



Department of History and Civilization

**Against the Great:
Joseph Roth (1894-1939) and the Dilemma of
Jewish Anchorage**

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I

The Lives of Man. Joseph Roth 1894-1939

It's a truism that men can suffer from the burden of their time as easily as from their own failure; or they may [...] suffer from the convergence of the two.

Fritz Stern¹

Introduction & Biographical Sketch

Joseph Roth possessed a sharply observant eye which allowed him to clearly read the signs of his times – those divided years of the 1920s and 1930s in Europe – a quality that has earned him the dubious epitaph “prophet”; a drunken prophet, as Europe’s demise into another world war went hand in hand with his own physical decline through alcoholism. Roth, his black coat draped around his shoulders, newspaper under his arm, cigarette and drink in hand while slowly moving from one hotel to another, was a border crosser, a train traveller, an observer and a hotel patriot.² He was a literary exile who chose an itinerant existence; a highly prolific journalist and novelist who entertained friends and acquaintances at his café table in Paris and who drank himself to death at the early age of 44. Often noted for his cosmopolitan flair, Roth received extraordinarily high book advances but spent most of his time in a perpetual financial worry; a man who, in line with his skilled journalistic eye for detail, had a great passion for the miniature universe of watches and clocks, a predilection mirrored in his miniscule and delicate handwriting.

Roth was also an East European Jew from Galicia; uprooted and assimilated but not quite comfortable with shedding all his Jewish markers. In 1894, the year of his birth – on 2 September – the small town of Brody was on the easternmost edge of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and populated by Jews, Poles, Ukrainians and Russians; now it is part of the Ukraine. It was also the year of the Dreyfus affair, and the decade during which organised political antisemitism reached a peak in Austria and Germany; before, indeed, it

¹ Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair. A Study in the Rise of Germanic Ideology*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1961, p. 276.

² Michael Hofmann once described Roth as a ‘newspaperman’, referring both to his profession as a journalist or writer of feuilletons and to the fact that newspapers are almost always present in pictures of Roth: either he is reading one, carrying one under his arm, or it is lying on the café table in front of him.

became an ideology. Roth's wanderings started early on in life. He grew up in his uncle's and grandfather's house with his mother; his father, a grain merchant, had derailed into madness on one of his trips to Germany and disappeared into the care of a miracle rabbi while his wife was pregnant; Roth never knew his father. He attended the Jewish community school from 1901 until 1905 before enrolling at the "K. K. Kronprinz Rudolf Gymnasium" in Brody, together with Lemberg (today's Lviv) the only two Gymnasia in Galicia. German was spoken there until the nationalist reforms in 1906, when Polish became its main language. On the school square, there now stands a bronze statue commemorating Roth and four other famous alumni. From Brody, Roth moved on to Lemberg and, in the summer of 1914, to Vienna, where, eager to become part of the "West" – in Brody he had proudly called himself an "assimilant," setting him apart from the school's many Zionists – he enrolled at the University. In Vienna, Roth met his life-long friend Józef Wittlin, the Polish-Jewish poet and prose writer who later converted to Catholicism. Around this time Roth published his first poems, when the war interrupted. In 1916, he and Wittlin volunteered for military service and were stationed in Galicia. Roth probably never saw front fighting, despite his own reports to the contrary. Details about the war years are few, but most likely he worked as a reporter for the army newspaper. This was the first instance of what has come to be known as Roth's "mythomania": his constant urge to invent stories about himself and his past and to resort to role playing whenever the opportunity arose. In this sense, Roth was a man of multiple lives.

After the war, Roth returned first to Brody, then to Vienna. His feuilletons appeared in *Der Neue Tag* and other newspapers, and in 1920 he departed for Berlin. It is there that he found the job that would bring him fame in literary circles and sustain him throughout the years; as a journalist for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, Roth not only earned a lot of money; the paper also sent him on many travels, and he fervently reported from Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Russia, Albania and France. It was in France, its southern coastal cities but in Paris, too, that Roth found the perfect antidote to the Berlin he had come to dislike so profusely. Often he took his young wife Friederike, a Jewish girl from Vienna whom he married in 1922, with him on his travels. In the early 1920s, Roth's first novels appeared in quick succession: *The Spider's Web* (1923), *Hotel Savoy* (1924) and *Rebellion* (1924), all short fragmented tales of homeless men in an urban, modern world. The important essay *The Wandering Jews* appeared in 1927, as well as *Flight without End*.

In 1928, Roth met the man who would become his mentor, benefactor and intellectual opponent until his death: the Austrian novelist Stefan Zweig. He also published

Zipper and his Father, followed in 1929 by *Left and Right* and *The Silent Prophet*. The late 1920s also marked the onset of a great suffering that would last a lifetime, in the form of Friederike's schizophrenia. After years of insecurity about her condition, in 1929 she was finally sent away permanently to various mental institutions, leaving Roth in great despair and guilt about her illness. In 1930, he published *Job. The Story of a Simple Man*, followed, two years later, by *The Radetzky March*, his most famous work. The next year, 1933, saw the beginnings of Roth's political exile as a result of Hitler's appointment as Chancellor of the Reich in January that year, and he settled permanently in Paris, where he had been spending most of his time from the mid-1920s onwards.

The last six years of his life were spent in Parisian exile, living in Hotel Foyot and working in the café across the street, Le Tournon. He wrote controversial essays and feuilletons, such as 1934's *The Antichrist*, and established relations with the Dutch exile publishers Allert de Lange, Querido and the Gemeenschap. He had an affair with Andrea Manga Bell, whose two children he took under his wings; the only semblance of a family life he ever knew. Despair about his financial situation and the loss of his wife – who, in a terrible fate, was murdered by the Nazis as part of their “euthanasia program” in July 1940, one year after Roth's own death – contributed to his drinking, a habit he had developed during the 1920s but which now took on self-destructive proportions. His literary output, however, did not suffer, and he published *Tarabas: A Guest on Earth* (1934), *Confession of a Murderer* (1936), *Weights and Measures* (1937), *The Emperor's Tomb* (1938), and *The Tale of the 1002nd Night* (1939). The novella *The Legend of the Holy Drinker* and the short story *The Leviathan* were published posthumously, in 1940. From 1936 to 1938, Roth found his last female companion in the German novelist Irmgard Keun, whose novel *A Child of all Nations* is said to be based on her relationship with Roth.

On May 23 1939, upon hearing of the news of Ernst Toller's suicide in a hotel room in New York, Roth collapsed in his Parisian café Le Tournon and was taken to Hôpital Necker, a hospital for the poor, where he died four days later, on 27 May, in a condition of horrible neglect. He was buried on 30 May in the Cimetière Thiais, in a south-eastern suburb of Paris. His grave is there to this day, covered in small stones and a few flowers.

Historiography

2009 marked the seventieth anniversary of Joseph Roth's death, and, since the copyrights of his work have now expired, activity and research on Roth are currently in an accelerated process. Important figures in this process are Dr. Heinz Lunzer in Vienna and Dr. Stéphane Pesnel in Paris.³ Five conferences dedicated to Roth alone were organised in 2009,⁴ and the Müncher Kammerspiele performed a stage adaptation of his 1930 novel *Job*.⁵ This surge in activity, apart from the copyright issue, is part of a greater rediscovery of Roth as a European writer with intellectual and literary resonances that go beyond the German speaking world of the interwar years. The recent completion of the translation of his complete works into English by German-American translator and poet Michael Hofmann is an important part of this. And, after more than three decades, a new biography appeared by Wilhelm von Sternburg.⁶ It presents a renewed entry into his life since the only other biography of Roth, by David Bronsen, from 1974, which remains unsurpassed, has long since been out of print and is almost impossible to find.⁷

³ Dr. Heinz has published extensively on Roth and is currently preparing the publication of previously undisclosed archival material. Lunzer established the *Internationale Joseph Roth Gesellschaft*, based at the Literaturhaus in Vienna, and is the curator of three large exhibitions on Roth in Ljubljana, Gent, and Paris. *Internationale Joseph Roth Gesellschaft*, Literaturhaus, Seidengasse 13, 1070 Vienna, Austria. (http://www.literaturhaus.at/autoren/R/J-Roth/roth_ges/). Their activities, besides exhibitions, readings, and a newsletter, include keeping track of dissertations and work-in-progress on Roth and the publication of new books. In 2008, Lunzer published part of the unpublished material that David Bronsen collected for 1974 biography of Roth in his book *Joseph Roth im Exil in Paris 1933-1939*. Together with his wife Victoria Lunzer-Talos he published *Joseph Roth 1894 - 1939. Katalog einer Ausstellung* (Wien: Zirkular, 1990) and *Joseph Roth: Leben und Werk in Bildern* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1994), a splendid collection of photographs and background information on Roth. The exhibitions are: *Joseph Roth im Exil 1933 bis 1939*. Curators: Heinz Lunzer, Victoria Lunzer-Talos, Marjan Rupert, Johann Lughofer, Annemarie Neuhold. Ljubljana, 25 May 2009 until 16 August 2009, Slovenian State- and National Library (Turjaska 1, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia, www.nuk.uni-lj.si); *Wel Bedankt. Duitse en Oostenrijkse kunstenaars als emigrant in België 1933-1945*. Curator: V. Schmidinger. Gent, from 27 May 2009 onwards, Boekentoren Gent; *Joseph Roth in Paris 1925 bis 1939*. Curators: Heinz Lunzer, Victoria Lunzer-Talos, Laurence Sigal. Paris, 17 June until 25 September 2009, Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme, Hôtel de Saint-Aignan (71 rue du Temple, 75003 Paris, France, <http://www.mahj.org/en/index.php>)

⁴ *Ein übernationaler Mensch und also ein Adelige echter Art. Konferenz zur Aktualität von Joseph Roth*, Department of Germanic Studies and Philosophy, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, 25-27 May 2009. Organisation: Prof. Dr. Mira Miladinovic Zalaznik and Dr. Johann Lughofer; *Joseph Roth als Exilautor. Rezeption und Übersetzung in den Niederlanden und in Flandern*, Hogeschool Gent, Het Pand, Ghent University, 28 and 29 May 2009. For the programme, see: http://www.literaturhaus.at/zirkular/symposien/vorschau/20090528_20090529_roth/; *Joseph Roth en exil à Paris 1933-1939*, Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme (24 and 25 September 2009) and the École Normale Supérieure at the Sorbonne (26 September 2009) in Paris, organised by Dr. Stéphane Pesnel. During this conference I presented a paper entitled "Prophecies of Unrest. Reconfigurations of Jewish Belonging and Divine Justice in Joseph Roth's *Weltanschauung* of the late 1930s"; *Journée "Joseph Roth"/"Joseph Roth" – Tagung*, Metz University, France, 5 December 2009. Organisation: Prof. Dr. Françoise Lartillot; *Joseph Roth: zur Modernität des melancholischen Blicks. Eine internationale Tagung zum 70. Todestag Joseph Roths*, Free University, Berlin, 3-5 December 2009, Organisation: Prof. Dr. Hans Richard Brittnacher and Prof. Dr. Irmela von der Lühe.

⁵ Müncher Kammerspiele, *Hiob*, <http://www.muenchner-kammerspiele.de/stueck.php?ID=769#>.

⁶ Wilhelm von Sternburg, *Joseph Roth. Eine Biografie*. Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2009.

⁷ David Bronsen, *Joseph Roth: Eine Biographie*. Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1974.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, since an English-speaking public is only now beginning to discover his work in all its diversity, most research on Roth has been done in a German-speaking academic context.⁸ It is mainly due to Roth's friend and novelist Hermann Kesten that his work was preserved and presented to the public after World War Two. Kesten also collected, annotated and published Roth's letters.⁹ In the 1970s, Ingeborg Sültemeyer and Klaus Westermann made Roth's journalistic writings available to readers, while David Bronsen biography stands on its own in terms of meticulous research about his life and the myths he created for himself.¹⁰ While in German-speaking academia a proper "Roth scholarship" has emerged, scholarship in English is still of a more scattered nature, consisting of separate articles, book chapters, one collected volume and a handful unpublished doctoral theses.¹¹ One strand of criticism has placed Roth, as a writer of "co-existent contradictions," in the tradition of Jewish ghetto writing; indeed a new and exciting approach.¹² Furthermore, three monographs have been published in English: Sidney Rosenfeld's *Understanding Joseph Roth* from 2001,¹³ Jon Hughes's published doctoral thesis *Facing Modernity. Fragmentation, Culture and Identity in Joseph Roth's Writing in the 1920s* from 2006,¹⁴ and, most importantly, Kati Tonkin's *Joseph Roth's March into History: From the Early*

⁸ For an excellent critical historiography of patterns in research on Roth, which I do not intend to repeat here, see Jon Hughes, *Facing Modernity*, pp. 5-10. Selected seminal works on Roth in German include: Claudio Magris, *Lontano da dove. Joseph Roth e la tradizione ebraica* (German version *Weit von wo: Verlorene Welt des Ostjudentums*, translation Jutta Prasse). Vienna: Europe Verlag, 1974). Turin: Einaudi, 1971; Heinz Ludwig Arnold (ed.), *Joseph Roth*. Munich: Edition Text + Kritik, 1974; David Bronsen, (ed.), *Joseph Roth und die Tradition: Aufsatz- und Materialiensammlung*. Darmstadt: Agora Verlag, 1975; Fritz Hackert, *Kulturpessimismus und Erzählform: Studien zu Joseph Roths Leben und Werk*. Berne: Lang, 1967; Michael Kessler and Fritz Hackert (eds.), *Joseph Roth: Interpretation-Kritik-Rezeption. Akten des internationalen, interdisziplinären Symposions 1989, Akademie der Diözese Rottenberg-Stuttgart*. Tübingen: Stauffenberg Verlag, 1990.

⁹ Hermann Kesten (ed.), *Joseph Roth. Briefe 1911-1939*. Cologne: Kiepenheuer and Witsch, 1979.

¹⁰ Ingeborg Sültemeyer, *Das Frühwerk Joseph Roths 1915-1926: Studien und Texte*. Vienna and Freiburg: Herder, 1976; Ingeborg Sültemeyer (ed.), *Joseph Roth, Der Neue Tag. Unbekannte politische Arbeiten 1919-1927, Wien, Berlin, Moskau*. Cologne and Berlin: Kiepenheuer and Witsch, 1970; Klaus Westermann (ed.), *Berliner Saisonbericht: unbekannt Reportagen und journalistische Arbeiten 1920-1939*. Cologne and Berlin: Kiepenheuer and Witsch, 1984.

¹¹ Three unpublished doctoral theses in English are Ward H. Powell, *The Problem of Primitivism in the Novels of Joseph Roth* (University of Colorado, 1956); Cary Alan Nathenson, *Joseph Roth in the Tension of Modernity* (Washington University, Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures, 1996); and Sigrid Julia Newman, *Visual Representation in the Work of Joseph Roth, 1923-1932* (University of St Andrews, 2006). There are many interesting articles and book-chapters about Roth in English. For a complete list, see the bibliography. Another recently completed dissertation, in German, is Nicole Frank's "*Mich Fixieren ist unmöglich.*" *Schreibstrategien von Joseph Roth. Eine Analyse neu entdeckter Zeitungsartikel aus seiner Berliner Zeit 1920-1923* (University of Freiburg, Switzerland, 2008).

¹² Ritchie Robertson has placed Roth in the tradition of Jewish ghetto writing. See Anne Fuchs and Florian Krobb (eds.), *Ghetto Writing: Traditional and Eastern Jewry in German-Jewish Literature from Heine to Hilsenrath*. London: Camden House, 1999. A collection of essays focusing on the "co-existent contradictions" of Roth's life and work was published in 1991: Helen Chambers, (ed.), *Co-Existent Contradictions: Joseph Roth in Retrospect. Papers of the 1989 Joseph Roth Symposium at Leeds University to Commemorate the 50th Anniversary*. Riverside, California: Ariadne Press, 1991.

¹³ Sidney Rosenfeld, *Understanding Joseph Roth*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001.

¹⁴ Jon Hughes, *Facing Modernity: Fragmentation, Culture and Identity in Joseph Roth's Writing in the 1920s*, MHRA Texts & Dissertations Volume 67 and Bithell Series of Dissertations Volume 30. Leeds: Maney, 2006.

Novels to "Radetzky Marsch" and "Die Kapuzinergruft", published in 2008.¹⁵ Rosenfeld's book is a short but vivid introduction of Roth to an American audience, whereas Hughes's is a highly textual analysis of the influence of modernity on Roth's early work, centred on in-depth literary analyses. Tonkin's book, finally, argues convincingly against the dominant interpretation of Roth as a nostalgic and apolitical writer, focusing mainly on *The Radetzky March* and *The Emperor's Tomb*, although she also includes one chapter on the early novels (*The Spider's Web*, *Hotel Savoy* and *Rebellion*). We encounter the anti-nostalgic argument in Hughes, too, who argues that despite his longing for the bygone Habsburg monarchy, Roth was actually a writer very much influenced by the onset and effects of modernity. According to Hughes, Roth's writing of the 1920s should be considered modernist not only because of its prescient sensitivity to political and cultural events, but also because of the self-conscious narrative form that made possible the illusionary wholeness of his later fiction. Even if, in this thesis, I will argue against the idea of a desire for "wholeness" underlying Roth's fiction, I do agree with Hughes that Roth's verbal dissociation from discourses of modernity did not mean they left no traces in his work.

The 1990s saw the near completion of a process of rediscovery and reassessment of Roth's work.¹⁶ Until then, most research was conducted along the lines of two clearly discernable arguments. The first was the assumption that Roth's oeuvre could legitimately be divided into two distinct phases, with his novel *Job* of 1930 marking the turning point in style and content – an assumption now generally regarded as an oversimplification.¹⁷ The second is the tendency to focus on Roth's later career at the cost of his work of the 1920s, dominated by a discussion of what most critics consider his masterwork, *The Radetzky March* from 1932, the epic tale of three generations of the Trotta family in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy.¹⁸ As a consequence, critics have assessed Roth's relationship to

¹⁵ Kati Tonkin, *Joseph Roth's March into History: From the Early Novels to "Radetzky Marsch" and "Die Kapuzinergruft."* Rochester & New York: Camden House Inc, 2008.

¹⁶ Jon Hughes points out that it is largely thanks to the efforts of Roth's friend Hermann Kesten that his work found a readership after the Second World War. "Roth had not survived to re-establish his reputation after the exile and the War, and with the partial exceptions of the novels *Hiob* (1930), *Radetzky Marsch* (1932), *Beichte eines Mörders erzählt in einer Nacht* (1936) and *Die Legende vom heiligen Trinker* (1939), Roth's fictional works had by the 1950s fallen out of print and into relative obscurity. The ephemeral nature of journalism had ensured that of his thousands of articles only a handful were known. Nevertheless, the first three-volume edition, edited by Kesten in 1956, provided a basis for scholarly and popular rediscovery of Roth's work." The subsequent decades saw increased publications of Roth's journalism and letters, as well as the first biography by David Bronsen. Hughes writes that "Bronsen helped establish the facts of Roth's life, which he had, famously, obscured and distorted." Jon Hughes, *Facing Modernity*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁷ This idea to discern a radical shift or break in Roth's literary career developed out of the wish to explain the formal and stylistic changes marked by *Job*, i.e. the fact that after 1930 the inconclusive open endings of the 1920s texts disappear, as do the contemporary settings.

¹⁸ The novel did not impress Robert Musil when it was published in 1932, while Georg Lukács praised it in 1939 as "künstlerisch geschlossen." In subsequent scholarship, *The Radetzky March* is almost univocally

Austria to be of overriding importance, while other themes, such as Jewishness, politics, language and gender are delegated to the sidelines. This has created distortions and one-sided interpretations of his life and work, especially in relation to Roth's religious background. Because of this focus on Austria, few works have explicitly addressed the question of Roth's Jewish heritage, preferring a Catholic-monarchist reading of his life instead.¹⁹ However, critical voices have begun to emerge, taking different approaches and concentrating on other, neglected themes. In what follows, I will outline these new themes and approaches, as they are relevant for my thesis and contribute to the formulation of its main questions and issues.

Ward H. Powell was the first, in 1961, to offer an anti-nostalgic interpretation of Roth.²⁰ Why this lonely cry in the land of literary criticism has not been taken up in subsequent scholarship earlier is puzzling. Powell points out that when Roth first began to attract attention as a novelist, he was considered "a relentless and devastating social critic bent on clearing the way for a new order of things to come." This interpretation changed in years

considered Roth's masterwork and as such received the most critical attention. About the focus on the Austrian theme, Jon Hughes stressed the fact that focusing on any form of national identity "in relation to a writer who frequently thematises the difficulties of binding individual identity to the fate of a nation" is problematic. Concerning Roth's treatment of Austria, Hughes argues that it should be considered only one aspect of a complex personality and multi-dimensional writer, a view to which I fully subscribe. Furthermore, it is important to remember that the "Austrianness" as it functions in Roth's identity refers to the Austria that was part of the Habsburg Monarchy, not, in the words of David Bronsen, to the "small alpine republic which measured less than one-eighth the size and population of the defunct Monarchy" after 1918. It was the Dual Monarchy and not the Austrian nation of the post-war years that formed the object of Roth's desire for a retrospective homeland. David Bronsen, 'The Jew in Search of a Fatherland: The Relationship of Joseph Roth to the Habsburg Monarchy,' *The Germanic Review*, Vol. 54, No. 2 (Spring 1979), pp. 54-61.

¹⁹ Three doctoral dissertations have focused on Roth's Jewishness: Matiyahu Kranz, *Joseph Roth und das Judentum seiner Zeit*. Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, Frankfurt am Mainz, 1972; Hans Otto Ausserhofer, *Joseph Roth und das Judentum. Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der deutsch-jüdischen Symbiose im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*. Bonn University, 1970; Alison May, *Joseph Roth. Mediator between Eastern European Jewry and the West*. Keele University, 1999. Selected articles that focus on Jewish heritage include: Hans Otto Horch, "'Im Grunde ist er sehr jüdisch geblieben...': Zum Verhältnis von 'Katholizismus' und Judentum bei Joseph Roth", in Frank-Ruther Hausmann et. al. (ed.), *Literatur in der Gesellschaft: Festschrift für Theo Buck zum 60. Geburtstag*, Tübingen: Narr, 1990, pp. 211-224. Gershon Shaked has argued that the symbolical and mythical depth of the novella 'Der Leviathan' springs from a recourse to Jewish culture, in 'Kulturangst und die Sehnsucht nach dem Tode: Joseph Roths 'Der Leviathan' – die intertextuelle Mythisierung der Kleinstadsgeschichte', in Michael Kessler and Fritz Hackert (eds.), *Joseph Roth: Interpretation – Kritik – Rezeption*. Stuttgart: Stauffenbutg, 1990, pp. 279-98. For a detailed analysis of Roth's "Jewishness", see Andreas Herzog, "'Der Segen des ewigen Juden': Zur 'jüdischen' Identität Joseph Roths", in *Habsburger Aporien? Geisteshaltungen und Lebenskonzepte in der multinationalen Literatur der Habsburger Monarchie*, edited by Eva Reichmann, Bielefelder Schriften zu Linguistik und Literaturwissenschaft 9, Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 1998, pp. 113-132; Edward Timms, 'Doppeladler und Backenbart: Joseph Roth und der österreichisch-jüdischen Symbiose bei Joseph Roth', *Literatur und Kritik* 25 (1990), pp. 318-324; Matiyahu Kranz, 'Juden und ihre Berufe in Joseph Roths Werk', *Tribüne* 63 (1977), pp. 55-82; Wolfgang Klimbacher, "'Melodien von trauriger Größe, besessener Liebe': jüdische Identitäten in Joseph Roths Roman 'Hotel Savoy'", *Das Jüdische Echo* 49 (2000), pp. 252-258.

²⁰ Ward H. Powell, 'Joseph Roth, Ironic Primitivist', *Monatshefte*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (March 1961), pp. 115-122, pp. 115-116.

that followed, and Roth scholarship is still struggling to reconcile the “apparent contradictions” between his earlier and later works. In Powell’s words:

When Roth’s later novels are assessed as the works of an ironic primitivist rather than the tracts of a convert and latter-day monarchist, it is no longer difficult to resolve the apparent contradictions which have been so bothersome to critics. To say that within a literary career spanning only fifteen years he turned from a sceptic to a believer, from a *revolteur* to a reactionary, is an over-simplification and misinterpretation. In the beginning he was a liberal, forward-looking critic of his times who could believe in the possibility of something better to come. At the end of his career he was a man completely disabused of his faith in the future, but one who nonetheless refused to admit the fact openly, baldly, and with finality. In some respects he resembled a person who suffers from an incurable disease and resigns himself to a palliative in order to ease the suffering and to salvage anything at all from the days which remain. Roth’s disease was despair; the palliative was ironic primitivism; and what he ultimately salvaged was his own artistic being.²¹

In other words, it is not possible, nor is it desirable, to analyse Roth’s intellectual journey and ideological affiliations in a calm and evolutionary manner, tracing its separate steps and phases; a kind of gradual development that relies on the process of aging and mellowing. Instead, Roth’s intellectual itinerary is characterised by jolts, regressions, temporary identifications, crystallisations and voids, elements that are present throughout, thus cutting through the two-phase idea of his career. Nor did Roth age gradually in a physical manner. He turned into an old man overnight; a remarkable aging that changed his physique in the space of a few short years between 1929 and 1933; when he died at 44, he looked years, if not decades, beyond his age. In light of this, I will approach Roth’s intellectual legacy from the viewpoint of the jolts and upheavals that characterise his thought from the beginning, identifying early appearances of themes that would come to full crystallisation later, and generally bypassing the idea that there is a stylistic as well as moral break to his career. One way to do this is to incorporate his journalism, short stories, novellas and letters into the analysis, something which I have done in this thesis. Thus, a focus on the jolts – which very often occurred at times of catastrophe or crisis – leads to an emphasis on continuity, as it allows for an analysis of the changes that occurred in Roth’s intellectual orientation over the entire span of his career, the years 1918 until 1939, thus connecting the previously separated phases through an analysis of Roth’s responses to his historical present and catastrophe.

²¹ Ward H. Powell, ‘Joseph Roth, Ironic Primitivist’, p. 121.

Related to the rejection of a two-phase notion of Roth's career is the idea that instead of a sentimental monarchist or Habsburg elegist, Roth was really a politically minded writer who had a great concern for his historical present; a concern that translated into linguistic politics and the desire to create a better future. This is the main value of Kati Tonkin's study, as she shows that underneath what appears to be unabashed nostalgia for the lost Habsburg monarchy, lay a layer of virulent critique of those elements within the monarchy that contributed to, if not caused, its ultimate demise. Here, Tonkin challenges the abovementioned widely accepted notion of a periodic break in Roth's career which critics believe also affected his ideological affiliations: from an early, socialist period in the 1920s to a later, monarchist phase in the 1930s. Unaccepting of this dualist view, Tonkin argues that Roth's oeuvre should be understood as a continuous search to find the perfect form of literary expression in which to verbalise his critique of contemporary postwar society. Sometime during the impasse between his third and fourth novel, 1924s *Rebellion* and 1927s *Flight without End*, Roth had "a change of heart" as he realised that he could not understand the present, the aim of his first three novels, without writing about the past. Furthermore, Tonkin argues that Roth's denial of all absolutist solutions to the problems of his time is one reason why labelling the early Roth a "socialist" is inaccurate.

Tonkin's main argument is that Roth's search for the perfect form in which to mould his urgent concern for his present crystallised in *The Radetzky March*, a book she argues is a historical novel, not a nostalgic one, in the way that Georg Lukács defined it: a novel that sets the aim of recreating the human and societal motivations of past lives and "capturing and illuminating the relationship of the present to the past, the 'prehistory' of contemporary problems."²² Tonkin's argument that the novel is not about historical fact but about truth in history is convincing, because it is an interpretation that corresponds to Roth's views about the role of language. One of Roth's more consistent opinions was that poetic truth, and not historical fact, mattered. Thus, unlike most of his contemporaries who described the condition of alienation in the Habsburg monarchy, in *The Radetzky March* Roth concentrated instead on the *process* of alienation. He not only showed how the monarchy kept the myth of supranationalism alive, but also exposed the unacknowledged reality of a strong sense of German cultural superiority which actively inflamed the rise of nationalisms among the monarchy's other ethnic and religious groups. The strength of Tonkin's analysis lies in this previously unacknowledged political dimension of the novel. This does not, however, weaken my opinion that it is time to let the "masterwork" rest for

²² Kati Tonkin, *Joseph Roth's March into History*, p. 111.

a while and instead concentrate on his lesser known novellas, novels and essays; not only because of their individual merits, but also as a way to unlock the political, critical eye in these works as well as to highlight the continuity of themes throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

A third development is the critical assessment of Roth's use of language. Until recently, scholars agreed that Roth's work should be seen as the expression of a "crisis of language" that postulates a gap between the posited realities of the text and those of the real world.²³ They understand Roth's work as a pessimistic capitulation in the face of reality; in other words, as the result of an inability to cope with the present. This, critics believe, explains Roth's move towards more phantasmagorical literary genres, such as fables or tales, in later years; a move indicative of his escapist rejection of the present. This focus on negativity and failure has no doubt been influenced by Roth's final years, the presence of death in his later works and the fact that so many of his characters remain in perpetual misery. However, as Jon Hughes has rightly argued, the despair of Roth's characters should not be equated with a desperate narrative. Indeed, "... given that language can only ever mirror reality imperfectly, the creation of an alternative, purely linguistic reality could be said to be a logical consequence."²⁴ In a similar vein, Ritchie Robertson has argued that the representation of Jewish life in *Job*, a novel often criticised for its simplicity and its reliance on stereotypes, is not so much based on a desire for mimicry, but that the text presents a modernist framework which provided Roth with a platform to experiment with a "cascade of impressions" that relies more heavily on the imagination than on accurate historical recollection.²⁵ This view, stressing the inner workings of representations and linguistics, brings to the fore an important feature that my thesis examines in more detail, namely the idea that Roth's focus on the imagination was a moral choice embedded in his historical present and born out of the desire for a better future; indeed, a strategy of resistance in the face of catastrophe. Roth's "mythomania" resembles what both Nietzsche and Kierkegaard have identified as an "aesthetic attitude" to life: a worldview that incorporates the mythic and the imaginative into the core of existence. In Roth, the aesthetic attitude was apparent in the powerful presence of clowns, actors, and *Luftmenschen* in his novels, the much overlooked ironic and comic tone of his

²³ Jon Hughes, *Facing Modernity*, p. 7.

²⁴ Jon Hughes, *Facing Modernity*, p. 8.

²⁵ See Ritchie Robertson's discussion of *Job* in *The "Jewish Question" in German Literature, 1749-1939: Emancipation and Its Discontents*. Oxford: UOP, 1999, pp. 421-428. A longer version of his argument can be found in Ritchie Robertson, 'Roth's *Hiob* and the Traditions of Ghetto Fiction,' in *Co-Existent Contradictions: Joseph Roth in Retrospect. Papers of the 1989 Joseph Roth Symposium at Leeds University to Commemorate the 50th Anniversary*, Helen Chambers (ed.), Riverside, California: Ariadne Press, June 1991, pp. 185-200.

narratives, and his own role-playing. Thus, against the stream of the obviously tragic in Roth, I will examine its counterpart, i.e. the role of miracles, humour and self-invention.

A final and recent development in Roth scholarship is a focus on gender. So far, four scholars have dealt with gender issues in Roth: abjection and the dissolution of identity by Anne Fuchs²⁶; the binary representations of Roth's literary women by Helen Chambers²⁷; femininity and assimilatory desire by Katja Garloff²⁸; and misogyny and the myth of masculinity by Marta Wörsching.²⁹ Others have noted the persistent absence or minority status of women in Roth's oeuvre.³⁰ Some of Roth's remarks about women in his journalism and letters, as well as the many literary depictions of women in his novels, are downright misogynist. In the least, they testify to his problematic relationship with women and love, but, by extension, they are indicative of his existential rejection of domestic and family life, core concepts in any discussion of belonging and anchorage. Furthermore, although information about the three women in Roth's life – his wife Friederike Reichler and his lovers Andrea Manga Bell and Irmgard Keun – is growing, their role in Roth's thought about love and home has not yet been examined. While a complete analysis of women and love in Roth falls outside the scope of this thesis, in chapter 4 I do examine one aspect of it, namely the relationship between suffering, madness and women as Roth portrayed it in *Job*, in conjunction with his own personal identification with the role of the suffering Jew.

Main Questions

What is lacking in the existing research on Roth is an analysis of his relationship to his Jewish heritage, as well as an assessment of his intellectual legacy and thought; or, in other words, an examination of Roth as a Jewish intellectual. This thesis, then, aims to present a study based on these questions. What kind of intellectual was Roth? What are the aspects of his thought that, in a way, transcend the sheer novelistic and journalistic? How did his

²⁶ Anne Fuchs, 'Roth's Ambivalence: The Logic of Separation in His Writings on Eastern Jewry', in Anne Fuchs, *A Space of Anxiety. Dislocation and Abjection in Modern German-Jewish Literature* (Amsterdamer Publikationen zur Sprache und Literatur 138). Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999, pp. 81-122.

