sign both of her family's wealth in being able to afford cosmetic surgery, and of the value they place on shedding their Jewish features so as to assimilate more easily into mainstream, non-Jewish American culture. Neil's disdain for Brenda's "nose job" is expressed later in the narration, when he meets Brenda's father, Mr. Patimkin, and sees the natural nose feature, which Brenda had inherited from him. Neil regards the bump in Mr. Patimkin's nose in positive terms, describing it as a "diamond," which suggests the symbolic value Neil himself places on this sign of Jewish identity: "Brenda's old nose fitted him well. There was a bump in it, all right; up at the bridge it seemed as though a small eight-sided diamond had been squeezed in under the skin." He describes the removal of this "diamond" from Brenda's nose in terms that imply that getting a "nose job" is equivalent to flushing a beautiful and valuable diamond down the toilet: "I knew Mr. Patimkin would never bother to have that stone cut from his face, and yet, with joy and pride, no doubt, had paid to have Brenda's diamond removed and dropped down some toilet in Fifth Avenue Hospital." Later, Mr. Patimkin expresses some sense of ambivalence about the degree to which his children have lost their Jewish heritage in their efforts toward assimilation, even disdainfully describing them at as non-Jewish. When Brenda's father uses a Yiddish word, based in Jewish cultural heritage, he is surprised that Neil knows what it means, as his own children, he claims, are "goyim," a derogatory term for non- Jewish people.

Yet the Patimkin's are not simply or unequivocally assimilationist. Neil has an uncomfortable interaction with Mrs. Patimkin in discussing Jewish religious affiliations and organizations. Just as Neil is painfully aware of his class differences with the Patimkins, he is also defensive and insecure in discussing his Jewish identity with Mrs. Patimkin. Their conversation, which Neil regards from an antagonistic perspective,

highlights the differences in their Jewish cultural identities. Mrs. Patimkin is checking a mailing list for Hadassah, a Jewish women's organization. Hadassah was founded in 1912 as the Women's Zionist Organization of America, known for its efforts in the areas of health care, education, and the needs of Jewish children. When Mrs. Patimkin asks if Neil's mother belongs to Hadassah, he nervously says that she did, he's not sure if she does now, but that his Aunt Sylvia is also in Hadassah. Mrs. Patimkin then asks Neil if he belongs to B'nai Brith, a Jewish men's organization, which he is not a member of. Mrs. Patimkin, who is active in an Orthodox temple, the most strictly observant Jewish religious affiliation, then questions Neil about his religious affiliations, inquiring if he belongs to a temple. Neil attempts to hide the fact that he is not affiliated with a synagogue or Jewish organization, for fear that Mrs. Patimkin will disapprove of his "pagan" tendencies. When Mrs. Patimkin invites him to attend Friday night services at their temple, he stammers, and says, "'I'm just Jewish.'" With this simple statement Neil attempts to reconcile his sense of his Jewish identity with his religious "paganism," evidenced by his lack of religious affiliation or observance. Yet, he still wishes "desperately" to "convince her I wasn't an infidel." When he attempts to gain some legitimacy in her eyes by asking if she's heard of Martin Buber, her response indicates her complete ignorance of this modern Jewish philosopher. Martin Buber is one of the most renowned, if controversial, Jewish philosophers of the twentieth century. While Buber felt that strict observance of Jewish religious laws was not necessary or important, his central tenet, expressed in his 1923 book, *I and Thou*, stresses the importance of the relationship between man and fellow man, man and nature, and man and God. Neil's mention of Buber in this context is ironic in that the entire story revolves around Neil's attempt to establish a genuine relationship with Brenda, which ultimately seems impossible, given their cultural differences.

Mrs. Patimkin tells Neil that she is Orthodox, while her husband is Conservative. Conservative Judaism, while adhering to observance of traditional Jewish religious law, is less strict than Orthodox. Reform Judaism is the least concerned with observing traditional Jewish religious law, in favor of modernizing religious observance practices. Mrs. Patimkin then states that "'Brenda is nothing,'" meaning that Brenda is not religious. Neil, however, attempts to make a joke of this statement by punning on the terms "conservative" and "reform." "'I'd say Brenda is conservative. Maybe a little reformed. . . .'" Neil realizes that joking about Judaism with Mrs. Patimkin will not go over well, and so, when the phone rings, "rescuing" him from the conversation, he says "a silent Orthodox prayer to the Lord." The humor in this lies in the irony of a non-religious Jewish man saying an "Orthodox prayer to the Lord," in thanks for "rescuing" him from being found out as a "pagan" and an "infi- del" by Mrs. Patimkin, who is genuinely Orthodox.

Later in the story, however, Neil's internal thoughts about God take on a more serious tone, as they are an expression of a genuine desire for insight and self-knowledge, albeit with a strong edge of irony, cynicism, and skepticism. While he is waiting for Brenda to get fitted for a diaphragm, Neil wanders into a Catholic church and sits down in a pew. Holding his hands together, he leans forward and closes his eyes. In this praying posture, Neil makes "a little speech" to himself: "Can I call the self-conscious words I spoke a prayer? At any rate, I called my audience God." Neil's "prayer" takes

the form of his first concentrated attempt to understand his relationship with Brenda, asking, "What is it I love, Lord? Why have I chosen? Who is Brenda? The race is to the swift. Should I have stopped to think?" Neil goes on to question his "carnality" and his "acquisitiveness," maintaining in a blatantly sacrilegious assertion that such pleasures of the flesh are a part of God: "If we meet You at all, God, it's that we're carnal, and acquisitive, and thereby partake of You. I am carnal, and I know You approve, I just know it. But how carnal can I get? I am acquisitive. Where do I turn now in my acquisitiveness? Where do we meet? Which prize is You?" Neil expresses some awareness that his "love" for Brenda is in part a love for the wealth and assimilation she represents; he cynically suggests that the "prize" that is "You" (God) is in fact these material luxuries and the assimilation they enable: "Gold dinnerware, sporting-goods trees, nectarines, garbage disposals, bumpless noses, Patimkin Sink, Bonwit Teller—." Neil concludes that "damn it, God, that *is* You!" that God is the materialism and consumerism made possible by wealth. This line of thinking on Neil's part indicates a complete crisis in faith. He indicates that he is aware of his own foolishness and wrong-headedness, by concluding, "God only laughed, that clown." (One can easily see why rabbis were outraged by Roth's representations of Jewish faith!) Roth does not provide the reader with a moral compass by which to chart Neil's bizarre rumination on God. Rather, the reader is drawn into the sense of crisis experienced by Neil himself, who waivers between worshipping a God of material goods and carnal pleasures, and mocking his own lack of faith.

Neil's identity crisis reaches an epiphany at the end of the story, after he leaves Brenda and the relationship behind him. While wandering around the Harvard campus, he stops to look at his reflection in the darkened window of the library. The "mirror" of the window symbolizes Neil's mental self-reflection. Seeing his external form reflected in the window, Neil wishes for some sense of selfknowledge of his internal self. Neil seriously questions the nature of his "love" for Brenda, and what that love has to do with who he really is: "What was it inside me that had turned pursuit and clutching into love, and then turned it inside out again? What was it that had turned winning into losing, and losing—who knows—into winning? I was sure I had loved Brenda, though standing there, I knew I couldn't any longer." The identity crisis which had been sparked by Neil's entry into Brenda's world of luxury and Brenda's family's concept of Jewish identity is in part resolved for Neil by his realization that, whoever he is, he is certainly not *that*.

Although no definite conclusions are drawn in Neil's mind, a self-knowledge is symbolically achieved: "I looked hard at the image of me, at that darkening of the glass, and then my gaze pushed through it, over the cool floor, to a broken wall of books, imperfectly shelved." The image of the "broken wall" and the books "imperfectly shelved" symbolizes Neil's acceptance of himself as "imperfect." It is highly significant that Neil reaches home "just as the sun was rising on the first day of the Jewish New Year." This closing image provides multiple symbols of renewal, both in the rising sun, and the first day of a New Year. Further, it is not a secular New Year, but a "Jewish" New Year. Neil's renewed sense of himself as a Jew, while not clearly defined, is expressed in an image full of hope.

