



## Indignation

By Philip Roth

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### Indignation By Philip Roth

Against the backdrop of the Korean War, a young man faces life's unimagined chances and terrifying consequences.

It is 1951 in America, the second year of the Korean War. A studious, law-abiding, intense youngster from Newark, New Jersey, Marcus Messner, is beginning his sophomore year on the pastoral, conservative campus of Ohio's Winesburg College. And why is he there and not at the local college in Newark where he originally enrolled? Because his father, the sturdy, hard-working neighborhood butcher, seems to have gone mad -- mad with fear and apprehension of the dangers of adult life, the dangers of the world, the dangers he sees in every corner for his beloved boy.

As the long-suffering, desperately harassed mother tells her son, the father's fear arises from love and pride. Perhaps, but it produces too much anger in Marcus for him to endure living with his parents any longer. He leaves them and, far from Newark, in the midwestern college, has to find his way amid the customs and constrictions of another American world.

Indignation, Philip Roth's twenty-ninth book, is a story of inexperience, foolishness, intellectual resistance, sexual discovery, courage, and error. It is a story told with all the inventive energy and wit Roth has at his command, at once a startling departure from the haunted narratives of old age and experience in his recent books and a powerful addition to his investigations of the impact of American history on the life of the vulnerable individual.

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## **Indignation** By Philip Roth Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

**Amazon Best of the Month, September 2008:** Enter once again into the echo chamber of Philip Roth's memory and imagination. In the second year of the Korean War, a butcher's son--a straight-A student wound tight with aspiration--flees Newark and his father's increasingly unhinged fears for his safety. Heading midwest, he finds a strange collegiate land of fraternities, football heroes, V-neck pullover sweaters and white buckskin shoes, panty raids, and mandatory chapel services, and, most startlingly, a young woman with desires of her own. Like another fiction grandmaster of his generation, Alice Munro, Roth seems able to spin infinite surprising tales from a few familiar building blocks, and in *Indignation*, his 25th novel, he has constructed a taut, haunting (and, as always, funny) story that ranks among his best. Reading at times like a buttoned-down *Portnoy's Complaint* (if it's possible to imagine such a thing), *Indignation* records a series of small explosions against '50s propriety and the dire consequences they lead to, capturing the misery of desire amid repression, along with the greater terror of being trapped in endless, relentless memory. --Tom Nissley

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Roth's brilliant and disconcerting new novel plumbs the depths of the early Cold War--era male libido, burdened as it is with sexual myths and a consciousness overloaded with vivid images of impending death, either by the bomb or in Korea. At least this is the way things appear to narrator Marcus Messner, the 19-year-old son of a Newark kosher butcher. Perhaps because Marcus's dad saw his two brothers' only sons die in WWII, he becomes an overprotective paranoid when Marcus turns 18, prompting Marcus to flee to Winesburg College in Ohio. Though the distance helps, Marcus, too, is haunted by the idea that flunking out of college means going to Korea. His first date in Winesburg is with doctor's daughter Olivia Hutton, who would appear to embody the beautiful normality Marcus seeks, but, instead, she destroys Marcus's sense of normal by surprising him after dinner with her carnal prowess. Slightly unhinged by this stroke of fortune, he at first shuns her, then pesters her with letters and finally has a brief but nonpenetrative affair with her. Olivia, he discovers, is psychologically fragile and bears scars from a suicide attempt--a mark Marcus's mother zeroes in on when she meets the girl for the first and last time. Between promising his mother to drop her and longing for her, Marcus goes through a common enough existential crisis, exacerbated by run-ins with the school administration over trivial matters that quickly become more serious.... The terrible sadness of Marcus's life is rendered palpable by Roth's fierce grasp on the psychology of this butcher's boy, down to his bought-for-Winesburg wardrobe. It's a melancholy triumph and a cogent reflection on society in a time of war. (*Sept.*)

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From [The New Yorker](#)

In a departure from Roth's recent meditations on age, his new novel revisits the no less sexually frustrating experience of growing up. We are back in nineteen-fifties Newark, and nineteen-year-old Marcus Messner, the son of a kosher butcher, attempts to escape his father's stifling influence by enrolling at a college in Ohio farm country. Messner is a scholarly type, while his new classmates are an unfriendly bunch of churchgoing, beer-swilling louts. Stubbornly disregarding overtures of friendship from members of the school's only Jewish fraternity, Messner devotes his attentions to a troubled Gentile named Olivia Hutton. There's something of Portnoy in the masturbation-filled high jinks that follow, but Messner, fearful that he might wind up a rifleman in Korea, is a far darker creation. Roth, blending the bawdy exuberance of his early period and the disenchantment of his recent work, demonstrates with subtle mastery the incomprehensible way one's most banal, incidental, even comical choices achieve the most disproportionate result.

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