²⁷ Helen Chambers, 'Predators or Victims? Women in Joseph Roth's Works,' in Helen Chambers (ed.), *Co-Existent Contradictions: Joseph Roth in Retrospect. Papers of the 1989 Joseph Roth Symposium at Leeds University to Commemorate the 50th Anniversary*. Riverside, California: Ariadne Press, 1991, pp. 107-127.

²⁸ Katja Garloff, 'Femininity and Assimilatory Desire in Joseph Roth', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 51, Number 2 (Summer 2005), pp. 354-373.

²⁹ Marta Wörsching, 'Misogyny and the Myth of Masculinity in Joseph Roth's *Radetzky*', in Ritchie Robertson and Edward Timms (eds.), *Gender and Politics in Austrian Fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1996, pp. 118-133.

³⁰ Susan Miron, 'On Joseph Roth,' *Salmagundi*, No. 98-99 (Spring – Summer 1993), pp. 198-206.

Jewish heritage influence, affect, or even distort his intellectual itinerary? The interesting thing about Roth is that his lonely stance as a thinker, writer and journalist is often emphasised, both in his own reflections and in those of his critics. The picture that emerges is that of an isolated and idiosyncratic thinker, battling the predicaments of his time as if they were solely and singularly his own. While there is some truth to this, it is nevertheless not the case that Roth was disconnected from the discourses and ideas that circulated in his time. If anything, this individualist stance must have been developed against something; a kind of “axionormative dissent” from the ideas, opinions, and political affinities of his contemporaries. Paul Mendes-Flohr has identified this “axionormative dissent” as a main characteristic that defines an intellectual, based on the notion that as a cognitive insider in her society, the intellectual nevertheless remains an outsider due to her critique of society as well as an often impenetrable social exclusion.³¹ In the case of German Jews, this tension between being a cognitive insider in German society, having familiarised themselves with its norms and values through the process of assimilation, while remaining distinctly alienated from it, is what caused a predilection for axionormative critique, i.e. intellectualism. An analysis of Roth’s responses to his Jewish heritage, therefore, is crucial in an examination of his intellectual itinerary and thought.

Roth’s individualist stance came to the fore most clearly in his refusal to affiliate himself permanently with any political or ideological party, either on the left, right, or center. But this non-dogmatic stance affected not only political groupings. Despite his long-term employment at the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, for instance, Roth never felt he belonged to his group of colleagues, a feeling that grew after 1933 when many of them chose to remain in Germany, something Roth considered close to treason. Also, his skepticism to become part of the “Gruppe 1925,” a leftist organisation of writers, journalists and artists in Berlin, whose members included Alfred Döblin, Bert Brecht, Egon Erwin Kisch, Ernst Toller, Rudolf Leonhard, Leo Lania, Otto Dix, George Grosz and Rudolf Schlichter, is well documented in his letters.³² His friendships with many of these people proved unstable, and he turned some into enemies by judging them in the light of his relentless moral standards. In addition, Roth often felt he carried the grudges of many of his émigré friends

³¹ Paul R. Mendes-Flohr, *Divided Passions: Jewish intellectuals and the experience of modernity*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991.

³² Joseph Roth, *Briefe*, p. 79. In a letter to Bernard von Brentano, dated 11 February 1926, he writes: “Ich habe nicht Döblin, der nich Vorsitzender des Klubs ist, geschrieben, sondern Rolf Leonhard, von dem die Sache ausgeht. Es ist kein Vorzug, under uns gesagt, diesem Klub anzugehören. Einige sind dort, auf die ich pfeife. Ich habe Leonard geschrieben, dass ich skeptisch bin, dass ich einen Verein loben würde, dessen Aufgabe es wäre, alle anständigen Menschen zur Auswanderung zu bewegen. Im Staate Gesslers, Stresemanns, Gerhart Hauptmanns, aber auch Heinrich Eduard Jacob’s, Alfred Kerrs und Rowohlts ist nichts für uns zu holen.”

and colleagues, adding to his already well developed sense of isolation.³³ Acknowledging this lonely stance as an individual, however, in this thesis I attempt to re-establish those intellectual and emotional bonds he did have; those connections that shaped his thought and have been lost in the singular focus on Roth as a highly original and singular individual. What, then, were Roth's intellectual friendships? What were the feverish and displaced contexts in which Roth's reflections on belonging took shape? Taking Roth's ambivalent vision of the modern world into account, I would nevertheless argue that the development of his thought took place within the context of a set of intense questions about belonging amongst Jewish as well as non-Jewish intellectuals in a time that was bursting with anxiety over this matter. In addressing these questions, I hope to shed light on the contexts, shades and origins of his critical thought in a way that does justice to its inherent idiosyncrasies as well as its undeniable influences.³⁴

In assessing Roth's legacy as a Jewish intellectual, I will focus on his complicated ties to his Jewish heritage – ties that were nevertheless there – and his struggle to find anchorage and develop a notion of belonging from a position of uprootedness, an idea which made its way into his novels, through themes and perspectives, and into his journalism, through a focus on the marginalised and displaced in modern society. This idea is reflected in the title of this thesis: Roth's struggle with Jewish anchorage, both as a concept, personal heritage and existential starting point, reflects the main dilemma of Roth's life and work. It conveys that idea that Roth's mental and physical restlessness, as well as his subsequent physical and intellectual wanderings, were the result of his experiences as an East European Jew; rooted, as it were, in his East European Jewish background. When I say "rooted," however, it is important to stress that I have an anti-essentialist approach to this question. Thus, instead of trying to establish a direct link between Roth's Jewish heritage and his intellectual dispositions, I aim to examine how his Jewish heritage mattered in his subsequent intellectual itinerary; a question that, as I noted

³³ Joseph Roth, *Briefe*, p. 415.

³⁴ On a related note, one of the persistent myths about Roth is that he was known for reading very little and that he proudly adhered to Karl Krauss's famous saying that "Ein Dichter, der liest, ist wie ein Kellner, der isst." He even claimed to have never read any of his companion Irmgard Keun's novels. As his Hungarian friend and colleague Géza von Cziffra remembers: "Er war bekannt dafür, dass er sehr wenig las. Sein umfassendes Wissen erwarb er noch in seiner Jugend, er las selbst die Bücher, die er zu besprechen hatte, nur flüchtig; zumindest in der Emigration, dauernd von Unruhe getrieben, zu nervös, um ein Buch zu Ende zu lesen, behaupteten seine Freunde." (Géza von Cziffra, *Der heilige Trinker: Erinnerungen an Joseph Roth*. Bergisch-Gladbach: Bastei-Lübbe, 1983/Frankfurt am Mainz and Berlin: ein Ullstein Buch, 1989, c1983, p. 105). So how can we trace the influences of a man who proclaimed to have never read a single book? Of course, the mythmaking inherent in this statement is much more pronounced than the statement itself, and his letters provide clues as to the books he read, admired, and despised. Yet this mythmaking, as well as his solitary and at times controversial position amongst his contemporaries, provides a challenging background to the tracing of his intellectual contexts.

before, has not been properly addressed in Roth scholarship. This thesis, then, tries to understand Roth's responses to catastrophe from a Jewish perspective, taking as a starting point the claim that he was a writer very much influenced by his Jewishness. It aims to identify the Jewish themes in his work and understand them within the greater context of his partly self-inflicted predicament of uprootedness. Yet, I aim to go beyond a sheer literary analysis of Jewish themes and characters in his work towards an assessment of Roth's political commitments as an observer of his time. What questions did he ask about his Jewish heritage, and what were the strategies he adopted in response to it, as well as to the external factors that were a result of the fact of his Jewish birth, such as assimilation, persecution and exile? In short, this thesis aims to provide insight into Roth's relationship with his Jewish heritage.

Finally, a note on the renewed contemporary interest in Roth. As a writer composed of paradoxes that stemmed primarily from his multivocal identity as an assimilated and uprooted Galician Jew, a man never wholly at home anywhere, Roth's ideas about the precariousness of political ideologies and national borders seem to meet with greater understanding today than they did in his own time. As Michael Hofmann writes, "Writing about the death of an empire and the end of an era Roth perhaps seems to have more to say to us now than ever before . . . At school, I was forever having to study the Habsburg Empire; it was only reading Roth, years later, that gave it human colour and meaning, to the point where it now strikes me as being the main story of our continent."³⁵ In this thesis, then, it is my aim to unlock Roth's critical voice, thus arguing against the many pervasive nostalgic interpretations, and to catapult him into contemporary discourses about belonging; to bring to the fore the "ripples" and echoes of his thought for contemporary readers and scholars and to contextualize his struggle with his Jewish heritage, which, I believe, forms the source of his posthumous position as an "unclassifiable" author. Furthermore, this thesis argues that Roth's configurations of self and other stemmed from a "positive" notion of uprootedness. To Roth, wandering was not just a Jewish fate; it became a moral imperative which he transposed onto entire mankind. It was one of the few constant elements of his thought, if not, perhaps, his main intellectual legacy.

³⁵ See the website of Peter Owen Publishers:
<http://www.peterowen.com/pages/Authors/Joseph%20Roth.htm>.

Responses to Catastrophe. Outline of the Thesis

The analytical frame of this thesis is the idea that Roth's intellectual itinerary took place in a context that can most adequately be described as an ongoing response to catastrophe. No doubt Roth's life(time) was one drenched in catastrophe, and his losses, ranging from homeland and the past to identity, sanity, health and love, were many. But, one may ask, why catastrophe? Wouldn't it be more agreeable to place under the lens those things that were constructive about his life and work? The truth about Roth is, though, that despite a deep and urgent wish to save the continent, he was a man with very few illusions about the present. He did not avert his eyes from the catastrophes that plagued his historical times; he reported on them with great fervour and reacted in a way that alienated him from many of his contemporaries. It fuelled his short-lived and lukewarm affair with leftwing politics in the mid-1920s and created a literary basin of themes and characters that, although cacophonous in colour and sound, was pulled mainly from those corners of the human world most affected by catastrophe. This focus on the "minor" characters of history, versus its grand and heroic protagonists, forms a red thread in his thought. His voice, in other words, expressed a politics "against the great."

David G. Roskies, in *Against the Apocalypse*, has identified longing for that which has been lost as part of the Jewish tradition.³⁶ Even if Roth did not succumb to it, it is nevertheless accurate to say that longing forms a red thread in his literary as well as private existence, spanning the two decades of the interwar years, a period sometimes referred to as the "apocalyptic interregnum."³⁷ However, while Roth flirted with the idea of redemption and was desperately looking for a way out of his catastrophic historical and personal predicament, it did not become a mainstay of his thought. As Kati Tonkin has shown, Roth's apocalyptic impulses always stopped short of redemption, thus blocking the

³⁶ Roskies writes: "Typically, the stimulus for the writing of a Jewish memoir was the precipitous end of an era, usually as a result of catastrophe. Jews sat down to write with a sense of longing, once the foundations of society as they knew it had been fundamentally altered; or they tried to restore a sense of equilibrium in the face of a new catastrophe by recalling the bitter experiences they had withstood in the one before. [...] As Jacob Shatzky put it with a touch of irony, only that which was lost forever was of interest to Jews." David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse. Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1984, pp. 134-5. See also Steven E. Aschheim, *Culture and Catastrophe: German and Jewish confrontations with National Socialism and other crises*. New York: New York University Press, 1996.

³⁷ David Roberts, 'The Sense of an Ending: Apocalyptic Perspectives in the 20th-Century German Novel,' *Orbis Litterarum* 32, 1977, pp. 140-58. See also Tonkin, *Joseph Roth's March into History*, p. 199 and Anson Rabinbach, *In the Shadow of Catastrophe. German Intellectuals between Apocalypse and Enlightenment*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997. This book contains the following essay: Anson Rabinbach, 'Between Enlightenment and Apocalypse: Benjamin, Bloch and Modern German Jewish Messianism', *New German Critique*, No. 34 (Winter 1985), pp. 78-124.

way to the idea of a definite solution to the problems of the present.³⁸ His early novels can be linked by a resistance to the pull of dogmatic solutions – which greatly overpopulated the interwar years – whether they were ethnic German nationalism, socialist revolution, Jewish anarchic apocalypticism, apolitical apathy, revolutionary violence, or complete surrender to apocalyptic impulses. Since Roth believed that history was an endless procession of repeated mistakes, he did not consider a belief in apocalyptic redemption to be an accurate response to the present.

David Roskies's depiction of many East European Jewish writers as people who "saw ruined cities in their mind's eye" is not at all far off the mark for Roth, either. However, contrary to much of Roth scholarship which sees this longing for the past as a symptom of a deep-rooted and paralysing nostalgia, I will argue that instead it provided the fuel for his critical consciousness and critique of the present; a concern aimed at saving what he believed were the universal morals and values of European civilisation. In his own way, therefore, Roth was writing against the apocalypse. He would be no stranger in the posthumous company of Walter Benjamin and Franz Kafka, but critical reception has reserved for Roth a rather isolated stance, limited mainly to German-language scholarship. One of the aims of this thesis is to present a study of Roth in the English language that incorporates the biographical in its narrative design; lifting him, as it were, into a wider receptive pool where the resonances have been, especially in recent years, great. It aims to "open up the crypt," like that of Emperor Franz Joseph in the novel *The Emperor's Tomb* (1938), of his intellectual and literary legacy and catapult him into the domain of the critical; to sever him, finally, from the dominant interpretation of his intellectual legacy as a reactionary, nostalgic, sentimentalist and ultimately doomed writer.

While the frame of the thesis centres on catastrophe, placing its main argument into the Jewish paradigm outlined above, I will argue that Roth had a particular response to his losses: namely, a reaction that put concern for the present and a conscious choice to remain within an uprooted predicament above nostalgia, longing for home or alliance to a fixed identity or political loyalty. He negated loss into a self-conscious position of active, positive concern for the present. As such, my thesis argues against the idea that a focus on catastrophe and suffering, especially in Jewish history but not exclusively so, is self-defeating and counter-productive. Instead, I argue that the catastrophic predicament of the interwar years and Roth's own life formed the starting point for his transgressive and often modern reflexions about belonging and Jewish anchorage.

³⁸ "A lesser novelist," she writes, "would have succumbed to the temptation of a literary resolution." Kati Tonkin, *Joseph Roth's March into History*, p. 91.

Chapter 2 of this thesis, ‘A Time Divided against Itself. Debates, Methods, Sources’, discusses the main intellectual and cultural debates in which Roth participated, as well as the methodological questions and sources in which I embed my research. The five thematic chapters which comprise the main analytical core of this thesis can all be understood within the greater frame of an ongoing response to catastrophe; they are all structured around a particular loss. Chapter 3, ‘Opening up the Crypt. Nostalgia, Retrospective Belonging and the Present’, examines the influence of the loss of the Habsburg monarchy on Roth’s expressions of nostalgia through a close reading of his novel *The Emperor’s Tomb* (1938). It argues that the loss of homeland, for the most part an imagined entity constructed in retrospect, was crucial to the development of Roth’s critical concern and political engagement in his historical present. Chapter 4, ‘The Lamentations of an “Old Jew.” Suffering and Madness’, addresses the loss of sanity and the concepts of suffering, mental illness and love through an examination of the novel *Job. The Story of a Simple Man* (1930). It argues that Roth’s identification with his Jewish heritage was strongest in moments of deep despair, as he actively donned the role of the suffering Jew in the period of his greatest suffering, namely, the years in the late twenties and early thirties when his wife descended into schizophrenia. It concludes that Roth had a disturbing “solution” to the problem of guilt connected to madness: he transferred it back onto the literary bodies of women.

In chapter 5, ‘“All Roads Lead to Brody.” Intellectual Heritage and Jewish Tradition’, I examine what kind of Jewish intellectual Roth was in the light of his intellectual heritage and itinerary. Through a discussion of the unfinished novel of his childhood, *Strawberries*, it asks what role the Jewish tradition of Brody played in his subsequent intellectual development and worldview, and concludes that Roth aimed to place himself in the partly invented tradition of uprooted but gifted Galician men. Chapter 6, ‘Prophecies of Unrest. Europe in the Claws of the Antichrist’, deals with the loss of the future and European civilisation through an examination of the idiosyncratic essay *The Antichrist* (1934), the concept of prophecy and the question of Roth’s posthumous fame. This chapter shows how the loss of the future and the values of European civilisation resulted in an ethical and moral critique of modernity and mankind. Chapter 7, finally, ‘Speaking from a Jewish Void. Exilic Performance and Masquerade as Strategies of Resistance’, focuses on Roth’s self-invention and argues that, firstly, it was a result of his Jewish heritage and exile and that secondly, it is a key to understanding his identity as well as his shifting ideological standpoints. Through an analysis of the novella *The Legend of Holy*

Drinker (1940), I show how the imaginative, the mythic and the wondrous were a crucial part of his worldview. Roth's famous essay from 1927, *The Wandering Jews*, forms a red thread throughout all five chapters.

II

A Time Divided against Itself. Debates, Methods, Sources

God is with the vanquished, not with the victors!

Joseph Roth¹

History is not a science, but “an approximation of a time and space we knew not.”

Fritz Stern²

To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognised need of the human soul.

Simone Weil³

Introduction

“... Die Völker vergehn, die Reiche verwehn. (Aus dem vergehenden besteht die Geschichte.) Aus dem Vergehenden, dem Verwehenden das Merkwürdige und zugleich das Menschlich-Bezeichnende festzuhalten ist die Pflicht des Schriftstellers,” Roth wrote in 1933.⁴ The irony befitting Roth is that the book that most people consider his masterpiece, the historical epic *The Radetzky March*, is not a novel of triumphs or victories. On the contrary; it is the tale of the decay of a European empire. It was not fate, but mankind, that caused its demise. As Ludwig Marcuse wrote in his review of the book: “Roth interessieren nicht die Paradeszenen der Weltgeschichte, sondern die kleinen Monologe, die hinter den pratschigen Diskussionen derer, die “Weltgeschichte” machen, im Verborgenen

¹ Joseph Roth, ‘The Auto-da-Fé of the Mind,’ in *What I Saw: Reports from Berlin, 1920-1933*. Translated by Michael Hoffman. London & New York: Granta, 2004, pp. 207-217, pp. 208-9.

² Fritz Stern, *Dreams and Delusions. The Drama of German History*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987, p. 28.

³ Simone Weil as quoted by Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001, p. 183.

⁴ Ludwig Marcuse, quoted from Wilhelm von Sternburg, *Joseph Roth. Eine Biographie*, pp. 397-398.

welken.”⁵ All the more appropriate, as I will discuss in detail below, that a method focusing on the fragments, forgotten details and idiosyncrasies of the past should be the underlying structure of a study of Joseph Roth.

This thesis, then, is interdisciplinary as the analysis takes place on the crossroads of history and literature. Instead of a passive illumination of historical facts, I consider literature to be an art in which time is constantly mirrored, constituted and created. In addition, due to the subject matter as well as the main quandary, my work immerses itself in Jewish Studies. In what follows, I will discuss the main debates in which my analysis of Roth takes place. This happens on two levels: the historiographical discourses in Jewish studies which resonate most with Roth, and those debates that took place in Roth’s own lifetime in which he engaged himself. Finally, I will shortly discuss the question of autobiography and biography, and explain the sources.

Debates

The period 1881-1939, in the words of Jonathan Frankel, was a time when the Jewish world was divided against itself.⁶ Since the pogroms of 1881 and the emergence of political antisemitism in the 1880s in Germany and Austria, prompting massive numbers of Jews to immigrate to the United States, rabbis, leaders, and laymen alike were divided over the right response to these new developments. The question of a Jewish homeland was hotly debated between proto-Zionists, cultural and political Zionists, and assimilated Jews. For a brief moment, Africa was considered as the new location of Zion, while others argued for resettlement in agricultural communities in America. The Balfour Declaration of 1917, promising British support in the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, injected confidence in many Zionists. However, it would not be until 1948, after the unimaginable losses of the Second World War, that Israel came into being. In the period between 1917 and the onset of the war in 1939, the “complex interwar hiatus” that coincided with Roth’s mature life, Jews had to make decisions in the face of the “apocalyptic fury soon to be unleashed.”⁷ Frankel has argued that the experience of the Jewish people mirrored, but also amplified, that of the belligerent societies after the First World War. The Jews’ “paradox of

⁵ Ludwig Marcuse, ‘Radetzkyarsch’, *Wie alt kan Aktuelles sein? Literarische Porträts und Kritiken*. Zürich: Diogenes, 1989, p. 53.

⁶ Jonathan Frankel, ‘S. M. Dubnov. Historian and Ideologist’, in *Crisis, Revolution, and Russian Jews*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 239-275, p. 293.

⁷ Jonathan Frankel, ‘The Paradoxical Politics of Marginality. Thoughts on the Jewish Situation during the Years 1914-1921’, in *Crisis, Revolution, and Russian Jews*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp.131-154, p. 132.

marginality” was that, despite their losses during the war, they were a potentially strong emerging power. This idea, however, was fuelled by the pervasive and antisemitic myth of Jewish power and the emergence of a dictatorship of world Jewry. Soon, the “danger” of Jewish power was undermined by waves of antisemitism in the early years of Weimar, and it would take years before the Jewish nation was finally realised. From its earliest conception onwards until the present, however, Israel was and remains a contested, if not embattled, reality.

This renewed antisemitism of the early 1920s was in part a reaction to the presence of East European Jews, or *Ostjuden*, in Western Europe, an influx that had begun after the pogroms of the 1880s.⁸ Around 1900, a profound change in orientation took place among certain sections of German-speaking Jewry in the context of Jewish self-definition, caused by the rise of political antisemitism, a turn away from Jewish religion, and the confrontation with Eastern Jewry. What became clear at this time was that there was a growing contrast between East European and German Jewish roads to modernity. Some Jews and Jewish organisations defended the plight of East European Jews on a moral level, but shared feelings of disgust for them with their German neighbours. Cultural Zionists, such as Martin Buber, replaced the negative stereotypes of the *Ostjuden* with a positive idealisation; the source of an unspoiled community, an image that also dominates Roth’s *The Wandering Jews*. The encounter with East European Jews during the war and the subsequent changed perception of the *Ostjuden* were indicative of a radical transformation of the German-Jewish consciousness. Franz Rosenzweig, for instance, developed a romantic appreciation of East European Jewry that reflected his own discontent with assimilation and the embourgeoisement of Germany Jewry, stressing their resistance to the enticements of Western civilisation. In this way, Eastern Jews became a counterimage of all that was wrong with Jews in the West. Many German Jews in Weimar, however, anxious that they would be identified with the socially disadvantaged Jews from the East, internalised the customary antisemitic stereotypes and projected them onto the *Ostjuden*, despite the fact that a great percentage of the Jewish intelligentsia in Weimar had Eastern origins. These debates, the *Ostjuden* and Zionism, were the two main discourses Roth reacted to most passionately in his journalism and letters.

⁸ A seminal study about the encounter between East European Jews and the West is Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers. The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800-1923*. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982. See also Michael A. Meyer and Michael Brenner (eds.), *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, Vol. 3 (Integration in Dispute 1871-1918) and Vol. 4 (Renewal and Destruction 1918-1945), New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

On a theoretical level, this thesis engages in several debates dominant in Jewish Studies. One of them is the concept, history and role of suffering. In confronting Roth's life, one cannot escape the pervasive narrative of misery, tragedy and bad luck that is often brought forward to illuminate or explain his work. However, in order to go beyond this superficial appeal of misfortune, it is necessary to know the roots of the debate and to place Roth – his reactions and actions – in this greater frame of the discourse of suffering. In *Suffering as Identity. The Jewish Paradigm*, Esther Benbassa confronts this “lachrymose” historiography that has firmly placed Jews in an ancestral linkage to the suffering of the past, present and future.⁹ This historiography is the result of the Jewish encounter with modernity during the early nineteenth century. As Jews increasingly left their communities, individual suffering replaced the communal suffering of previous centuries. The new historical writing was a reaction to this individualised suffering, as it aimed to forge a long-term collective identity and a communal bond in a time of increased secularisation and acculturation. The memory of ancestral suffering was supposed to serve as a protective shield against the internal erosion of the Jewish community; to maintain, in other words, its political and communal cohesion and to guarantee its survival. In this way, an invented past of amplified Jewish suffering became the main thread or glue meant to tie Jews together.

Benbassa's critique of the triumph of mourning is multiple. First, she argues that suffering creates victimhood; victimhood that is then transformed into a moral posture. The discourse of suffering, now disconnected from its religious experience, has become identity politics. Modern identities base themselves on what she calls the “moral capital” of suffering: suffering gives a kind of pretence of added value to identities that nevertheless remain empty and exploited. But, she asks, how can identities be constructed on suffering, loss, and victimhood, on the negation or denial of life? This question is especially poignant for Israel, where enforced remembrance of the Holocaust and the murder of million Jews still seem to provide the main substance and rationale of Israeli identity; according to Benbassa, an unsustainable construct.

Secondly, Jewish history as the memory of suffering prevents a “proper understanding of history” and confuses the appropriate distance between history, emotion and memory. In order to create the suffering paradigm, nineteenth-century German-Jewish intellectuals believed it necessary to place Judaism outside the parameters of history. Only an atemporal, ahistorical Judaism could ensure its survival and essence. As a consequence, the image and self-perception of Jews as passive creatures outside history emerged.

⁹ Esther Benbassa, *Suffering as Identity. The Jewish Paradigm*. London: Verso 2009.

Benbassa refutes the idea of Jewish history as passive; its offensives and bravura, she says, “do not start with Zionism.” Nor are the centuries leading up to Jewish emancipation solely times of perpetual darkness, persecution, misery and lamentation. The memory of suffering, in other words, clouds and distorts an accurate portrayal of the past. Against the dominance of memory, Benbassa pleads for the “urgent need for history” in order not only to universalise the historical experience of the Jews, but also to “make it possible to transmit it to a posterity comprised of Jews and non-Jews alike [...], so that, one day, both Jews and non-Jews can contemplate a rounded picture of the Jews, rather than observing them from the angle of their abiding misfortunes alone.”¹⁰

Benbassa’s book is the second study published recently that aims to subvert one of the “great myths” of Judaism by critically reassessing traditional Jewish historiography. Shlomo Sand, in *The Invention of the Jewish People* (2009) has argued that the idea of the forced expulsion of the Jews, leading to their millennial exile, is a myth.¹¹ Instead, active proselytizing and conversions led to a rich and multifarious community of Diaspora Jews who do not share a common origin in the Holy Land. Thus, Sand’s argument runs counter to the *raison d’être* of Israel’s claims to the “old homeland.” Sand, drawing on archaeological as well as historical sources, challenges the idea of an unbroken, linear Jewish history leading straight into the bosoms of the biblical forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He refutes the certainty of the existence of a Jewish nation “since Moses received the tablets of the law on Mount Sinai” by showing how, since the emergence of the national idea in the first half of the nineteenth century, Jewish historiography has bent and shaped the facts and findings of the history of the Jews to fit its national ideology. Its main aim was to consolidate the idea of the Jews as a chosen people with a historical-divine right to the Holy Land, their “national” home. In doing so, Sand brings to light the crucial role that historians played, and still play, in this process of national-historical consolidation. Zionist and German-Jewish historians such as Heinrich Graetz, Simon Dubnow, Salo Baron, Yitzhak Baer, and Ben-Zion Dinur, were “sculptors” who together created what Sand calls a “mythistory”: a tale of metaphysical dimensions that gave the Jewish people a common biological and historical origin.

By removing the rationale from under firmly held convictions about the Jewish past, convictions supported by a subjective and ideological use of history, both Sand and Benbassa have noble aims: their pursuit of intellectual honesty ultimately serves the betterment of contemporary Jewish and Arab life in Israel and Palestine. Both care deeply

¹⁰ Esther Benbassa, *Suffering as Identity*, p. 79.

¹¹ Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People*. London: Verso 2009.

about the future of Judaism as a genuine and anti-reactionary source of life, community and religion. Roth, too, had a humane community of man in mind when he voiced his virulent criticism of the modern world, but his trajectory was different. Whereas contemporary scholars accept Israel as a fact, criticising it from within, Roth was acridly opposed to the idea of a Jewish national home, which, at the time, was still an unrealised possibility. Thus, in the light of this, what did Roth envision for the Jews? If opposed to a national home while fully aware of the trials and tribulations of Jewish life in the Diaspora, what was his vision? What did exile mean to him? The Russian Jewish historian S.M. Dubnov, for instance, professed, like Roth, a cyclical version of history and a focus on the tragic aspects of Jewish history, which he paradoxically combined with a linear belief in the progress of men toward a humane and just society; kind of a “Diaspora autonomism.” Dubnov considered time to be the only remedy for the historical catastrophe overtaking Europe and European Jews.¹² What were Roth’s ideas about the role of the Jews in the greater historical picture? These are some of the main questions my research aims to address.

Finally, in this thesis, the intellectual dialogue functions on three levels. First, there is Roth’s relationship with his main intellectual opponent, mentor and friend Stefan Zweig.¹³ The two men met in 1928, and it was with Zweig that Roth experienced the only lasting intellectual exchange of his life; his other encounters were short-lived, passionate outbursts. Zweig was of a generation that had put all their hope in *Bildung* and still believed in the possibilities of complete integration into German and Austrian society, and the thirteen years that separated them were crucial in the very different worldviews they held: the one humanist and naïve, the other idealist and cynical. Roth turned to Zweig for emotional and financial support, while Zweig played the role of the wise elder in distress about his young but self-destructive protégé. Even if Roth resented Zweig’s move to London, “deserting the continent,” as he said, their friendship lasted until Roth’s death.

A second intellectual partner is Walter Benjamin. This, however, was not an actual friendship in the lives of both men, but a dialogue based on my own assessment of the striking similarities between their ideas on urban life in modernity and the role of history. While Benjamin has become an intellectual mainstay, the same cannot be said of Roth. This is in part the result of the different natures of their work, as Benjamin’s oeuvre is philosophical rather than literary, and as such more receptive to historical and theoretical

¹² Jonathan Frankel, ‘S. M. Dubnov. Historian and Ideologist’, p. 266 and p. 272.

¹³ For an analysis of the correspondence between Roth and Zweig, see Gershon Shaked, ‘The Grace of Reason and the Grace of Misery: Zweig and Roth - A Correspondence,’ *The Hebrew University Studies in Literature*, Vol. 10, No. 2, Jerusalem (Autumn 1982), pp. 247-270.

reflection. However, their intellectual legacies indicate a theoretical correspondence between two people from very different backgrounds and opinions, and this relationship is worth exploring in more detail.¹⁴ In chapter 6, the intellectual connection between them comes to actual encounter when the two men meet in the flesh, for the first and last time, in the cold and harrowing Moscow winter of December 1926.

Finally, a third partner in this dialogue is Hannah Arendt. Arendt's work functions as an intellectual frame on a theoretical level. This is solely my own doing, as Arendt and Roth did not know each other. I especially found Arendt's work on the Jew as pariah useful in analysing Roth's (op)position vis-à-vis society, and his inclination for mythmaking (see chapter 7).¹⁵ Also, Arendt forms a link between Benjamin and Roth as the result of her analysis of the concept of posthumous fame and the "unclassifiable" writer, which she examined beautifully in the case of Benjamin.¹⁶ These ideas are strikingly relevant in the light of Roth's recent critical rediscovery, and I have used them in order to analyse those elements of his thought that account for this sudden posthumous interest.

Methods

When studying the life and work of one individual, the historian necessarily needs to confront the question of biography, or biographical writing. Now I must immediately make clear that I do not have any pretence that the current work can justifiably be labelled an intellectual biography, even if it is concerned with the intellectual itinerary of one writer. Since this work is interdisciplinary, on the crossroads of intellectual, cultural, and literary history, literature, and Jewish studies, it by default escapes such a narrow definition. However, in the way that this thesis aims to reconstruct the circumstances of the creation of texts and to analyse how their author made sense of his time, my work certainly shares some of the fundamental qualities of intellectual biography in particular and intellectual history in general.¹⁷ Furthermore, since modernity, and especially post-modernity, the idea of a coherent self around which to construct a narrative has been put into question – causing what Antony La Vopa has called the "orphaned status" of modern biography –

¹⁴ While a complete analysis of the intellectual correspondence between Benjamin and Roth falls outside the scope of this thesis, this is a theme I will develop further, most likely in the form of an article, in the future.

¹⁵ Hannah Arendt, 'The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition', *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (April 1944), pp. 99-122.

¹⁶ Hannah Arendt, 'Introduction', in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations, Essays and Reflections. Edited and with an Introduction by Hannah Arendt*. New York: Schocken, 1968, pp. 1-53

¹⁷ Annabel Brett, 'What is Intellectual History Now?', in David Cannadine (ed.), *What is History Now?* Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, pp. 113-131.

which makes it necessary to reflect on the narrative and historical constitution of the subject at hand.¹⁸ About the study of individuals, Fritz Stern has admitted to the “broad, anonymous forces” that characterise the setting or structure of an age, but argues that “it is the interplay between these forces and actual people that allows us to recapture something of the spirit of the age.”¹⁹ Intellectual history is, indeed, an approximation of the real.²⁰ Secondly, the individual that I am concerned with happened to be Jewish, which, since this work is based on the assumption that his Jewishness mattered, prompts another question: why does Jewishness matter? This is my second methodological concern. But let us start with the biographical.