Source: Liz Brent, Critical Essay on "Goodbye, Columbus," in *Short Stories for Students*, The Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Halio presents an overview of "Goodbye, Columbus," and examines the character development of Neil Klugman.

Roth's most famous protagonist, Alexander Portnoy, complains that he is living inside a Jewish joke and pleads with his psychiatrist, Dr. Spielvogel, to help get him out of it. Though at first he seems oblivious of it, Neil Klugman in "Goodbye, Columbus" lives inside a burlesque-show joke—a sexual tease that from the opening paragraph sets his hormones pumping wildly. He describes his first sight of Brenda Patimkin at the country club swimming pool, when she asks him to hold her glasses. After her dive, as Neil returns her glasses he gazes after her. "I watched her move off. Her hands suddenly appeared behind her. She caught the bottom of her suit between her thumb and index finger and flicked what flesh had been showing back where it belonged. My blood jumped." Without any kind of formal introduction, Neil calls her that very evening for a date. Thus their affair begins.

That Neil is a "nice Jewish boy" who quickly captures the reader's sympathy is manifest from his background, his education, his current job, and his warm family relationships. Educated at the Newark Colleges of Rutgers University with a degree in philosophy, he makes no apologies for not having gone to an Ivy League school or anything so prestigious (Brenda is a Radcliffe undergraduate). An only child, he lives with his aunt and uncle and their daughter in a Jewish neighborhood of Newark, because his mother and father, afflicted with asthma, have immigrated to the aridity of Arizona. Neil is devoted to his surrogate family, especially his Aunt Gladys who, like any Jewish mama, worries about his food, his social behavior, and anything else that affects her loved ones. Like many nice Jewish boys, Neil is often impatient of her concern and desperately, sometimes bluntly, tries to reassure her so that she will leave him alone. He works at the Newark Public Library in a respectable position that promises early promotion to the kind of industrious, conscientious young man Neil appears to his immediate superiors to be.

But nice Jewish boys also have strong masculine glands, and Neil is no exception. When he first sees Brenda, no wonder his heart jumps. Although this is not an attraction Roth often deals with later (Neil is not enticed by the forbidden fruit a shiksa, or gentile woman, represents to an older generation of Jews), in its way the situation is still typical. Brenda is Jewish; it is at a Jewish country club that Neil meets her. But Jewish American Princess that she is (Neil, as narrator, never uses the phrase himself), Brenda is rich, spoiled, and smart, if somewhat shortsighted (literally and perhaps figuratively). She knows her attractions, and she knows how to use them.

And so when Neil calls her, Brenda does not put him off. Evidently without a current boyfriend (though she has had her share in the past), she allows Neil to meet her at tennis with her girlfriend, Laura Simpson ("Simp") Stolowitch. The game Brenda plays is another good initial indication of her character. Cocky, confident, she wins the set from Simp, but not in the "one more game" she tells Neil it will take when he arrives. Though

dusk is falling, and falls, the two battle on into the dark, giving Neil a further chance to size Brenda up. He is struck by her ferocious play, her unwillingness to let the set end in a tie, and her reluctance to rush the net and put herself in physical jeopardy: "Her passion for winning a point seemed outmatched by an even stronger passion for maintaining her beauty as it was." After the game is over, as they walk off the court together Neil falls a step behind Brenda, giving him another opportunity to "appreciate" her: "Her hands did not twitch at her bottom, but the form revealed itself, covered or not, under the closeness of her khaki Bermudas. There were two wet triangles on the back of her tiny-collared white polo shirt, right where her wings would have been if she'd had a pair. She wore, to complete the picture, a tartan belt, white sock, and white tennis sneakers."

The suggestion of wings may be deliberately misleading, for Brenda is no angel, no more than Neil is, though to all outward appearances they are a nice Jewish couple. Moreover, in Neil's romantic/ erotic gaze the wings image may be justified. Falling under a spell, he ignores warnings against the temptation Brenda represents. Although he registers her eagerness to win, which later will have important consequences for them—or him—and is irritated by her flip reply to where she goes to school, he perseveres in his pursuit of her. Further warnings, such as Brenda's comments on living in Newark or on the nose job she has had ("I was pretty. Now I'm prettier"), are also registered—and ignored.

Neil counters her responses with sarcastic wit, which Brenda either doesn't get or criticizes as being "nasty." Intent on the relationship, which he finds challenging, he tries to recover "civility," more or less successfully. When he asks for a closer look at her nose, Brenda takes the gambit, on which she too seems intent, and says, as he peers at her, "If I let you kiss me would you stop being nasty?" Whether or not this is another tease, or something more, Neil thinks he feels "a faint fluttering, as though something stirred so deep in her breasts, so far back it could make itself felt through her shirt. It was like the fluttering of wings." That the wings were so small, smaller than her breasts, does not bother him: "it would not take an eagle to carry me up those lousy hundred and eighty feet that make summer nights so much cooler in Short Hills [where Brenda lives] than they are in Newark."

That is how it all starts; the few pages that constitute the first chapter of the novella present the basic contours of the story and its theme. About halfway through the book, however, the story takes a different twist, as the burlesque-show joke deepens into something else. As often happens to nice Jewish boys, what starts out as an affair turns into love—with all its attendant complications. As this aspect of the story unfolds, Neil's true character reveals itself, also involving complications, for the writer as well as the narrator. From this earliest stage in his career, Roth shows that he cannot resist the urge to develop the character of a *schlemiel*. That is what Neil Klugman, despite his surname (which means "clever fellow"), turns out to be, though about this aspect of his protagonist's character Roth seems to be somewhat ambivalent or uncertain. On the one hand, he has developed and seems reluctant to surrender the sympathy Neil has earned; on the other hand, he finds all but irresistible the comedy latent in the

predicament Neil gets himself into by falling in love with a girl like Brenda. But we are getting ahead of the story. Neil has still to meet Brenda's family, the Patimkins.

Mr. and Mrs. Patimkin are among the nouveau riche Jewish families that years earlier moved out of the city and into the suburbs. The fortune Mr. Patimkin made in the war by supplying sinks to army barracks is partly responsible for that; the rest is the result of his continuing hard work and shrewdness as a businessman who knows how to make a buck—lots of them. The Patimkin household thus comes in for the kind of satire that has since become a rich source for Roth's wit and humor—and his trademark, as viewed by many critics. When Brenda invites Neil to dinner for the first time, we see what lies ahead for him—and the Patimkins. The invitation comes after another day at the country club pool, where Brenda and Neil have disported themselves in the water and engaged in further erotic play. The invitation is spontaneous and, for Neil, unexpected, as he tries to explain to his naturally worried Aunt Gladys why he will not be home for dinner that night.

Neil has already met Brenda's older brother, Ron, at the pool. He is built on the lines of a Greek god, as Neil describes him: "suddenly, like a crewcut Proteus rising from the sea, Ron Patimkin emerged from the lower depths we'd just inhabited and his immensity was before us." Ron is a playful, harmless Proteus, not very bright, but amiable and, like all the Patimkins, athletic. The comic juxtapositions Roth uses to describe Ron he also uses to describe Mr. Patimkin at the dinner table: "He was tall, strong, ungrammatical, and a ferocious eater." Brenda's kid sister is rather less amiable, not yet a princess but certainly a princess-intraining. Julie is "ten, round-faced, bright, who before dinner, while the other little girls on the street had been playing with jacks and boys and each other, had been on the back lawn putting golf balls with her father." Though she is the handsomest of them all, Mrs. Patimkin appears ominous and arouses an immediate dislike, or fear, in Neil: "She was disastrously polite to me, and with her purple eyes, her dark hair, and large, persuasive frame, she gave me the feeling of some captive beauty, some wild princess, who has been tamed and made the servant of the king's daughter—who was Brenda."

The comic potential of such a cast is great, and Roth exploits it fully and economically. Instead of transcribing the fragmented or garbled talk interrupting the Patimkins' energetic eating, he consolidates dialogue and description and presents them both in "one fell swoop." The result is just as funny as—perhaps funnier than—the actual talk, which the reader can easily imagine. Eating among these Brobdingnagians seems to reduce their guest, even to diminish him physically (or so he thinks), and gives early indications of the schlemiel that will emerge. The conflict between Mrs. Patimkin and Brenda also emerges, ever so subtly. In the midst of everything the erotic play continues, as Neil feels Brenda's fingers fondling his calf under the table.

After dinner the comedy continues, with somewhat darker overtones. Brenda describes her feelings about her mother and the jealousy between the two women, mother and daughter, which she calls "practically a case study." An excellent tennis player in her youth, Mrs. Patimkin arouses Brenda's admiration for what she was—then. Now the two constantly battle about money, about clothes, about everything. Brenda's snobbery

again shows itself, but Neil chooses to ignore it, afraid to "lift the cover and reveal that hideous emotion I always felt for her, and is the underside of love." If Neil is falling in love with Brenda, he is nevertheless aware of the lust that has drawn him to her and keeps him by her side.

At this moment Julie interrupts, and another indication of Neil the schlemiel emerges, as he lets a basketball thrown at him bounce off his chest. Like Mr. Patimkin, Neil allows the child to win a game of "five and two," though a part of him desperately wants "to run little Julie into the ground." Extremely self-conscious, he feels the gaze of the Patimkins and even Carlota, the black maid who served dinner. Feeling humiliated, Neil is reassured when Brenda says that even Ron, a star basketball player, lets Julie win.

The next morning Neil, at work in the library, has an experience that seems to comment on his involvement with Brenda and her family. As he goes to work he sees a little black boy in front of the library growling and snarling at the cement lions that guard the building. "Man, you's a coward," the boy says to one of them, and then growls again. Shortly afterward the boy enters the library and asks Neil where the "heart" section is. He means the *art* section, and Neil later finds him absorbed in a folio of Gauguin reproductions. The boy is struck by the serenity and beauty of the Tahitian women in the paintings: "These people, man, they sure does look cool," he says. "They ain't no yelling or shouting here, you could just see it." Turning the pages, he shows Neil another picture and says, "Man, that's the f—n' life."

The boy's rapture is not quite what Neil feels about Brenda and Short Hills, but it's close. In fact, Neil makes an explicit comparison, as he daydreams about meeting Brenda that evening in Short Hills, "which I could see now, in my mind's eye, at dusk, rose-colored, like a Gauguin stream." His rose-colored expectations are disappointed, however, for when he arrives Brenda and her family drive Ron to the airport, leaving Neil at home to baby-sit Julie. Angered by the imposition, he sends Julie off to watch television alone. His impulse is to leave quietly and return to Newark, where he feels he belongs, among his own humble people. But he doesn't leave. Instead, he explores the house, or rather the basement, where among other things he finds an unused bar with two dozen unopened bottles of Jack Daniels—"the bar of a wealthy man who never entertains drinking people, who himself does not drink, who, in fact, gets a fishy look from his wife when every several months he takes a shot of schnapps before dinner"—further comic commentary on the middle-class Jewish household the Patimkins' represents. Wanting a drink now himself, Neil is afraid to break the seal of one of the unopened bottles. He muses that the bar had not seen a dirty glass since Ron's bar mitzvah and probably wouldn't see another until one of the children was married or engaged. He then finds an old refrigerator full of fruit, to which he helps himself until discovered by Julie, who surprises him in the act of eating a nectarine. The handful of cherries he has also taken he drops into his pocket, afraid of further discovery.

Neil gets his revenge against Julie for the interruption and the game of five and two when he unmercifully beats her at Ping-Pong in the basement recreation room. Actually, Julie quits in hysterics before he is able to score the final point. She is outraged that Neil, no longer under the gaze of the family, will not make concessions and let her win,

as he and the others had always done before. He completes his revenge after the family has gone to bed that night, when he makes love to Brenda for the first time: "How can I describe loving Brenda?" he muses. "It was so sweet, as though I'd finally scored that twenty-first point." The juxtaposition of events is deliberate and reveals what the love affair is truly about: winning. The question is, Who is winning what?

In the episodes that follow Roth reemphasizes that the affair is a game—another aspect of the burlesque-show joke, or tease—and not truly love, despite Neil's longings and self-deceptions. First Neil plays games with an elderly, jowly gentleman who tries to check out the Gauguin book the little boy has been looking at during his daily trips to the library. Neil explains that the book has a "hold" on it and cannot be taken out. Later Neil and Brenda are at the country club; it is late evening, and they are alone. As the lights go out around the pool, Neil thinks they should be going home, but reassuring him it's all right to stay, Brenda starts asking him questions about himself—for the first time since they met. Although initially these are questions her mother wants answered, soon Brenda admits to her own curiosity, and then asks Neil if he loves her. He hesitates, and she says she will sleep with him anyway, whether he loves her or not. When he says he does not, she answers, "I want you to." He refers to his library job, but she seems untroubled by his humble occupation, and continues: "When you love me, there'll be nothing to worry about." Then they begin playing pool games, hiding from each other for longer and longer intervals, until Neil, anxious, confesses, "I love you . . . I do."

Gamesome, manipulative Brenda wins that one as she wins others. By now fully aware of what is happening, Neil seems not to care. They see each other every evening, make love whenever possible, and finally Brenda invites Neil to spend a week of his vacation at her house. Then they make love every night in her room. The day Neil arrives is the day Ron announces his engagement to Harriet, his girlfriend in Milwaukee, and the house plunges into turmoil preparing for a Labor Day wedding. Why the wedding is so rushed is not clear, though there are hints that Harriet may be pregnant. Neither is an explanation offered as to why the wedding is arranged by the groom's parents and not the bride's, following tradition. Perhaps no explanation is needed. Mr. Patimkin, the equivalent of a *nogid* (rich Jew of the shtetl) enjoys showing off what his money can buy, and in any event Roth wants Neil to be a wedding guest.

Roth's introduction of these events, however, is not simply to find yet another opportunity for satiric comedy, which first Harriet's arrival and then the wedding celebration afford. He means to juxtapose Neil's affair with Brenda against Ron's wedding to Harriet so that the issue of marriage between Neil and Brenda can come to the fore, as it does. Rather than proposing marriage to Brenda, which is the way their relationship seems to be heading, Neil instead proposes that she get a diaphragm, thereby forcing quite a different kind of issue.

Brenda rejects Neil's proposal, claiming that they are OK as they are, but Neil presses her. Although the best argument he can offer is that a diaphragm will make sex more pleasurable for him as well as safer for her, he ultimately admits that he wants her to get one simply to please him, to yield to his desire. It is another contest of wills between them, another attempt by Neil to assert his manhood against Brenda's domineering

spirit. In many other respects she has successfully led him around by the nose, so that by the time he is living in her house he has actually begun to look like her, not only in dress—sneakers, sweat socks, khaki Bermudas, and all—but in manner and deportment; he has begun to look the way she wants him to. He has started to fit into the Patimkin family, much to his Aunt Gladys's disgust but precisely as Brenda wants. It is time for Neil either to assert himself or to lose his manhood altogether.

Why, then, doesn't Neil ask Brenda to marry him? He is sure he loves her, and she him, but somehow things don't seem quite right, as she promised him they would be the night at the pool. Fearing that anything other than a resounding "Hallelujah!" to a marriage proposal would utterly daunt him, he proposes the diaphragm instead, hardly realizing how much more daring the latter would actually be. More evidence of the kind of schlemiel Neil is occurs in a scene at Patimkin Kitchen and Bathroom Sinks. There Neil watches in amazement as men load sinks onto a truck, tossing them to one another, oblivious of the danger of dropping them. Suddenly Neil imagines himself directing them and hears himself screaming warnings. His reverie continues: "Suppose Mr. Patimkin should come up to me and say, 'Okay, boy, you want to marry my daughter, let's see what you can do.' Well, he would see: in a moment that floor would be a shattered mosaic, a crunchy path of enamel. 'Klugman, what kind of worker are you? You work like you eat!' 'That's right, that's right, I'm a sparrow, let me go.' 'Don't you even know how to load and unload?' 'Mr. Patimkin, even breathing gives me trouble, sleep tires me out, let me go, let me go.'" Is this the real Neil Klugman? Where is the sensitive, clever young fellow Roth has been presenting to us? Where is the assertive, masculine chap who orders his lover to get fitted with a diaphragm? Is he capable only of stealing fruit and beating little Julie at Ping-Pong so long as no one is looking? or of telling transparent lies so that the black boy can enjoy his book in the library a little longer?

