

weeks, finally seems to have lost his mind. His questions are persistent, naïve: "Where were you? Why weren't you home? How do I know where you are when you go out? You are a boy with a magnificent future before you—how do I know you're not going to places where you can get yourself killed?"

Incidentally, Marcus's primary fear—in fact his only other option for escape—is that he'll end up going off to war. The year is 1951, and the Korean War is well underway. He is not only haunted by the fact that two of his cousins were killed in World War II, but is hyper-aware of what it means for him to leave home at all. "I was the first member of our family to seek a higher education," he says in the book's opening paragraph. "None of my cousins had gone beyond high school, and neither my father nor his three brothers had finished elementary school. 'I worked for my money,' my father told me, 'since I was ten years old.'" And so, driven by the will to abandon the family line of business, and to avoid the draft, Marcus leaves Newark, fleeing to the Midwest to attend a small-town liberal arts school 500 miles from home.

By the time Marcus begins to relate with his new surroundings—he can't seem to get along with or even keep any of his roommates, and becomes involved with a formerly suicidal girl he knows his Jewish parents would abhor—we are convinced that Roth has not lost his touch. His writing remains confident and sharp, his prose simple yet affirmative. And I won't be the first person to acknowledge that Roth has always had a wicked sense of humor. Take, for instance, the primary setting of Roth's novel: Winesburg, Ohio, where Marcus attends Winesburg College. Few writers today would have the tenacity to exploit such memorable literary territory, but Roth does. The question is, what does this accomplish? Is this in fact the same Winesburg, Ohio of Sherwood Anderson's American classic? It is difficult to tell, and perhaps insignificant. Although an actual Winesburg does exist, Anderson's novel-in-stories was modeled after Clyde, Ohio, the author's hometown. And although Anderson's book, whose setting predates that of *Indignation* by more than thirty years, is not referenced in Roth's, the parallels are often striking, and at least worth acknowledging.

Like George Willard, the ambitious, aspiring writer and sensitive protagonist of Anderson's book, Marcus is smart, enjoys learning, and has a desire to apply his knowledge. But like George, Marcus is also bound by innocence. Both young men seek to escape a world they find oppressive and stagnant, small-town worlds that cannot cultivate their potential. As a result, both characters are forced to leave. And this is where the similarities desist. By the end of *Winesburg, Ohio*, once we have developed our clearest sense of George's repressive environment, he finally escapes. And though we can only surmise his fate, from what we are given it seems to be hopeful. But it is early in the novel that Marcus leaves his home, and whether out of irony or sheer authorial playfulness, ends up in (perhaps) the same place George started, the town he spent an entire book trying to leave. Marcus's ignorance only fuels his innocence, as he wages a personal war in order to avoid the bloodshed of the Korean War.

By the time I left home for college I was so enamored by the sheer weightlessness of independence that I failed to sense the burden I would endure in the years that followed, that is, the memory of youthful ignorance. To make this sort of realization, however, is perhaps to condemn oneself to a lifetime of turmoil—for some people memory becomes a sort of hell. Or as Marcus learns, sometimes all we have left in the end is our story, like it or not.

At this point in Roth's career, it is doubtless that the man harbors his own share of resentments. But what becomes more evident with every novel, as Roth delves deeper into his past, as he allows his anger to become increasingly transparent, is that his bite is only getting firmer. *Indignation* is ultimately a book about the torture of memory, the loss of an innocence that stems from ignorance, a concept we may only grasp once our eyes have been propped open and forced to watch the story of our past.