According to Anthony La Vopa, intellectual history as a field should approach intellectual cultures not individualistically, but rather as a collective phenomenon. However, the study of a single life does not necessarily entail the collapse of its historicity. While making narrative integral to comprehending a life, it is the focus on the various contexts of that life which firmly inserts it back into the domain of the historical. It is these contexts that shaped a writer’s consciousness and fuelled her creativity, and thus the contextual density of a biographical work gives broader meaning to a life while at the same time it provides insights into historical culture and its relation to texts. By tracing, for instance, the lineages of a text in biographical material such as letters, notes and manuscripts, the contextual biographer can indicate echoes, concerns and relationships at the moment of its creation, thus enlarging historical understanding by the evocation of these particular social-emotional attachments. This approach is circular in the sense that meaning is generated, reformulated and contested in a field of social relations, making the relational process central to the exploration of ideas.

Since the linguistic turn, scholars no longer have faith in the immediacy of texts and their ontological value, i.e. in their ability to faithfully mirror historical reality. Instead, authors actively recreate and constitute multiple realities in their texts, and instead, what we are dealing with are representations, not mimics. People, now as in the past, are part of discursive systems, and an author’s agency as a controller of her linguistic puppets is therefore undermined. This idea of representations, or the poetics of culture, is explored by

¹⁸ Anthony J. La Vopa, ‘Doing Fichte. Reflections of a sobered (but unrepentant) Contextual Biographer’, in Hans Erich Bödeker (ed.), *Biographie schreiben*. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2003, pp. 107-171.

¹⁹ Fritz Stern, *Dreams and Delusions. The Drama of German History*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987, p. 5.

²⁰ Annabel Brett writes that the “central burden that history cannot evade” is “the story of bodily human beings, the story of the real.” Annabel Brett, ‘What is Intellectual History Now?’, p. 126.

the critical theory of New Historicism.²¹ Texts, which now not only include archival material but literary works, too, are considered to be embedded in a greater historical context, encompassing culture, language and everyday practices. This has led to new interpretations which, sidestepping grand explanatory narratives and theories, turned their eye to previously repressed, forgotten or neglected aspects of the past. The emergence of New Historicism has brought out the difficulties of truly interdisciplinary work, as historians and literary scholars remain divided over how to approach and portray the past.²² This difference comes to the fore most poignantly in the use of the anecdote, much favoured by New Historicism. Whereas historians tends to be suspicious of *la petite histoire*, regarding the anecdote as a timeless piece of wisdom there only to illuminate a theory or context, for New Historicists it forms the crux of their argument, placing it next to an archival fragment so as to bring out contingencies through time and space in a move away from history's grand narratives. However, in line with cultural historians of this school, I do think that the anecdote should not simply be there as an ornament; instead, it can be a point of entry into a broader cultural system, into a different worldview. Indeed, the idea is to take the aberrant and outlandish, and proceed to reconstruct it in a cultural and social context which makes it comprehensible.²³ The isolated voices or idiosyncratic events, which are often the subject of New Historicism, cannot make sense without the broader context of dominant ideologies or institutions to which they were a reaction or through which their dissidence was preserved. This does not mean, however, that a concern for the narrativity of historical writing can be surpassed. What Hayden White has called emplotment, i.e. the conscious insertion of a past life into a present narrative, has become an important consideration for historians of this school.²⁴ For a study of Roth, who was a self-conscious inventor of narratives about his own life, this awareness of the narrative structure of historical writing functions on two levels: within the historical context of the subject, and as a conscious practice in which the historian is naturally engaged. While elaboration and variation are part of the "normal armoury" of the gifted storyteller, with

²¹ Catherine Gallagher and Stephan Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000.

²² For an excellent assessment of the differences between historians and literary critics, see Sarah Maza, 'Stephen Greenblatt, New Historicism, and Cultural History, Or, What we talk about when we talk about interdisciplinarity,' *Modern Intellectual History*, Vol. 1, Issue 02 (August 2004), pp. 249-265.

²³ Sarah Maza, 'Stephen Greenblatt, New Historicism, and Cultural History', p. 263.

²⁴ Hayden White, 'Historical Employment and the Story of the Truth,' in Saul Friedländer (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution."* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992, pp.37-53. See also Hayden White, 'The Historical Text as Literary Artifact', in Canary and Kozicki (eds.), *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978, pp. 41-62.

Roth it did not only affect his tales, but his personal life narrative, too.²⁵ The idea that personal identity is produced through a series of constructions and performances contradicts the traditional desire to believe in an essential self, “a core being beneath all roles, all fashioning and formulation.”²⁶

This leads to me another aspect of biographical writing, namely, the fictive aspect of lives as such. As Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker have argued, even if lives are “the predominant form of non-fiction,” it is nevertheless not their factual or public appearance but, on the contrary, their imagined or even phantasmagorical existence that becomes the “archive of biography.”²⁷ Modern biography, in its quest for organic wholeness and linear narrative, has avoided the use of private texts and denied the fragmentation that lies at the core of all lives, something which has led to one-sided interpretations with a contrived focus on consistency. Instead, in line with other critical theories such as linguistics and critical theory, and with a healthy dose of scepticism about grand master narratives, Sharpe and Zwicker strongly privilege the fragmentary “as a window onto historical circumstances and contingencies.”²⁸ This implies a focus on texts previously neglected because of their private and thus “irrelevant” nature, as well as the inclusion of visual sources, the emotions, the mythic and rhetorics. The psychic dimensions of biography, such as private suffering and discontentment, or a certain “resentment of loneliness,” matter, because often “essentially unpolitical grievances” intrude into politics.²⁹ It is here, in the validation of the fragmentary, in “a full reinhabiting of the local and an embrace of the gaps and silences in the archive, of the fragmentary and the episodic,” that biography as a literary and historical genre can align itself with recent developments in critical theory and linguistics.³⁰

A final difficulty with biographical writing is that the link between the personal and the historical is often made in symbolic terms.³¹ Correspondences between subject and context are made by conflating the particular with the universal, by (mis)taking the part for

²⁵ For the “normal armoury” of the storyteller see Andrew Pettegree, ‘Translation and the Migration of Texts’, in Thomas Betteridge (ed.), *Borders and Travellers in Early Modern Europe*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007, pp. 113-125, p. 122.

²⁶ Sharpe and Zwicker, in their edited volume on life writing in early modern England, note that some articles in their collection “gesture to a new biography in which the archives of the life are signs, symbols, and mythologies. Even for lives less obviously theatrical, less insistently represented, modern biography needs to find greater space for the symbolic and performative as essentials of the early modern life.” This, of course, is also true for biographies of modern lives. Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (eds.), *Writing Lives. Biography and Textuality, Identity and Representation in Early Modern England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 10.

²⁷ Sharpe and Zwicker (eds.), *Writing Lives*, pp. 1 and 5.

²⁸ Sharpe and Zwicker (eds.), *Writing Lives*, p. 6.

²⁹ Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair. A Study in the Rise of Germanic Ideology*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1961, p. xiv.

³⁰ Sharpe and Zwicker (eds.), *Writing Lives*, p. 25.

³¹ Nikos Papastergiadis, *Modernity as Exile. The Stranger in John Berger's Writing*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993, p. 193.

the whole and a symbolic reading of the particular as a “sign of the times.” Instead, biographical material should lead the historian into a “thoroughly non-essentialist historicism” that yields ample information to construct what La Vopa has called the “biographical self”: a subject that is reconstructed in retrospect and placed in a narrative that is not her own. This practice is embedded in, and has consequences for, a historian’s present. By reinserting a historical subject into her past contexts, we may not only gain a better understanding of both person and time, but also end up enhancing her presence “as a contributor to our current conversations.”³² As Dominick LaCapra has stated, intellectual history is a dialogical enquiry between past and present.³³ Especially with authors like Roth, who have known a resurgence in contemporary interest, this dialogue between past and present gains significance. The insertion of the afterlife into the analysis of a life is a recent development in biographical writing, as classical biographies tend to be structured between the opposite poles of birth and death. But indeed, in the words of Annabel Brett, “in trying to unravel the mental words of the past, we give ourselves the opportunity to re-weave our own.”³⁴

Joseph Roth, apart from being a self-invented, discursively constituted historical subject, was also a Jewish individual. In this thesis, I examine the influence of the fact of Roth’s Jewish birth on his intellectual itinerary, assuming, therefore, that what he himself sometimes called “the accident of his birth” actually had lasting consequences for his intellectual and creative life. The question of why Jewishness matters functions on two levels: first, as an analytical category aimed to enter the debate about Roth’s life and work from a new angle, and second, as an issue that is incompletely addressed in Roth scholarship. What, then, are the gains of foregrounding Roth’s status as a Jew?

The debate about what constitutes an appropriate subject for Jewish historical inquiry has been one of the main quandaries of modern German-Jewish history. Often, scholars focus on a conscious advancement of Jewish collective identity, based on positive identifications of “Jewish themes” in a writer’s oeuvre. However, this identification is problematic because it easily borders on the essentialist and it does not tell us much about the meaning of Jewishness as a constitutive element in an individual’s identity. In an attempt to move beyond the rhetoric of what counts as Jewish and what does not, Lisa

³² Anthony J. La Vopa, ‘Doing Fichte’, p. 161.

³³ Dominick LaCapra, ‘Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts’, in Dominick LaCapra and Steven L. Kaplan (eds.), *Modern European Intellectual History. Reappraisals and New Perspectives*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982, pp. 83-85.

³⁴ Annabel Brett, ‘What is Intellectual History Now?’, p. 128.

Silverman has argued that a silence on the subject of Jewishness indicates that it is a concern.³⁵ Most importantly, this concern with the category “Jewishness” is an engagement with society’s constructed ideals of it. One engagement with the “Jewish” which was not uncommon among Central European Jews in the interwar years was an espousal of antisemitic ideology. However, this silence or neglect of “Jewish” themes, or even the negative portrayal or internalisation of it, does not mean that a writer should be excluded from Jewish historical writing. In Silverman’s words, “Jewishness as a frame of critical analysis, however, can help us move beyond identifying the phenomenon as the internalization of negative criticisms, to examining how and whether this particular form of engagement with society’s constructed ideals of the “Jewish” affected the ways in which individuals lived their lives and carried out their social and cultural projects.”³⁶ In this way, unarticulated and often painful aspects of the modern Jewish experience can finally be highlighted and examined.

Even if Silverman speaks from the perspective of a cultural historian, I would argue that her approach can be most valuable for intellectual history, too. One of the reasons, indeed, why scholarship has not critically analysed Roth’s relationship to his Jewish heritage, apart from his relationship to antisemitism, is because of this seeming lack of positive treatment of the subject – apart from, of course, *The Wandering Jews*.³⁷ However, Roth’s engagement with the category of Jewishness was much more diverse and complex than a simple case of Jewish self-hatred. Also, his texts show a concern with Jewishness not only in the form of Jewish characters or the fact that he borrowed from a repertoire of Jewish themes, but also because his narratives reveal a preoccupation with social issues that concerned many Jews during the interwar years. Changes in literary style and content, especially after 1933, were linked to changes in writers’ self-perception as Jews. Thus, Jewishness as an analytical category allows for “a deeper consideration of individuals whose lives and works reveal an engagement with the category of the “Jewish” regardless of their own degree of Jewish self-identification.”³⁸

As I explained in the previous chapter, the greater frame of this thesis is the notion of Jewish responses to catastrophe, a theme that has avid historiographical precedence in Jewish Studies. Whether applauded or criticised, it is an accepted idea that models of Jewish

³⁵ Lisa Silverman, ‘Reconsidering the Margins. Jewishness as an analytical framework’, *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (2009), pp. 103-120.

³⁶ Lisa Silverman, ‘Reconsidering the Margins’, p. 113.

³⁷ For a discussion of Roth’s relationship to antisemitism, see Katharina L. Ochse, *Joseph Roths Auseinandersetzung mit dem Antisemitismus*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1999.

³⁸ Lisa Silverman, ‘Reconsidering the Margins’, p. 111.

identity are often constructed on the experience of crisis.³⁹ Apart from the fact that Roth's life was drenched in catastrophe, adding to his posthumous appeal, many of his ideas and opinions were reactions to a particular loss or adversity. As such, I found catastrophe a most suitable structuring element for my thesis; however, not in a self-defeating or disempowering sense, but as a predicament that teased out a critical consciousness of the present.

Apart from catastrophe as a conceptual frame for my research, my work has other ties to Jewish Studies. Sander L. Gilman's concept of Jewish history as the story of a people living on a "frontier," both imagined and real, greatly informs my work.⁴⁰ Gilman advocates the frontier as a more just model for reading the modern Jewish experience because it allows for the expression of multiple voices and experiences. As long as Jewish history is written in the dialectics between centre versus periphery and homeland versus diaspora, the periphery will remain marginal. These opposing concepts, Gilman says, can be understood "as either cosmopolitan (good) or rootless (bad) in their expression. The Jews are either the exemplary people at home in the world or are so isolated from any natural attachment to place they become the consummate mimics of everyone else on the frontier."⁴¹ On the contrary, the notion of the frontier allows for a focus on the linguistic and cultural interactions as well as the conflicts that take place in the psyches of those who cross the border. Here, identity is understood as the ways in which one defines oneself in the encounter between reality and fantasy that takes place on the border.

In refuting the centre-periphery model of homeland versus diaspora, Gilman also confronts the now contested notion of a return to the Holy Land as the only authentic model for Jewish identity. Ideologically speaking, Roth did not live in a diaspora situation that was oriented towards a Jewish homeland; if anything, he proposed the opposite, i.e. an intellectual move away from Zion. His configurations of home always transcended the national. As Gilman observed, we live in a time in which national states and citizenship are understood to be counterproductive in relation to identity formation, and the promise of a stable, unconflicted identity through national identification has proven problematic. More than fifty years after the founding of the state of Israel, opinion has shifted away from the sense of a stable national identity, towards a renewed importance of a complex Diaspora

³⁹ Sarah Fraiman-Morris, 'Assimilation, Verrat und versuchte Wiedergutmachung: Zum Identitätsprozess bei Franz Werfel, Stefan Zweig und Joseph Roth', *Seminar*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (2003), pp. 203-216, p. 203. Here, Fraiman-Morris refers to Hanni Mittelman and Armin Wallas (eds.), *Österreich-Konzeptionen und jüdisches Selbstverständnis. Identitäts-Transfigurationen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Frontiers. Essays on Bodies, Histories, and Identities*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

⁴¹ Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Frontiers*, p. 3.

identity.⁴² It is exactly Roth's self-conscious construction of a "complex Diaspora identity" that gives increased relevance to his life and work; not just as an interesting particular, but as a precursor of ideas currently developed and explored in the fields of intellectual and Jewish history.

Another important concern of my work is the posthumous fate of Jewish intellectuals in general and Joseph Roth in particular. Steven E. Aschheim has confronted the posthumous fame of German-Jewish émigré intellectuals like Hannah Arendt, Walter Benjamin, Franz Rosenzweig and Gershon Scholem, seeking to examine the compelling reasons behind their hold over much of our contemporary intellectual and academic culture.⁴³ Aschheim locates the crux of their posthumous fame in the intellectual and physical act of border crossing; an activity that expanded far beyond the physical borders of their exile into the realms of abstract thinking. Also, the tensions caused by a sudden heightened awareness of their Jewishness after 1933, Aschheim argues, played a crucial role in the critical ways in which these intellectuals sought to go beyond conventional borders and ways of thinking, resulting in transformations of both self and work. Milan Kundera, himself familiar with exile, also considers the threat to one's physical and intellectual existence to be an important drive behind transformations of thought. He writes:

The identity of a people and of a civilization is reflected and concentrated in what has been created by the mind – in what is known as "culture." If this identity is threatened with extinction, cultural life grows correspondingly more intense, more important, until culture itself becomes the living value around which all people rally.⁴⁴

What history presents us with is a condition of threat, not unlike the framework of catastrophe and crisis. It is the thought-transformations that result from this predicament, as well as the posthumous lives it created, which concern me here. In this, Jewishness is at the center of my analysis, because, as the main target of these historical processes, and both as a concept and a reality, it has gone through multiple reconfigurations, the study of which will provide insight into the lesser known experiences of modern Jewry.

⁴² Sander L. Gilman, Preface to *Jewish Frontiers*, pp. v-xi. Other works that deal with Judaism and Postmodernism are David Theo Goldberg and Michael Krausz, Michael (eds.), *Jewish Identity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993) and Steven Kepnes (ed.), *Interpreting Judaism in a Postmodern Age* (New York: New York University, 1996).

⁴³ Steven E. Aschheim, *Beyond the Border: The German-Jewish Legacy Abroad*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007. The opening quotation can be found on page 97; the quotations that follow can be found on the first page of the Preface and on page 3 of the Introduction.

⁴⁴ Milan Kundera, 'The Tragedy of Central Europe', *New York Review of Books*, 26 April 1984, pp. 33-38, p. 33.

Note on (Auto)Biography

As I noted in chapter 1, information about Roth's life is very hard to come by in English.⁴⁵ His death is often mistaken for suicide, encouraged by the fact that Roth did not write an autobiography or memoirs. It is telling that despite the urgency of the times which prompted so many of his contemporaries to write their memoirs, Roth shunned the autobiographical and left his critics guessing as to the autobiographical character of his work. His letters are the closest source of autobiographical writing we have. Some of his novels, however, are considered "veiled autobiography," such as *Flight Without End* – as one of its dust jacket proclaims, it "reveals an identification so strong that Roth claimed this book as autobiography" – and *Zipper and His Father*, whose narrator, called "Joseph Roth," seems to be on the same opinionated plane as his creator. The narrator of *The Antichrist*, too, is called "Joseph Roth." Then there is the short story 'Youth' (1931) and the unfinished novel *Strawberries*, meant to describe his childhood in Galicia, but so far no analysis of this has been made.⁴⁶

Michael Hofmann says about Roth's essays from France that they offer "a psychological vita, or a founding myth" of his person, because even though the focus lies on the cultural and religious life of the French, the book is also an inner reflection on the conditions in Germany and his own autobiography.⁴⁷ Jon Hughes, on the other hand, attests that David Bronsen "writes with such authority about Roth as a person" in his 1974 biography "that there is now little scope for or interest in this type of argument." This biography, however, is in German and has been out of print for years; the projected

⁴⁵ For the moment, quotations from Roth's letters appear in the original German. However, envisioning the final thesis, I would like to translate his words into English and insert them into the main body of the text, with the original German quotations delegated to the footnotes.

⁴⁶ According to J. M. Coetzee, the short story 'Youth', from 1931, whose main character Anton Wanzl appeared some fifteen years before in Roth's debut story 'The Honors Student,' "scarcely pretends to be fiction: we seem to be reading a mordant, barely veiled piece of self-analysis on Roth's part." J.M. Coetzee, 'Joseph Roth, the stories' in idem, *Inner Workings: Literary Essays, 2000-2005. With an introduction by Derek Attridge*. New York: Viking, 2007, pp. 79-93. In a letter to Otto Forst-Battaglia, dated 28 October 1932, Roth writes: "'Die Flucht ohne Ende" enthält meine Autobiographie zum großen Teil" (Joseph Roth, *Briefe*, p. 240). According to Wilhelm von Sternburg, we must approach such statements cautiously: "Das ist wieder einmal ein Spiel mit dem eigenen Lebensweg. Sicher, im ersten Teil des Romans, der im revolutionären Russland der Jahre 1917 bis 1919 spielt, spiegeln sich eigene Reiseindrücke wider. Auch die Orte, an denen Tunda Fremdheit und Leere empfindet – Moskau, Wien, Berlin, Paris –, kennt der Autor persönlich. Tunda aber ist nicht Roth, sondern ein Geschöpf der dichterischen Phantasie, wenn auch viel vom Lebensgefühl des Autors, von seiner Deutung der Zeit und ihrer Schrecken in sie eingeflossen ist." *Joseph Roth. Eine Biographie*, p. 343. Other interpretations of Roth's fiction have focused on the idea that his novels are 'Ich-Projektionen', centred on the idea of authorial personality. See Peter Wilhelm Jansen, 'Der autofiktive Erzähler: Roman und Existenz bei Joseph Roth', in David Bronsen (ed.), *Joseph Roth und die Tradition: Aufsätze und Materialiensammlung*, Darmstadt: Agora, 1975, pp. 364-373, p. 367.

⁴⁷ Michael Hofmann, 'Introduction', in Joseph Roth, *Report from a Parisian Paradise. Essays from France 1925-1939*. Translated with an Introduction by Michael Hofmann, New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004, pp. 11-21, see page 16.

English translation was never realised.⁴⁸ The recent biography by Wilhelm von Sternburg (2009), which reads like a good story and gives ample access to the historical contexts, people and personal events that made up Roth's world, is also exclusively in German.⁴⁹ As such, non-German speaking readers interested in Roth's life are left with a vacuum that is yet to be filled. Apart from the obvious fact that a critical treatment of Roth's biographical context is needed in order to understand and explain his intellectual itinerary, I aim to at least partly close this lacuna of (misinformed) biographical information.

Here, it is important not to fall into the trap of what Kati Tonkin has called "biographical hermeneutics"; the tendency of many Roth scholars to assume an inherent author-narrator identification.⁵⁰ The historical escapism of which Roth is often accused is the result of one-sided readings of his work and the failure to differentiate between narrator and author. Many scholars have found in the retrogressive attitudes of Roth's nostalgic and politically apathetic characters, like Franz Ferdinand Trotta in *Die Kapuzinergruft*, signs of Roth's own backward-looking attitude. The idea that Roth was a writer much concerned with his present is severely undermined by this author-narrator identification which, on a textual level, also neglects the play with language and the role of the writer. The latter, indeed, was "to explore and understand the society in which he was living and to draw attention to what was happening."⁵¹ Convenient identifications of the author with his characters in order to support a monarchist-sentimentalist interpretation of his work and person are refuted by this attention to language and Roth's own ideas about the role, if not historical duty, of the writer.

On a related note, Roth's reluctance to align himself with any kind of identity politics or party indicates a highly individualised disposition in a time when many people longed for the pre-war safety of explanatory models of systems (such as, their internal

⁴⁸ An abridged French version of the book exists: David Bronsen, *Joseph Roth*, edited by Katharina Ochse, translated by René Wintzen. Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 1994.

⁴⁹ Von Sternberg noted that, although it is possible to distil some kind of biographical continuity from Roth's letters, notes, novels and feuilletons, "Absolute Wahrheiten sind das nicht, sondern nur Angebote und Deutungsversuche. Der Lesen wird gebeten, das nicht zu vergessen." (p. 93).

⁵⁰ Kati Tonkin, *Joseph Roth's March into History*, p. 4. Besides taking recourse to the historical contexts of Wilhelmina and Weimar Germany in order to explain Roth's anti-totalitarian standpoint, Tonkin's method of dissecting instances of *erlebte rede* in Roth's novelistic world as a means of grasping the narrator *or* the author's intentions are highly illuminating. This analysis of the world of meaning that lies trapped between the direct and indirect narrative form is a solid protection against falling into the trap of narrator-author identification and thus avoiding the grave distortions that often follow in its train. In her discussion of *Die Kapuzinergruft* in chapter 4, Tonkin succeeds in illuminating the parallels between Trotta's past and present behaviour and argues that Roth created these with the aim of showing the dangers of political apathy, an attitude he partly held responsible for the catastrophe of the *Anschluss*. In addition, this method provides Tonkin with the means to develop new and exciting insights into Roth's thought which resonate not only with his own time but with ours, too.

⁵¹ Kati Tonkin, *Joseph Roth's March into History*, p. 67.

strives aside, the empires). Susan Sontag has written about Walter Benjamin that he “placed himself at the crossroad. It was important for him to keep his many ‘positions’ open: the theological, the Surrealist/aesthetic, the communist. One position corrects the other; he needed them all. Decisions, of course, tend to spoil the balance of these positions, vacillations kept everything in place.”⁵² This idea of a multiplicity of opinions kept in check by their precarious balance resonates with Roth, too. It may be a postmodern awareness of the fluctuating borders of concepts in particular and the modern world in general that inspired my attraction to a “duplicitous” writer like Roth, but this plurality lies at the core of his thought, not only mine. Thus, this thesis, too, lies on the crossroads of “work solely dedicated to the past and work born out of the present.”⁵³

Sources

In the light of modern biography’s new concern with “fabrications of the intimate” resulting from a focus on the private, oral sources and testimonials, I decided to use one particular source available to Roth scholars, namely the papers known as the David Bronsen Archive in the Dokumentationsstelle für neuere österreichische Literatur in Vienna: the notes and unpublished fragments of the oral testimonies and interviews that Bronsen conducted in the 1960s with more than a hundred and fifty people who knew Roth.⁵⁴ Whereas Bronsen gracefully unravelled the contradictory testimonies of his interviewees and wove them into one coherent biographical narrative, what instead concerns me is the internal logic of the various accounts of Roth’s life. Who said what, and why? How do we assess these testimonies based on friendship and myth? There is a second layer to this source material, namely Bronsen’s own construction of a Joseph Roth narrative, scribbled in the margins of his interviews and based on a deep personal sympathy for the man whose traces and steps he was backtracking. Bronsen was highly empathetic in his portrayal of Roth, and he often defended him posthumously in his notes. When

⁵² Susan Sontag, *Under the Sign of Saturn. Essays*. London: Picador, 2002, p. 133. Kati Tonkin reads Roth’s refusal to align himself with one doctrine of regime in a consciously Central European perspective, i.e. in the context of the dense linguistic and ethnic diversity of the region. In Roth’s case, these are the Galician borderlands of his youth, as a consequence of whose multifaceted character he came to hold the conviction that identity was plural. Here, Tonkin’s analysis is based on the work of Moritz Csáky. She concludes that in his refusal to “confess his colours” Roth saw the equivalent of freedom, as well as the logical opposite of his predicament as a German-Jewish writer in exile from Nazi Germany. Kati Tonkin, *Joseph Roth’s March into History*, p. 37.

⁵³ David N. Myers, *Between Jew & Arab. The Lost Voice of Simon Ravidowicz*. Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2008, p. 90

⁵⁴ Dokumentationsstelle für neuere österreichische Literatur, Wien, Handschriftensammlung. Sammlung Joseph Roth / David Bronsen.

Siegfried van Praag, author of *Het Ghetto*, told Bronsen: “Roth had a big face, a pointed chin, les cheveux plat rouge, la moustache rousse,” Bronsen wrote “Siegfried says he gave the impression of a Judas,” only to comment “... borrowed from Christianity by a Jew, against a Jew!”⁵⁵ Or, after Dr. Ernst Wollheim told Bronsen that Roth was “ein unerhört liebenswerter Mensch für seine Freunde, der unmittelbare Mittelpunkt jeder Tafelrunde,” Bronsen remarked: “I have to succeed in conveying this; all I am getting together is a clinical picture of what was odious about Roth.”⁵⁶ And, after interviewing writer and journalist for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* Bernard von Brentano, and his wife, who was disgusted when Roth fell off his chair, drunk, during their wedding party, Bronsen notes dryly: “In the company of Brentano and his wife one would have to drink out of pure boredom.”⁵⁷ This personal narrative, implicit in the book itself, forms the backbone of Bronsen’s 1974 biography, which to this day remains the seminal text about Roth’s life. In private correspondence with Dr. Heinz Lunzer, director of the archives who published extensively on Roth, I was told that Bronsen could not publish all the information he gathered. “So there is more material to contemplate.”⁵⁸ Lunzer published a selection of Bronsen’s notes and interviews in a beautifully crafted catalogue, but much of the material remains undisclosed.⁵⁹ Another source at the Dokumentationsstelle is the collection of unpublished letters to the family of Friederike Reichler. They contain allusions to Jewish aspects and as such these letters are important to the development of my argument.

Another main source is Roth’s collection of letters, a rare book now out of print. Entitled *Joseph Roth. Briefe 1911-1939*, it was published in 1970 by Roth’s German publisher Kiepenheuer & Witsch and contains the roughly five hundred letters that remain out of the thousands Roth wrote during his lifetime.⁶⁰ His friend and novelist Hermann Kesten took

⁵⁵ Siegfried van Praag in an interview with David Bronsen, David Bronsen Archive, Dokumentationsstelle für neuere österreichische Literatur, Vienna.

⁵⁶ Ernst Wollheim in an interview with David Bronsen. Dokumentationsstelle für neuere österreichische Literatur, Wien, Handschriftensammlung, Sammlung Joseph Roth / David Bronsen, Interview Bronsen – Ernst Wollheim, p. 1: JR/DB 10/94/17.1/3.

⁵⁷ Bernard von Brentano and his wife in an interview with David Bronsen, David Bronsen Archive, Dokumentationsstelle für neuere österreichische Literatur, Vienna.

⁵⁸ Private correspondence with Dr. Heinz Lunzer dated 30 March 2009. Together with his wife Victoria Lunzer-Talos, Lunzer published *Joseph Roth 1894 - 1939. Katalog einer Ausstellung* (Wien: Zirkular, 1990) and *Joseph Roth: Leben und Werk in Bildern* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1994), which also contain fragments of the Bronsen material. Lunzer sent me a file containing the private letters to the Reichler family.

⁵⁹ Heinz Lunzer, *Joseph Roth im Exil in Paris 1933 bis 1939*. In Zusammenarbeit mit Victoria Lunzer-Talos. Vienna: Zirkular, 2009.

⁶⁰ Joseph Roth. *Briefe 1911-1939*. Edited and collected by Hermann Kesten. Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1979, c1970. Despite owning a great selection of Roth’s works, Kiepenheuer & Witsch no longer publishes this book. I found a copy through Abebooks from a German antiquarian bookstore, but at the time of writing there seems to be no other copy available. The Leo Baeck Institute in New York owns a copy, but in general this book is hard to find and as such out of reach to most readers of Roth. And since no translation exists, this source remains unavailable to an English audience.

upon himself the task of collecting and annotating the surviving documents. It is a miracle, Kesten says, that so many of the letters survived, as the war that immediately followed Roth's death in May 1939 contributed to the precariousness of their survival. In the postwar decades, letters were found in desk-drawers and boxes in the attics of many friends and acquaintances scattered across the continent. A great part of the book is taken up by Roth's correspondence with Stefan Zweig, and Zweig's letters are included. Other recipients are his French translator Blanche Gidon, to whom his very last letter is addressed; Benno Reifenberg, friend and editor in chief of the feuilleton section of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*; Felix Bertaux, "perhaps the most important contemporaneous mediator and interpreter of modern German literature in France"⁶¹; novelist and friend René Schickele; Walter Hasenclever; Hermann Hesse; Klaus Mann; Ludwig Marcuse; Carl Seelig; and finally, Hermann Kesten himself. Some of the earliest letters are addressed to Roth's cousins Resia, Paula and Heini Grübel in Brody and Lemberg. And in the late 1920s, fuelled by Friederike's mental illness, there are letters to Jenny and Sigmund Reichler, Roth's parents in law. These are one of the few published written ties that exist between Roth and his family.

Kesten finds himself at pains to stress that the person behind the letters was a much fuller and livelier man than the impression they convey. The existential pathos present in the letters from the late 1920s and 1930s does indeed put great weight onto the pessimistic and tragic scale that has dominated Roth's reception. Robert S. Wistrich presents a fair judgment when he says that the letters from the 1930s are "full of the deadly *morbus Austriacus* – resignation, melancholy, self-irony, and therapeutic nihilism."⁶² Yet, despite his hardened fatalism, Roth maintained a sense of clairvoyance about himself even in the most difficult times, as well as a sense of humour, a much underestimated aspect of his thought and person.

It is important to note that these letters were never intended for publication, not even as a possible afterthought lingering in the back of the writer's head. Roth often asked his recipients to destroy his letters upon reading, and he did not keep the letters he received. His habit was to reply immediately, on hotel stationary or café paper, and toss away the letter. This approach to letter writing was partly the result of the fact he had no place to store them, nor the means to collect them, as he was a man of few belongings who owned no home, let alone a permanent bookshelf or a desk to keep his papers. The image

⁶¹ M. Lynne Martin, 'Review of *Briefe 1911-1939* by Joseph Roth', in *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 3, (May 1973), pp. 470-472.

⁶² Robert S. Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 663.

that comes to mind is that of a man writing with feverish speed; frantically in need, for psychological as well as practical reasons, to respond immediately to written news from his friends and colleagues. Often his financial situation depended on quick replies from publishers, and as such a sense of great urgency pervades his letters. Ardently producing page after page, Roth seemed dedicated and passionate in the act of writing, but he never allowed himself time for contemplation, causing some of his self-proclaimed “foolish” responses. These letters, then, were written by a man without a catalogue; a man who did not even own copies of his own books.⁶³

The fact that these letters were not written with an eye for preservation is all the more poignant when we consider the fact that, besides the aforementioned sense of existential urgency, a profound sense of his early death pervades them. Part pathos, part honest desperation, Roth never envisioned a very long life for himself. Living from book advance to book advance – admittedly not the lowest of his time – and, in the worst of times, on the kindness of friends, he was barely able to secure his financial position for more than two or three months at the time. As Kesten writes: “Er rechnete mit dem Untergang seiner Briefe wie mit dem eigenen Untergang.”⁶⁴ From 1929 onwards, Roth expressed a constant fear of not making it through the next year and of being unable to survive both his own and Europe’s predicament. On 14 July 1933, he wrote: “Ich glaube nicht, dass ich jemals die Möglichkeit habe, dies Alles zu überleben.” And on 20 July 1934: “... ich bin nicht mehr zu reparieren.”⁶⁵ While the conviction that his own end was near is pervasive, there is at the same time the will to write, the will to live: “Ich habe aber immer noch einen Lebensinstinkt, ich will schreiben [...], ich will nicht so jämmerlich umkommen,” he writes in 1936.⁶⁶ It is from this tension between the sense of his impending demise and the need to record what he saw that many of his novels were written.

Because Roth’s responses were immediate and written under the increasing influence of alcohol, some of his friends expressed doubts as to the “sanity” of his words. Especially Zweig, who functioned as the calm and pragmatic elder, often urged Roth to be less impulsive in his reactions. Zweig strongly disapproved of Roth’s intoxicated state while tending to his correspondence. Admitting to the impulsiveness of some letters, especially to

⁶³ In 1933, for instance, Roth asked Stefan Zweig to send a copy of *Zipper and His Father* to an Italian publisher on his behalf. Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 20 July 1933, *Briefe*, p. 270.

⁶⁴ Joseph Roth, *Briefe*, p. 12.

⁶⁵ Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 14 July 1933, *Briefe*, p. 269; and in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 20 July 1934, *Briefe*, p. 363.

⁶⁶ Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 29 May 1936, *Briefe*, p. 476.

publishers, Roth nevertheless insists that Zweig should take his private letters as seriously as his novels:

Sie werden mir glauben, dass ich mit einem ungetrübten – auch durch Alkohol ungetrübten – Gewissen schreibe, nachdem Sie zu sehen glauben, dass ich ein literarisches habe. Sie glauben doch nicht, mein lieber Freund, dass ich unklarer im Privaten rede, als im Buch. Ich bitte Sie also deshalb, diesem Brief mindestens den gleichen Kredit zu schenken, wie einem meiner Bücher. Ich gebe Ihnen mein Ehrenwort, dass ich Briefe nicht weniger gewissenhaft schreibe, als Bücher.⁶⁷

The constant effort to convince Zweig of his mental clarity is a poignant red thread in their correspondence. Also, it is a testimony that Roth's was an oppositional voice to the humanistic but ultimately unattainable cosmopolitanism of a generation of Jewish elders represented in the figure of Zweig. As Robert Wistrich said, "... for all his fatalism and Habsburg legitimist eccentricities, Roth was more perceptive than Zweig regarding the Nationalist-Socialist threat to Jewry."⁶⁸

One final remark about this collection is the role that narrativity and self-invention play in the letters, in much the same way as these concepts function in Roth's novels, feuilletons, and the self-narration of his life. According to Kesten, there is no great difference between his fiction and his letters, because in his correspondence Roth also followed "den Gezeiten seiner Sprache und den Launen seiner Phantasie. [...] Roth spielte mit seinen Briefen wie mit seinem Leben, und er nahm sie Ernst wie seine Kunst und seine Humanität. [...] Briefe schrieb er, wie er telefonierte, wie er sprach, wie er dichtete, wie er lebte, voller Vernunft und voller Leidenschaft, ein Optimist voller Verzweiflung, ein finitenreicher Moralist."⁶⁹ In a way, these letters are his partial and multilayered autobiography, because what comes to the fore is the dramatic way in which Roth chose to present himself, "als eine halb fiktive Figur." Since he left no other personal memoirs or journals besides these letters, heightened by his tendency to present contradictory variations of the biographical facts of his life, Kesten may be not far off the mark when he says that in Roth's case, "Bekanntlich ist die Fiktion eine maskierte Wahrheit."⁷⁰

Two other recent collections are Roth's correspondence with his exile publishers Allert de Lange and Querido in Amsterdam between 1933 and 1939, in one volume, and with his

⁶⁷ Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 18 October 1935, *Briefe*, p. 429.

⁶⁸ Robert S. Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph*, p. 663.

⁶⁹ Joseph Roth, *Briefe*, pp. 11-13.

⁷⁰ Joseph Roth, *Briefe*, pp. 16-19.

Catholic publisher De Gemeenschap in Utrecht from the late 1930s, in another.⁷¹ More accessible than Roth's collected letters and clearly annotated and introduced, these more business-oriented letters also form part of my primary sources since they remain an understudied part of Roth's legacy.

Furthermore, after some effort I managed to obtain a copy of the documentary that the Westdeutscher Rundfunk in Köln made about Roth in 1970, called *Joseph Roth. Das Portrait*. Again, Hermann Kesten was crucial in the preservation of this "living material"; he interviewed, on film, many of the important people in Roth's life who at the time were still alive, among them Benno Reifenberg, Ludwig Marcuse, Andrea Manga Bell and Irmgard Keun. The documentary is a rather obscure source, as we encounter Hermann Kesten in a dark and sparsely decorated office, taking up the expert's chair while being interviewed by a young German scholar and his female assistant. We move back and forth between Kesten's explanations about Roth the man and writer, and short fragments of the interviews, to which we get access through the subdued push of a button by the female assistant – who, it must be noted, remains silent throughout the entire sixty minutes of the documentary.

Last but not least, the Leo Baeck Institute in New York hosts the largest collection of Joseph Roth archival material, most importantly letters, postcards, personal memorabilia as well as out-of-print memoirs, newspaper clippings and secondary literature. This material forms an invaluable source to my work. And, finally, all biblical references are to the Holy Bible, the authorised King James Version by the Cambridge University Press, hereafter indicated as KJB.⁷²

One last word, then, on the question of literature as a historical source and document, especially in a study that, like mine, is drawn to the lesser known literary works of an author. Often, in historical studies, literature is given a passive and supporting role in the analysis, something that New Historicists tried to counter by pleading for its multiplicity. The challenge is to find a way of connecting literary texts to history "without subjecting them to historical determinism or negating their complexity and internal contradictions." In other words, the ambition of New Historicism is "truly interdisciplinary

⁷¹ *Aber das Leben marschiert weiter und nimmt uns mit: Der Briefwechsel zwischen Joseph Roth und dem Verlag De Gemeenschap*, edited by Madeleine Rietra and Theo Bijvoet. Cologne: Kiepenheuer and Witsch, 1991; '*Geschäft ist Geschäft. Seien Sie mir privat nicht böse. Ich brauche Geld.*' *Der Briefwechsel zwischen Joseph Roth und den Exilverlagen Allert de Lange und Querido 1933-1939*. Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2005. For a history of publisher De Gemeenschap (1935-1941) see Lex van de Haterd, *Om Hart en Vurigheid - Over Schrijvers en Kunstenaars van Tijdschrift en Uitgeverij De Gemeenschap 1925-1941*. Uitgeverij In de Knipscheer, Haarlem, 2004. (3 delen) - Deel I: *Literair- en kunsthistorische Inleiding op tijdschrift en uitgeverij De Gemeenschap*. - Deel II: *21 Portretten van de belangrijkste medewerkers van de Gemeenschap*. - Deel III: *Fondsljst van De Gemeenschap*.

⁷² The Holy Bible, authorised King James Version, *containing the Old and New Testament, translated out of the original tongues and with the former translations diligently compared and revised by his Majesty's special command*, Emerald Text Edition, Cambridge University Press.

in its simultaneous pursuit of cultural patterns, the usual business of historians, and the exceptional voice, the traditional quarry of literary critics.”⁷³ While I am fully aware of the challenges of truly interdisciplinary work, I hope this thesis does justice to these aims. Also, Gershon Shaked’s ideas about the connection between literature and life are illuminating.⁷⁴ History, according to Shaked, is a “kaleidoscopically changing intertextuality” that by definition cannot be understood as a linear advance to an imagined goal or the realization of a preordained telos. Instead, history always happens in the moment when religious heritage and contemporary challenges are in flux. Literature is “an adumbration of what lies buried in life”; fictionality “a surface structure in which a mutilated life finds expression, though simultaneously without any hope of the catharsis that a manifestation of suffering seems to promise.” What makes it possible to explore the relationship between literature and life, or the shifting scenes that characterise them, is the exposition of the life of the past as it presents itself in the fictionality of a writer. Fiction can therefore be understood as an extension of human life which allows us to conceive of that which is inconceivable, such as the manifold defeats of a life lived in limbo, such as Roth’s.

⁷³ Sarah Maza, ‘Stephen Greenblatt, New Historicism, and Cultural History,’ pp. 249-265, pp. 252-3 and p. 260.

⁷⁴ Gershon Shaked as quoted in Wolfgang Iser, “German Jewish Writers during the Decline of the Hapsburg Monarchy: Assessing the Assessment of Gershon Shaked”, in Emily Miller Budic (ed.), *Ideology and Jewish Identity in Israeli and American Literature*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001, pp. 259-273, pp. 261 and 265.

III

Opening up the Crypt. Nostalgia, Retrospective

Belonging and the Present

Homesickness is “that icy little bit of soul that a person is not aware of when the room is warm, that hidden fragment of poverty which one reveals to no one and which one does not see oneself when one is wealthy, the tremulous longing which only begins to sing in the last hours of life.”

Joseph Roth¹

Introduction

These words, spoken in 1928 by the narrator of *Zipper and His Father* (whose name, as we find out on the last page, is Joseph Roth) reveal something about what Roth experienced during his own “last hours of life”; the late 1930s when his longing for the collapsed Austro-Hungarian Empire rushed to the surface with unprecedented force and catapulted him into what bordered on monarchist politics and a quasi-sentimental, imperial form of Catholicism. But despite the density of Roth’s nostalgic visions during these years, were they really, as has often been claimed, the final tremors of a disintegrating life? Were his monarchist dreams, executed in a small circle of likeminded friends, really the frantic ravings of a desperate poet who believed in the possibility of a resurrected past? The dominant interpretation in Roth historiography is that he was a nostalgic writer who never really came to terms with the loss of the Habsburg Empire; a fact that, most critics agree, determined his personal as well as literary itinerary.² While I agree that the collapse of the monarchy was a decisive event in Roth’s life, I disagree with the given character of this influence. Instead of turning Roth into a backward-looking sentimental Habsburg elegist, I will argue that the collapse of the monarchy prompted an opposite response: namely, it

¹ Joseph Roth, *Zipper and His Father*. London: Granta Books, 2005, p. 211.

² For nostalgic interpretations of Roth, see for instance Robert S. Wistrich, ‘Imperial Swan-Song: From Stefan Zweig to Joseph Roth’, in *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 621-665; and Claudio Magris, *Lontano da dove. Joseph Roth e la tradizione ebraica* (German translation *Weit von wo: Verlorene Welt des Ostjudentums*, translation Jutta Prasse. Vienna: Europe Verlag, 1974). Turin: Einaudi, 1971.

created a deep awareness of, and concern for, the present, based on a critical examination of the past.³

The irony of Roth's homeland, rooted in a retrospective fantasy of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, is that it came into existence the very moment of its dissolution, thus forever closing the possibility, imagined or real, of an actual return – very much like the locked crypt of his beloved emperor in the final pages of his novel *The Emperor's Tomb* (1938).⁴ Despite what at first sight seems an ideal representation of life under Habsburg rule, especially in *The Radetzky March* (1932), Roth recognised the inaccessibility of the past. A better way to understand his nostalgia, then, is to consider it the result of his attempts to conceptualise the disastrous historical predicament of the interwar years. Furthermore, it is questionable whether “nostalgic” is the appropriate term to describe Roth's attitude, because, while homesickness for a lost world is a strong emotion, it does not necessarily imply a denial or negation of the present. On the contrary, nostalgia formed the starting point of the subsequent course of Roth's intellectual and political itinerary, but not in the way most critics assume; it catapulted him right back into the present and formed the basis of the content as well as the form of his critique of interwar European, and German, society. I will also discuss the ways in which the empire, as it emerged in Roth's postwar imagination, influenced his sense of self and his ideas about the multiplicity of identity.

In this chapter, I will go beyond the common assessment of Roth as a nostalgic writer who possessed an elegiac voice and mourned the loss of a European world before it descended into horror.⁵ The risk of such a romanticized approach is that his voice remains locked in this particular vision and that Roth himself, who in many ways was a profoundly modern thinker, becomes a relic of the past, swallowed up by the vanished world he so eloquently described. It also clouds the critical insights he possessed about the fate of

³ Ward H. Powell, in 1961, wrote the first contra-nostalgic interpretation of Roth, which was virtually ignored in subsequent scholarship. See Ward H. Powell, 'Joseph Roth, Ironic Primitivist', *Monatshefte*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (March 1961), pp. 115-122, p. 118. Kati Tonkin further developed the argument that Roth's nostalgia was characterised by a critical concern for the present, focusing on his insistence of the “inexorably forward move” of history, and not, as critics often claim, on a retreat into the past. See Kati Tonkin, *Joseph Roth's March into History. From the Early Novels to Radetzky March and Die Kapuzinergruft*. Rochester & New York: Camden House Inc, 2008, p. 201.

⁴ Joseph Roth, *The Emperor's Tomb*. Translated by John Hoare (originally published as *Die Kapuzinergruft* in 1938). Woodstock & New York: The Overlook Press, 2002. All further references are to this edition.

⁵ Roth has been accused of escapism due to what many have understood as a flight from reality in his later works. Bettina Engemann, for instance, examines the historiographical quarrel that polarised politically committed works and those “suspected of escapism” that took place in the bigger debate of the role of exile literature as “engagé.” She cites Roth as an example of the latter. See Bettina Engemann, *Poetik des Exils: die Modernität der deutschsprachigen Exilliteratur* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001), quoted from Hubert Roland, 'German and Austrian Exile Literature in Belgium 1933-1945. Topography and Perspectives', in Johannes F. Evelein (ed.), *Exiles Traveling. Exploring Displacement, Crossing Boundaries in German Exil Arts and Writings 1933-1945* (Amsterdamer Beiträge zur neueren Germanistik 68). Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2009, pp. 73-98, p. 87.

Europe and the threats to its civilization. The aim in this chapter, then, is to open up the crypt of Roth's nostalgia; to let in the air, so to speak, into this fascinating aspect of his intellectual heritage and to understand it as an active and critical response to the predicament of the historical vacuum of the interwar decades.

Nostalgia, Historical Discontinuity, and the Critical Eye

The term “nostalgia” comes from the Greek words *nostos*, a return home, and *algos*, a painful condition. It was first coined by Johannes Hofer, a medical student who combined these words in order to describe the strange melancholy felt by Swiss soldiers serving abroad and longing to return home.⁶ During the nineteenth century the term, now household vocabulary, lost its specific meaning of a deep and articulated desire to return to a particular place, and instead came to refer to a more general longing for a bygone time or era. What remained, however, was the assumption that nostalgia manifested an inability to make oneself at home in a constantly changing world. According to Svetlana Boym, who has argued that nostalgia possesses a strong future-oriented element, modern nostalgia is “a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values; it could be a secular expression of a spiritual longing, a nostalgia for an absolute, a home that is both physical and spiritual, the edenic unity of time and space before entry into history.”⁷ While clearly embedded in historical circumstances resulting from the First World War – emerging nationalisms, ethnic divisions and tensions among the empire's subjects, the death of Emperor Franz Joseph – the empire's decline and fall instantly created its afterlife, i.e. the phantasmagorical, mythical and often ideal world that was brought to life in the fiction of its intellectuals.

Peter Fritzsche, who in various studies has given voice to the armies of historical subjects that felt they had been left “stranded in the present” by the great upheavals of modern time, puts forward the view of nostalgia as a “fundamentally modern phenomenon” that erupted at the same time as Western conceptions of temporality changed dramatically.⁸ The fateful date of this historical break in understandings of the past

⁶ Similar accounts of the origins of nostalgia are given by Peter Fritzsche and Svetlana Boym; for references see footnotes 10 and 11.

⁷ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2001, p. 8.

⁸ Peter Fritzsche, ‘Specters of History: On Nostalgia, Exile, and Modernity’, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 106, No. 5 (December 2001), pp. 1587-1618. See also *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004) in which Fritzsche posits that the feeling of exile is not a temporary condition, but a “distinctively modern fate” (p. 58). The reconfiguration of time and place

is 1789, the year of the French Revolution. This revolution, contrary to others that had come before, shattered lines of social continuity and interpenetrated the private lives of ordinary people to such an extent that they, too, felt severed from the times preceding the upheavals. The sheer amount of published memoirs following the revolution, as well as the fact that the memoir became the most popular literary genre of post-revolutionary tidings, can be explained by the fact that these personal accounts of loss resonated deeply with the greater reading public, expressing as they did the historical nature of the hardships of their own lives. Since “bayonets could be seen marching across the garden hedge,” private hardship had suddenly become part and parcel of the greater march of history that had violently broken the chain of perceived continuity with the past.⁹ Highly personal accounts of distress were denoted to emphasise the “particular, individual effects of general historical forces” and nostalgia as such relied heavily on this imbrication of the personal and the public.

It is not coincidental that Fritzsche starts his analysis with an account of François August René de Chateaubriand, the celebrated nineteenth-century French diplomat and memoirist. Chateaubriand’s concept of multiple, disconnected lives and the fact that he constantly told and re-told his own life as a series of abrupt leave-takings is indicative of this broader reconfiguration of temporality in the wake of the French Revolution. Contemporaries no longer felt the logic or causality of tradition and progress; instead, they articulated “an unfamiliar sense of being out of place or of having died an untimely death”; of being, indeed, stranded in the present. Common and private existence had now become soaked with the perception of historical processes, and this development proved irreversible. As Franz Ferdinand Trotha explains in the last pages of *The Emperor’s Tomb*: “I saw myself, as I had for so long since my return from the war, as someone who was wrongly alive. I had, after all, accustomed myself for a long time to observing all the events which were described in the newspapers as ‘historic’ with the judicious eye of someone

after the revolution invoked a sense of homeless that has stayed with modern man throughout the centuries up until the present. “It is the displaced individual who, in fact, is best placed to tell the truth about the impurity and the burden of collective history.” (62)

⁹ This is a reference to George Steiner’s comment that when “ordinary men and women looked across the garden hedge, they saw bayonets passing.” According to Fritzsche, with this sentence Steiner got to the essence of the changes that were happening in these revolutionary years. See Fritzsche, ‘Specters of History’, p. 1595, quoting from George Steiner, *In Bluebeard’s Castle: Some Notes towards the Redefinition of Culture* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1971, pp. 12-13). What is telling in this context is that, despite the urgency of the times that prompted so many of his fellow writers, from Ernst Toller to Stefan Zweig, to write their memoirs, Roth shunned the autobiographical. He didn’t write memoirs or journals, and, apart from his letters, Roth has left his critics guessing as to the autobiographical contents or character of his work.

who no longer belonged to this world! I had for a long time been on indefinite leave from death. [...] What did the things of this world matter to me...?”¹⁰

Fritzsche’s understanding of nostalgia is important because of the implications it has for the altered conceptions of historical time of those writers who expressed nostalgia. According to Fritzsche, nostalgia betrays the recognition that history, instead of a tale of continuous progress and causal relations, is a narrative of catastrophe. It embodies the deeply modern awareness that discontinuity lies at the core of all historical narrative, private as well as public. Nostalgia is the inability to repossess or recollect the past; a “melancholy feeling of dispossession” and a source of disquiet. Indeed, it is a “nagging, unmasterable presence of absence.” The nostalgic sentiment exposes a catastrophic version of modern history; the idea of picking up the rubbles of the past, as they are the main building stones of historical narratives; much in the same way that Walter Benjamin saw his angel being blown away from paradise and Roth populated his novels with dilapidated war-cripples and displaced tragic-comic *Luftmenschen*, shadows of their former, pre-catastrophe selves. Indeed, one of the most striking consequences of the reconfiguration of Western temporality at the turn of the nineteenth century was the production of ruins. Traces of past lives suddenly appeared everywhere, and the feeling of being “wrongly alive” became common emotional stock.¹¹

It is in this recognition of disaster as the main catalyst of modern history that the critical ability of nostalgia can be found. It is telling that in sociological analyses of modernity, nostalgia has long since been used as a critical tool in understanding and analysing the mechanisms of the modern world, whereas in historical analysis, accounts of nostalgia have remained somewhat traditional. In the words of Peter Fritzsche:

Historians have not accounted for the improbable form that nostalgic longing takes or the remarkable discernment of difference in the categories “past” and “present” it assumes. Moreover, they miss how nostalgia expresses a culture of victims that proposes an alternative version of history as catastrophe. [...] A more useful way to think about nostalgia is to see it in correspondence with the emergence of the historical age. Nostalgia not only cherishes the past for the distinctive qualities that are no longer present but also acknowledges the permanence of their absence. It thus configures periods of the past as bounded in time and place and as inaccessible.¹²

¹⁰ Joseph Roth, *The Emperor’s Tomb*, p. 151.

¹¹ Peter Fritzsche, ‘Specters of History’, p. 1610. The feeling of being “wrongly alive” or “dead amongst the living” is a main theme in Roth’s life and work. See also the introduction of this thesis.

¹² Peter Fritzsche, ‘Specters of History’, p. 1592.

Despite the recognition that historical disruption lies at the centre of nostalgia, historical studies very often brush aside the concept as unintelligent sentimentality or see it as a sign of a writer's inability to cope with the present; an immature predilection towards much-repeated reveries of what has been lost. This is the conventional understanding of nostalgia: a regressive desire for the past which keeps the melancholic sufferer locked in an unproductive longing for a lost world which leaves her unable to participate in the present. Indeed, nostalgia is not normally seen as a gift; let alone "a whetstone upon which critical insights can be sharpened."¹³ Indeed, Roth's intensified nostalgia during the late 1930s has often been read in the light of his increased alcoholism and, as a result, it has come to be seen as the irrational reveries of a lost and deranged mind. Nostalgia, however, is not singularly about loss. In mourning the loss of past values there is also an unformulated potential for critical insight into contemporary matters. In other words, by paying attention to those contemporary aspects a writer criticises or despises most, it is possible to discern what she images a future, better world should look like. What is so lacking or askew in the present that it creates a desire for a "temps perdu"? What configurations of the future lie dormant in expressions of nostalgia? Nikos Papastergiadis found the right words to describe this existential paradox of nostalgia:

It might seem a paradox to suggest that nostalgia is as much future-oriented as it is concerned with the past, just as it is paradoxical to say that visionaries are melancholics who have invested themselves with the necessity of 'having' to 'speak the truth without having the authority to speak it,' and so it could be said that travellers who leave one point are often (and even before departure) actually searching for their place of origin. The quest for belonging is so vigorously sought that it uproots and displaces the very possibility of ever finding the ultimate point of arrival.¹⁴

This idea of nostalgia as carrying within itself critical insights into an envisioned and better future connects to Fritzsche's conclusion that nostalgia is an intellectual faculty that leads to sightfulness, not blindness. Also, it is a tool that enables us to read beyond the individual writer into the realm of historical time that is conjured up, criticised as well as mourned in her work.¹⁵ It is crucial not to dismiss these "narratives of dispossession" as sentimental reverie; instead, they are testaments to conceptions of changed historical time; the core, as it

¹³ Nikos Papastergiadis, *Modernity as Exile. The Stranger in John Berger's Writing*. Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1993, pp. 166-171.

¹⁴ Nikos Papastergiadis, *Modernity as Exile*, p. 169.

¹⁵ As Svetlana Boym argues: "Unlike melancholia, which confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory." Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p. xvi.

is often said, of historical research. Thus, an analysis of Roth's nostalgia allows us to understand his insights about the fate and future of Europe, as well as his subsequent intellectual course, and to view this as the result of an existential position that was in many ways typical of his generation of Central European Jewish intellectuals. The predicament of existing in an historical void, of being faced with the permanence of absence, was the condition of many Jewish intellectuals of the Habsburg Empire after 1918. Indeed, many experienced their historical times as an enforced political and emotional vacuum. As David Roberts has observed about the reaction of Jewish authors to the catastrophes of the interwar years: "The authors' sense of crisis, their acute awareness of living through a turning point of truly cataclysmic dimensions is the driving force of their desire to make sense of their time. The result is that their novels unfold an historical perspective which places contemporary events in a larger historical pattern."¹⁶ In their literature, these writers scrutinise the past in order to understand the predicament of the present. And for many Jewish writers of Habsburg heritage, the past began in 1918.

1918

The great fall that catapulted the empire's "orphaned Jewish children," as Gershon Shaked has called them, into an existential void, was a polymorphous event.¹⁷ It was the collapse – at the same time emotional, historical and imaginary – of those political strongholds and existential pillars that had for a long time provided authority and stability. The empire, the "antithesis of the nation-state" which had held together a mix of nationalities, ethnic groups and religions, became, in the eyes of its large Jewish population, an idealized embodiment of supranational power. Jews played an important role in this perceived stability of the empire, since it was mainly the result of the predominance of its large capitalist classes, among whom Viennese and Budapest Jews played a central role. In this sense they were an "efficacious force" in the cohesion of the monarchy.¹⁸ Furthermore,

¹⁶ David Roberts, 'The Sense of an Ending: Apocalyptic Perspectives in the 20th-Century German Novel,' *Orbis Litterarum* 32, 1977, pp. 140-58, p. 155.

¹⁷ Gershon Shaked, 'After the Fall: Nostalgia and the Treatment of Authority in the Works of Kafka and Agnon, Two Habsburgian Writers', *Partial Answers*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2004), pp. 81-111. See also Ritchie Robertson, '1918. This year of the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire marks a crucial historical and symbolic change for Joseph Roth', in Sander L. Gilman and Jack Zipes (eds.), *Yale Companion to Jewish Writing and Thought in German Culture, 1096-1996*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997, pp. 355-362.

¹⁸ Robert S. Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 156. Wistrich quotes from Oscar Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy* (Chicago and London, 1971). See also William O. McCagg Jr., *A History of the Habsburg Jews, 1670-1918*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989; Marsha L. Rosenblit, *The Jews of Vienna, 1867-1914: Assimilation and Identity*.

Jews lacked a distinct national identity and as such they emerged as a scattered yet continuous presence in the empire's lands. They were its "omnipresent folk substance" with no desire to undermine it with nationalist aspirations.¹⁹ This sense of stability worked both ways, as the empire provided its Jewish subjects with a focus of loyalty that made it possible for them to sidestep the increasingly bitter national conflicts that flared up within the empire's borders.²⁰

It was also the fall of the declining might and power of the aging emperor Franz Joseph, whose death in 1916 in many ways signified the end of an era. His reign spanned the years 1848, through the Compromise with Hungary in 1867, to 1916. In the years leading up to and following his death, the "old commandant" was overthrown by nationalist, revolutionary and racist forces. As a result of this violent change in the political power system, which also saw tsarist Russia and the German Empire shattered to minor versions of their former selves, a sharp sense of longing for the emperor and his "ramshackle but relatively decent realm" became a driving force in the subsequent intellectual mindset of many Jewish writers of Habsburg heritage.²¹ While the emperor's protective and tolerant attitude towards the Jews is often portrayed in a highly idealised manner, it is true that Franz Joseph did indeed "not tolerate" antisemitism in his empire. The Jewish press often jubilantly stressed Franz Joseph's religious tolerance and sense of justice, and expressed a deep loyalty for and identification with him. Part of this identification was based on the idea of shared suffering, as the emperor's life was characterised by many personal tragedies, including the suicide, in 1889, of his son Crown Prince Rudolf, who, because of his loathing for modern nationalisms and clericalism, represented for the Jews an even better promise for the future.²² Thus, 1918 was the breaking up of a realm that had come to represent a stable, safe, and, most importantly, peaceful world. Indeed, this discourse of illusory peace which persisted in the empire despite increasingly violent conflicts between Czechs, Germans, Magyars, Ukrainians and Poles, and which had provided it with much of its powerful imaginative supranational credibility, lived on especially in the minds and hearts of its Jewish subjects. The viability of

Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1983; Marsha L. Rozenblit, 'Jewish Ethnicity in a New Nation-State. The Crisis of Identity in the Austrian Republic,' in Michael Brenner and Dereck J. Penslar (eds.), *In Search of Jewish Community: Jewish Identities in Germany and Austria, 1918-1933*. Bloomington, In.: Indiana University Press, 1998, pp. 134-153; Marsha L. Rozenblit, 'The Jews of Germany and Austria: A Comparative Perspective,' in Robert S. Wistrich (ed.), *Austrians and Jews in the Twentieth Century: From Franz Joseph to Waldheim*. London: Macmillan, 1992, pp. 1-18.

¹⁹ Carl Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*. New York: Knopf, 1980, p. 129.

²⁰ Ritchie Robertson, '1918', p. 355.

²¹ Erza Mendelsohn, *Painting a People. Maurycy Gottlieb and Jewish Art*. Hannover and London: Brandeis University Press, 2002, p. 10.

²² Robert S. Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph*, pp. 175-181.

the Habsburg monarchy, in other words, was in many ways dependent on this mythical dream of a supranational and tolerant empire. It was, in the words of Hermann Broch, “impregnated by mythical elements,” and its survival depended on the maintenance of this dream.²³ The contrast with the interwar years, during which intolerance, instability, and extreme right-wing politics reigned, could not have been greater, and this provided the background against which many of the retrospective fantasies were created.²⁴

In the context of this posthumous dream of imperial peace and the postwar nationalist ideologies that competed with it, Moritz Csáky has argued that after 1918 a “false historical consciousness” emerged which was aimed at denying the existing continuities between the many peoples and traditions of the extinct monarchy.²⁵ This denial, Csáky argues, was necessary in order to support what was essentially a fiction; namely, the idea of a national or ethnic nation state. Against this deafening roar of separatist nationalist politics, Roth set out to emphasize the continuities between the empire’s many subjects. In *The Radetzky March*, for instance, he suggests a Habsburg-Slavic-Jewish symbiosis as an ideal form of government. In order for this particular Central European vision, based on the recognition of plurality and diversity within one’s borders, to have any kind of appeal in a historical situation increasingly determined by virulent nationalisms, it needed to root itself firmly in the past to find proof and credibility. But there was a price to be paid for not allowing national sentiments to overtake the soul. As Shaked writes, “For those intellectuals who did not fill the religious and human vacuum with romantic national dreams, German, Czech, or Jewish, as the case might be, the rupture resulted in a dreadful and hopeless loneliness – in particular a Jewish intellectual’s loneliness in a European metropolis.”²⁶ In line with his idiosyncratic and anti-dogmatic attitude, Roth made a conscious decision to stay within this existential vacuum of “dreadful and hopeless loneliness” and did not succumb to one ideology, religion, or nationalism. However, this multiple positioning was not without risk, and I do believe that it was the fall

²³ Hermann Broch, *Hofmannsthal und seine Zeit*. Munich: Publisher, 1964, p. 133.

²⁴ “Generally Jews have flourished in lands of cultural and religious tolerance, political liberalism, stability and economic growth. In interwar East Central Europe they were confronted, rather, with chauvinism and intolerance, instability, economic stagnation, and extreme right-wing politics.” Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987, p. 5. Mendelsohn argues that what makes East Central Europe in the interwar years of particular dramatic interest for the student of modern Jewish history is that it provides the background of the rise of violent antisemitism (in Mendelsohn’s mind a prelude to World War Two) as well as of modern Jewish political movements which flourished during the 1920s and 1930s.

²⁵ Moritz Csáky, “Der Zerfall Österreichs mit seiner Geschichte: Die Lebenswelt von Joseph Roth,” *Limes* 13 (1990), pp. 9-14. Because Roth’s reconstruction of an idealised world was the result of catastrophic historical events, Csáky doubts Wolfgang Müller-Funk’s thesis that Roth, in his dependency on myth, “mit der Unsicherheit von Existenz und Identität ein Spiel getrieben hat.”

²⁶ Gershon Shaked, ‘After the Fall’, p. 83.

of the empire, as well as the historical events that followed in its wake, that contributed to the decline, instability or collapse of the physical and mental health of some of its most prolific intellectual offspring, Roth included. However, it also influenced their thought in the way that they were forced to explore new intellectual territories. In many of these explorations, the city of Vienna, after 1918 capital of Austria, plays an important role.

Vienna: a Cardboard Décor

Roth's post-war invention of his high army rank during the First World War was the result of the lasting influence of the Habsburg myth.²⁷ It was the way in which this myth, based on the fact that Jews could become reserve officers in the Habsburg army whereas anywhere else they were virtually banned, allowed Roth to construct this image of himself as officer while at the same time glorifying the world in which such a fact had been possible. However, Roth differed from many of his contemporaries in his evocations of Vienna. Whereas the majority indulged in what Steven Beller has called "Viennese Jewish nostalgia," i.e. the discourse of Vienna as the focal point of the cosmopolitan idea, Roth's memories of the city were more sober.²⁸ However, the world of fin-de-siècle Vienna, where Jews flourished as intellectuals, artists and musicians and where the Jewish bourgeoisie imagined itself relatively safe, was a subject that charmed many, both then and now.²⁹ But when we read the memoirs of this lost world, many of which were written with decades of hindsight, what is often left out are the darker sides of Jewish life in 1900 Vienna.³⁰ Viennese political life was in fact far from ideal. It was the first capital in Europe that was governed by an antisemitic mayor. Peter Pulzer has argued that the era of relative tolerance

²⁷ The concept of the Habsburg myth was first explored by Claudio Magris in his 1963 dissertation *Il mito asburgico nella letteratura austriaca moderna*, published in German as *Der habsburgische Mythos in der österreichischen Literatur* (Müller Verlag: Salzburg, 1966). For more recent commentaries, see Tony Judt, 'The Rediscovery of Central Europe', *Daedalus*, Vol. 119, No. 1, Eastern Europe... Central Europe... Europe (Winter, 1990), pp. 23-54 and Gerard Delanty, 'The Resonance of Mitteleuropa. A Habsburg Myth or Antipolitics?' *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (1996), pp. 93-108.