Obviously Neil is both men, and therein lies Roth's ambivalence toward his character and the source—conscious or otherwise—of both subterranean and surface comedy. While Neil's wit can puncture the pretentiousness of the Patimkins and other social-climbing middle-class Jews, he is also vulnerable within himself. He lacks the *cojones* of a real man. Arguing vehemently with Brenda about the diaphragm, he eventually agrees not to force her to get one. Whereupon she does.

The victory that should have been Neil's therefore becomes Brenda's. She even makes him accompany her to New York to the doctor's office, though she does not force him to go in with her. And when she comes out and Neil does not see her carrying a package, he thinks she may have changed her mind. Actually, he is relieved, but then his emotion turns completely around when Brenda tells him she's wearing the device. "He said shall I wrap it up," she explains, "or will you take it with you?" Whereupon Neil cries, "Oh Brenda, I love you."

Roth's ambivalence toward Neil is matched by Neil's toward Brenda and leads to further indications of his schlemielhood. Even as Brenda apparently yields to Neil's wishes and is fitted with the diaphragm, Neil wanders away to St. Patrick's Cathedral and indulges in a kind of prayer: "God, I said, I am twenty-three years old. I want to make the best of

things. Now the doctor is about to wed Brenda to me, and I am not entirely certain this is all for the best. What is it I love, Lord? Why have I chosen? Who is Brenda? The race is to the swift. Should I have stopped to think?" Getting no answers, he perseveres, confessing his carnal and acquisitive nature and identifying it with God: "I am carnal, and I know You approve, I just know it. But how carnal can I get? I am acquisitive. Where do I turn now in my acquisitiveness? Where do we meet? Which prize is You?" Suddenly he feels ashamed and, still without an answer, walks out into the hubbub of Fifth Avenue, and hears, "Which prize do you think, *schmuck*? Gold dinnerware, sporting-goods trees, nectarines, garbage disposals, bumpless noses, Patimkin Sink, Bonwit Teller—." The answer, which in his imagination Neil again insistently identifies with God, gets only a celestial belly laugh.

In later novels, preeminently in *Portnoy's Complaint* but also in *My Life as a Man* and in others, Roth develops ambivalence toward his protagonists for comic effect. His attitude can be related to the typical kind of Jewish humor in which Jews make fun of their own inconsistencies and contradictions, while frowning on anyone else's doing so. But Roth has other sources of humor. His excellent eye and ear capture, and his typewriter accurately transcribes, observations that not only are funny in themselves but serve as social commentary and as commentary too on the observer, in this instance Neil Klugman. Aunt Gladys is an excellent case in point, and though a minor character, she is surely a contender for the real heroine of the novella.

As against Neil's false sense of superiority and the Patimkin women's wealth and pretentiousness, Aunt Gladys stands as a model of common sense, hard work, wry humor, and shrewd perception. An early version of the typical Jewish mother in Roth's fiction, she partly eludes the stereotype by knowing how and when to stop nagging Neil, by her reduced role in the fiction (compare Sophie Portnoy later on), and by her innate stature as above all a decent, caring woman. Forever complaining about the work she has to do—for example, the four different meals she has to prepare at four different times for the members of her household, including herself—she simply gives vent to her feelings in a harmless, usually humorous way. Neil does not try to explain her odd dinnertime routine except to say that his aunt is "crazy." From his rationalist viewpoint it certainly seems that way, but underlying the "craziness" is a firm resolve to serve the needs of her loved ones. Neil's flip comment thus boomerangs. Witty as he is, her wit matches his but, more important, Aunt Gladys differs from Neil in the depths and strengths of her commitments. Funny in her remarks and her fractured syntax—"I'll see it I'll believe it"—she is not merely a figure of fun but a standard of humanity against which others in the novella, including Neil, pale.

Roth wisely does not sentimentalize Aunt Gladys; in fact, he strongly opposes sentimentality, as he shows in his satiric portrait of Ron Patimkin. Large and amiable, Ron is devoted to the "light classics" of André Kostelanetz and Mantovani but above all to the album that gives this story its title and theme. Lying on his bed after a basketball game in the evening, Ron enjoys listening to the graduation record narrated by "a Voice, bowel-deep and historic, the kind one associates with documentaries about the rise of Fascism." Nostalgia for the Class of '57 lulls Ron to sleep as he hums along with the

band and the Voice intones "goodbye, Ohio State, goodbye, red and white, goodbye, Columbus . . . goodbye, Columbus . . . goodbye." The perfect ending to a perfect day.

Source: Jay L. Halio, "Nice Jewish Boys: The Comedy of 'Goodbye, Columbus' and the Early Stories," in *Philip Roth Revisited*, Twayne, 1992, pp. 13-22.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Nilsen examines Neil Klugman's attempts to establish an individual identity amidst various societal pressures.

In this novella by Philip Roth the protagonist, Neil Klugman, is involved in a struggle to develop and preserve an identity of his own amid different environments and conflicting impulses within himself. Throughout the story he makes love to Brenda Patimkin and tries to find a role in society that corresponds to what he regards as his own, unique self. In the process he loses Brenda, but he refuses to compromise and surrender what he regards as his integrity. As a result of this he remains mainly a detached observer in relation to the various settings and role models that make up the social universe of the story. Brenda is the only one that he seeks an intimate relationship with. However, Neil does not choose this outsider role solely for its own sake, as an expression of wilfulness. As a modern, liberal intellectual living in the conservative and repressive American society of the nineteen fifties, he identi- fies with a set of secular and rationalistic values that are bound to bring him into conflict with the world around him.

Neil's struggle to establish his own identity is highly understandable in view of his circumstances. He represents the third generation of a Jewish immigrant group that has experienced great changes and transitions. His milieu is basically working class or lower middle class and strongly colored by traditional Jewish ethnic attitudes and customs, but he himself is a librarian with a bachelor's degree in philosophy and a modern, assimilationist approach to American society. Neil finds it impossible to accept the narrow-minded concept of life of his relatives, especially his aunt Gladys. He is ready to break away from the lifestyle of the parental generation, and when he meets Brenda, he is attracted both to her beauty and her manners. A resident of the wealthy suburb of Short Hills, she seems to represent a different and better world. Newark and Short Hills constitute two sharply contrasted regions in the symbolic geography of the story, and Neil tries to define his own self mainly in relation to these two extremes, though the library where he works seems to represent a third alternative.

In the Patimkin household Neil is regarded as an outsider and he responds with acerbic inner comments to the various absurdities of this family. They are affluent, but crudely materialistic and snobbish, devoted to appearances, material wealth, social position and athletic prowess. Neil does not hesitate to characterize the whole clan as 'Brobdingnags' who make him feel small and insignificant at their overfilled dinner table. Everything about them and the class that they represent reinforces his conviction that this lifestyle does not correspond to the identity that he seeks for himself.

The library is disappointing to Neil because he cannot identify with the others there and worries that he may end up like one of them, a dusty librarian with a pale skin whose life becomes a bloodless devotion to his duties. Always alert and aware of the imperfections of his surroundings, Neil creates a distance between himself and his colleagues and wants to define himself in terms of his opposition to them, just as he does in relation to his own family and that of Brenda. In the library he achieves such a separation by

sympathizing with a black boy who spends hours in the art book section looking at pictures of Gauguin's Tahiti paintings. Another librarian, John McKee, is worried about this little black intruder and what he may be up to in the stacks looking at pictures of nudes. But this racism and sexual anxiety and prudery are repellent to Neil, who has experienced and rejected such attitudes already in his own environment.

Neil appreciates the longings of the black boy for a better world, a freer and more sensuous life, which is so powerfully expressed in Gauguin's colorful scenes and figures. In the story, these pictures are part of a chain of images of an exotic setting which includes Neil's vision of Brenda as a Polynesian maiden and his later dream of a South Sea island. This imagery symbolizes an alternative lifestyle and a happiness which Neil also longs for. Though he is frustrated by the Patimkins, he is not yet ready to given up his dream of a different and more satisfying life which may lie in store for Brenda and himself. Short Hills is the same kind of dream for him that Tahiti is for the black boy, and he envisages the suburb 'at dusk, rose-colored, like a Gauguin stream.'

Neil tries to fulfil his dream by creating a separate realm of love between himself and Brenda which assumes a subversive function in relation to the respectable Puritanism of the Patimkin family. The young couple's erotic activities in the television room are a kind of conspiracy and a parallel to the black boy's hiding in the library to look at pictures. Gauguin himself lived in Tahiti, in voluntary exile from his native French bourgeoisie. Neil's conquest of Brenda and their surreptitious lovemaking are the means by which he not only bolsters his sense of masculinity, but also supports a part of his identity which he feels is threatened by his new situation. His efforts to help the black boy are also an element of this self-protective mechanism.

However, Brenda soon begins to reveal her insecurity and dependence on her parents' approval. They want to know more about Neil and his prospects, and she starts to question him in order to determine his social acceptability or lack of it. She also asks him if he loves her and tells him that she intends to go on sleeping with him whether he does or not. This declaration suggests that she regards her affair with Neil, up to this point, mainly as a sexual fling. She also reveals that she attributes the same motives to himself, something which he finds 'crude' because he has greater hopes for their relationship than that. Thus he is pained by her inability to understand the real nature of his feelings. From the start, it seems that the two of them have different concepts of love. Unable to appreciate Neil's motives for approaching her, Brenda believes that he does not love her yet, telling him that she wants him to do so and that when he does, 'there'll be nothing to worry about.' She has a superficial concept of love which has little relation to the actual process which is going on between them. He does love her, and that is the problem, since he wants to aid her in her tentative efforts to liberate herself from her parents' influence.

Brenda is a willing partner for Neil in the physical sense, but in reality she is much less independent than he. She attempts to cover up the whole issue by asserting that everything will be all right once he loves her, but this turns out to be an illusion. However, Neil is not in a position to foresee that this will be the case, and he commits himself to her and declares his love for her. According to one critic, however, the

relationship between these two is 'nothing more than a means of escape,' and Neil 'remains without the values of commitment which could take escape beyond itself.' Here, Neil's love for Brenda is seen as pure escapism, whereas he in fact is engaged in a search for something and someone that he can commit himself to in a genuine fashion because they correspond to his real self. This commentator sees no difference between Neil and Brenda and argues that 'neither is willing to face the problems that any involvement entails.' It would rather seem that it is mainly Brenda who shies away from contemplating the deeper challenge that is inherent in Neil's courting of her.

The approaching marriage of Ron Patimkin and his fiancée Harriet is an indication of the kind of life that is expected of a member of the clan, and Neil has a hard time hiding his dislike of the completely unimaginative sort of marriage and life that Ron seems to contemplate quite happily. Neil is aware that Ron is quite nice to him, but the fact remains that the latter's mental horizon does not extend to anything beyond sports and the music of Mantovani or Kostelanetz. As for Brenda, she quarrels with her mother and reveals that she is jealous of Harriet. She complains that Mrs. Patimkin will forget that she exists once Harriet arrives, and Neil suggests that this ought not to be a problem, but rather an advantage. He would like for both himself and Brenda to be as free of parental influence as possible, but Brenda is more hesitant about this. She is very upset about her mother and tells Neil that she would have torn up some of her own hundred dollar bills if she had found them and then put the pieces in her mother's purse. She is crying as she says this, and the whole idea seems to be an expression of her childish need to revenge herself upon her mother for not giving her the love and attention that will now be bestowed upon Harriet, the bride to be. Brenda then throws herself at Neil, demanding that he make love to her on the old sofa in the storage room where she had hidden her money. But this, like some of her later actions, is an immature rather than a truly selfassertive rebellion against her parents.

When Brenda asks Neil to take up running with her, he realizes that this is a way in which she tries to make him more acceptable to her by changing his identity so that it becomes less threatening to her and the family. She tells him that he looks like her, and they are wearing similar clothes for the occasion, but Neil feels that 'She meant, I was sure, that I was somehow beginning to look the way she wanted me to. Like herself.' Neil enjoys the running and feels happy afterwards, but this is because both he and Brenda are having a fine time together as young and healthy people in love, not because he has decided to change his attitudes to suit her needs. This, however, is probably what she believes while they are exercising, and hence she gives him the love and attention that contribute to his happiness. In fact, it is only after they have been running for a while on a regular basis that she feels free to tell him that she loves him. Thus their relationship is fraught with misunderstandings and conflicts that come to a head at the end of the story.

The content of Neil's dream about a Pacific island suggests that he is beginning to fear that the affair with Brenda cannot last, that the realities of their situation, the power of the Patimkin environment, may destroy his goal of love and freedom. In the dream, he and the black boy, his fellow conspirator, as it were, are on a boat in the harbor of the island, but soon they drift away from the naked Negro women on the shore and have to

watch their island paradise disappear. The natives sing 'Goodbye, Columbus,' the refrain of Ron's college record, as the two of them go, suggesting that they will not possess their dream, their America. The historical parallel is fitting, inasmuch as the real Columbus also became disillusioned in his quest for a better world. Thus Neil is spurred on by his fear that the affair will be over once Brenda returns to Radcliffe, and he begins to contemplate a marriage proposal as a way of securing her for himself. He is, however, afraid to propose since he is not sure of Brenda's reaction and suspects that there are still unresolved issues between them. Instead he decides to ask her to wear a diaphragm both to increase his sexual pleasure and as a symbol of their defiantly intimate relationship out of wedlock.

This diaphragm hardly represents what has been called Neil's dream of a 'classless, creedless hedonism.' It is true that he aims to break down the barriers of class and religious conventions, but hedonism is not a purpose in itself for him, but rather a means by which he affirms his dissenting values and identity. Brenda does not feel mature enough to commit herself to such a deliberate action, but for Neil it is imperative that they are both conscious of what they are doing and that they use the opportunity of their love to define themselves in opposition to the outside pressures that bear upon them. By sustaining their conspiracy, so to speak, they will be changed together and in a direction which Neil finds is right and stimulating. But Brenda rejects the suggestion, making him feel that she also rejects him and what he stands for. The core of the problem is his actual self, which she cannot accommodate herself to.

Neil is offered a new identity, in a manner of speaking, as an employee in Mr. Patimkin's firm, where Ron already works. Mr. Patimkin suggests to Neil that he, too, would be able to learn the business, but the latter recognizes that he is unsuited for such a life. He is not robust enough for the work, but, on the other hand, he is attracted to the neighborhood where the company is located, the black section of Newark that once was peopled by immigrant Jews of his grandparents' generation. This and other parts of Newark are the only locations that Neil feels continuously drawn to throughout the novella. There is an authenticity and vitality in life as it was and as it is lived in these neighborhoods, and the colorful scenes and pungent smells suggest this. The ways of the old Jews as well as those of the blacks of the present are chaotic and poverty-ridden yet more suited to real human needs than the middle-class lifestyle that is replacing them. The old blacks, for example, are not segregated from the community, but are placed in 'screenless windows' where they can watch the throbbing life in the streets. Here, in spite of many problems, there is a freedom and zest for life that Neil appreciates and will not entirely surrender in his own existence either.

Brenda is sufficiently influenced by Neil to finally accede to his request that she obtain a diaphragm. She seems to do this because she wants to act like an adult, but also because she is affected by Ron's marriage and begins to want the same thing for herself. For example, she acquires a new dress which makes her look as attractive as the bride, or even more so. Deep down, it seems, Brenda sees herself in the role that Harriet plays, as a lovely bride with a successful husband, being led to the altar on her father's arm and being protected and cared for by her mother. But for the time being she carries on with Neil Klugman and goes to New York with him to get the diaphragm. For

Neil, however, this development is very serious and fraught with consequences. He is both enthusiastic about what he sees as Brenda's affirmation of their rebellious bond and anxious about the responsibilities that lie ahead of him now that their union is about to assume a more permanent aspect.

