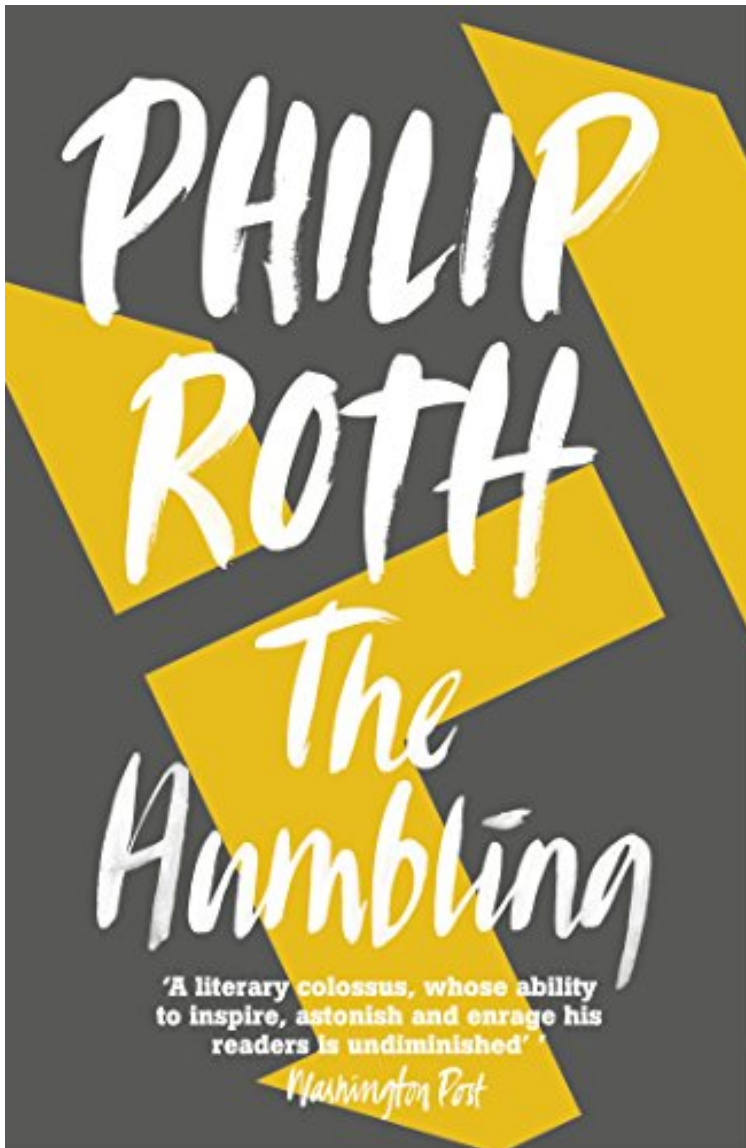


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The Humbling



Par Philip Roth
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurSimon Axler is one of America's leading classical stage actors, but his talent - his magic - has deserted him. All the spontaneity and unthinking impulsiveness that made him great has been replaced by a paralysing self-consciousness. Overwhelmed, Axler's wife promptly leaves him, and Axler checks into a psychiatric hospital. It is only when he begins an affair with Pegeen - formerly a lesbian of 17 years - that Axler's regeneration (and then his final catastrophe) can begin.Extrait1.Into Thin AirHe'd lost his magic. The impulse was spent. He'd never failed in the theater, everything he had done had been strong and successful, and then the terrible thing happened: he couldn't act. Going onstage had become agony. Instead of the certainty that he was going to be wonderful, he knew he was going to fail. It happened three times in a

row, and by the last time nobody was interested, nobody came. He couldn't get over to the audience. His talent was dead. Of course, if you've had it, you always have something unlike anyone else's. I'll always be unlike anyone else, Axler told himself, because I am who I am. I carry that with me that people will always remember. But the aura he'd had, all his mannerisms and eccentricities and personal peculiarities, what had worked for Falstaff and Peer Gynt and Vanyawhat had gained Simon Axler his reputation as the last of the best of the classical American stage actors none of it worked for any role now. All that had worked to make him himself now worked to make him look like a lunatic. He was conscious of every moment he was on the stage in the worst possible way. In the past when he was acting he wasn't thinking about anything. What he did well he did out of instinct. Now he was thinking about everything, and everything spontaneous and vital was killed he tried to control it with thinking and instead he destroyed it. All right, Axler told himself, he had hit a bad period. Though he was already in his sixties, maybe it would pass while he was still recognizably himself. He wouldn't be the first experienced actor to go through it. A lot of people did. I've done this before, he thought, so I'll find some way. I don't know how I'm going to get it this time, but I'll find it this will pass. It didn't pass. He couldn't act. The ways he could once rivet attention on the stage! And now he dreaded every performance, and dreaded it all day long. He spent the entire day thinking thoughts he'd never thought before a performance in his life: I won't make it, I won't be able to do it, I'm playing the wrong roles, I'm overreaching, I'm faking, I have no idea even of how to do the first line. And meanwhile he tried to occupy the hours doing a hundred seemingly necessary things to prepare; I have to look at this speech again, and by the time he got to the theater he was exhausted. And dreading going out there. He would hear the cue coming closer and closer and know that he couldn't do it. He waited for the freedom to begin and the moment to become real, he waited to forget who he was and to become the person doing it, but instead he was standing there, completely empty, doing the kind of acting you do when you don't know what you are doing. He could not give and he could not withhold; he had no fluidity and he had no reserve. Acting became a night-after-night exercise in trying to get away with something. It had started with people speaking to him. He couldn't have been more than three or four when he was already mesmerized by speaking and being spoken to. He had felt he was in a play from the outset. He could use intensity of listening, concentration, as lesser actors used fireworks. He had that power offstage, too, particularly, when younger, with women who did not realize that they had a story until he revealed to them that they had a story, a voice, and a style belonging to no other. They became actresses with Axler, they became the heroines of their own lives. Few stage actors could speak and be spoke to the way he could, yet he could do neither anymore. The sound that used to go into his ear felt as though it were going out, and every word he uttered seemed acted instead of spoken. The initial source in his acting was in what he heard, his response to what he heard was at the core of it, and if he couldn't listen, couldn't hear, he had nothing to go on. He was asked to play Prospero and Macbeth at the Kennedy Center it was hard to think of a more ambitious double bill and he failed appallingly in both, but especially as Macbeth. He couldn't do low-intensity Shakespeare and he couldn't do high-intensity Shakespeare and he'd been doing Shakespeare all his life. His Macbeth was ludicrous and everyone who saw it said as much, and so did many who hadn't seen it. "No, the don't even have to have been there," he said, "to insult you." A lot of actors would have turned to drink to help themselves out an old joke had it that there was an actor who would always drink before he went onstage, and when he was warned "You musn't drink," he replied, "What, and go out there alone?" But Axler didn't drink, and so he collapsed instead. His breakdown was colossal. The worst of it was that he saw through his breakdown the same way he could see through his acting. The suffering was excruciating and yet he doubted that it was genuine, which made it even worse. He did not know how he was going to get from one minute to the next, his mind felt as though it were melting, he was terrified to be alone, he could not sleep more than two or three hours a night, he scarcely ate, he thought every day of killing himself with the gun in the attic Remington 870 pump-action shotgun that he kept in the isolate farmhouse for self-defense and still the whole thing seemed to be an act, a bad act. When you're playing the role of somebody coming apart, it has organization and order; when you're observing yourself coming apart, playing the role of your own demise, that's something else, something awash with terror and fear. *Revue de presse* "A deteriorating and increasingly irrelevant actor finds the possibility of renewal in a younger woman in Roth's tight Chekhovian tragedy... Roth observes much (about age, success and the sexual credit lovers hold one with another) in little space... and the svelte narrative amounts to an unsparing confrontation of self." --- Publishers Weekly, starred review "Bare-bones brilliant, Philip Roth's novella *The Humbling* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt) brings us face-to-face and groin to groin with the long acclaimed, lately retired theater actor Simon Axler and all the sexy, sickly, slippery

goings-on that make up his shockingly funny (when not funereal) offstage suburban-Connecticut highs, lows, and in-betweens. -- Lisa Shea, Elle magazine "I hope you will read *The Humbling*, I found it to be Roth's best work in years; sentence for sentence, paragraph for paragraph, he's still the most readable serious writer we've got." -- Jesse Kornbluth, The Huffington Post "One of Roth's most eloquent, painful and memorable books." -- Kirkus, starred review "Philip the great, Philip the audacious, the voracious... When you hear about a new Philip Roth novel, you have to read it." -- O, The Oprah Magazine "The Humbling is the story of arrogance deflated. Yet from its opening sentence, 'He'd lost his magic,' until its stunning, resonant final line, the result is oddly exhilarating. Unlike Axler, Roth has lost none of his power to conjure up teacups from which a willing reader gladly sips." -- The Forward "[Philip Roth has] been on an audacious hot streak for a dozen years... [The Humbling is] an entertaining inquiry into the relationship between sex and creativity, sex and age, and sex and the ego." -- Entertainment Weekly "elegant and brutal direct and urgent, a taut and controlled fever-dream that demands to be experienced at a single sitting." -- Los Angeles Times