²⁸ Steven Beller, 'The World of Yesterday Revisited: Nostalgia, Memory, and the Jews of fin-de-siècle Vienna', *Jewish Social Studies* Vol. 2, No. 2 (1996), pp. 37-53.

²⁹ In recent decades, fin-de-siècle Vienna has spurred great interest amongst both scholars and readers. The best-known work is Carl Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*. New York: Knopf, 1980. But see also Steven Beller (ed.), *Rethinking Vienna 1900*, Austrian Studies Volume III. New York: Berghahn Books, 2001; Richard Geehr. *Karl Lueger, Mayor of fin-de-siècle Vienna*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990; Walter Laqueur, "Fin-de-Siècle: Once More With Feeling." *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (1996), pp. 5-47; and Leslie Topp, *Architecture and Truth in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

³⁰ Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday. An Autobiography*. New York: Viking Press, 1943.

under Franz Joseph ended with Karl Lueger's appointment as mayor of Vienna in 1897.³¹ The only reason that the Jews of Vienna could imagine themselves relatively safe was because of the absence of large-scale physical violence against them compared to other parts of the empire. However, the 1880s saw a rise in antisemitism so violent that it prompted many Jews to forego the "politics of silence" advocated by the Jews of Germany and instead take on the public defense of Jewish rights and safety in the political sphere. This public defense against antisemitism became so widespread that around 1900 it had become a common Jewish practice as well as an important element of the secular Jewish identity of Habsburg Austrians.³² Thus, even if the emperor did not tolerate antisemitism, it was nevertheless a strong sentiment among the monarchy's diversified populace.³³ It was in Vienna that Roth first encountered antisemitism, during his first and only year at the university, in 1913, and in Vienna, too, that he dropped his first name, Moses.

That Vienna left a mark on Roth is apparent in the fact that the city functions as the setting of some of his early novels, most notably *Flight without End* (1927). Roth moved to Vienna directly after the First World War, and it was there that he was confronted with the dilapidated presence of the war-cripples who flooded the streets, some of whom would make their way into his fiction. This postwar confusion, in Vienna and Berlin alike, indeed forms the background of the misfortunes of many of his early characters. Yet, while Vienna is present in Roth's literary evocations of the sad and limping reality of postwar life, it is virtually absent from his letters. Whereas Berlin inspired some of Roth's most vitriolic outbursts, and it was Paris he loved, he was silent about Vienna. He never evoked it as the capital of a lost and now much desired world; instead, it lingers rather weakly in the shadows of Berlin and Paris. As early as 1925, Roth expressed the fear that Austria would succumb to the military will and might of its more powerful neighbour, Germany. In a letter to Benno Reifenberg, he writes:

Ich bin sehr verzweifelt. Ich kann nicht einmal mehr nach Wien fahren, seitdem die sozialistischen Juden einen solchen Anschluss-lärm machen. Was wollen sie? Sie wollen Hindenburg? Als der Keizer Franz Joseph starb, war ich zwar schon ein "Revolutionär", aber ich weinte. Ich war Einjähriger in einem Wiener Regiment, einer "Elite-Truppe", die als Ehrenwache vor der Kapuzinergruft stand und ich weinte wirklich. Eine

³¹ See Peter Pulzer's chapter "The Return of Old Hatreds" in Michael A. Meyer and Michael Brenner (eds.), *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, Vol. 3 (Integration in Dispute 1871-1918), New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

³² Robert S. Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph*, p. 202.

³³ Indeed, the empire had "a system of popular beliefs, traditions, assumptions, and practices that ingrained antisemitism in virtually all "minority" national movements." Steven Beller, 'The World of Yesterday Revisited', p. 47.

Zeit wurde begraben. Mit dem Anschluss wird noch einmal eine *Kultur* begraben. Alle Europäer müssten gegen die Anschluss sein.³⁴

This conflation between imperial Vienna and European culture has its roots in the concept of *Bildung*; the development of character through the study of culture and language. German was the language of the state in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but more importantly, for many Jews, it was the main road to acculturation, integration and success. Indeed, many Jews considered German culture, that “free-thinking, Enlightenment tradition of German humanism” and its greats, Lessing, Goethe, Schiller and Humboldt, a normative expression of Europeanism and Enlightenment. Some scholars have called this the Jews’ “inculcated admiration” for the German classics; a result of instilled habit.³⁵ But Jewish admiration for German culture was also based on the hope of pointing out their mutual claims to this culture heritage. Jews celebrated Goethe’s humanism and his indebtedness to Judaism and the Old Testament as a demonstration of the dual heritage of German culture, i.e. its cultural debt to Judaism. Indeed, German Jewry, among which were many Viennese Jews, was attracted to a distinct image of *Deutschtum*, “a Germany of humanistic culture and values, the vision of Germany fostered by its classical poets and philosophers.”³⁶ In this context, the German language was the gateway to a wider European culture; indeed, to a “cosmopolitan *Deutschtum*.” This greater civilisation, disconnected from German politics and nationalism but based on the country’s nobler cultural traditions, was what Roth had in mind when he feared for Europe; all Europeans, on the basis of this shared cultural heritage, must object to German military dominance, and Vienna’s capitulation would mean that the last stronghold of this humanist tradition, albeit in imaginary form, would be lost.

Other proof that Vienna was not the cultural centre of the Habsburg monarchy as it functioned in Roth’s postwar imagination is the fact that he portrayed it, in *The Emperor’s Tomb* and elsewhere, as the superficial and parasitic core sucking dry the riches of the crown lands, sitting like “some brilliant and seductive spider” at the heart of the empire. The “real” Austria, now the small alpine nation of post-1918 fame, could not be found in its capital city, but in the local traditions of its peripheries and crownlands. Count Chojnicki, the literary character Roth created as his mouthpiece to voice these opinions,

³⁴ Joseph Roth, in letter to Benno Reifenberg dated 30 August 1925, *Briefe*, p. 65.

³⁵ Robert S. Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph*, pp. 135, 143. For the idea of “inculcated admiration” see Michael A. Meyer and Michael Brenner (eds.), *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, Vol. 3 (Integration in Dispute 1871-1918), p. 307. “Though some Jews acquired these trappings of refinement only to make a proper bourgeois impression, others became genuinely devoted to the values of high culture.”

³⁶ Michael A. Meyer and Michael Brenner (eds.), *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, Vol. 4 (Renewal and Destruction 1918-1945), p. 160.

says: “Austria’s essence is not to be central, but peripheral. Austria is not to be found in the Alps, where you can find edelweiss, chamois and gentians but never a trace of the double eagle. The body politic of Austria is nourished and constantly replenished from the Crown Lands.”³⁷ Vienna, with its focus on aesthetics and its fascination with progress, had a corrupting influence on the crown lands. It was kitsch and superficial; a value vacuum. Therefore, by way of its margins, Vienna greatly contributed to, if not caused, the demise of the empire. But it was not a narrative force in Roth’s novels. As Otto W. Johnston has pointed out, it was not Vienna but Berlin and Paris which formed the “geographical dialectics” of Roth’s narrative technique, the extreme poles between which his tales take place. This observation is supported by Roth’s silence about Vienna in his letters.³⁸

Thus, Roth’s identification with Vienna indeed remained “secondary and essentially superficial.”³⁹ Despite his fascination with the aristocratic lifestyle of the Viennese, whose cultivated manners he adopted for himself – in dress, elaborate hand-kissing and a pronounced Viennese accent – Roth realised that postwar Vienna was no longer identifiable with the Habsburg monarchy. More so, it had never really been the monarchy’s main strength, as that, he believed, lay in the multivocal existence of the crownlands. Thus, it was not so much the city of Vienna itself as the idea of what it was built on that mattered: it epitomised, in some ways, the pinnacle of what had been possible for the Jews of the empire; relative safety, freedom, religious tolerance, financial freedom, and justice. This, then, is what remains of Habsburg culture in Roth; a set of moral and ethical values that had a lasting influence on his subsequent intellectual and literary explorations. In these, Vienna only plays a marginal role; it is not much more than the raw material for the cardboard décor of his tales of urban, postwar homelessness.

Identities and Diasporas

Some scholars have argued that modernity, which rose from the ashes of the collapsed empires after the First World War, was mainly the work of assimilated Jews who not only brought on, but also diagnosed, the modern condition.⁴⁰ This development was a direct result of their double alienation as Jews in German society. As Wolfgang Iser said it, “Being

³⁷ Joseph Roth, *The Emperor’s Tomb*. Translated by John Hoare (originally published as *Die Kapuzinergruft* in 1938). Woodstock & New York: The Overlook Press, 2002, p. 16. All further references are to this edition.

³⁸ Otto W. Johnston, ‘Jewish Exile from Berlin to Paris. The Geographical Dialectics of Joseph Roth’, *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, Vol. 31 (1986), pp. 441-454.

³⁹ Robert S. Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph*, p. 661.

⁴⁰ See, for instance, Gershon Shaked, ‘After the Fall’ and Jacob Katz (ed.), *Toward Modernity: the European Jewish model*. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1987.

exiled within the society in which they lived, and simultaneously responding to this nonacceptance by exiling themselves from their own heritage, the Jews found themselves in a dilemma when the empire was on the verge of collapse.”⁴¹ Their attempts at overcoming this sense of self-alienation transformed the community of Jewish intellectuals of the empire into the “spearhead of modernity.” According to Stefan Zweig, who believed that Jewish participation in Viennese culture was an expression of the ardent patriotism of the Jews, they, with their more mobile understanding and little hampered by tradition, were the “exponents of all that was new.”⁴² This idea of the Jews as the forerunners and instigators of modernity has been opposed by a recent trend in Jewish studies which instead focuses on the so-called “pathology” of the Jewish situation in the interwar years. It sees the Jews as the victims, rather than the catalysts or beneficiaries, of modernity, and, according to this view, Jews constructed their identities mainly as a negative response to external pressures of antisemitism and prejudice. Instead of developing a dual identity that combined the best of both worlds, Jews internalized the very worst of what it meant to be a Jew. Thus, the Jews’ cultural contribution to modernity and the culture of the interwar decades is considered not in terms of singularity and originality, but instead in terms of alienation and self-hatred.⁴³

The truth, I think, lies somewhere between these two extremes of internalised antisemitic hatred on the one hand, and flourishing, free-floating creativity on the other. Both positions however stress the Jews’ marginality in German and Austrian society of the interwar decades. The literature of its most modern exponents – especially Franz Kafka but Roth, too, has been included in this group – is sometimes thought to be an expression of the “condition juive” in the diaspora.⁴⁴ This condition is marked by a “dual identity” or a “double consciousnesses” which is the result of a lost Jewish heritage and an incomplete assimilation; not altogether that different from David Bronsen’s assessment of Roth as a man whose “torn identity” was rooted in the double consciousness of being both an Austrian and a Jew.⁴⁵ Kafka once formulated it as follows: “With their hind legs the Jews

⁴¹ Wolfgang Iser, “German Jewish Writers during the Decline of the Hapsburg Monarchy: Assessing the Assessment of Gershon Shaked”, in Emily Miller Budic (ed.), *Ideology and Jewish Identity in Israeli and American Literature*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001, pp. 259-273, p. 264.

⁴² Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, p. 22.

⁴³ Steven Beller, ‘The World of Yesterday Revisited’, pp. 49-50. The seminal study on the concept of Jewish self-hatred is Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986.

⁴⁴ See Wolfgang Iser’s essay on the legacy of Gershon Shaked, ‘German Jewish Writers during the Decline of the Hapsburg Monarchy: Assessing the Assessment of Gershon Shaked.’

⁴⁵ David Bronsen, ‘Austrian vs. Jew: The Torn Identity of Joseph Roth’, lecture delivered at the Joseph Roth Symposium, 29 December 1970, in Robert Weltsch (ed.), *Yearbook 18 of the Leo Baeck Institute*, London: Secker & Warburg, 1973, pp. 220-226.

are fastened to the Jewish tradition of their fathers, and with their forelegs they get no ground under their feet. The despair thus ensuing translates into inspiration.”⁴⁶ Kafka’s writings show no direct traces of his Jewish heritage; indeed much less so than Roth’s. But what matters in relation to the “Jewishness” of this literature are the ways in which these writers do not so much suppress their Jewish heritage, but transfigure it “to such an extent that the deep structure of what it means to be a Jew in the diaspora is tellingly revealed.”⁴⁷ Gershon Shaked has argued that the irony of having a double identity is that it equals having none at all, especially when these two identities are mutually exclusive.⁴⁸ It entails a condition of living in limbo, an in-between space that creates a sense of existential despair. Walter Benjamin, in a letter from 11 September 1912 to Ludwig Strauss, editor of the journal *Kunstwart*, wrote: “If we are indeed two-sided, Jewish *and* German, up to now all of our enthusiasm and affirmation has been directed towards the German! The Jewish side was perhaps only a foreign (worse, sentimental) Jewish aroma in our production and our lives. No individual, not even an artist, knows how to balance this dual spirit. But we will discover it.”⁴⁹ In the words of Wolfgang Iser:

Dual identity implies being grounded in neither identity, and such a situation squares almost exactly with what modern subjectivity is exposed to. It is the hallmark of the latter that any ground it might have, is withheld from it. This may be one of the reasons why ideologies have been so rampant in our century. They are concoctions devised to compensate for what remains unattainable. *Unavailability of origins is the stigma of modernity that inscribes itself even into its compensations.* Lack of access to any base is a nagging presence in the conscious life of the modern subject, whose decentered position makes it not only into a subject without self, but also into a vortex of ever-changing shapes. Such a duality is double-edged: on the one hand it may cause paralysis, but on the other it energizes the drive to cope with it.⁵⁰

It is true that uncertainty about identity is one of the main characteristics of the interwar era, for Jews, Austrians and Germans alike. But I disagree that the so-called dual identity of many German and Austrian Jews meant a total negation of identity; that it equalled, in other words, having none at all. Moreover, the term “identity” itself has suffered from such semiotic and ideological confusion that it has become virtually impossible to use as an

⁴⁶ Quoted by Gershon Shaked in ‘Kafka: Jüdische Erbe und hebräische Literatur’, in *Die Macht der Identität. Essays über jüdische Schriftsteller* (Königstein: Jüdischer Verlag bei Athenaeum, 1986), p. 18.

⁴⁷ Wolfgang Iser, “German Jewish Writers during the Decline of the Hapsburg Monarchy”, p. 263.

⁴⁸ Wolfgang Iser, “German Jewish Writers during the Decline of the Hapsburg Monarchy”.

⁴⁹ Quoted from Anson Rabinbach, ‘Between Enlightenment and Apocalypse: Benjamin, Bloch and Modern German Jewish Messianism’, *New German Critique*, No. 34 (Winter 1985), pp. 78-124, p. 94.

⁵⁰ Wolfgang Iser, “German Jewish Writers during the Decline of the Hapsburg Monarchy”, p. 267.

analytical tool.⁵¹ Instead, it is more useful to analyse the ways in which writers and intellectuals constructed, portrayed and discussed their multiple backgrounds, identifications and personal and political loyalties, which in the case of Jewish intellectuals, of course, was even more complex. It pays off to go “beyond identity,” to pass by the dual construction of identity as existing between opposite poles – whether Jew versus German, self-hatred versus creativity, wandering versus belonging – because this opens up the intellectual landscape for new vistas and other, less rigid forms of self-understanding. Just like communities and nations, often relying on people’s metaphysical faculties, identities are very often imagined.⁵² For Roth, a situation that comprised or called for a multiplicity of selves did not mean in itself a cancellation of identity. While it certainly excluded the possibility of ever being grounded, being at home, in the traditional sense, it appears that he shifted rather elegantly between various expressions of loyalty and identity, depending, indeed, on circumstance, mood, and (financial) necessity. It was more a case of self-invention, self-narration and self-representation than a quest for a fixed identity; indeed, his shifting selves were a political and ideological standpoint aimed at the development of universal, not national values.

It is very likely that the linguistic and ethnic diversity of Galicia, and the dense plurality of identities it contained, influenced Roth’s ideas about identity as a plural and moveable concept. Indeed, the “dense patchwork of peoples, languages, and cultures,” in the words of Kati Tonkin, much determined the particular character of Central Europe, and it created an intelligentsia which had a “heightened consciousness of the ethnic, linguistic and cultural plurality of the region and consequently was affected intensely by the fall of the Empire and the creation of new nation-states.”⁵³ The expression of multiple and often contradictory identifications became for Roth an ideal mechanism to ward off all absolutist ideologies as solutions to the problems of the present. Indeed, “having spent his formative years in the plurality of cultures characteristic of the eastern parts of the Habsburg realm, Roth’s experience of individual identity contrasted starkly with an

⁵¹ Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, ‘Beyond “Identity”’, *Theory and Society*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (February 2000), pp. 1-47. As the authors say, “We have argued that the concept is deployed to do a great deal of analytical work - much of it legitimate and important. “Identity,” however, is ill suited to perform this work, for it is riddled with ambiguity, riven with contradictory meanings, and encumbered by reifying connotations. Qualifying the noun with strings of adjectives - specifying that identity is multiple, fluid, constantly renegotiated, and so on - does not solve the Orwellian problem of entrapment in a word. It yields little more than a suggestive oxymoron - a multiple singularity, a fluid crystallization-but still begs the question of why one should use the same term to designate all this and more.” (p. 34).

⁵² For the concept of imagined communities, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983.

⁵³ Kati Tonkin, *Joseph Roth’s March into History*, p. 17. Tonkin calls this focus on Roth’s recognition of multiple identities based on his Galician experience a “Central European perspective” on Roth.

ideology that insisted that German and Jewish identity were mutually exclusive.”⁵⁴ Roth’s identity was certainly conflicted, but it was never wholly negated or extinguished. Nor were his multiple loyalties an expression of an “identity crisis,” as Tonkin has convincingly argued, but instead the result of a conscious recognition of, and a choice to remain within, a state of multiplicity.

This awareness of the coexistence of linguistic, ethnic and cultural identities is also part of what scholars have called the “Central European Jewish tradition.”⁵⁵ This tradition stems from the adaptation of traditional Jewish thought and practice to the modern world of postwar Central Europe. Aspects of the old Jewish tradition were adapted, sometimes unrecognisably, to the larger German culture, and despite fervent efforts towards complete assimilation Jews maintained a relationship to their Jewish heritage. Indeed, the fact that Jews invariably denied, affirmed, or complicated the ties to their Jewish background is a strong argument in favour of the survival of a certain Jewish consciousness in modern Central European culture. Furthermore, this tradition is a result of the difficult predicaments that Jews faced on the road to assimilation and modernity, such as antisemitism, pogroms, exclusion and expulsions. Their responses to these challenges, and the reconfigurations of Jewish religion and identity that resulted from it, are the subject of Michael A. Meyer’s work, who, in the words of Richard Cohen, has “constantly tried to decipher what it meant for the modern Jew to fashion an existence within these turbulent currents” [of modernity] and, turning to the creative minds of writers and intellectuals, tried to uncover the “parameters of their identity.”⁵⁶ These reconceptualizations of Judaism were the result of Jewish encounters with modernity that often modified and sometimes completely altered an individual’s attachment to Judaism. One reaction to this encounter was a sense of longing for the world prior to these transformations; in other words, nostalgia. However, as Steven Beller has argued, it was not much in line with the Central European Jewish tradition to “overly indulge in nostalgia”:

[...] yet what the Central European Jewish tradition contributed was not nostalgic reverie, but rather a concentration on valuing the ethical over the aesthetic, on being true to oneself, on looking behind the beautiful appearances of Habsburg society, on rejecting the conformism that created inauthenticity and the idolization of the false picture of Central

⁵⁴ Kati Tonkin, *Joseph Roth’s March into History*, p. 23.

⁵⁵ Steven Beller, *Vienna and The Jews, 1867-1938. A Cultural History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 50-52. See also Kati Tonkin, *Joseph Roth’s March into History*, p. 37.

⁵⁶ Richard I. Cohen, ‘Reflections on Jewish Nostalgia in the Era of Globalization’, in Michael Brenner and Lauren B. Strauss (eds.), *Mediating Modernity Challenges and Trends in the Jewish Encounter With the Modern World Essays in Honor of Michael A. Meyer*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008, pp. 305-314, p. 305.

European harmony. In other words, the Central European Jewish tradition did more than any other one source to provide Central Europe with a culture of the critical pursuit of truth, whether in art, morality, or politics. The great contribution of Viennese and Central European Jewry to modern culture was formed against the conservative, nostalgic version of Austrian culture represented by the Habsburg myth, against its self-satisfied hedonism and the fear of the future inherent in its longing for the past.⁵⁷

Milan Kundera, too, has identified the critical pursuit of truth as one of the main strengths of the Central European tradition, which he places in the greater context of European civilisation. He writes: “All of this century’s great Central European works of art, even up to our own day, can be understood as long meditations on the possible end of European humanity.”⁵⁸ Elsewhere, Carl E. Schorske has argued that the great cultural effervescence that emerged in the wake of the collapse of the Habsburg Empire was two-fold: on the one hand, there was a flight into art and aesthetics, a reaction to the political sterility of the times, and, on the other hand, a focus on the darker sides of the interwar period, characterised by an obsessive interest in ideology, the ego and death.⁵⁹ What sets Roth’s nostalgia apart from many other writers who shared a similar fate is that he concentrated on those elements of Habsburg culture and life he believed contributed to its demise, such as vanity, self-deception and political incompetence. This critical eye was present even in his most ardent expressions of longing for the world of the Habsburgs. Roth’s nostalgia, then, incorporated a sense of the modern that allowed him to cast a critical eye on those disruptive forces, historical and political, that were responsible for the demise of the empire. Furthermore, it was characterised by a rebellion against the idea of modern time as the story of progress; instead, Roth wrote against this great historical narrative of the victorious. It contained within itself the observant, the critical, as well as the mythical. Whereas in most historical accounts of the interwar period attention to morality and ethics is positioned against attention to aesthetics, thus separating politically engaged from so-called escapist intellectuals, in Roth the moral and aesthetic went hand in hand. His flight into art, the wondrous and the imagination which dominated his later years seems at first sight opposed to the critical attention he paid to the disrupting historical forces that lay at the roots of the interwar crisis, but this contradiction is deceiving. As I will argue below, Roth’s nostalgia was centred on the present and future as much as it was on the past. It was fuelled by an urgent concern to address the catastrophic predicament of European

⁵⁷ Steven Beller, ‘The World of Yesterday Revisited’, p. 52.

⁵⁸ Milan Kundera, ‘The Tragedy of Central Europe’, *New York Review of Books*, 26 April 1984, 33-38, p. 36.

⁵⁹ Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980.

civilisation, and, in order to verbalise and support his critique of the present, Roth took recourse to the sources of the past.

The Emperor's Tomb (1938)

"I am not a man of my time. In fact I find it hard not to declare myself its enemy."⁶⁰ Thus begins a one-man tale of places, villages, faces and customs that no longer exist; a meditation on those darker elements that brought on the demise of the narrator's world as he knew it before the onset of the First World War. Franz Ferdinand Trotta, unrelated except by association to his more famous Trotta namesakes of *The Radetzky March*, recalls the days of his youth in the context of his struggle to find a sense of purpose in a postwar world that appears meaningless and filled only by absences. He finds himself "alive by accident" in a world that feels increasingly alien. Disaster looms on the horizon, and he confesses that "... the sins which my friends and I heaped on our own heads were not so much personal matters as the faint, still hardly recognisable, foreshadowing of the coming annihilation which I shall soon describe."⁶¹ I will argue that instead of a nostalgic evocation of a lost world or the thinner, less successful sequel of *The Radetzky March* (the opinion shared by most Roth scholars), *The Emperor's Tomb* is in fact a tale of critical confession in the face of imminent death, triggered by, and written against, the catastrophes of the 1930s. Among these, Hitler's ascent to power in January 1933, the Nuremberg laws of 1935, and the increased expulsions of Jews from Germany were the most visible. 1938 was of particular catastrophic meaning to Roth, as Austria's *Anschluss* meant that his final hope for a solution to the present had been lost, followed by the 7 November pogrom that year, the *Kristallnacht*.

My analysis of *The Emperor's Tomb* is informed by the idea of the metaphor of the crypt as a means to represent the experiences of exile.⁶² The crypt as metaphor reveals the insurmountable loss of things loved which lies behind the creation of a text, and stresses the exile posture of its author. As Liesbeth Haagdorens explains:

"... the construction of a crypt takes place when a loss, a 'segment of an ever so painfully lived Reality – untellable and therefore inaccessible to the gradual, assimilative work of mourning' – cannot be admitted as a loss. The crypt, then, constitutes a place in the inside of the subject, in

⁶⁰ Joseph Roth, *The Emperor's Tomb*, p. 1.

⁶¹ Joseph Roth, *The Emperor's Tomb*, p. 23.

⁶² Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

which the lost object is ‘swallowed and preserved.’ Thus, the crypt enables avoidance of a confrontation with the loss of a loved object, while at the same time preserving and conserving it.⁶³

The buried objects, then, whether memories, past experiences, or the cherished values of a lost world, remain accessible despite their burial because they are often endowed with positive, life-affirming meaning.⁶⁴ In literary analyses of exile, the concept of the crypt is used as a structural device for exploring the narrator’s representations of exile, while most scholars tend to stay away from it as a psychoanalytic tool to understand the author’s psyche. Indeed, needless to say, in this chapter it is not Roth’s “psyche” that I aim to analyse, but instead the mechanisms of his cultural criticism and the ways in which his intellectual confrontation with his times resulted in a narrative that undermined his own nostalgia for the world of the Habsburgs.

In order to do justice to the aesthetic value of *The Emperor’s Tomb* as a “document of 1938” it should be considered in a separate light from its predecessor, *The Radetzky March*.⁶⁵ These two novels have often been twinned together as Roth’s great tale of Habsburg demise, a tale in which *The Emperor’s Tomb* emerged as the weaker postscript to the first novel. I believe that this negative reception of *The Emperor’s Tomb* has been influenced by a sentimental understanding of nostalgia, coloured by Roth’s visible despair and alcoholism when he wrote it. Furthermore, the two novels differ in that the first deals with the Habsburg Empire in its grand pre-1918 size and shape, whereas the latter confronts a diminished Austria; indeed, the “painstaking and partial reconstruction of a mere idea of Austria in the mind of a limited and rootless narrator.”⁶⁶ Critics, themselves trapped in the shadow of a masterpiece, have overlooked the historical differences between 1932 and 1938 that account for the changes in the narrator’s point of view. Whereas the *Anschluss* lingers large *The Emperor’s Tomb*, and is the main historical event against which the book is written, in 1932 it was still possible to write a novel with a comforting narrative closure, ending before the dissolution of the empire and therefore leaving it intact.

⁶³ Liesbeth Haagdorens, ‘Displacements of Exile in Albert Drach’s Novel *Unsentimentale Reise*’, in Stephan Alexander (ed.), *Exile and Otherness. New Approaches to the Experience of the Nazi Refugees*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005, pp. 249-268, p. 259.

⁶⁴ “... in spite of the massive walls, there always looms the threat that the object entombed will leave the crypt because it is endowed with positive meaning; what is buried alive in it is entombed, because the confrontation with the suffering of this loss cannot be overcome.” Liesbeth Haagdorens, ‘Displacements of Exile’, p. 259.

⁶⁵ Geoffrey C. Howes, ‘Joseph Roth’s *Kapuzinergruft* as a Document of 1938’, in Donald G. Daviau (ed.), *Austrian Writers and the Anschluss: Understanding the Past – Overcoming the Past*. Riverside, California: Ariadne Press, 1991, pp. 156-167, p. 158. Howes asks what the novel, as a “document of 1938”, can teach us about the *Anschluss*. The article also contains a critical discussion of the novel’s reception.

⁶⁶ Geoffrey C. Howes, ‘Joseph Roth’s *Kapuzinergruft* as a Document of 1938’, p. 158.

The text as a crypt, then – what does this mean in the case of *The Emperor's Tomb*, whose title envelopes the narrative as a whole? The circumstances of its creation were certainly haunting. Initially entitled *Ein Mann sucht sein Vaterland*, then *Der Kelch des Lebens*, the novel received its final title, *Die Kapuzinergruft*, in June 1938. Its conception had been an ardent one. Roth's difficulties in finishing the book resulted in handing his Dutch publisher De Gemeenschap, after months' delay, a mere 173 pages instead of the promised 350-page manuscript. Roth may have had a greater tale in mind, but it seems that the times did not permit him.⁶⁷ It is telling that from the rather optimistic connotations of the first two titles which allowed for a way out of the harrowing predicament of 1938, Roth, in his final manuscript, which he finished after the annexation of Austria into Nazi Germany, changed his mind and settled on a decidedly more irrevocable idea: the dead emperor and his crypt. This was not the first time Roth chose the crypt as a means of literary expression. It appears in much of his writing, most of all in his correspondence, where he repeatedly compares houses, or any form of stable domestic residence, with “etwas Endgültiges”; i.e. a crypt.⁶⁸ His literary characters, too, feel a great terror for domestic life in enclosed spaces. Franz Ferdinand Trotta remarks, “... the houses in which we lived seemed to us to be crypts or, at best, refuges.”⁶⁹ In Roth's literary world, enclosed spaces in the form of domestic residences represent ignorance and the denial of experience; a claustrophobic containment versus embodied, wandering and therefore “real” life on the streets or in hotels. However, in *The Emperor's Tomb* it is exactly such an enclosed space that the narrator chooses to contain his memories of the past, embodied in the figure, and the dead body, of the emperor. Trotta safely stores away his beloved emperor in the crypt, containing and preserving him while at the same time acknowledging his death and the failure of the empire. In other words, the lost subject is preserved in a liminal space representing finality.

The Emperor's Tomb is told from the perspective of what appears to be a Christian believer looking back on his not so Christian past: “forgive me my sins,” he often says. God is omnipresent, and Trotta's pre-war existence is characterised by a deep ignorance of worldly matters and the cruel fate which he feels is hanging closely above his head. Casting aside the possibility of ever finding an audience for his story, however, Trotta reclines: “Anyway, I am writing to clear my own mind about myself; and also, in a manner of speaking, *pro*

⁶⁷ Geoffrey C. Howes, ‘Joseph Roth's *Kapuzinergruft* as a Document of 1938’, p. 163, quoting David Bronsen, *Joseph Roth. Eine Biographie*, p. 510.

⁶⁸ Géza von Cziffra, *Der Heilige Trinker. Erinnerungen an Joseph Roth*. Frankfurt am Mainz & Berlin: Ein Ullstein Buch, 1989, c1983.

⁶⁹ Joseph Roth, *The Emperor's Tomb*, p. 151.

nomine Dei. May He forgive me my sins!”⁷⁰ He has felt a sense of looming doom all long. Before the war, while his comrades celebrate their upcoming departure to the front, Trotta feels “the sinister pressure of the future.” He is alone in seeing death written on the laughing faces of his comrades:

I was the only one who could already read on their harmless, even happy, and in any event unmoved faces, the writing of death. It was as if they were in that state of euphoria which so often graces the dying; death’s forerunner. And although they sat at table, still healthy and cheerful, drinking their schnapps and beer, and although I pretended to take part in their silly jokes, I had the impression of being a doctor or a nurse who watches his patient dying and is happy that the dying man is still quite unaware of death’s proximity.⁷¹

But Trotta becomes ill at ease with this knowledge, thinking to himself that “it is hard to know whether it is not better to tell the doomed man that his time is near rather than to welcome to euphoria which would send him off without suspicion of any sort.”⁷² The world, it seems, is not interested in hearing prophecies of doom and despair, and Trotta is silent. But years later, looking back upon his past, Trotta turns to confession in the face of the imminent disaster of the *Anschluss* and his own foreseeable death. He admits that the reason he did not act upon his pressing awareness of death in the past was because his generation “had no awareness of God.” Trotta’s confession extends to his creator, who at the time of writing still clung to the hope that his novels may reach an audience. Whereas the degree of overlap between fact and fiction can of course never be fully determined, this scene gives voice to the ideological fatigue of a writer overwhelmed by the scepticism of the times.⁷³ The novel’s last chapter, written after 12 March 1938, the day of Austria’s *Anschluss*, forms a sudden end. Thus in many ways the novel, whose jumpy character represents the pace of the times, was written against the endlessly suspended collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire which now, finally, had seen its final hour.⁷⁴

In the novel, forebodings of Europe’s decline come in the figure of Death who is “crossing his bony hands above the goblets out of which we drank, cheerful as children”

⁷⁰ Joseph Roth, *The Emperor’s Tomb*, p. 82.

⁷¹ Joseph Roth, *The Emperor’s Tomb*, pp. 46.

⁷² Joseph Roth, *The Emperor’s Tomb*, pp. 47.