Neil's uncertainty emerges in his reflections in St. Patrick's Cathedral, where he seeks refuge while Brenda is in the doctor's office: 'Now the doctor is about to wed Brenda to me, and I am not entirely certain that this is all for the best. What is it I love, Lord? Why have I chosen? Who is Brenda?' One crucial question is the first one, concerning the nature of his love. The answer that suggests itself is that Neil loves the possibilities he sees in Brenda, apart from her physical attractiveness, and that he is haunted by a sense that he may be mistaken, that he does not really know her.

Continuing his meditation in the church, Neil addresses God, but his 'prayer' is hardly meant to be serious. In fact, the God he talks to seems to be a pantheistic one who is present in everything: 'If we meet You at all, God, it's that we're carnal, and acquisitive, and thereby partake of You. I am carnal, and I know You approve. I just know it. But how carnal can I get? I am acquisitive. Where do I turn now in my acquisitiveness? Where do we meet? Which prize is You?'

Neil is hardly a philosophic pantheist, but he makes some good points in this strange inner monologue. If God is identical with a universal process of creation and life, our sexual urges must be manifestations of the divine will. Moreover, if God made us acquisitive, he himself must share that trait in some sense. Neil has no problems with his carnal nature and welcomes it, and he also admits to being acquisitive. He is, however, less certain of the strength of this particular trait in himself and is overwhelmed by the power of the answer that Fifth Avenue gives to his question about the importance of the desire for possessions: 'Which prize do you think, *Schmuck?* Gold dinnerware, sporting goods trees, nectarines, garbage disposals, bumpless noses, Patimkin Sink, Bonwit Teller.'

Neil's concept of God is jocular, but it also embodies his satirical view of religion as an integrated part of the whole bourgeois value system of an acquisitive middle class. To join this class and its gods means joining in the race for wealth and position, and it is here that Neil draws the line as far as he himself is concerned and insists on another self-definition. But he knows that it is difficult to preserve one's identity in the face of society's demands and that it will not be any easier together with Brenda Patimkin. Accordingly, he is momentarily relieved when he sees her coming from the doctor without carrying anything. He thinks that she has broken their agreement, which means that their relationship will be less binding, as he sees it, thus letting him off the hook. However, this relief is only a passing 'levity,' as Neil calls it. He is still committed to Brenda, with or without the diaphragm. But when she tells him that she is actually wearing the device, he is overjoyed and takes it as a sign that she is joining forces with him in their defiance of traditional norms.

But back in the Patimkin house there is no relief for Neil. The wedding of Ron and Harriet offers an array of middle-aged couples that can only serve to confirm Neil's

worst expectations of what the Jewish bourgeois lifestyle amounts to. Many of these people are affluent, but they have paid dearly for their success with emotional frustration, physical decay and spiritual emptiness. They are locked into their tradition of hard work, materialism and puritanism coupled with a narrow-minded outlook on everything outside their own circles, and they also suffer from rigid sex roles where the male is the provider and the female the excessively proper housewife. There is no room in their lives for joy, passion or any individualism except mere eccentricity.

Brenda's uncle Leo is the only one who seems to have an inkling of what has happened to him and is aware that only two good things have occurred in his life: finding an apartment in New York and having oral sex with a certain Hannah Schreiber. Otherwise, he has sacrificed all joy and spontaneity as a result of his struggle to survive as a bulb salesman, and his many frustrations have turned into a settled melancholy that is the only emotional content that is left in his life. Neil is touched by the older man's confessions and regards his story as further confirmation that he, Neil, is on the right track in refusing to let his life be controlled by such misery and renunciation. The older generation may have been victims of circumstances, of economic and social necessity, but for modern Jews the situation is different and offers more options.

The end of the novella is ripe with imagery suggesting loss of love as well as of illusions. Leo and his wife leave the wedding, looking like people 'fleeing a captured city,' and to Neil, driving on the New Jersey Turnpike, the desolate landscape looks like 'an oversight of God,' a phrase that echoes the image of the valley of ashes in *The Great Gatsby*. When Brenda leaves for Boston, 'the wind was blowing the fall in and the branches of the weeping willow were fingering at the Patimkin front lawn.' At the library things are also changing, the black boy disappears and Neil is charged with discourtesy by an old gentleman who had wanted to borrow the Gauguin book which Neil had put on reserve, against the regulations, for the boy.

However, by now Neil has also changed his attitude towards his job and his colleagues. He becomes more assertive and sure of himself and invents a story to cover up his manipulations with the book. He is beginning to feel that he belongs in the library as much as the others, but on his own terms and according to his own definition, and he even has Mr. Scapello, the boss, apologizing to him as he is led to his new post and actually receives a promotion. He is aware of the change in himself and half-ironically attributes his newfound strength to the lesson he has learnt in the Patimkin family, where there is a premium on aggressive behavior in the workplace. However, Neil's renewed attachment to the library does not bode well for his relationship with Brenda, who has never shown any appreciation of the job he has chosen for himself and the meaning it may have for him.

The last meeting between Brenda and Neil takes place in a Cambridge hotel where she has reserved a room, pretending that they are married and wearing a fake wedding ring. At this point, Neil, with his strengthened sense of identity as a result of his experiences in the Patimkin family and the library, realizes that he has come to visit her because he wants to ask her to marry him: '. . . it had been long enough. It was time to stop kidding about marriage.' Her registering in the hotel also encourages him, since he sees it as a

sign that she is getting more liberated and ready to subvert social conventions. However, she tells him that her parents have discovered her diaphragm at home and that she has received two letters from them, an angry one from her mother and a more conciliatory one from her father, who is all too willing to forgive and forget if she will only stop seeing Neil any more. The letters themselves are marvelous examples of the crippling conventionalism in the sexual area on the part of the parents.

Brenda's revelation comes as a shock to Neil, and he feels that her carelessness in leaving the diaphragm indicates her half-conscious wish to prevent their relationship from becoming serious and permanent. She is scared by the prospect, which would force her to take a stand against her parents and risk their enmity. Her decision to take a hotel room with Neil does not suggest any liberation, but rather that she wants him as a casual lover. Again, she indulges in what can be called a pseudo-rebellious act. But Neil is acutely aware of the signifi- cance of her forgetting the diaphragm and suspects that this means that they are incompatible. She denies having left it on purpose, and there is no way to prove that this has been the case. However, the fact that she has done it is enough. It clearly reveals her insecurity and insincerity to Neil and makes him desperate, since it suggests that she has never really freed herself from the moral viewpoint of her parents. When he asks her if she thinks that their sleeping together was wrong, she does not answer for herself but refers to her parents' opinion. In other words, she accepts their verdict by refusing to declare herself against it.

Brenda tells Neil that she cannot bring him home for Thanksgiving, once more indicating her compliance with her parents' decisions and attitudes. Without saying so, she seems to agree with them, which is suggested by the 'solid and decisive' look on her face. Her expression reveals the internalized norms that Neil will not stop fighting against, and he tries hard to make Brenda see what she is doing to herself and their relationship. Their dialogue demonstrates the conflict: 'Who can I bring home, Neil? I don't know, who can you? Can I bring you home? "I don't know," I said, "can you?" Stop repeating the question! I sure as hell can't give you the answer.'

Brenda continues to evade responsibility for herself by referring to her family's standards instead of her own opinions, and Neil tries vainly to make her realize that she alone is responsible for what she does with her life, whether she chooses to ally herself with him or not. Neil also suggests that she can stay away from home if she likes, but her only answer is that she has to go home and that 'Families are different.' He is forced to conclude that she prefers her family to him and the challenge he represents, and that they have more or less misunderstood each other all along. She complains about his criticism of her, failing to perceive that he was critical because he wanted her to be true to herself instead of to her family. As he sees it, he had offered his opinions because he cared for her.

