

Everyman by Philip Roth.
Jonathan Cape 2006.

In spite of the comparative shortness of this book it packs an almighty punch, and confirms the fact that Philip Roth's writing just gets better and better.

Everyman is about the life and death of its principal character, and especially about his mental and physical decline. His is a life full of pain and sorrow, suffering, illness, betrayal and partial redemption; it is a story of some opportunities missed and others taken, often, though not always, the wrong ones.

Roth's Everyman resents much about the past, particularly the loathing felt for him by the children of his first marriage, but rejoices in the love of the one child of his second, his daughter Nancy, and the loyalty and devotion of his much more successful brother.

Everyman is full of touching moments, each one resonating differently with the reader, no doubt based on the life experience that they bring to the reading of the book; for me the most moving, and pitiful, is his very belated attempt to chat up a pretty young jogger on the board walk near his retirement home. He talks to her, but no more, and then never sees her again, one last attempt to recapture the virility of his youth snatched away from him.

This is not necessarily a book to read if you feel depressed, for it shines a bright light on some of life's most frightening issues, but it is an extraordinarily uplifting one nevertheless.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh