In History’s Grip
Stanford Studies in Jewish History and Culture

Edited by Aron Rodrigue and Steven J. Zipperstein
In History’s Grip
Philip Roth’s Newark Trilogy

Michael Kimmage

STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA
to Alma

knower, teller, lover of stories
As I’ll explain later, the books I read in Lubyanka made one of the greatest experiences of my life. Not because they allowed me an escape but because, to a certain extent, they transformed me and shaped me greatly. It was the way I read those books; I came at them from a completely new angle. And from then on I had a completely new understanding, not only of literature, but of everything.

Literature is insight and synthesis, which means that poetry, ultimately, is heroic. Naked, weak, hungry, trembling, endangered by all the elements, all the beasts and demons, the cave men performed that act of heroism for consolation, in the deepest sense of the word. And at that time there in Lubyanka this seemed to me the essence of literature and the source of its legitimacy in the world. Consolation for a weak, naked cave man.

Aleksander Wat,

*My Century: The Odyssey of a Polish Intellectual*