During this final confrontation the issues between them become clear. Neil declares his willingness to continue the relationship and defy her family, but Brenda chooses the security of the known instead of the uncertainties that she feels that he represents. There is no doubt that Neil is ready to go with Brenda to the Patimkin house for the Thanksgiving feast and defy her parents along with her. To argue that 'To oppose

Brenda's parents would have required a decisive commitment which neither is capable or really desirous of making' is to misread the ending of the story. It is only Brenda who shies away from this confrontation. Considering that the story takes place during the fifties, Brenda's choice is understandable, but the fact remains that she puts a stop to a relationship that has a basis in love and that contains the promise of increasing depth and development.

It is likely that Neil would have been accepted by the Patimkins, including Brenda, if he had recanted and followed a path similar to that of Ron, but this is never an option for him. The whole point of the story is to render a protagonist who is determined to retain his own identity and not surrender to outside pressures. It is misleading to interpret Neil mainly as a confused and 'uncoordinated soul' who cannot maintain any sense of selfhood at all and whose life is 'aimless.' Such a view leads to the statement that 'Neil does not know how to be true to himself,' which is the opposite of what the story demonstrates. It is exactly Neil's feeling that he has an inner self that is different and oppositional that makes him act in accordance with his convictions. Both he and Brenda finally realize that there is an unbridgeable gap between them, and he leaves the hotel room, walking into the yard of Harvard University. He stops before the Lamont Library, where he can see himself in a window as if it was a mirror. Frustrated and disappointed as he is, he has an impulse to pick up a rock and throw it through the glass, but instead he gives way to a profound meditation: 'I looked, but the outside of me gave up little information about the inside of me. . . . What was it inside me that had turned pursuit and clutching into love, and then turned it inside out again? What was it that had turned winning into losing, and losing—who knows—into winning? I was sure I had loved Brenda, though standing there, I knew I couldn't any longer.'

To become aware of one's real identity, or that of others, is difficult. Ultimately, personal identity is a mystery that can only be partly unveiled, and Neil had felt this also when looking at the sleeping Brenda at the end of the wedding party, wondering if he knew 'no more of her than what I could see in a photograph.' But though he admits to a sense of confusion regarding the enigma of his own self, certain answers to his questions do suggest themselves. He has lost Brenda by winning her, since she did not turn out to be what he thought, but by relinquishing, or losing, her, he was won in the only real sense that exists for him, that is, by remaining true to himself.

The final paragraph of the story has a promising ring: 'I did not look very much longer, but took a train that got me into Newark just as the sun was rising on the first day of the Jewish New Year. I was back in plenty of time for work.' The image of the rising sun suggests that Neil is doing to make a new start in life, and that Newark, as indicated earlier, is his real home after all. It is not the region associated with the parental generation of Jews, but his own Newark, as it were, a place where he can maintain the self that he has struggled toward during his hectic summer of lovemaking and measuring himself against various temptations and illusions. He returns to the library with a new and greater awareness of its attractions and limitations. It is, after all, an institution where culture, art and dreams are allowed a kind of existence which is impossible in the other environments that he has known, and it is located in a neighborhood that has preserved a certain room for individuality and a measure of

freedom. In the library, one must assume that Neil will steer a course of his own, between the pedantry of his colleagues and the anti-social attitudes of the black boy that had spent so much time among the book stacks. If Roth's later novels are anything to go by, it may well be the role of the artist or writer that lies in store for Neil Klugman and which he is preparing for by remaining faithful to his outsider status and to his talent for observing and analysing people and places with such unerring critical accuracy.

Source: Helge Normann Nilsen, "Love and Identity: Neil Klugman's Quest in 'Goodbye, Columbus,'" in *English Studies*, Vol. 68, No. 1, 1987, pp. 79-88.

Critical Essay #4

In the following essay, Macleod examines parallels between "Goodbye, Columbus" and F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby.

In his monograph on the writings of Philip Roth, Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr., draws a useful comparison between Roth's first novella, "Goodbye, Columbus," and Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Rodgers notes that Neil Klugman's final ruminations, at the end of "Goodbye, Columbus," remind us of Nick Carraway's observation about Jay Gatsby having lost something of himself in loving Daisy. Rodgers goes on to suggest that, given their typological similarity, any links between these novels are best seen as inevitable structural similarities which should not get in the way of more tangible differences. Nevertheless, several kinds of intriguing correspondences can be pointed to between these novels, some of them close enough to seem, not typological at all, but a conscious part of the artistic design of the later story.

Brenda Patimkin, the heroine of "Columbus" is—as Jeffrey Helterman has called her—the "archetypal Jewish American princess." The fairytale title is more than descriptively apt—it is exactly how Neil himself sees Brenda. In what is Roth's most 'explicit allusion' to *The Great Gatsby*, Neil at one point sees the relationship between Brenda and her mother as one where the mother is "some captive beauty, some wild princess, who has been tamed and made the servant to the King's daughter— who was Brenda." Daisy Fay was seen by Nick as being, for Gatsby, "High in a white palace the King's daughter, the golden girl. . . . "

Certain very specific features of "Columbus" and *Gatsby* march in parallel. Thus, both novels tell of the crowded events of a single summer, the passage of time related in both books to significant conventional or seasonal dates—the Fourth of July, Labor Day, the longest day of the year, Rosh Hashana. In both cases, the heroes are imaginative orphans—Gatsby has abandoned his parents, hinting or letting people believe that they are dead: ". . . his imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all," Neil too sees himself as something of an orphan, left to be provided for by his aunt and uncle, while his parents—"those penniless deserters"—have retired to Arizona. Both stories start when a major protagonist is introduced to an alien social milieu through a cousin—Neil by his cousin Doris, a member of the same country club as Brenda; and Nick Carraway reminds us, as he drives over to dinner with the Buchanans, that Daisy is his "second cousin once removed."

Significant events in both stories involve letters delivered and read while the heroes are briefly in unaccustomed academic surroundings. Gatsby received his "Dear John" letter from Daisy, announcing her betrothal to Tom Buchanan, while he was at Oxford for five months in 1919, an opportunity available after the armistice for Allied officers when they could go to any of the universities in England or France. The letter from Brenda's mother— the event which precipitates the end of Neil's and Brenda's affair—is received by Brenda (and shown by her to Neil) on the very day when Neil arrives at Radcliffe to spend the holiday weekend of Rosh Hashana in Boston with Brenda.

Both Gatsby and Neil contravene a fundamental canon of old-fashioned hospitality. Neither the Fays nor the Patimkins, it seems, were entertaining what they would regard as angels when they each gave hospitality to strangers. Gatsby, who "knew that he was in Daisy's house by a colossal accident . . . made the most of his time. He took what he could get, ravenously and unscrupulously—eventually he took Daisy one still October night. . . ." Neil similarly transgresses the old-fashioned houseguest's code, and Brenda's mother's letter, after she has found out, complains with dismissive irony —"Certainly that was a fine way to repay us for the hospitality we were nice enough to show him, a perfect stranger."

Correspondences between both novels involve not only themes and motifs, but also details of style, characterization and setting. Both novels make jokes about noses—concerning their injury, loss, absence, size, shape, or alteration. In both novels there are characters who refer (following the habits of their social strata) to universities by the names of the places where they are situated: Tom Buchanan and Nick talk about "New Haven" (hardly noticing that Jordan Baker talks about "Yale"), and Neil, who pointedly describes his own college as "Newark College of Rutgers University," is irritated by Brenda's and other people's various references to "Bennington," "Boston," (not Radcliffe), "New Haven," "Northampton" (not Smith College), and so on. In both novels socially distinct areas exist side by side. Across the bay on Long Island Sound from where "the white palaces of fashionable East Egg glittered along the water," Nick Carraway lives at West Egg, "the less fashionable of the two." Neil and Brenda are similarly separated by the social division between neighboring areas, Neil living in Newark, in the older suburb of Livingston, Brenda in affluent and fashionable Short Hills.