⁷³ Curt Sanger has proposed a direct author-narrator identification as the means to understand Roth’s texts. See Curt Sanger, ‘The Experience of Exile in Joseph Roth’s Novels,’ in John M. Spalek and Robert F. Bell (eds.), *Exile. The Writers’ Experience*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982, pp. 258-266. Kati Tonkin argues against this direct author-narrator identification, something she calls “biographical hermeneutics,” in favour of an analysis of Roth’s narrative techniques. See Tonkin, *Joseph Roth’s March into History*, pp. 4 and 190.

⁷⁴ David Roberts, ‘The Sense of an Ending: Apocalyptic Perspectives in the 20th-Century German Novel,’ *Orbis Litterarum* 32, 1977, pp. 140-58, p. 155.

and who lingers “at night above the beds in which we slept with women.”⁷⁵ Trotta describes the pre-war days as “before the great Armageddon” and he and his friends as the “doomed but proud sons” of pre-war Viennese culture. Via his narrator, Roth admits to the arrogant decadence of pre-war Viennese society, supporting the idea that his own identification with Vienna indeed remained negative. The death of Trotta’s butler Jacques, a faithful, traditional man and symbol of the world of aristocratic Vienna, on the eve of the First World War is a personal premonition of the imminent death of the old world and its values which would be destroyed in the course of the war. However, Death plays a nasty trick on Trotta by keeping him alive in a barren postwar world, a punishment he considers worse than death. He envies the dead, who lay calmly beneath flower-covered soil. They, the living, are a generation “dedicated to death, by death disdained.” Indeed, they were found “unfit for death,” and this, ironically, is their greatest failure.

The idea of being wrongfully alive is one of Roth’s most persistent themes, and it is the main feature of his representations of the postwar generation. Young Zipper, in *Zipper and His Father*, thinks to himself: “Ich glaube, der Krieg hat uns verdorben. Gestehen wir, daß wir zu Unrecht zurückgekommen sind. Wir wissen soviel wie die Toten, wir müssen uns aber dumm stellen, weil wir zufällig am Leben geblieben sind...” David G. Roskies has described these *telushim*, or dangling men, as characters who

... agonize so long and hard about their place in the world that their confrontation with society, when such occurs, leads nowhere. They are alienated urban intellectuals, perennial students who recently returned from some place in Switzerland, or self-taught philosophers who mercilessly expose their own motives and those of others. They are called *telushim* (dangling men) and have no place to go, caught between the lost world of tradition and inaccessible worldly pleasures. They are a new breed who live on the periphery of politics and culture, knowing too much and doing too little. [...] What happens to such tortured souls in the face of catastrophe mirrors more directly than anything we have seen the collapse of normative behaviour, the denial of meaningful choices, and the crippling burden of memory.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ The quotations in this paragraph can be found on the following pages: 32, 57, 23, 16, 118-119. On page 14 and 15 we find another telling passage: “With them I shared a sceptical frivolity, a melancholy curiosity, a wicked insouciance, and the pride of the doomed, all signs of the disintegration which at that time we still did not see coming. Death was already crossing his bony hands. [...] Alone and old, distant and at the same time turning to stone, but still close to is all and omnipresent in the great and brilliant pattern of the Empire, lived and ruled the old Emperor, Franz Joseph. Perhaps in the hidden depths of our souls there slumbered that awareness which is called foreboding, the awareness above all that the old Emperor was dying, day by day with every day that he lived, and with him the Monarchy – not so much our Fatherland as our Empire; something greater, broader, more all-embracing than a Fatherland.”

⁷⁶ David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse. Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1984, pp. 143-4 and 147.

The concept of living shadows, of people who live a life on the border of death, is a common image in Roth's portrayal of mankind in general. In 1925, during his first visit to France, he wrote about Nice: "Most of the characters you see on the promenade and the beach come straight out of the lending library and the dreams of little country girls. God can't have created such people. They aren't made of common clay, but of high-end pulp. [...] Here are people who were originally a literary creation, and were then copied out in flesh and blood."⁷⁷ Whereas this is primarily a critique of consumer culture, and not yet an evocation of the darker sides of modern civilisation, it is the idea of an inversion of life and death so present in his later work that surfaces here in an earlier form. In *The Antichrist* (1934), the idiosyncratic and controversial essay which I will analyse in more detail in chapter 6, Roth identified Hollywood as the breeding ground for these shadows; people selling their soul to become celluloid copies of themselves. Roth abhorred the fact that mankind believed itself to be God; this, he thought, was one of the main causes of the terrible state of European civilisation in the 1930s. There is an intricate connection between these living shadows, or dangling men, and Roth's world-view as it developed during the 1930s: in his eyes, the living dead were a result of mankind's abuse of the divine gifts of grace and reason, gifts meant for the betterment of the world but instead placed in service of the unholy and corrupted aims of man. Thus, in his depictions of the living dead, Roth indirectly voiced his critique of the modern present.

Despite the constant references to sin, the idea of the novel as a tale of confession can be best understood in the context of the existence of these living dead than in the Christian sense of the word. More so than regret for his sins in the face of the divine, Trotta professes regret in the face of his own cowardice; his paralysis in confronting and acting upon the signs of his times. Indeed, as Kati Tonkin has argued:

Roth makes Franz Ferdinand's fatalism and political apathy the center of his concern in *Die Kapuzinergruft*, because it is an attitude that he sees as both endemic and dangerous, in the sense that it can have horrendous political consequences. Through the exposure of parallels between Franz Ferdinand's behavior in the past and his conduct in the present Roth demonstrates that the failure to engage with politics not only characterized the Habsburg times but was also typical of postwar Austrian society and was in part responsible for the catastrophe of the *Anschluss*.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Joseph Roth, 'Nice' (*Frankfurter Zeitung*, October 26, 1925), *Report from a Parisian Paradise*, pp. 61-63, p. 61.

⁷⁸ Kati Tonkin, *Joseph Roth's March into History*, p. 185.

In Trotta's social and political paralysis we find echoes of Roth's critique of the political inertia of many of his fellow intellectuals, a critique that he first voiced during the mid-1920s and continued to do so until his death in 1939. This call for political engagement advocated in the novel refutes the claim that Roth's work is escapist. Furthermore, Trotta's regret is about his family, his own broken "chain of generations."⁷⁹ Trotta's father, an eternal absentee at the dinner table who called his son Franz Ferdinand after the archduke, symbol of the monarchy's hopes for a better future, died shortly before the assassination of the archduke. This death makes Trotta the executioner of his father's ideas: namely, the idea of a triple monarchy of Austrians, Hungarians and Slavs expressed earlier in *The Radetzky March* and betraying Roth's conviction that a plurality of peoples is always preferable to the narrowing confines of the nation state; in this case, Austria. Against this national discourse, Count Chojnicki expresses the desire for local belonging, to be part of "a particular field, a particular copse or pond or person" in the empire's crownlands versus national belonging in a postwar state. But it is too late, and the great wheel of history, riding on discontinuity and disaster, has already crushed the possibility of local belonging.

Indeed, world events and the relentless march of history not only influenced Roth, but his literary characters, too. The mighty Kapturak, trader in false papers and provider of new identities for the Jewish displaced, still possessed, in 1930s *Job*, the confident air of a man who knows that others depend on him and are willing to pay a high price to escape to the new world. When Mendel Singer's wife Deborah visits him to obtain false papers for her sons in the hope that they can avoid the army, she spots him sitting in a corner of the taproom, writing at the window, surrounded by peasants and Jews. "His cap, with the lining turned upwards, lay on the table, next to the papers, like an outstretched hand, and many silver pieces rested in it already, and drew the eyes of all those who stood around him. From time to time, Kapturak counted them, although he knew that no one would dare to take even a kopek. He wrote petitions, love letters, and postal checks for the illiterate. (He could also cut hair and extract teeth.)"⁸⁰ An uncanny charlatan of sorts, heavily charging the immigrants-to-be for his services, Kapturak is a man of the world who maintains a casual attitude in the midst of his fellowmen's misery. He is Roth's commercial border crosser and a power literary presence. Now, six years later, with the looming *Anschluss* and illegal border crossings increasingly more difficult, Kapturak appears again, a destroyed version of his former self, sitting in a corner of the border tavern that Trotta

⁷⁹ For the concept of the chain of generations in Roth, see Sidney Rosenfeld, 'The Chain of Generations: A Jewish Theme in Joseph Roth's Novels,' in *Yearbook 18 of the Leo Baeck Institute*, Robert Weltsch (ed.), London: Secker & Warburg, 1973, pp. 227-231. I will analyse this theme in more detail in my chapter 6 of this thesis.

⁸⁰ Joseph Roth, *Job. The Story of a Simple Man*. London: Granta Books, 2000, p. 47.

visits on the eve of the war. “The great thunder of world history had silenced the chatter of little Kapturak, its blinding lightning had reduced him to a shadow.”⁸¹ History’s march towards disaster, Roth is saying, will crush both its mighty and its marginalised players.

Trotta quite unexpectedly embraces the disaster of war that is on the horizon, because, he says, “this wretchedness [...] devoured our small, particular, personal troubles,” and, also, it is part of human nature to prefer “a mighty, all-embracing calamity, a monstrous disaster” to any particular and small worry.⁸² Trotta’s immediate reaction to the *Anschluss*, on the novel’s final pages, is to run to the emperor’s tomb, in a similar way that he found refuge there on the night of his return from the war. But it is no longer possible. The tomb is closed, the gate locked, the emperor dead, and a flight into the past is no longer an option.⁸³ Trotta is trapped in the present, indeed, “stranded,” and all he has left is a miserable present and an even more miserable future. The tomb is inaccessible; its possible redemptive powers denied. Here Roth argues that there are limits to taking recourse to the past as a means of providing redemption for the present; all it can provide the present with are clues to its understanding, not solutions. Being locked, trapped or stranded in the present is the only possible predicament for mankind in 1938. In this way, Trotta can be understood not only as the orphaned son of a crazy father with “wild dreams,” but also as the banished son of a symbolic king in the tradition of midrashic parables, where symbolic kings and banished sons are omnipresent.⁸⁴ With the emperor’s locked tomb, it seems that we have run into a definite border, and the possibility of cherishing those things resting behind its walls has forever vanished. Not nostalgic reverence, but political action is what the present demands. Roth already voiced this idea in the novella *The Bust of the Emperor* (1935) in which the ceremonious burial of the emperor’s bust is a sign of Roth’s recognition that the past is the past, precluding the escapist nostalgia of which he is accused, in this novella as well as his 1930s fiction in general.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Joseph Roth, *The Emperor’s Tomb*, p. 49.

⁸² Joseph Roth, *The Emperor’s Tomb*, p. 119.

⁸³ As Howes points out, Klaus Pauli was the first to note the significance of the tomb being locked: “Damit wird ... die Zuflucht zur Geschichte ... als realisierbare Möglichkeit ausgeschlossen” (Klaus Pauli, *Joseph Roth: ‘Die Kapuzinergruft’ und ‘Der stumme Prophet’ – Untersuchungen zu zwei zeitgeschichtlichen Portraitromanen*. Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1985, p. 26). See Howes, ‘Joseph Roth’s *Kapuzinergruft* as a Document of 1938’, p. 163.

⁸⁴ Robert Alter, ‘Jewish Dreams and Nightmares’, in Hana Wirth-Nesher (ed.), *What Is Jewish Literature?* Philadelphia and Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1994, pp. 53-66, p. 64.

⁸⁵ Kati Tonkin, *Joseph Roth’s March into History*, p. 197.

Conclusion

So, what remains?

In this chapter I hope to have shown that Roth's preoccupation with the past was fuelled by an urgent concern for the present as well as the future of the European continent; that his nostalgia was, indeed, a "historical emotion."⁸⁶ Roth did not envision the future as a weak replica of the lost Empire, but as a continuation of the humanist values inherent in the *idea* of the empire, embodied in the cosmopolitan tradition of Vienna; something he would go on to project, from the mid-1920s onwards, on Paris. His mourning of the loss of the empire meant the mourning of the world of the future. Roth's critical nostalgia allowed him to clearly see those aspects of this lost world that contributed to its demise, and it led to the admission, in the form of the locked crypt, that a return to this world was impossible. As Kati Tonkin observed, "Roth's idealization of the universalism of the Habsburg monarchy in comparison with the nationalism of Germany is tempered by his acknowledgement that as far back as Joseph II the Habsburgs misunderstood their own supranational mission, and that through their mistakes they were responsible for the rise of a supercilious nationalism among the ethnic Germans in the empire. Here, as in *Radetzky*, the universalism and supranationalism of the late Habsburg Empire are exposed as more myth than reality."⁸⁷ His initiatives, in the late 1930s, to restore the Habsburg monarchy should therefore not be understood as sentimental reverie, but instead as a last attempt to restore the humanism of a world that was heading towards its own annihilation. Monarchism, he believed, was the only way to restore stability in Central Europe. But, no matter how much Roth was drawn to fantasy and mythmaking in his private life, this was not possible in his art.⁸⁸ The world he presents his readers is a realistic one, aimed at portraying the underlying causes of the catastrophic present. His nostalgia provided him with an intellectual tool that permitted him to be both critically involved in his present while allowing him to preserve those elements, however frail, of the empire he valued so much and felt lacking in the present.

Roth responded to the catastrophic events of the 1930s with a critique of political apathy and fatalism, an idea already developed in his early novels.⁸⁹ Political engagement,

⁸⁶ The term "historical emotion" is from Svetlana Boym.

⁸⁷ Kati Tonkin, *Joseph Roth's March into History*, p. 173.

⁸⁸ As Wilhelm von Sternburg writes: "Auch wenn dieser Autor, der sich bald als Legitimist vor Otto von Habsburg verbeugt und in Vorträgen das österreichische Kaisertum propagiert, es im Leben nicht wahrhaben will, als Künstler kann er sich und seine Leser nicht betrügen: Die Zeit, über die er schreibt, hat sich selbst gerichtet, und Roth erzählt davon." *Joseph Roth. Eine Biographie*, pp. 398-399.

⁸⁹ For an analysis of Roth's early novels in the light of his critique of political apathy, see chapter 2, 'The Early Novels: *Das Spinnennetz*, *Hotel Savoy*, *Die Rebellion*', Kati Tonkin, *Joseph Roth's March into History*, pp. 46-102.

and not apathy, was what was required from engaged European intellectuals. Indeed, the interwar years were in many ways a human and political vacuum in which the old order no longer worked but where a new one was only slowly beginning to take shape; a spiritual vacuum which led many on the road to neo-romanticism and a dangerous idealisation of the irrational and the organic, its ultimate result being Nazism. Despite a desire for order, which the Habsburg monarchy represented in all its instability, Roth stayed put in a condition of ideological homelessness and multiplicity; rooted, as we have seen, in his conviction that identities were plural. By concentrating on the lives of minor and seemingly unimportant figures, Roth wrote against the greats of history, stressing how history's march towards disaster affected the lives of ordinary people. This break with historical continuity also fed his nostalgia, recognising that the past was inaccessible besides what it can tell us about the causes of the troubles of the present.

So, from this burial, we can now move on to life after mourning and its aftermath. In the following chapters, I will analyse the main preoccupations and themes of Roth's intellectual itinerary which by default developed after, yet always in close relation to, the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In it, nostalgia functions as a fuse that amplifies Roth's responses to his present, and his secular Jewish identity as it emerged from the ruins of the empire remained in active opposition to the forces that were driving Europe to the brink of disaster.

IV

The Lamentations of an ‘Old Jew.’ Suffering and Madness

“Ich habe ewig nasse Füße.”

Joseph Roth¹

“Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul; Which long for death, but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures; Which rejoice exceedingly, and are glad, when they find the grave?”

The *Book of Job*, 3:20-23²

Introduction

It has been said, by Jews and Christians alike, that in order to understand *galut*, or exile, we must return to the original *galut*, namely the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden.³ In a similar way, my analysis of Roth’s depictions of suffering starts with a discussion of the biblical *Book of Job*. Job is the only clearly Jewish figure prominently present in Roth’s oeuvre, namely in his novel *Job. The Story of a Simple Man*.⁴ Published in 1930, the story unfolds around the Russian Jew Mendel Singer, a “pious, God-fearing, and ordinary, an entirely commonplace Jew,” who instructs children in the teachings of the

¹ Joseph Roth, in a letter to Benno Reifenberg dated October 1926, *Briefe*, p. 99.

² KJB, *The Book of Job*, p. 553.

³ The view of the perennial and enforced exile of the Jews has recently been challenged in a brilliant book by Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People* (London: Verso 2009). Historical evidence combined with findings in archaeology has shown that there never was an enforced expulsion from Judea after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, and that the myth of Jewish exile, created by the Christians of the Roman Empire, was appropriated by the Jews as part of their own historiography with the aim of facilitating a return to the Holy Land. See especially chapter 3, ‘The Invention of the Exile: Proselytism and Conversion’, pp. 129-189.

⁴ Joseph Roth, *Hiob. Roman eines einfachen Mannes*. Berlin: Gustav Kiepenheuer, 1930. Further references to the novel are from the American edition: Joseph Roth, *Job. The Story of a Simple Man*. Translated by Dorothy Thompson. London: Granta Books, 2000. Critics have subsequently (and doubtfully) labelled *Job* his “quintessential Jewish novel.”

Torah at his humble kitchen table.⁵ The biblical Job, towering over the tale like an ancient shadow, frames the story of this “simple man” in a context that weighs heavily on the shoulders of Mendel Singer, bursting with references to divine justice, pride, humility, guilt, madness, and a simple Jewish man’s losses.

The novel is not just a literary depiction of a biblical figure; an artistic exercise around a charged and fashionable theme. Much more, it presents an intellectual pursuit in exorcising one’s demons; an imaginative attempt to change the course of life and undo the ways of fate. With *Job*, Roth entered a new phase in his literary career in which he openly explored, for the first time, the weights and measures of his Jewish heritage and he began to experiment with phantasmagorical literary techniques. The theodicy spans many areas of Roth’s life, most importantly the recurring fact of mental illness. The schizophrenia of Roth’s wife Friederike and the suffering it caused was the main imperative to explore *Job*, and Roth turned to his Jewish past to find consolation. But it was not just his personal life that provided material for debate. The late 1920s in Germany, after the relative calm of the middle Weimar years, was a time of increased instability and political violence. As a result of the financial crisis and the government’s failure to create a stable and trustworthy democracy, the political milieu turned to the right; antisemitism was on the rise again. The elections of September 1930 saw the Nazis emerge as the second largest party. In retrospect, some scholars have argued that 1930 presented the end of Weimar, with the years 1930-1933 as a prelude.⁶ During these years many Jewish authors turned to the *Book of Job* for answers: what could explain the presence of evil and justify the perennial suffering of the Jews? How could God possibly be just if injustice was the talk of the day?

The narrowing horizon of Jewish life during these years was a critical concern for Roth, and he occupied himself with larger questions such as justice and the possible purpose behind the suffering of man. In this chapter, I will focus on several elements of his personal, literary and intellectual theodicy of suffering. First, I will analyse the biblical figure of Job as Roth portrayed and used him in *Job. The Story of a Simple Man*. Two themes emerge from my reading: justice and mental illness. Roth comes to a rather original, albeit disturbing conclusion in his efforts to reconcile the presence and the purpose of suffering: he diagnoses women as its source. In his entire dialogue with suffering, however, Roth identified with it to such an extent that he actively took on the role of the suffering Jew.

⁵ “Er war fromm, gottesfürchtig und gewöhnlich, ein ganz alltäglicher Jude. [...] Hundertausende vor ihm hatten wie er gelebt und unterrichtet. Unbedeutet wie sein Wesen war sein blasses Gesicht.” Joseph Roth, *Job*, p. 1.

⁶ Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture. The Outsider as Insider*. New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001 (1968), p. 136.

The loss of sanity (his father's, his wife's, his own) became a core element of his identity; an identification he equalled with Jewishness.⁷ Did he, then, suffer *because* he was a Jew?

Exemplary Sufferers: Jews, Artists, and Righteous Men

The *Book of Job* opens with the words: "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job: and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil."⁸ It is these God-fearing qualities that carry the seeds of Job's misfortune. One day Satan appears in the divine Court and challenges God's good opinion of Job. Job is pious, Satan claims, only because God has made him prosperous. Once stricken by poverty, he will lose his faith. And so, in all adversity, Job is handed over to Satan as a puppet in God's hands. Everything is taken from him; his house is swept to the ground by a great wind, killing his eldest brother, three daughters and seven sons. Job falls down to his knees, fearing God. In his seven days of mourning, three friends sit with him in silence, aware and respectful of his great grief. When Job opens his mouth to speak again, he "curses his day" and demands to reason with God. He wants to know "why me?"; in other words, a justification for God's actions. Job's friends beg him to confess his sins, and in doing so reveal a classical teleological error. Their assumption is that God always punishes evil and rewards good, and since God cannot be guilty of injustice, Job must be hiding a sin. After much suffering, doubt and debate, a voice appears out of a thunderous cloud, recounting "the music of creation."⁹ Faced with God's ultimate freedom in deciding over the fate of his miraculous creation that is the world, Job is humbled. This revelation from the whirlwind, the 'seeing' of the Divine itself, takes away any desire for moral restitution, and the suffering servant is restored to health and prosperity. Job dies, surrounded by his sons and the most beautiful daughters, an old and wise man.

Dealing with the ancient dilemma of reconciling the presence of evil and suffering in the world with the existence of God, the *Book of Job* has been called "the most profound and literary work of the entire Old Testament."¹⁰ It is part of the so-called tradition of

⁷ The work of American cultural and literary historian Sander L. Gilman has been seminal in this respect. He has contributed greatly to the study of madness in Jewish history with such studies as, amongst others, *Seeing the Insane: A Cultural History of Psychiatric Illustration* (1982), *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (1986), *The Visibility of the Jew in the Diaspora: Body Imagery and Its Cultural Context* (1992), *Hysteria: A New History* (1993), and *Jewish Frontiers: Essays on Bodies, Histories, and Identities* (2003).

⁸ KJB, *The Book of Job*, 1:1.

⁹ Edward F. Mooney, 'Kierkegaard's Job Discourse: Getting back the world', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Volume 34, Number 3 (December 1993), pp. 151-169, p. 158.

¹⁰ John L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible*. London: Simon & Schuster, 1965, p. 440.

“wisdom-literature”, those books of the Bible that examine the purpose of life and how to live. It is a book of opposites, structured in dialogues about life and death, light and darkness, guilt and innocence.¹¹ What makes the book so fascinating is the unexpected disconnection between evil and suffering. Its main quandary is man’s relationship with God, and the book comes to the conclusion that suffering is not necessarily an indication of sin, which is “a major break in religious thinking.”¹² By removing the logical causality between doing evil and suffering, it catapults suffering into the realm of the existential, i.e. right into the daily lives of the humble. It confronts the moral question posed by the suffering of the righteous: how one is to understand the suffering of a good, humble, god-fearing man? If one cannot challenge the moral authority of God, how, then, is a righteous man to relate to his misfortunes other than to simply bear them? If even God cannot provide an explanation for a man’s earthly sufferings, who can? What does it mean to suffer?

According to Moses Maimonides, the twelfth-century rabbi and scholar mostly known for his *Guide for the Perplexed*, the story of Job presents us with an instruction on how to live religiously.¹³ It is not enough to be a pious man, to simply observe the daily rituals and be grateful for one’s blessings, such as Mendel Singer, who lives by the rhythm of the clock ticking away in unexamined obedience.¹⁴ Instead, according to Maimonides, for a man to be truly religious, he must constantly examine, question, and delve into his faith. God abandons Job so that he will turn inwards and reflect on his faith. Here, the suffering of the righteous functions as a protection against even greater evils, for the moral betterment of the believer and the creation of an unwavering faith in God in times of adversary. In Roth’s *Job*, Mendel’s suffering has the opposite effect, and he turns

¹¹ NBV *Studiebijbel. De Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling met uitleg, achtergronden en illustraties*. Heerenveen: Uitgeverij Jongbloed, 2010 (2008), pp. 733-786.

¹² Esther Benbassa, *Suffering as Identity*, p. 7.

¹³ Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*. Revised Edition. New York: Dover Publications, 2000, III-22-23. For a discussion of Maimonides in the context of Jewish scholars who self-fashioned their lives and work in the framework of being “solitary prophets” see David N. Myers’s *Between Jew & Arab. The Lost Voice of Simon Rawidowicz*. (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2008), pp. 34-35.

¹⁴ Mendel Singer’s life is structured by the ticking of the clock. Clocks appear everywhere throughout the novel and as such give it an internal narrative structure. “Finally the clock on the wall struck three, the hour when the pupils assembled in the afternoon” (17); “Soon the clock would strike six, the hour when Mendel Singer was accustomed to rise. [...] and the clock ticked and struck six, and the man breathed. [...] The clock struck like a release.” (22); when Shemiah has safely reached the first town after the border, “a tower clock struck six. [...] The wall clock of the Singers also struck six. Mendel arose, gargled, cleared his throat, murmured a morning prayer. [...] Then Deborah, still standing at the stove, swallowed her hot tea. ‘Where is Shemiah?’ she said suddenly. They had all been thinking of him.” (57); in a clerk’s office, petitioning for papers, where Mendel sits and waits, “one heard the ticking of the clock.” (88); upon receiving the news of Shemiah’s death, “It was so still, one heard the sharp ticking of the clock.” (152); indicating the end of a mournful, sleepless night, “Six strokes sounded from inside the clock.” (171); foretelling the arrival of spring, “The clock had not yet struck six when the water on the spirit lamp began to purr. [...] It was spring.” (183).

blasphemous. There are no answers, and the *Book of Job* does not provide them. Wisdom lies in the complete acceptance of God's authority. The little we know about Roth's religious experiences tells us that he subscribed to the God of the Jewish tradition, i.e. He who encapsulates both good and evil and who does not sever his bonds with mankind despite its sins.¹⁵ His literary characters react to their misfortunes without rebellion, do not question them, but instead try to maintain their own sense of justice in the midst of it.¹⁶

In Jewish discourse, the role of suffering has been the subject of controversial debates. Increasingly scholars consider a profound focus on suffering, especially the trials and tribulations of exile, to be a self-defeating approach that undermines the aims of Jewish self-determination and identity.¹⁷ Others cling to the century-old conception of expulsion as divine punishment, as proof of the Jews' special covenant with God. In this view, suffering is an essential part of Jewish fate. In Christian discourse, too, a positive value is placed on suffering. Susan Sontag has noted how in the West, as a result of its Christian legacy and the paradigm of the Cross, suffering is seen as the supreme token of seriousness. "For two thousand years," she writes, "among Christians and Jews, it has been spiritually fashionable to be in pain." This tradition assumes a strong connection between suffering and creation, and Sontag argues that our contemporary interest in the tortured souls of writers and artists is a result of their closeness to suffering. In our time, the artist has replaced the saint, or, for that matter the biblical figures, as the "exemplary sufferer."¹⁸ No doubt part of Roth's appeal lies in his tragic life. However it is important not to base any interpretation of his intellectual legacy on the easy equation of suffering and

¹⁵ Hans Otto Horsch, "Im Grunde ist er sehr jüdisch geblieben...": Zum Verhältnis von 'Katholizismus' und Judentum bei Joseph Roth', in Frank-Ruther Hausmann et. al. (ed.), *Literatur in der Gesellschaft: Festschrift für Theo Buck zum 60: Geburtstag*. Tübingen: Narr, 1990, pp. 211-224, p. 219.

¹⁶ "Religie, zoals Roth het zag, was het vermogen om rechtvaardig en rancuneloos te zijn, ongeacht de materiële omstandigheden waarin men verkeert, hoe onrechtvaardig die ook zijn. [...] In *De Antichrist* komt die gedachte telkens terug: de personages die als 'rechtvaardig' worden omschreven maken zich niet kwaad over het onrecht dat hun wordt aangedaan, maar richten hun inspanningen op het bewaren van hun eigen rechtvaardigheid en de acceptatie van de schepping zoals die is; licht èn donker, goed èn slecht." Ewoud Kieft, 'Joseph Roth en De Antichrist. Religieus engagement in de strijd tegen de nazi's', in Hans Blom, Lieve Gevers & Paul Luykx (eds.), *Religie: Godsdienst en geweld in de twintigste eeuw*. Jaarboek NIOD 17. Zutphen, 2006, pp. 115-136, p. 132.

¹⁷ A recent critique of the Jewish focus on suffering or the idea of Jewish history as a "valley of tears" comes from Esther Benbassa in *Suffering as Identity. The Jewish Paradigm* (London: Verso, 2010).

¹⁸ "And why are we interested in the soul of the writer? Not because we are so interested in writers as such. But because of the insatiable modern preoccupation with psychology, the latest and most powerful legacy of the Christian tradition of introspection, opened up by Paul and Augustine, which equates the discovery of the self with the discovery of the suffering self. For the modern consciousness, the artist (replacing the saint) is the exemplary sufferer. And among artists, the writer, the man of words, is the person to whom we look to be able best to express his suffering. The writer is the exemplary sufferer because he has found both the deepest level of suffering and also a professional means to sublimate (in the literal, not the Freudian, sense of sublimate) his suffering. As a man, he suffers: as a writer, he transforms his suffering into art." Susan Sontag, 'The artist as exemplary sufferer', in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. London: Deutsch, 1987, pp. 41-42.

Jewishness, even if, as I will show, Roth himself made this active link. The Jew, especially after the Holocaust, has become the quintessential victim, the “archetypical sufferer,” a projected or assumed identity that remains essentially empty.¹⁹ Therefore it is important to examine Roth’s conceptualisations of suffering in a critical light, starting with his novel *Job*.

Job (1930): The Creation of Mendel Singer

Roth’s *Job* is the story of a humble Jewish family from a Russian *shtetl* that is afflicted by war, mental illness, and death. In order to save his family from complete disintegration, Mendel takes them to America, where more misfortune befalls them. In New York, upon the deaths of his wife and son, Mendel stays alone, blasphemous and lost, until the miraculous return of his long-lost and crippled son Menuchim. Since Roth’s most revered depiction of suffering takes place within the context of the family, the story prompts a discussion of the role of women. In *Job*, Roth places guilt and sin in the hands and bodies of women who are susceptible to mental instability and hysteria, and whose presence disrupts the unity of the secure male symbolic order. Both Mendel Singer’s wife Deborah and their daughter Mirjam suffer in a way that is deeply connected to guilt and the disruption of Jewish law.²⁰ Mirjam’s mental decline is a divine punishment, but it is Mendel Singer who is punished, not his daughter. Since mental illness was a ghost at Roth’s café table in the form of his absent mad father and his wife Friederike, the tale reflects back on him and prompts questions about the role madness played in Roth’s life.

Job was first published in serial form, between 14 September and 21 October 1930, in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. The book’s reception was good, and in 1931 the American edition appeared with New York’s Viking Press. Two years later the English edition followed, and sales greatly increased when, in an interview for a London newspaper, Marlene Dietrich named *Job* her favourite book (and in her 1962 autobiography, *Marlene Dietrich’s ABC*, she once again expressed her admiration for the novel).²¹ The film rights were bought by Fox

¹⁹ Esther Benbassa, *Suffering as Identity*, p. 114.

²⁰ Anne Fuchs, ‘Roth’s Ambivalence: The Logic of Separation in His Writings on Eastern Jewry’, in Anne Fuchs, *A Space of Anxiety. Dislocation and Abjection in Modern German-Jewish Literature* (Amsterdamer Publikationen zur Sprache und Literatur 138). Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999, pp. 81-122.

²¹ The American edition, called *Job. The Story of a Simple Man*, was published in New York in 1931 by The Viking Press, and translated by Dorothy Thompson, whom Roth asked for advice about his description of New York streets and customs in the novel. The newspaper article in which Marlene Dietrich indicated *Job* as her favourite book was entitled “Marlene Dietrich Confesses” and was written by Peter Halley and published in London’s *Sunday Referee* on 1 November 1936. When asked “What is your favourite book?” she simply answers, “*Job*, by Joseph Roth.” In brackets a comment says: “*Job*: An English version of this German novel

Entertainment, who quickly rejected the script written by Russian-Jewish playwright Ossip Dymov and Frederick Kohner in favour of an adaptation of the book where the hero, stripped off all Jewish markers, reappears, still a pious man, as a Catholic from South Tyrol. As *Sins of Man*, the film, now aimed at “all men” instead of one “simple, Jewish man,” betrays the universalist aspirations so characteristic of the Hollywood that Roth despised.²²

Roth’s biographer David Bronsen placed the book firmly on the historiographical map by repeatedly describing it as “erzjüdisch,” “arch-Jewish.”²³ Bronsen’s view has long been considered authoritative, but recently other voices have emerged. *Job* has subsequently been read as a story of disillusionment, bitterness and mockery²⁴; as a variation of the Jewish myth in the midst of a hostile environment²⁵; as a prefiguration of a post-war German-Jewish symbiosis²⁶; as a modernist collage of literary images in which the world of the Russian *Ostjuden* is a “literary construct”²⁷; as an expression of Jewish abjection and dislocation²⁸; as a plea for equanimity through the Shabbat ritual²⁹; as a treatment of the classic literary theme of father-son within the Jewish tradition³⁰; as a spiritual exploration of a new world³¹; and, finally, as a tale of the disastrous effects of feminine assimilatory desire.³² A striking commonality in these various interpretations is the distillation of what critics have called the book’s ‘ultimate humanity.’ Sidney Rosenfeld called it a “profoundly

was published by Heinemann, 1933.” Her autobiography *Marlene Dietrich’s ABC* was published in New York in 1961/2 by Doubleday (her mention of *Job* can be found on page 192).

²² In a context unrelated to Roth yet referring to the *Book of Job*, Edward F. Mooney points to the “Hollywood ending” of the Biblical story (referring to the doubling of all Job’s fortunes before his suffering). The prologue, in which God’s good judgement of Job is challenged, and the epilogue, restoring Job to the riches of the world, frame the core lyric of the *Book of Job*. According to Mooney, this particular ‘folk tale’ framing, including the happy end, provides for ‘easy answers’ and as such does not include them in his analysis. (155)

²³ David Bronsen, *Joseph Roth. Eine Biographie*, pp. 11 and 72. In his discussion of the book, Bronsen doesn’t engage in a discussion of its Jewishness, taking it as a given, and instead focuses on the other main historiographical question, i.e. the poetic justification of its miraculous ending.

²⁴ G.P. Butler, ‘It’s the Bitterness that Counts: Joseph Roth’s ‘most Jewish’ Novel Reconsidered,’ *German Life and Letters*, Vol. 41 Issue 3 (April 1988), pp. 227-234.

²⁵ Guy Stern, ‘Job as Alter Ego: The Bible, Ancient Jewish Discourse, and Exile Literature,’ *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (Spring 1990), pp. 199-210.

²⁶ Sidney Rosenfeld, ‘Joseph Roth’s *Hiob* and the Question of the German-Jewish Symbiosis,’ *Austriaca. Cahiers Universitaires d’Information sur l’Autriche*. Rouen, No. 30 (June 1990), pp. 23-31.

²⁷ Robertson, Ritchie, ‘Roth’s *Hiob* and the Traditions of Ghetto Fiction,’ in *Co-Existent Contradictions: Joseph Roth in Retrospect. Papers of the 1989 Joseph Roth Symposium at Leeds University to Commemorate the 50th Anniversary*, Helen Chambers (ed.), Riverside, California: Ariadne Press, June 1991, pp. 185-200.

²⁸ Fuchs, Anne, ‘Roth’s Ambivalence: The Logic of Separation in His Writings on Eastern Jewry,’ in Anne Fuchs, *A Space of Anxiety. Dislocation and Abjection in Modern German-Jewish Literature* (Amsterdamer Publikationen zur Sprache und Literatur 138). Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999, pp. 81-122.

²⁹ Daniel Hoffmann, ‘Des Herzens Gleichmut. Eine jüdische Lektüre von Joseph Roths “Hiob”,’ in *“Im neuen Einband Gott gereicht”: liturgische Poesie in der deutsch-jüdischen Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Berlin: Juedische Verlagsanstalt, 2002, pp. 109-126.

³⁰ Richard N. Atkins, ‘Some Thoughts about Joseph Roth and Job,’ *National Synagogue Book Club*, March 19, 2006.

³¹ Dieter Schrey, ‘Geistige Grundlagen für eine neue Welt? Joseph Roths “Hiob”-Roman in geistes- und kulturgeschichtlichen Kontexten’, <http://home.bn-ulm.de/~ulschrey/roth/index.html>.

³² Katja Garloff, ‘Femininity and Assimilatory Desire in Joseph Roth,’ *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 51, Number 2 (Summer 2005), pp. 354-373.

human story of loss and renewal, whose essence transcends the bounds of national particularities.”³³ Geoffrey P. Butler warns against an unquestioned reading of *Job* as a mostly ‘Jewish’ novel since this may “obscure the profound components at its core which may in fact account for much of its durability.”³⁴ An awareness of the essentially Jewish background against which Mendel Singer’s misery unfolds may account for intelligent readings or observations, Butler says, but it is not what explains the story’s lasting durability. Instead, it is that part of the story that speaks to a more general human level that creates its appeal, its tears, if we may, and that makes it “for the most part a credible story of human distress.”³⁵

Implicit in this latter view is the assumption that a Jewish story couldn’t possibly have the wide appeal that befell Roth’s *Job* and, consequently, that there must be something in the tale that transcends this Jewishness. What we observe here is the desire to disconnect the great human appeal of the book from its obviously Jewish context; or, in the words of Anne Fuchs, the urge to silence “the articulation of cultural difference in order to arrive at the [...] humanist core.”³⁶ Instead, Fuchs advocates an emphasis on the book’s Jewishness by placing it, besides its biblical context, in a tradition of Jewish ghetto writing. In doing so she stresses the importance of the *melamed*, the impoverished Torah and Talmud teacher that is Mendel Singer, the *shtetl*, as well as the scripting of the Singer’s Jewish family system which is constantly under treat. Despite Fuchs’s highly original and in my opinion just reading of *Job*, many still feel that in order to explain the great humanity underlying Roth’s depiction of suffering, its “universal” appeal, they have to discard the Jewish particularities of Mendel’s suffering.³⁷

³³ Sidney Rosenfeld, ‘Joseph Roth’s *Hiob* and the Question of the German-Jewish Symbiosis,’ p. 28.

³⁴ G.P. Butler, ‘It’s the Bitterness that Counts’, p. 227. Anne Fuchs points at the “poor logic” inherent in the implicit assumption that “an essentially Jewish story could not have had such a wide appeal”: “At the best of times, this is poor logic which once more begs the question as to why the readers’ tears should at all be explained without reference to the hero’s particular circumstances in the novel – clearly, Butler’s argument effectively silences the articulation of cultural difference in order to arrive at the aforementioned humanist core.” Anne Fuchs, ‘Roth’s Ambivalence’, p. 102 and footnote 67 on pages 103-4.

³⁵ Butler states that the particularities of Mendel Singer’s suffering – the Russian world of anti-semitism and the *shtetl*, his humble job as a *melamed*, his homelessness in New York – can of course not be entirely dissociated from the story’s appeal, but they are not crucial, since “his downhill journey, the apparently unprovoked buffeting he suffered, was harrowing and real enough in all conscience.” G.P. Butler, ‘It’s the Bitterness that Counts’, p. 231-2.

³⁶ Anne Fuchs, ‘Roth’s Ambivalence’, p. 108. The treats posed to the Singer family system include Mirjam’s sexual relationships with a Russian Cossack, breaking essential Jewish laws on marriage and conduct; her attraction to the ‘glamour’ of the Gentile world; the suggestion that Menuchim be treated in a Gentile hospital, posing a treat to Jewish dietary laws; Deborah’s despise of her husband’s lack of status and her envy of others’ wealth. On ghetto fiction, see Anne Fuchs and Florian Krobb (eds.), *Ghetto Writing: Traditional and Eastern Jewry in German-Jewish Literature from Heine to Hilsenrath*. London: Camden House, 1999.

³⁷ He is, Geoffrey Butler writes, “above all surely a rather indistinct personification of poverty and of patience in the face of what appeared to be undeserved affliction, *not a Jew but a sufferer* originating in the Scriptures

This “silencing of cultural differences” is indeed highly problematic. The tendency to read the biblical Job as a symbol for entire’s mankind’s plight stripped of his Jewish markers has a long history; indeed, the idea of Job as the “exemplar for all humankind” is not new.³⁸ Now Roth, writing in 1929, wasn’t alone in turning to biblical themes in difficult times. The increased presence of Old Testament themes in German-Jewish exile literature in the years following 1933 was a reaction to the threatening urgency of those years. Theodical questions arose all the more forcefully, and literary invocations of the *Book of Job* were in need, in the company of so much modern evil. Indeed, none of the biblical books held such hold over the literary imagination of exiled writers as the *Book of Job*, and many writers identified with the biblical figure in their own suffering. While, during the days of Weimar, the majority of German Jewry had gladly taken upon themselves many aspects of the German cultural past, after 1933, with the roads to assimilation closed, they were plunged back into the resources of their Jewish heritage. This rediscovery of traditional Jewish values was partly a reaction to political developments, i.e. the rise of Nazism and its unwavering antisemitism, that forced this turn inwards. However, it was also part of a greater trend in German-Jewish modernism which evoked the world of Eastern Jewry as an authentic alternative to a soulless and mechanic modern existence in the West. Both developments were a reaction to external threats to Jewish life that prompted reflections about Jewish identity in hostile surroundings, and the Old Testament proved a source of inspiration and hope.³⁹ Job’s fate played a crucial role in the attempt to give a literary voice to the sufferings of the Jewish people in the years leading up to the Second World War. Job was reinvigorated to safeguard Jews from a certain numbness or speechlessness in the face of unutterable cruelty.⁴⁰ For some, Job’s fate even foreshadowed the entire destiny of the Jewish people in exile.⁴¹ In the very least, Job became a symbol for modern Jewish

whose tribal and religious credentials were of secondary importance.” G.P. Butler, ‘It’s the Bitterness that Counts’, p. 231, emphasis mine.

³⁸ “Read *Job*,” said Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), “read him; everything about him is so human.” See Edward F. Mooney, ‘Kierkegaard’s Job Discourse: Getting back the world’, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Volume 34, Number 3 (December 1993), pp. 151-169, p. 152.

³⁹ Stern writes: “It was not only the external dictates of Nazi cultural hegemony but also inner necessity that turned exile writers and their public to the Bible and other traditional Jewish sources, that is, outer and inner direction supplemented each other. The questioning of Jewish identity in hostile surroundings launched the quest for a new sense of being; the Bible provided ready models and analogous situations.” About hope, he says: “Yet, the Hebrew Bible was also consistently mined for its recurring theme of hope and as a source for restoring Jewish self-esteem. [...] As so many writers and artists before them, the exiles used the Bible to restore hope.” Guy Stern, ‘Job as Alter Ego’, pp. 201 and 207.

⁴⁰ Daniel Hoffmann, ‘Des Herzens Gleichmut’, p. 109.

⁴¹ Margarete Susman, ‘Das Hiob-Problem bei Kafka’, in Ingeborg Nordmann (ed.), *Das Nah- und Fernsein des Fremden. Essays und Briefe*. Frankfurt am Main: Jüdischer Verlag, 1992, pp. 183-202, p. 188. Quoted from Daniel Hoffmann, ‘Des Herzens Gleichmut’, p. 109.

suffering and his story a reservoir of motives and material, a blueprint on which many novelists crafted their own work.

Besides providing a frame for the experiences of exiled German-Jewish writers, variations on the Job theme have in common that they refuse the idea of suffering as a test. Most Jewish novelists of the time were convinced that contemporary Jewish suffering was not a divine test or punishment; instead, the crimes inflicted against the Jews were the crimes of man against man. Not one writer doubles the happy ending of the *Book of Job*; there is no restitution for Job, no new state of Israel for Moses, and no prefigurations of an actual, living messiah.⁴² Here, Roth's happy ending, in the form of the miraculous return of the crippled son, now a famous composer, stands in sharp contrast to the solemn and sorrowful interpretations of his contemporaries. Against the odds of the times, Roth made sure there was restitution for his Job. He may not have been speaking for all Jews, but he was definitely speaking for himself: a singular "poor Jew" at a time when his feelings of desperation about Friederike's illness were at its peak.

"An old Jew with a heavy heart." Roth's Lamentations

Spiralling down centuries into time from the biblical Job, we find an anxious Joseph Roth writing feverishly about the misfortunes of Mendel Singer under critical conditions of his own in Paris in 1929. By this time Roth had quietly but firmly established himself as "a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity."⁴³ 1929 was the year in which Friederike's schizophrenia had become so profound that she was sent away, first to friends and family, and then, in December 1930, to the Rekawinkel Sanatorium near Vienna. In 1926 she had already been treated in Dr. Weiler's Kuranstalten "für Nerven- und Gemütsleidende, Stoffwechselkranke und Erholungsbedürftige" on the Nußbaumallee in Berlin. Her illness, which many considered an expression of extreme sensitivity to life's increasing demands – tensions with her husband, their unstable hotel existence and his increased drinking; in other words, "female hysteria" – was diagnosed as the flu and weakness of the lungs. In 1928, a Frankfurt doctor diagnosed her case as "hopeless" and advised that she be under

⁴² Guy Stern, 'Job as Alter Ego', pp. 201 and 204.

⁴³ From *Isaiah*, 53:3, foretelling the sufferings of Christ: "He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and one from whom others hide their faces; he was despised, and we held him no account." The *KJB* gives a slightly different translation: "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid as if were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

constant observation as her illness may prompt her to jump out of the window.⁴⁴ In 1929, unwilling to admit to the severity of his wife's illness and unable to talk about it, Roth described it as an "Anfall von Schwäche, faiblesse comme des vagues..." and sends her, in the company of a nurse, to the Kurort Franzensbad in Tschechia.⁴⁵ Until December 1933 Friederike is interned at the Rekawinkel Sanatorium near Vienna. Roth's political exile in January 1933 deprived him of his usual income, and it became impossible to pay for his wife's treatment. Friederike was taken to an official institution, the Landes- Heil- und Pflegeanstalt für Geistes- und Nervenranke "Am Steinhof" in Vienna, where she stayed until June 1935.⁴⁶ From June 1935 until July 1940, with the help of Roth's friend and author Franz Theodor Csokor, Friederike moved to the Landespflegeanstalt Mauer-Öhling near Amstetten, relieving Roth of a heavy financial burden. In July 1940, one year after her husband's death, Friederike was sent to the Heil- und Pflegeanstalt für Geistesranke Am Steinhof in Niedernhart near Linz/Donau where, on 15 July 1940, she was murdered by the Nazis as part of their "euthanasia programme."

Roth met Friederike Reichler in Café Herrenhof in Vienna in the autumn of 1919. At the time she was engaged to another man but soon broke off the engagement to be with Roth. They got married in Vienna's Synagogue in the Pazmanitenstraße on 5 March 1922, just days after the death of Roth's mother. Friederike was born the eldest daughter of Sigmund 'Selig' Reichler (1875-1958) and his wife Jenny 'Jente' Torczyner (1876-1954) on 12 May 1900. Friederike, together with her two sisters Hedy and Erna, grew up in a family that observed traditional Jewish religious law. Having lived all their life in Vienna's Haus am Tabor 15 in Leopoldstadt, the Reichlers immigrated to Palestine in 1935, a move that Roth considered a severe abandonment of both Friederike and himself.⁴⁷ In Géza von Cziffra's memoir, we encounter Friederike as a small and anxious woman, beautiful, with black hair and dark eyes, prone to giving frightened stares and starting every sentence with an apologetic and insecure "Oh..." Ludwig von Marcuse explains the inflamed portrait

⁴⁴ Bronsen, *Joseph Roth. Eine Biographie*, p. 336. As Benno Reifenberg's wife Maryla remembers, "Wir hatten inzwischen Dr. Goldstein, einen bekannten Frankfurter Nervenarzt, kommen lassen, der von Anfang an sagte, der Fall sei aussichtslos. Aber Roth wollte nichts davon hören und meinte, es handele sich um eine falsche Diagnose. Andererseits zeigte sich Roth sofort einverstanden mit dem Rat des Arztes, man sollte Friedl nicht einen Augenblick allein lassen." The word that Dr. Goldstein used to describe Friederike's condition was "aussichtslos."

⁴⁵ Joseph Roth, in a letter to Félix Bertaux dated 13 February 1928, *Briefe*, pp. 122-123.

⁴⁶ It is interesting to note here that years before his wife's internment at Am Steinhof, Roth wrote a feuilleton about the institution (this was in 1919). It again appears by the exact name in his novel *Flight without End*. Am Steinhof was taken over by the Nazi's in 1938 following the annexation of Austria.

⁴⁷ "Ich habe Schreckliches, das sich zum alten Schrecklichen fügt. Meine Schwiegereltern wandern nach Palästina aus. Dieser alten Leute wegen habe ich so viel für meine Frau getan, jetzt verlässt die Mutter ihr Kind, ich allein bin die Mutter." Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 18 September 1934, *Briefe*, pp. 379-80.

Roth created of his wife (he compared her to Madame de Staël) as a way of dealing with his embarrassment about her lack of interest in literary and intellectual matters. Apparently, Roth's ideal wife was a woman who would sit beside him at the café table, engaged in highly stimulating conversation with friends and writers while inviting the awe of waiters. According to Bronsen, Roth enforced this ideal image upon Friederike to such an extent that it caused distortions in her psyche, an observation supported by Marcuse.⁴⁸ The mythology surrounding Friederike includes Roth's tale of her premature death: he told his orthodox Jewish uncle that Friederike had died. An explanation for this may be that, for an orthodox Jew, to have a dead wife is still better than to have a wife who is "von bösen Dybuk besessen."⁴⁹

According to Irmgard Keun, Roth often expressed the fear that he would end his days in a lunatic asylum, a fear she believed stemmed from Roth's awareness of the risks of alcohol for his mental health. This fear, however, may have also been hereditary, as the memory of his insane father loomed large above his precarious sense of his own sanity. In a letter to Stefan Zweig from July 1934, Roth writes: "Wie umstellt ich ringsum bin von Finsternissen! Ich fürchte, tageweise, für meinen Verstand, und die Ahnungen kommen wieder, die ich seit meinen Knabenzeit nicht mehr gekannt hatte: dass ich im selben Alter verrückt werde, wie mein Vater."⁵⁰ And, two years later: "Ich werde totkrank oder verrückt, vielleicht bin ich es schon."⁵¹ Roth's father Nachum Roth, a grain merchant, never came back from one of his train journeys to Germany shortly before Roth's birth. On the train, he suffered a mental breakdown and was taken to a sanatorium in Galicia where he died, years later in 1910, anonymously and deranged in the care of a miracle rabbi. Roth never knew his father, but this paternal image loomed large in his imagination and caused a break in Roth's conceptions of generational continuity, heritage, and home. It created a seminal break in the chain of generations which he subsequently tried to reconstruct in his novels and relationships, imagined and real, to Emperor Franz Joseph and Stefan Zweig. This constant threat of living in the shadow of hereditary madness developed into a sense of being persecuted, of being, indeed, punished.

⁴⁸ "Ich kannte Friedl am Anfang als ein reizendes, intelligentes, sehr lustiges Wiener Mädchen. Aber Roth's Typ war die elegante, zurückhaltende Dame, und er modelte an seiner Frau, bis er sie zu einem Dichtungsgeschöpf machte und ihr jede Natürlichkeit raubte. Sie mußte nach seinen Anweisungen spielen, und er hat sie zugrunde gerichtet." From an interview that Bronsen conducted with Ludwig Marcuse; quoted from Von Sternburg, *Joseph Roth*, p. 224.

⁴⁹ Géza von Cziffra, *Der Heilige Trinker*, p. 75.

⁵⁰ Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 11 July 1934, *Briefe*, p. 349.

⁵¹ Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated February 1936, *Briefe*, p. 451. Hermann Kesten, in his introduction to the letters, subscribes to the view of Roth's "inherited" fear for his mental health (p. 13).

Thus, the creation of *Job* was embedded in a context of mental illness, soaked, as it were, in intense anxiety about Friederike's worsening condition and a great sense of guilt for her decline.⁵² Stefan Zweig, brought to tears when Roth read him passages of the novel, recognised Friederike's reflection in the character of Mirjam. In October 1930, in a letter addressed to Jenny Reichler one month before Friederike was taken to the Rekawinkel Sanatorium, Roth asked his parents-in-law to prevent Friederike from reading the novel, afraid that this would worsen her condition. "Friedl sollte lieber mein Buch nicht lesen," he writes. "Es ist darin beschrieben, wie Mirjam geisteskrank wird, und das wird die doch verstehen. So lange sie in dieser gehässigen Stimmung bleibt und auf alle Welt böse ist, bleibt sie leider auch krank, und man darf ihr nicht Alles zutrauen. Vielleicht schadet es ihr, wenn sie mein Buch liest."⁵³ The correspondence between Roth and the Reichlers, whom he since his marriage to Friederike addressed as "Eltern" and "Vater und Mutter," focuses on Friederike's predicament and the heavy psychological and financial burden this put on Roth. In often desolate letters Roth laments their fate: "God punishes us, who knows, what for... I am rather defenceless against this fate..." And later: "I go around with a heavy heart, like an old Jew. [...] Perhaps God will finally help."⁵⁴ He repeatedly emphasises his lack of means to care for her, but he keeps quiet about his actual income, his own high living expenses and hotel bills, and, poignantly, the costs of living with other women (at this time his lover Andrea Manga Bell). He contemplated divorce, but never did. Roth's need to believe in a miracle is echoed in the description of Deborah's belief in a reversal of her son's fate:

Deborah was silent. She heard the words of the Rabbi of Kluczýsk: "Do not leave him, stay with him, as though he were a healthy child." She was not staying with him. For long years, day and night, hour after hour, she had waited for the promised miracle. The dead, beyond, did not help; the

⁵² As Bronsen observed, it was Roth's sense of guilt for Friederike's illness that preoccupied him and kept him attached to the theme of mental illness in many ways: "Die Inspiration zu diesem jüdischen seiner Romane schöpft Roth aus der Quelle seiner größten Betroffenheit – der zermürbenden und nicht endenwollenden Qual durch die unheilbare geistige Umnachtung seiner Frau, für die er sich verantwortlich fühlt." Bronsen, *Joseph Roth*, p. 382.

⁵³ Heinz Lunzer & Victoria Lunzer-Talos, *Joseph Roth: Leben und Werke in Bildern* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1994), p. 113. The whole text of the letter, as well as an image of the letter itself, is printed there. The English text (translation mine) reads: "Friedl should better not read my book. It describes how Mirjam becomes mentally ill, and she would understand. As long as she remains in this spiteful mood and is angry with the entire world, she unfortunately also remains ill, and we shouldn't entrust her with everything. Perhaps it will harm her, when she reads my book."

⁵⁴ "Aus Paris schreibt er an die Schwiegermutter: "Der liebe Gott straft uns, wer weiß, wofür ... ich bin ganz ohnmächtig gegen dieses Schicksal ..." Wiederholte Male beschwört er "Gottes Hilfe" und wie ein Refrain aus dem Munde Mendel Singers klinkt die Klage: "Ich fahre mit schweren Herzen, wie ein alter Jud", um darauf wieder einmal fortzufahren: "Vielleicht hilft endlich Gott..." " David Bronsen, *Joseph Roth. Eine Biographie*, p. 384.

Rabbi did not help; God did not want to help. She had wept an ocean of tears. Night had been in her heart, misery in every pleasure, since the day of Menuchim's birth. All festivals had been tortures, and all holidays had been days of mourning. There was no spring and no summer. All seasons were winter. The sun rose, but it did not warm. Hope alone refused to die. "He will always be a cripple," said the neighbours. *For they had not been visited with misfortune, and he who has had no misfortunes does not believe in miracles.*⁵⁵

Roth's representation of the *tsaddik* mockingly defies rational approaches to Jewish mysticism dominant in this time. Influenced by the ancient Hasidic tales collected by Martin Buber, whom he admired, Roth's miracle rabbi is an entirely serious character. Against more common portrayals of the *tsaddik* in German-Jewish literature as a corrupt charlatan or a figure from a backward and superstitious Eastern Jewish world, Roth's rabbi is the novel's chief spiritual authority.⁵⁶ Echoes of the Frankfurt doctor who warned Roth not to leave his wife out of sight resound in the description of Deborah's visit to the miracle rabbi. Menuchim, the rabbi says, "is hers even as a healthy child. Pain will make him wise, ugliness good, bitterness mild, and sickness strong."⁵⁷ When Friederike's psychotic episodes became unbearable, on Roth's request his friend Stefan Fingal fetched a miracle rabbi from the Hirtenstrasse ghetto in Berlin. Together they sat with her while the rabbi prayed in Yiddish and Roth probed him about faith and the destiny of man. Fingal told David Bronsen years later: "Ich sah wie inbrünstig er gebetet hat, wie besessen er war. Ganz meschugge und gewalttätig. Joseph Roth hat sich ausgezeichnet mit dem Mann unterhalten – Stunden und Tagelang. Fasziniert war Roth, unterhielt sich mit ihm Stunden un Tage lang."⁵⁸ It didn't heal her, yet Roth was full of hope about the rabbi's healing abilities and paid him generously.⁵⁹ "Roth was ungeheuer zurückhalten mit dem Thema von seiner Frau," said Fritz Gotfurt. "Es war ein sehr jüdischer Wahnsinn – für irgendwelche jüdische Sünde – das hat sich herumgesprochen. Sie versuchte Selbstmord zu begehen."⁶⁰ Whether Roth believed his wife had committed a sin in order to be so severely punished is not clear, but his literary women, on the other hand, are punished and blamed profusely.

⁵⁵ Joseph Roth, *Job*, p. 96, emphasis mine.

⁵⁶ Ritchie Robertson, "The Jewish Question", p. 424.

⁵⁷ Joseph Roth, *Job*, p. 15.

⁵⁸ Stefan Fingal in an interview with David Bronsen. Dokumentationsstelle für neuere österreichische Literatur, Wien, Handschriftensammlung. Sammlung Joseph Roth / David Bronsen. Interview Bronsen – Fingal, on 10 June 1961, 20.9/27, p. 9.

⁵⁹ David Bronsen, *Joseph Roth. Eine Biographie*, p. 341.

⁶⁰ Fritz Gotfurt in an interview with David Bronsen. Dokumentationsstelle für neuere österreichische Literatur, Wien, Handschriftensammlung. Sammlung Joseph Roth / David Bronsen. Interview Bronsen – Gotfurt, on 12 May 1961, 20.9/45, p. 1.

Narratives of Guilt

One of the striking similarities between Mendel Singer and his biblical counterpart is the implied seminal role that their wives play in the onset of their misfortunes. Both Deborah and Job's wife, who remains nameless, are portrayed as seeds of temptation, cross-eyed and blasphemous. The *Book of Job* reads: "Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still remain thine integrity? Curse God, and die."⁶¹ Deborah, too, is introduced in a setting that highlights her complaints. She blames her husband for their poverty, their children, "and sometimes, even, for the bad weather." She is jealous of the fortunes of others, and, like Job's wife, is looking for someone to blame. She moans, complains, and sighs. "'Ah!' sighed the woman. 'Do not sigh,' warned Mendel Singer."⁶² Deborah's desire to visit a miracle rabbi is met with a stubborn religious pride:

'I should go to the Rabbi? You were there once. Go again. You believe in him; he would give you advice. You know that I don't believe in that sort of thing. No Jew needs a mediator between himself and God. He hears our prayers if we are righteous. When we sin, though, he can punish us.' 'Why does He punish us now? Have we sinned? Why is He so cruel?' 'You blaspheme him, Deborah. Leave me in peace – I cannot talk with you any longer.' And Mendel Singer buried himself in a pious book.⁶³

Within what I call *narratives of guilt* it is the woman's idle blasphemy and jealousy that ignites God's wrath. On the level of storytelling, reasons for male misfortune are inserted like poisonous needles into their fragile feminine physiques. Deborah's complicity in the misfortunes that befall her children is woven into the structure of the novel as well as into her physical body. Her blasphemy is a logical result of her femininity; it is rooted in her. Deborah doesn't just fail as a wife, however; she also fails as a mother, a failure that comes to the surface in her children's relentless attraction to the gentile world: Mirjam's attraction to Russian lovers, Shemariah's ambitions in the world of American commerce, and Jonas's pride as a soldier. Her failure is even greater when it becomes clear that these attractions cause the disintegration of her family and, in a greater scheme, the Jewish community. The children's moral and ethical transgressions are out of control and Deborah, as their mother,

⁶¹ KJB, *Book of Job*, 2:9. Job replies: "But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips" (2:10).

⁶² "Living became dearer from year to year. The crops were always poorer and poorer. The carrots diminished, the eggs were hollow, the potatoes froze, the soup was watery, the carp thin, the pike short, the ducks lean, the geese tough and the chickens amounted to nothing. Thus sounded the complaints of Deborah, the wife of Mendel Singer. She was a woman; sometimes she seemed possessed." Joseph Roth, *Job*, pp. 5-6.

⁶³ Joseph Roth, *Job*, p. 97.

the womb that gave birth to them, is both the source and location of their hurried escape from the laws of Orthodox Judaism.

The burden of domesticity that lies on Deborah's shoulders reflects the increased pressure on women during the 1920s to hold the Jewish community together. Jewish religious tradition was at stake in a period of increased assimilation, and women were held responsible both for its decline and its preservation. Around the same time as Roth was writing *Job*, Martin Buber called upon Jewish women to reclaim their traditional role within the home, important for the creation of a strong Jewish homeland. Other Jewish writers criticised women's involvement in public life and disapprovingly observed their attraction to "all that was foreign." "In raising their children without a Jewish national consciousness," Paula E. Hyman writes, "Jewish mothers failed to prepare them for the world in which they would live. It was the Jewish mother's task [...] to "give back the nation to her child" and through Zionism provide him with a high ideal."⁶⁴ Others called upon the important role that women had played since biblical times in defence of the Jewish people through the creation of strong Jewish homes.⁶⁵

These concerns were the result of a persistent popular myth that emerged in the nineteenth century and held that Jewish women were leading all Jews towards assimilation.⁶⁶ This myth, professed by religious and lay leaders and expressed in highly exoticised literary depictions, saw Jewish women as "agents of assimilation." It accused women of being attracted to the luxuries of urban life as well as intermarrying and converting for "frivolous reasons." Since Judaism depended to a large extent on women as the carriers of religion within the Jewish home, it was believed that their attraction to majority culture was a main cause for the demise of Jewish spirituality. Indeed, more so than ever before "women were charged with the spirit of the home. Housewives were expected to provide islands of serenity in a madly industrializing world, and Jewish women [...] were to maintain Judaism in the face of rapid secularization." According to Marion A. Kaplan, women were blamed "for the contradictions and dislocations of modernity, even as their responsibilities in the home and to the family interfered with their exposure to the

⁶⁴ Sara Pomerantz, 'Di tsionistische idée un di yudishe froy,' in the Zionist pamphlet *Di yudishe froy un der Tsionism*, (Warsaw: Druckerei "Hazefera", 1918), pp. 13-19, p. 18. Quoted in Paula E. Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: The Roles and Representation of Women* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), p. 148.

⁶⁵ Nahum Sokolow, *Idishe froy*. London: English Zionist Federation, 1917, pp. 3-13, p. 12. Quoted from Paula E. Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History*, p. 149.

⁶⁶ Marion A. Kaplan, 'Tradition and Transition: The Acculturation, Assimilation and Integration of Jews in Imperial Germany – A Gender Analysis', *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 27, 1982, pp. 3-35; Marion A. Kaplan, 'Priestess and Hausfrau: Women and Tradition in the German-Jewish Family', in Steven M. Cohen and Paula E. Hyman (eds.), *The Jewish Family: Myths and Reality*. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986, pp. 62-81.

modernising influences to which their husbands were subjected.”⁶⁷ Roth, too, echoed this myth when, in 1927, he wrote that “the assimilation of a people always begins with the women.”⁶⁸

This ambivalence about “the contradictions and dislocations of modernity” is also present in Roth’s portrayal of Deborah. She is a weak, complaining creature, prone to the less idle of human sentiments such as jealousy and frivolity. Since her pregnancy with Menuchim, she is the cradle of all sin that has entered the family’s inner sphere. One day, when visiting the town with Mirjam, the child runs into a church during a flurry of excitement caused by the arrival of a Countess. Mirjam runs straight “into the midst of the golden shining, the full-voiced music, the organ’s roar”; in other words, straight into the external splendours of Christianity. Deborah grabs the child and flees, but “from this day on, Deborah knew that a misfortune was under way. She carried a misfortune in her womb. She knew it and was silent.”⁶⁹ Mirjam’s transgression of Jewish law, caused by a lack of maternal guidance, in turn causes the birth of a cripple. Deborah’s womb, now dry and barren, is an impure place, the source of misfortune. It is the location of death in the midst of life. This is a theme one also finds in the *Book of Job*: “What is man, that he should be clean? And he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?” Ironically, however, the womb is also the place to which Job, in his desperate pleas, longs to return.⁷⁰

Mirjam’s attraction to shiny, golden surfaces reveals itself when she is still a child; early signs, it turns out, of her flirtatious, feminine and ultimately disruptive nature. Her outer senses are genuinely taken by the sparkling splendour of the town church and, a little later, by the “silver clinking and rustling of spurs” of the Russian officers stationed in the

⁶⁷ Marion A. Kaplan, ‘Tradition and Transition’, p. 10. In ‘Priestess and Hausfrau’, she writes: “The contradictions inherent in Jewish women’s new positions come to light in the fact that they were subject to accusations of frivolity and ostentation due to the hypersensitivity of an assimilating Jewish community and to charges of materialism made by anti-Semites.” (p. 66).

⁶⁸ Joseph Roth, ‘Paris’, excerpt from *The Wandering Jews* (1927), in *Report from a Parisian Paradise*, p. 149.

⁶⁹ Joseph Roth, *Job*, pp. 26-27.

