



Nemesis (Vintage International)

By Philip Roth

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Set in a Newark neighborhood during a terrifying polio outbreak, *Nemesis* is a wrenching examination of the forces of circumstance on our lives.

Bucky Cantor is a vigorous, dutiful twenty-three-year-old playground director during the summer of 1944. A javelin thrower and weightlifter, he is disappointed with himself because his weak eyes have excluded him from serving in the war alongside his contemporaries. As the devastating disease begins to ravage Bucky's playground, Roth leads us through every inch of emotion such a pestilence can breed: fear, panic, anger, bewilderment, suffering, and pain. Moving between the streets of Newark and a pristine summer camp high in the Poconos, *Nemesis* tenderly and startlingly depicts Cantor's passage into personal disaster, the condition of childhood, and the painful effect that the wartime polio epidemic has on a closely-knit, family-oriented Newark community and its children.

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Nemesis (Vintage International) By Philip Roth Bibliography

- Rank: #189112 in Books
- Brand: Philip Roth
- Published on: 2011-10-04
- Released on: 2011-10-04
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 7.99" h x .63" w x 5.17" l, .40 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 304 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Roth continues his string of small, anti-Horatio Alger novels (*The Humbling*; etc.) with this underwhelming account of Bucky Cantor, the young playground director of the Chancellor Avenue playground in 1944 Newark. When a polio outbreak ravages the kids at the playground, Bucky, a hero to the boys, becomes spooked and gives in to the wishes of his fiancée, who wants him to take a job at the Pocono summer camp where she works. But this being a Roth novel, Bucky can't hide from his fate. Fast-forward to 1971, when Arnie Mesnikoff, the subtle narrator and one of the boys from Chancellor, runs into Bucky, now a shambles, and hears the rest of his story of piercing if needless guilt, bad luck, and poor decisions. Unfortunately, Bucky's too simple a character to drive the novel, and the traits that make him a good playground director--not very bright, quite polite, beloved, straight thinking--make him a lackluster protagonist. For Roth, it's surprisingly timid.

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review The fourth in the great and undiminished Roth's recent cycle of short novels follows *Everyman* (2006), *Indignation* (2008), and *The Humbug* (2009), and as exceptional as those novels are, this latest in the series far exceeds its predecessors in both emotion and intellect. In general terms, the novel is a staggering visit to a time and place when a monumental health crisis dominated the way people led their day-to-day lives. Newark, New Jersey, in the early 1940s (a common setting for this author) experienced, as the war in Europe was looking better for the Allies, a scare as deadly as warfare. The city has been hit by an epidemic of polio. Of course, at that time, how the disease spread and its cure were unknown. The city is in a panic, with residents so suspicious of other individuals and ethnic groups that emotions quickly escalate into hostility and even rage. Our hero, and he proves truly heroic, is Bucky Canter, playground director in the Jewish neighborhood of Newark. As the summer progresses, Bucky sees more and more of his teenage charges succumb to the disease. When an opportunity presents itself to leave the city for work in a Catskills summer camp, Bucky is torn between personal safety and personal duty. What happens is heartbreaking, but the joy of having met Bucky redeems any residual sadness. --Brad Hooper

Review

"Roth's book has the elegance of a fable and the tragic inevitability of a Greek drama."—*The New Yorker*

"An artfully constructed, suspenseful novel with a cunning twist towards the end."—J. M. Coetzee, *New York Review of Books*

"Elegant. . . . Suffused with precise and painful tenderness. . . . Stands out for its warmth." —*The New York Times Book Review*

"Painful and powerful. . . . Somberly but vividly, [Roth] recreates the panic and fear triggered by polio." —*USA Today*

"A perfectly proportioned Greek tragedy played out against the background of the polio epidemic that swept Newark, New Jersey, during the summer of 1944." —*Financial Times*

"Like a very well-executed O. Henry story. . . . A parable about the embrace of conscience. . . .and what its suffocating, life-denying consequences can be." —Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times*

“Yet another small triumph from one of our native artists largest in spirit. And by small I mean in length of the book. . . . This dual portrait, of a neighborhood and of a man quite representative of the times when trouble struck his neighborhood with lethal force, gives this new novel a singular appeal.” —*Chicago Tribune*

“Roth writes a lean, vigorous prose that burns with the intensity of his purpose. It flows smoothly even when he wrestles with the knottiest of philosophical problems.” —*Plain Dealer*

“Exquisite. It is utterly straightforward American realism that could almost have been written not long after *Letting Go* and *Goodbye Columbus* at the beginning of Roth’s career.” —*Buffalo News*

“Roth is all about character and how we are shaped by improbable circumstances, and here he offers up insight to match his many years on the job.” —*San Francisco Chronicle*

“Grippingly and with documentary expertise, it tells a story set in the devastating 1944 polio epidemic. . . . Roth writes vividly of heat-choked streets and cramped houses.” —*Boston Globe*

“Classic Roth: handsomely written, historically evocative and brutally honest about human emotions. . . . Impressive.” —*Richmond Times Dispatch*

“Roth’s prose, that magnificent voice of his, has always fed off the twin passions of lust and rage.” —*The New Republic*

“Roth does an excellent job of conjuring up the fear that polio caused before the arrival of a vaccine. . . . Cantor is one of Roth’s best creations and the atmosphere of terror is masterfully fashioned.” —*The Daily Telegraph (UK)*

“Roth has always been terrific at rendering the times and places close to his own youth. And in *Nemesis*, he masterly contrasts the sweaty, close world of all-day ball games and nights spent on front stoops with affluence and young love developing in the cool countryside. . . . A quick, propulsive read full of chiseled storytelling.” —*Chicago Sun-Times*

“Some of the most scathing and beautiful prose of our time.” —*The Toronto Star*

“Part of the appeal—and the strangeness—of Roth’s novel is the way that it renders this situation, with its seemingly undramatic topic and unlikely protagonist, without hyperbole, yet maintains a grasp on the tension and ethical drama.” —*The Times Literary Supplement (London)*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Judith Mandel:

Have you spare time for a day? What do you do when you have considerably more or little spare time? Yes, you can choose the suitable activity for spend your time. Any person spent their very own spare time to take a move, shopping, or went to the actual Mall. How about open or perhaps read a book titled *Nemesis* (Vintage International)? Maybe it is to become best activity for you. You realize beside you can spend your time along with your favorite's book, you can wiser than before. Do you agree with the opinion or you have

different opinion?

Francisco London:

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