Sometimes a reference in "Columbus" seems an ironic counterpoint to a corresponding feature in *Gatsby*. In his bedroom, Gatsby takes a simple delight in showing Nick and Daisy "his shirts, piled like bricks in stacks a dozen high" showing them off by throwing them into careless disarray. Gatsby's flamboyant pleasure in his collection of luxurious shirts contrasts with Neil's impoverished self-consciousness and his strained, insecure gesture of ostentation when he unpacks on arrival at the Patimkin house, watched by Brenda's brother, Ron: "I have one shirt with a Brook Brothers label and I let it linger on the bed a while; the Arrows I heaped in the drawer."

References to the same sports crop up in both *Gatsby* and "Columbus." Each novel has its shadowy champions—Brenda's mother was the best at tennis in her state, Jordan is a golf champion and tournament finalist, Brenda has been a teenage champion horserider. Ron Patimkin and Tom Buchanan have both been university football stars (Ron for Ohio State, Tom for Yale) and both are similar characters—clumsily physical, culturally unsophisticated, mentally commonplace, verbally in articulate or platitudinous, neither intellectual nor reflective. Ron's and Tom's mature lives are desolate after their youthful sporting *floruit*. Ron, who, like Tom, is "a great, big, hulking physical specimen," is someone who—also like Tom—will "drift on forever seeking, a little wistfully, for the dramatic turbulence of some irrecoverable football game."

Jordan Baker plays the same games—tennis and golf—as Brenda, and her appearance is one that strongly recalls Brenda: ". . . she was a slender, small-breasted girl, with an

erect carriage." But in her character Jordan Baker is more clearly called to mind by Brenda Patimkin's little ten-year-old sister, Julie. Jordan is hollow and selfish, and a liar—Nick calls her "incurably dishonest." She is interested only in her own satisfaction, and shows a jaunty defiance towards those who cross her or act against her interests. Jordan shares her spoilt, selfish nature with Julie Patimkin—a nature exemplified in each case by the fact that they are bad sports and cheats. Jordan is reputed to have cheated by moving a ball from a bad lie in her first big golf tournament. In Nick's estimate, "She wasn't able to endure being at a disadvantage and, given this unwillingness, I suppose she had begun dealing in subterfuges when she was very young in order to keep that cool, insolent smile turned to the world . . ." These words would apply exactly to the young Julie. Julie is indulged by all her family ("Even Ron lets her win," says Brenda) who allow her to take basketball and golf shots over again when they go astray: ". . . over the years Mr. Patimkin had taught his daughters that free throws were theirs for the asking." Only Neil, playing table tennis with her, fails to comply with Julie's expectations, instead ignoring her constant pleas, supported by got-up excuses, to take points over again.

The story of "Goodbye Columbus" reminds us of the story of Gatsby's sojourn with Daisy in Louisville. Indeed, "Columbus" is in many ways structured like a "prequel" to *Gatsby*, to use the modish cinematic term for a later, "follow on" production set at an earlier stage than the predecessor. "Goodbye, Columbus" shows us the early stages of the story of Gatsby and Daisy being repeated in the story of Neil and Brenda. Julie and Brenda Patimkin are like younger, still formative versions of Jordan Baker and Daisy: Ron Patimkin is still near that "acute limited excellence at twentyone" before everything "savors of anticlimax" as it has done for Tom Buchanan. Neil's disappointment from which he looks forward to a future after the loss of Brenda where "I knew it would be a long while before I made love to anyone the way I made love to her" previews exactly the sense of loss which motivates Gatsby's dream of recovering "the freshest and the best."

In "Goodbye Columbus," Philip Roth has intercalated allusions to, and recollection of, *The Great Gatsby* in a new, kaleidoscopically shifted pattern. This allusive sub-text appropriately links novels which explore, from different standpoints and in different settings, complementary themes.

Source: Norman Macleod, "A Note on Philip Roth's 'Goodbye, Columbus' and Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*," in *The International Fiction Review*, Vol. 12. No. 2, Summer 1985, pp. 104-07.

Adaptations

"Goodbye, Columbus" was adapted to the screen and made into a movie by the same title directed by Larry Peerce and released in 1969. It stars Ali McGraw as Brenda Patimkin and Richard Benjamin as Neil Klugman.

Topics for Further Study

The little boy who comes to the library every day in "Goodbye, Columbus" spends his time looking only at a book of paintings of native women in Tahiti by Paul Gauguin. Roth uses the imagery of the paintings to symbolize a world of escapist fantasy. Find a book of paintings by Gauguin. In what ways are these paintings especially suited to the story's theme of fantasy and escapism?

The novella "Goodbye, Columbus" was made into a movie by the same title in 1969. Watch the movie and compare and contrast the ways in which the themes of the novella are treated in the cinematic form.

Roth's stories are usually about Jewish characters and include themes of Jewish culture and identity. Read another short story or novella by Roth. In what ways does it treat these themes similar to or different from the ways they are handled in the story "Goodbye, Columbus"?

Roth intersperses Yiddish words throughout his story. While Yiddish is rooted in Jewish culture, it has also become a part of the idiom of American English. Compile a list of Yiddish words you know or have heard, and what they mean.

Compare and Contrast

1950s: Radcliffe College, which Brenda attends, is a women's college and sister school to Harvard, a men's college.

1999: Radcliffe College merges with Harvard University; both are now completely co-ed.

1950s: Conservative Judaism, which originated in the 1840s, largely adheres to traditional Jewish religious practices, while allowing for some modernizing of these traditions. Less modernized than Reform Judaism, Conservative Judaism holds closer to the practices of Orthodoxy.

1990s: In 1985 the Conservative Jewish movement makes a significant change in policy when it begins to allow for the ordaining of female rabbis. This change increases the differences between Reform and Orthodox Jewish practices.

Pre-World-War-II era: There are approximately 11 million Yiddish-speaking people in the world.

Post-World-War-II era: Approximately half the world's population of Yiddish-speaking people have perished in the Holocaust.

1950s: Although the diaphragm is available to married women, access to birth control is limited for young, unmarried women, and abortions are performed only illegally and often under conditions hazardous to the pregnant woman.

1990s: Women have greater access to birth control options, after the birth control pill became readily available to American women in the 1960s, and abortion was made legal in the early 1970s.

What Do I Read Next?

Portnoy's Complaint (1969) is Roth's third novel, and is his most famous, most popular, and most controversial. This novel is a stream-of-consciousness narrative by the protagonist, a young Jewish man, speaking to his psychoanalyst, who says nothing.

Goodbye, Columbus and Five Short Stories (1959) is Roth's first published collection, which won him the 1959 Book Critics Award. It includes the novella "Goodbye, Columbus" and the short stories "The Conversion of the Jews," "Epstein," "Defender of the Faith," "You Can't Tell a Man by the Song he Sings," and "Eli, the Fanatic."

The Oxford Book of Jewish Stories (1998), edited and with an introduction by Ilan Stavans, is a collection and translation into English of international Jewish short stories. It includes "The Conversion of the Jews" by Philip Roth. The Introduction covers language and tradition in Jewish short stories.

God: Stories (1998), edited by C. Michael Curtis, is a collection of short stories on themes of God, faith, spirituality, belief, and doubt. This collection includes "Defender of the Faith" by Philip Roth.

First Sightings: Stories of American Youth (1993), edited by John Loughery, is a collection of short stories featuring protagonists from three to eighteen years old. It includes "The Conversion of the Jews" by Philip Roth.

Further Study

Buber, Martin, *I and Thou*, Scribner, 1958.

In this central text from one of the foremost modern Jewish philosophers, Buber's main concern is with the relationships of man to God, to nature, and to his fellow man.

Maney, J. P., and Tom Hazuka, eds., *A Celestial Omnibus: Short Fiction on Faith*, Beacon Press, 1997.

This collection of American short stories on the theme of faith includes "The Conversion of the Jews" by Philip Roth.

Shapiro, Gerald, ed., *American Jewish Fiction: A Century of Stories*, University of Nebraska Press, 1998.

This collection of short stories by Jewish-American authors includes "On the Air" by Philip Roth.

Updike, John, and Katrina Kenison, eds., *The Best American Short Stories of the Century*, Houghton Mifflin, 1999.

This collection of short stories from the series *The Best American Short Stories*, published every year from 1915 through 1998, includes an introduction by John Updike and "Defender of the Faith" by Philip Roth.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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