⁷⁰ KJB, *The Book of Job*, 15:14, p. 561. After Job cursed the day he was born, he longs to have never been born at all: “Why did I not die from the womb? Why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly?” (KJB, *Book of Job*, 3:11) The womb becomes the location of his death wish, and he wished he had never come out, so that “no eye had seen me!” (10:18) The womb is an unclean place, yet it is the place of death, the location of longing, the wish to return there. Deborah’s womb is shrivelled up, dry, barren, after she gave birth to a cripple, to misfortune. “Menuchim did not die; he lived, a mighty cripple. From now on, Deborah’s womb was dry and barren. Menuchim was the last deformed fruit of her body. It was as though her womb refused to bring forth more misfortune. In hasty moments she embraced her husband. The moments were short as lightning, dry lightning on a distant summer horizon. Long, cruel, and sleepless were Deborah’s nights. A wall of cold glass separated her from her husband. Her breasts withered; her body swelled, as if in mockery of her barrenness; her thighs became heavy; and lead hung to her feet.” And later, after Deborah’s death, Mendel sighs: “I have begotten children, your womb has borne them, death has taken them. Meaningless and full of poverty was your life.” Joseph Roth, *Job*, pp. 20 and 156.

town's garrison.⁷¹ In *Job*, women appear "possessed" for reasons that are inherent in their femininity. Madness, then, this "female malady," always lies lingering, dangerously close, under the thin layer of a woman's fragile subjectivity.⁷² Roth's representation of female madness is characterised by a focus on the sexual nature of the disorder. There is a direct relation between Mirjam's promiscuity and her insanity, between her transgression of Judaic law and her consequent decline into hysteria. The origins of Mirjam's madness lies in the fields where, one night, Mendel sees her with her Russian lover, punitively called "the Cossack." It is then, the narrator reminds us, that "the Devil entered her."⁷³ As Anne Fuchs has observed, by entering into a sexual relationship outside marriage with a non-Jew, Mirjam breaks a ground rule of the entire Jewish family system based on regulating their relations with the world: "... Mirjam's affair is an offence against the Covenant of God. Her intimacy with a non-Jew thus allows the impure and the abject to invade and threaten the family at the very core of its belief system."⁷⁴ Mirjam's overt sexuality as a "promiscuous femme fatale" is what lies behind her transgressive escape from Jewish tradition, and her subsequent madness is a punishment for this transgression. This punishment, however, is then transferred back onto the man who "didn't love enough" – onto Mendel Singer and, finally, onto Roth himself.⁷⁵

What is remarkable is that Roth transferred his own stubborn faith in the *tsaddik* onto a female character. In *Deborah*, did Roth create a character that, as a carrier of sin, allowed him a divorce from Friederike through the textual elimination of his guilt? Did he, through writing, aim to place the responsibility of Friederike's insanity back onto her?⁷⁶ It

⁷¹ "When Mirjam hurried through the streets on errands, slender and small, a shimmering shadow, a brown face, a wide red mouth, a golden-yellow shawl knotted in two flying wings under her chin, and with two old eyes in the midst of the brown youth of her countenance, she attracted the attention of the officers of the garrison, and remained in their careless, pleasure-seeking minds. Occasionally, one would lie in wait for her. She noticed nothing about her pursuers except the impression they made upon her outer senses: a silver clinking and rustling of spurs and arms, a pervasive smell of pomade and shaving soap, a fulminating gleam of gold buttons, silver braid, and bright-red reins of Russia leather. It was little, it was enough. Just behind the outer portal of her senses curiosity lurked in Mirjam, curiosity which is the sister of youth and the awakener of desire. [...] It was Mirjam's only pleasure. Even if there had been anyone at hand who could understand her, she would have kept her mouth closed. For delights are stronger the longer they remain secret." Joseph Roth, *Job*, pp. 27-28.

⁷² A seminal study about the representations of women and madness is Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady. Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830–1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985). The book shows how deeply embedded cultural ideas about "proper" feminine behaviour shaped the definition and treatment of female insanity.

⁷³ Joseph Roth, *Job*, p. 159.

⁷⁴ Anne Fuchs, 'Roth's Ambivalence', p. 106-7.

⁷⁵ The description of Mirjam as a "promiscuous femme fatale" is Anne Fuchs's, 'Roth's Ambivalence', p. 121.

⁷⁶ According to Paula Hyman, it was not uncommon for assimilated Jewish men to play out the ambivalence of their Jewishness in gendered terms. Consequently, they represented Jewish women as responsible for the burdens of Jewishness they had to bear. One burden she identifies is the conflation of Jewishness and femininity in Western societies, attaching 'classic' female signifiers such as irrationality and weakness to the male Jew. Consequently, anxiety about Jewish men's masculinity flared up, forming another burden.

has been previously noted that Roth's male protagonists, finding themselves at a loss in a world that, as a result of war and modernity, had changed significantly, at some point all entertain the hope of "fulfilment in sexual and emotional union with a woman, and these hopes inevitably lead to disappointment."⁷⁷ It is a well-known fact that Roth was hostile towards women's emancipation and believed that gender roles were immutable and essential. John Hughes has shown how, as a reaction to women's emancipation, stereotypes about women based on ancient dichotomies such as whore versus madonna, *femme fatale* versus child women, were reinvented during the Weimar years.⁷⁸ This dichotomy is reproduced in Roth's texts. However, Hughes argues that Roth's stereotypical women should be viewed as projections of the "damaged and inadequate consciousnesses" of the male characters; an assertion that is correct but also reveals a significant weakness on the side of the author. Onto the application of old stereotypes, then, Roth added to his female characters the burden of guilt for family disintegration, madness, and male misfortune. His *Job*, then, is no innocent tale, and it prompts a further investigation of the theme and role of madness in Roth's life and literary world.

Madness

The portrayals of Deborah and Mirjam Singer are informed by the idea that a lack of love lies at the core of their miserable fates. Mendel Singer actively makes the link between his lack of affection for his wife and the misfortunes that befall him in America. "In my youth I took delight in your flesh," he murmurs to the dead Deborah, "in later years I scorned it. Perhaps that was our sin. Because the warmth of love was not in us, but only the frost of familiarity, everything around us perished, or was ruined."⁷⁹ Roth's short story *The Leviathan*, about the red-haired coral merchant Nissen Piczenik and his excessive love for the objects of his trade – a character based, at least in name, on Roth's uncle Nusen Piczenik – also treats this theme.⁸⁰ Piczenik's wife experiences emotional neglect as a result

However, while shedding many of the external markers of Jewishness, Jewish men returned to a domestic, i.e. feminised sphere where Jewish rituals and tradition were still observed. Paul E. Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History*, p. 9.

⁷⁷ Jon Hughes, *Facing Modernity*, p. 93-4.

⁷⁸ Jon Hughes, *Facing Modernity*, p. 93-4.

⁷⁹ Joseph Roth, *Job*, p. 156. Earlier in the novel, Mendel reflects on the sad unity with his wife, whose face he can no longer stand: "From a woman with whom he had only coupled himself in the darkness, she had become a disease that was bound to him by day and by night, belonging entirely to him, no longer something he shared with the world, whose faithful enmity was to mean his own destruction" (p. 42).

⁸⁰ "The Leviathan" appeared in serial form in the *Pariser Tagezeitung* in October and November 1938 (it had been printed in extracts elsewhere from 1934 onwards). At the time of the Nazi invasion of Holland in 1940,

of her husband's love for his precious corals. Her womb remains barren and childless, and she, too, dies of a lack of love. Like Mendel Singer, Piczenik looks at his wife with indifferent eyes, and blames her for their childless existence. "He wanted a fertile woman, as fertile as the sea on whose bed so many corals grew. His wife, though, was like a dried-up lake." Although it was an unlucky fall that caused his wife's death, Piczenik tells himself that "she had not died only from her concussion, but also because her life had not been linked to that of any other human being in this world. No one had wanted her to remain alive, and so she had died." Piczenik's own death soon follows, as he drowns and sinks to the bottom of the deep ocean, finally reunited with his precious corals.

In the waning of Singer and Piczenik's love for their wives we find rhetorical traces of Roth's fears that Friederike's deteriorating mental state was a result of his "abgekülte" or "chilled" love for her. In a letter to his mother-in-law from 1931 he writes: "Es ist ein Jammer, daß ich nicht noch mehr auf [Friedl] aufgepaßt habe. Ich kannte die Krankheit genau und war blind beu den ersten Symptomen."⁸¹ Roth's friend Hans Natonek made the poignant observation that the words "nicht genug geliebt!" would have served well as *Job's* subtitle. Indeed, in Jewish law, a husband's neglect of his wife sexual desires – the commandment is called *onah* – is considered a sin.⁸² Although this law says nothing about love as such, it is clear that the fulfilment of a wife's sexual desires is an expression of it, and we can only imagine the seriousness of such a sin. In his letters, Roth often reports that Friederike is elsewhere or that he is on the verge of departing and leaving her behind.⁸³ In one of the two surviving letters written by Friederike, from 1921, written late at night in Berlin, she reports to Roth's cousin Paula Grübel how fear moved her out of bed since "Muh" is still not home from the theatre: "Schrecklich!" She apologises for Roth's silence

Roth's publisher Querido had printed but unbound sheets of the book in its warehouse. Michael Hofmann writes that "coolly and heroically, the publisher kept them hidden, and the book was bound and distributed, "with a small delay," after the war" (*The Collected Stories of Joseph Roth. Translated and with an Introduction by Michael Hofmann*. New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002, p. 278. "The Leviathan" can be found on pp. 248-276, quoted on pp. 252 and 273). A reference to Roth's uncle Nusen Piczenik can be found in Fred Grubel, 'Mein Vetter Muniu', in Walter Zadek and Christine Brinck (eds.), *Sie flogen vor dem Hakenkreuz: Selbstzeugnisse der Emigranten: Ein Lesebuch für Deutsche*. Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1981, pp. 229-235.

⁸¹ The letter was written from the Antibes, where Roth spent some weeks together with Stefan Zweig. David Bronsen, *Joseph Roth. Eine Biographie*, p. 384.

⁸² "Biale offers two etymologies of "onah": while according to the first one "onah" is derived from the word for "season" or "period" and defines the frequency of sexual intercourse, according to the second etymology it is derived from the word "innui" meaning "suffering or pain". This would suggest that the denial of a woman's sexual rights within marriage causes her suffering or pain which brings us back to Mendel and Deborah Singer in Roth's *Hiob*: the clinical gaze of Mendel's eye in the mirror scene is, from an orthodox rabbinical viewpoint, sinful because it causes a lasting breach of "onah" within their marriage and deprives Deborah of her sexual rights." Anne Fuchs, 'Roth's Ambivalence', p. 118. Fuchs is quoting from Rachel Biale, *Women and Jewish Law. The Essential Texts, Their History, and Their Relevance for Today* (New York: Schocken, 1984), p. 125.

⁸³ Joseph Roth, in a letter to Willy Grübel dated 22 June 1925, *Briefe*, p. 49.

and says he is often “launisch.”⁸⁴ When Roth writes about his wife, it often concerns his inability to write or reply to letters as duly as he wants to because Friederike’s illness prevents him from keeping a daily routine; his tone is often apologetic. From 1929 onwards, the concept of fate comes into play and is explicitly addressed in relation to his perception of his wife’s illness. Roth laments the fact that he causes so much suffering in the lives of his women: “Ich ertrage es nicht, dass noch eine Frau meinetwegen leidet (Es ist die vierte.) Die zweite Psychose, diese abgelenkt ins Katolische.”⁸⁵ By 1935, Roth’s perception of his marriage to Friederike had dwindled into disillusion, and he referred to her as his “legitime Frau,” bound to her by legal documents and a history of mutual suffering. He told Stefan Zweig that he had needed two years to overcome the misery of his wife’s illness, “an der ich immer noch glaube, schuldig zu sein.”⁸⁶

In order to illuminate the context of Roth’s portrayal of insanity in *Job* it is important to note that he understood certain aspects of Friederike’s illness in specifically Jewish terms, such as her periods of intense bodily cleanliness, which he referred to as her “Reinlichkeitskomplex.” He translated her amplified desire to cleanse herself, instead of recognising it as a manic component of her schizophrenia, into the atonement of sin.⁸⁷ This understanding of Friederike’s psychiatric symptoms betrays the idea of something “dirty” or “sinful” that needs to be expelled; of extreme cleanliness as a means of redemption – but, redemption for what? The idea of women as natural vessels of impurity that need to be cleaned and, if not abjected, at least kept at bay, can be traced back to the orthodox Jewish definition of the uterus as a “place of rot.”⁸⁸ Specific rituals and rites of purity after menstruation and childbirth were meant to keep fears about the maternal under control. Friederike’s “degenerative vulgarity” did not go unnoticed by Roth’s friends. Johannes Urzidil, who met Friederike in Prague in 1923 and described her then as “everything but vulgar” years later remembered the same woman as someone who behaved “obscenely” in

⁸⁴ Joseph Roth, in a letter to Paula Gröbel dated 28 December 1921, *Briefe*, p. 38. The second letter is from 14 July 1924, in which Friederike urges Paula to tell her about the living costs in Poland since she and “Muh” are about to travel to Krakow.

⁸⁵ Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 24 May 1931, *Briefe*, p. 201. Roth may be referring to the 20-year-old Catholic girl with whom he fell in love in France.

⁸⁶ Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 1 September 1935, *Briefe*, p. 428.

⁸⁷ “Damals sprach sich hinter den Berliner Freunden herum, es handele sich bei Friedl um typisch jüdische Anfälle, die als Buße für irgendwelche jüdischen Sünden anzusehen seien. Roth selber gab Jahre später einem Intimus in Paris gegenüber zu, seine Frau habe, als die irrsinnig wurde, einen Reinlichkeitskomplex gehabt, habe sich nicht genug waschen können und habe immer wieder in die Mikwe in der Pestalozzistraße gewollt. (Es handelt sich um das Ritualbad, das orthodox-jüdische Frauen vor dem ersten Geschlechtsverkehr nach der Monatsregel nehmen.) Roth, der sich zu der Zeit mit der Psychiatrie vertraut machte, sprach dabei von Sühnegefühlen, einer Reinigungspsychose und symbolischen Reinigungen seiner Frau.” Bronsen, *Joseph Roth*, p. 339.

⁸⁸ Esthelle Roth, *The Riddle of Freud. Jewish Influences on His Theory of Female Sexuality*. London and New York: Tavistock, 1987, p. 99. Quoted from Anne Fuchs, ‘Roth’s Ambivalence’, *A Space of Anxiety*, p. 113.

public and undressed herself in front of a doctor while making “sexually charged” gestures.⁸⁹

In February 1929 Roth wrote that he had taken on the responsibility for his wife in “a moment of carelessness.” Friederike, however, was physically unable to bear a life by his side, and the idea that his café existence had ruined his wife hunted him until his death.⁹⁰ By the mid-1920s Roth had become the star journalist of the liberal *Frankfurter Zeitung*, and apart from six months in a Berlin flat with his young wife, Roth resided in hotels; all his belongings fit in three suitcases. Such was his predilection for a nomadic lifestyle that he did not possess copies of his own books, as they were too heavy to transport. This perpetual travel continued for the rest of life, although from 1925 onwards he made Paris his permanent home, living in Hotel Foyot and writing across the street in café Le Tournon. After Friederike’s condition worsened, Roth became increasingly convinced that his neglect and “coffee-house existence” had ruined her. Distrustive of medical practice and doctors, Roth read his way through the professional literature and concluded that he was to blame. When, in 1929, Friederike was permanently institutionalised, Roth took on the guilt for her fate, and for the next few years actively played the part of the “suffering Jew.”

Roth made a clear connection between madness, misfortune and Jewishness. His letters are full of lamentations in which he accepts the part of the unjustly punished man not, indeed, as the Austrian officer he had imagined himself to be up till then, but as a Jew; moreover, a “poor, old Jew with a heavy heart.” Friends say he turned an old man in the space of three, four years. Even years after the publication of *Job* and the pinnacle of the agony over Friederike’s schizophrenia, Roth still defined himself in the context of her illness: “I am an old Jew who has a mentally ill wife.”⁹¹ It catapulted an already well-developed tendency for solitude into deep isolation, as Friederike had formed the

⁸⁹ “Sie war alles andere als vulgär. Ich hätte mir nie einen lockeren Scherz mit ihr erlaubt.” David Bronsen, *Joseph Roth. Eine Biographie*, p. 339.

⁹⁰ Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 19 March 1936, *Briefe*, p. 455. Roth writes: “Mein Kaffeehausleben hat die Frau ruiniert.” In 1929, he wrote: “Was meine Frau betrifft, so ist ihre jetzige Krankheit nur eine akute Verschärfung einer chronischen Schwäche, einer vollkommenen Widerstandlosigkeit, an der ich selbst nicht unschuldig bin, die zum Teil ihre Ursachen in verschiedenen Ereignissen hat. Und an diesen Dingen, von denen ich seit Monaten und bald seit Jahren nicht sprechen kann, bin ich tiefer bedrückt, als von Krankheiten. Vielleicht kann ich sie erst nach zehn Jahren schreiben, wenn ich dann noch ein Schriftsteller bin.” Joseph Roth, in a letter to Pierre Bertaux dated 7 March 1929, *Briefe*, p. 148.

⁹¹ “Ich bin ein alter Jude, der eine geisteskranke Frau hat.” Rudolf Leonhard, ‘Bemerkungen. Geschichten von Joseph Roth’, *Die neue Weltbühne*, 35 (1939), 22, p. 792-794.

connection to his surroundings.⁹² The influence of the sheer fact of having a mentally ill wife on Roth's sense of self cannot be underestimated. Indeed, he amplified it, internalised part of the suffering that was meant for his wife and wore it as convincingly as the bohemian coat draped around his shoulders. The identification that Roth chose in order to express his misfortunes was a Jewish one, finding solace, perhaps, in Judaism's long tradition of and emphasis on suffering.⁹³

This profound identification with madness can be explained biographically as the dominant generational heritage of an insane father. However, Roth's fears of hereditary madness overlap in many ways with the discourse about the "mad Jew" or the "mythopoesis of mental illness" that dominated the German intellectual scene during the first decades of the twentieth century.⁹⁴ Jewish bodies were the main focus in the debate about the meaning and source of health, disease and madness. By actively identifying not as an Austrian but as a Jew in the context of his misfortunes, Roth resorted to his Jewish heritage most profoundly in those moments that were to be his weakest. Furthermore, it was a reaction embedded in anxieties about identity in the context of Jewish difference in the Diaspora, i.e. Jewish anxieties about appearance in the assimilated West.⁹⁵ According to Sander Gilman, the dilemma of the Jew is that she remains visible, even if she gives up all signs of cultural difference, because of the stigma that society places on Jewish heritage. Jews are thought to be different, and one form of this difference is their "uncanny ability" to look like everyone else; in other words, the double standard of assimilation. For some, these pressures of assimilation led to "perversions of the self" caused by an internalisation of antisemitic stereotypes and a denial of Jewishness. Indeed, some would argue that Roth's excessive self-invention during the early 1920s in a centrifugal movement away from the traditional image of the Eastern Jew was a form of "Jewish self-hatred."⁹⁶

There is another element to the equation of madness and Jews, and that is the image of the artist. At the end of the nineteenth century, an important change occurred in West European medical discourse, influenced by German romanticism: instead of isolating the insane, the avant-garde incorporated them and considered their "primitive" art as a

⁹² "Bei meiner Abgeschlossenheit war meine Frau die einzige Beziehung zur Umwelt, der gesellige Teil meiner selbst." Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 1 April 1930, *Briefe*, p. 158.

⁹³ As noted above, for a recent critique of suffering as a Jewish paradigm see Esther Benbassa, *Suffering as Identity. The Jewish Paradigm* (London: Verso, 2010).

⁹⁴ Sander L. Gilman, 'The Mad Man as Artist: Medicine, History and Degenerate Art', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 20, No. 4, Medicine, History and Society (October 1985), pp. 575-597, pp. 586, 590 and 594. Roth believed Friederike's attacks were a result of her "uncleanliness."

⁹⁵ Sander L. Gilman, 'The Jew's Body: Thoughts on Jewish Physical Difference', in Norman L. Kleeblatt (ed.), *Too Jewish? Challenging Traditional Identities*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996, pp. 60-73.

⁹⁶ Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred. Antisemitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, c1986.

protest against technological society. Especially schizophrenia was seen as the perfect 'medium' to criticise society. As Sander Gilman has noted, the artist created for himself "the persona of the outsider, which he [donned] like a helmet to do battle with society." The idea of the artist as outsider whose borderline position allows for critical art is a concept that currently pervades postmodern discourse. Here the exile, seen as the quintessential outsider, is thought to have a vantage point that allows for critical (academic and creative) insight. In Roth, this idea expressed itself in his oft-lamented position as an isolated and underappreciated writer, alone and idiosyncratic amidst colleagues and friends. The emergence of the concept of the artist as outsider coincided with another development, namely the creation of the "quintessential outsider in German society," the Jew. In an increasingly antisemitic environment, Jews were considered to be more prone to mental illness. They became the supreme signifiers of all that was disruptive and "unhealthy" in German society. The myth of the mad Jew linked these two outsiders, the insane and the Jew, with serious consequences. By the beginning of the First World War, this long-lingering association of the Jew, the artist and the madman had been completed. It was quickly taken up by Nazi propaganda, pervaded public discourse throughout the 1920s and resulted, in the late thirties, in the first mass killings: tellingly, of the mentally ill. Indeed, as Gilman writes, "the movement from killing the insane to killing the Jews was but a short step, as the interchangeability of the mad and the Jew had long been established in Germany." Friederike Roth was among these first victims.

This collapse of the outsider, the mad and the Jew into one overarching paradigm also took place in Roth's identity, most poignantly in relation to his and Friederike's suffering. During the 1920s, Roth experienced an increased sense of isolation, fuelled by disgust at the political developments in Germany. His extreme reactions often evoked the criticism of his friends, who urged him to stay calm; thoughts of himself as "crazy" pervade his letters.⁹⁷ Could it be that Roth's amplified identification with the image of the mad Jew carried traces of rebellion? That, by taking on the role of the outsider as mad artist, he protested in a highly personal manner against modern stereotypes of the Jew? In this way Job, the novel and the biblical figure, functioned as a model for the role of the "suffering

⁹⁷ A poignant example of this is the reversal of himself as "what one calls crazy" and Friederike as "normal" in a letter to Bernard von Brentano from 1925: "Ich werde immer einsamer, lieber Freund. In den tausend Kleinigkeiten des Lebens, in Geschmacksfragen, Essen, Kleidung, Restaurant und Vergnügen noch einsamer als in den prinzipiellen, weltanschaulichen. [...] Selbst meine Frau entfernt sich von mir, trotz ihrer Liebe. Sie ist normal und ich bin, was man verrückt nennen muss. Sie reagiert nicht so, wie ich, nicht so stark, nicht so zitternd, sie ist weniger atmosphärisch bestimmbar, sie ist gerade aus und gescheit. Mich erregt jetzt Alles, das Gespräch am Nachbartisch, ein Blick, ein Kleid, ein Gang. Es ist wirklich nicht 'normal.'" Joseph Roth, in an undated letter to Bernard von Brentano, *Briefe*, p. 75.

Jew” that he took on during these years. The contradiction lies in the fact that, unlike the biblical Job and many of Roth’s contemporaries, who felt that their suffering was a result of external factors and not a personal punishment, Roth actively took the blame of Friederike’s afflictions upon himself. He was different in that he framed his predicament as a test, a punishment and a trial. By doing so, Roth at times took on the role of a martyr, a solitary sufferer whose lamentations are well documented in his letters. His literary characterisations of suffering are connected to his non-literary rhetoric of himself as a “poor, old Jew.” While it is true that Roth knew a deep self-deprecation about his Jewishness, it is difficult to say to what extent he internalised antisemitism. He never denied nor publicly affirmed his Jewishness. Contradictory opinions exist in his work, and his loving portrait of East European Jewry in *The Wandering Jews* (1927), aimed at counteracting their negative image that pervaded public discourse during the Weimar Republic, is a far cry from an alienated attitude to the Jewish people. Roth understood that the Galician Jew was considered the lowest amongst men, because even other Jews despised him.⁹⁸ Also, he often used the Yiddish terms “Schnorrer” (beggar) and “Nebbich” to describe himself, terms connoting helplessness, dependency and misery. He often underlined his pride in being a “poor little Jew” from the East, “ein gescheiter Jud” who swayed left and right: “Mit lechzender Zunge laufe ich herum, ein Schnorrer mit heraushängender Zunge und mit wedelndem Schwanz.”⁹⁹ Thus, it was suffering – his own, Friederike’s, and that of the East European Jews – that prompted the strongest identification with his Jewish heritage.

Justice

Roth’s portrayal of suffering also prompts questions about the concept of justice. Mendel Singer, who feels dignified and just in the face of his punishment, shares a sense of

⁹⁸ “The more Western the origin of a Jew, the more Jews are there for him to look down upon. The Frankfurt Jew despises the Berlin Jew, the Berlin Jew despises the Viennese Jew, the Viennese Jew despises the Warsaw Jew. Then there are still the Jews from way back in Galicia, upon whom they all look down, and that’s where I come from, the lowest of all Jews.”⁹⁸ David Bronsen, ‘Austrian vs. Jew’, p. 223. See also chapter 5 of this thesis.

⁹⁹ In a particularly telling exchange with Stefan Zweig from March 1936, Zweig urges Roth not to blame his surroundings for his misery, but to finally have the courage to acknowledge that “so gross Sie als Dichter sind, Sie im materiellen Sinne ein kleiner arme Jude sind, fast so arm wie sieben Millionen andere und werden so leben müssen, wie neun Zehntel Menschen dieser Erde, ganz im Kleinen und äusserlich Engen.” Roth is furious: “Was ein armer kleine Jude ist, brauchen Sie nicht ausgerechnet *mir* zu erzählen. Seit 1894 bin ich es und mit Stolz. Ein gläubiger Ostjude, aus Radziwillow. Lassen Sie Das! Arm und klein war ich 30 Jahre. *Ich bin arm.*” Joseph Roth, in letters to Stefan Zweig dated July 1934 and February 1926, *Briefe*, pp. 352 and 450.

righteousness with the biblical Job.¹⁰⁰ In their lamentations, their suffering becomes a trial; they think of themselves as being tested in the face of innocence.¹⁰¹ In a most original reading of the *Book of Job*, René Girard transfers the act of punishment from the divine back onto mankind, portraying Job as a “failed scapegoat,” the victim of a community’s narrow-mindedness.¹⁰² Indeed, Roth also felt punished in a social sense, i.e. a pariah amongst his colleagues, and is it possible that his wife’s mental illness amplified this sense of social isolation. However, what is important here is the fact that in his lamentations, the idea of divine punishment plays a major part. The belief that he was curse-stricken, indeed, on trial, is one of his strongest responses to the suffering he experienced. To his mother-in-law, he writes, “Es ist ein Fluch, der mich getroffen hat... ich bin gläubig genug, um an einen Fluch zu glauben. Gott allein kann helfen...”¹⁰³ He constructed Friederike’s illness as God’s punishment, and it ignited an active sense of guilt in him. It is telling that Roth created a Jewish character, orthodox and God-fearing, for his ultimate tale of suffering.

In analysing the sources of the evil that caused the suffering of man, Roth did not avoid a diabolical questioning of the Lord’s motives, as is clear from Mendel’s and his own blasphemy. However, he clearly placed the ultimate responsibility on man. Human suffering, Roth believed, was the result of the actions of man; more specifically, of the fact that man had taken divine right into his own hands. This idea is expressed most clearly in *The Antichrist* (1934). Roth believed that one of the greatest crimes of the modern world was the fact that human dignity was no longer considered a divine grace, but a human merit. Man takes pride in his virtuous accomplishments as if they were solely and splendidly man-made. Indeed, “if [...] we regard His gifts and mercies as human merits – and worse still – as proofs against His existence, then this happens at the command of the

¹⁰⁰ Mendel Singer’s righteousness and lamentations in the face of divine punishment equal that of Job: while enduring an enforced smallpox vaccination, “Many hid themselves, but Mendel Singer, the righteous, fled before no punishment of God. Resigned, he even accepted the vaccination.” (8); when Deborah offers to get help after their sons’ army conscription, “What sort of help do you await from mankind when God has so punished us?” (37); in Mendel’s failed attempts to communicate with Menuchim, “‘Why am I so afflicted?’ thought Mendel, [...] ‘What sin did I commit? What sin did I commit?’” (45); when, in New York, Mendel stands before the fire, bellowing, stamping his feet: “‘He has no son, he has no daughter, he has no wife, he has no country, he has no money! God said: I have punished Mendel Singer! For what has He punished him? Why has He not punished Lemmel, the butcher? Why not Skovronnek? Why not Menkes? He punishes only Mendel. Mendel has death, Mendel has madness, Mendel has hunger – all God’s gifts are for Mendel! All, all over – it is the end of Mendel Singer!’” (164-165).

¹⁰¹ See Stuart Lasine’s analysis of legal terminology in the *Book of Job* and Franz Kafka’s *The Trial*. Stuart Lasine, ‘The Trials of Job and Kafka’s Josef K.’, *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 2, Focus: Jews and Germans/Jewish-German Literature, (Spring 1990), pp. 187-198.

¹⁰² René Girard, ‘Job as Failed Scapegoat’, in Leo G. Perdue and W. Clark Gilpin (eds.), *The Voice from the Whirlwind: Interpreting the Book of Job*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992, pp. 185-207.

¹⁰³ David Bronsen, *Joseph Roth. Eine Biographie*, p. 385.

Antichrist.”¹⁰⁴ Man now measures value as the merit of his accomplishments; in material instead of spiritual worth, but “human justice is not as perfect as divine justice, for people look at the degree of toil and the amount of its reward.”¹⁰⁵ Through this opposition of merit and mercy, or grace in one’s confrontation with God, the problem of justice arises as the book’s main theme.¹⁰⁶ Whether or not it is a “particularly Jewish problem” closely connected to Jewish existence in the diaspora, as some critics have argued, the role of justice as a major ethical concern increased during Roth’s exile years, and was consequently given a more fervent expression in his literary as well as journalistic work.¹⁰⁷

The idea that evil lies in the hands of man fits into the classical biblical and Midrashic interpretations of the Old Testament. Most interpretations agree that the order created by God is supposed to have been good. As Esther Benbassa writes, “evil and suffering, which culminate in death, are the consequence of the actions of man (Adam), who is supposed to have turned from God. It would follow that suffering and death came about as the result of choices made by human beings who realised possibilities inherent in creation. Suffering is, in general, approached as a fact of life. Moreover, the problem in Scripture does not consist in determining why suffering exists, but in learning the reasons for the unfair way in which it is distributed. Why it is that the evil prosper and the just suffer? For someone with traditional beliefs, this question is inseparable from faith.”¹⁰⁸ From the Psalms, too, emerges the image of the just man who knows that he is oppressed, but who does not blame God or consider Him responsible for his misery.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, it is

¹⁰⁴ Joseph Roth, *The Antichrist*. London: Peter Owen Ltd., 2010, p. 97.

¹⁰⁵ Joseph Roth, *The Antichrist*, p. 110.

¹⁰⁶ Justice is also a major theme in Roth’s novel *Das falsche Gewicht* (1937), an analysis of which unfortunately falls outside of the scope of this paper. The idea that justice is a main theme of *The Antichrist* has recently been challenged by Els Andringa, who argues that the connection between justice and Jewishness was made by critics more so than by the author himself. Els Andringa: «Eine Sprache alttestamentarischer Pracht? Joseph Roth als jüdischer Autor in der niederländischen Rezeption», in: *Joseph Roth in den Niederlanden und Flandern. Rezeption und Übersetzung eines vielseitigen Oeuvre*, Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2010 (forthcoming); and Els Andringa, «Die Sesshaftigkeit hat in Europa aufgehört. Rezeption und Reflexion der deutschen Emigranteliteratur im niederländischen Polysystem der dreißiger Jahre», in: *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur (IASL)* 33, 2008, 2, p. 145-183.

¹⁰⁷ According to Menno ter Braak: “What other people are more closely concerned with justice than the people who are forced to call upon it as the only means against the instruments of power of people quantitatively stronger, and whose hospitality they often only unofficially enjoy? Justice, for the weak, is the only argument they can support in the face of brutal ascendancy. Justice is also directly related to faith, because how could justice, justifying the weak, really be justice if it is not based upon eternal values?” Original text: “[...] want welk volk is nauwer bij de gerechtigheid betrokken dan het volk, dat zich op het recht moet beroepen als eenige macht tegenover de machtsmiddelen van numeriek sterker volken, bij wie het vaak slechts officieus gastvrijheid geniet? De gerechtigheid is voor de zwakken het eenige argument, waarop zij kunnen steunen tegenover de brute overmacht. Gerechtigheid hangt weer onmiddellijk samen met het geloof, want hoe kan de gerechtigheid, die de zwakken rechtvaardigt, werkelijk gerechtigheid zijn, als zij niet op eeuwige waarden berust?” Menno ter Braak: «De Antichrist», p. 70.

¹⁰⁸ Esther Benbassa, *Suffering as Identity*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁹ Esther Benbassa, *Suffering as Identity*, p. 10.

these “possibilities inherent in creation” that Roth saw as the cause of modern evil: mankind’s urge for personal betterment by way of neglecting their humility in the face of God. By depending on the material and technological merits of modernity, man lost sight of himself.

Justice, or the many instances of its failings, is one of Roth’s recurring literary themes. It was fuelled by his interest in the daily workings of postwar society. Marginal people, outsiders and underdogs had Roth’s outspoken sympathy and often made their way into his novels; the perspectives he sought out were those of “the unfortunates, the people who fall between the cracks, [...] the homeless living and the nameless dead.”¹¹⁰ This predisposition towards the marginalised also influenced his professional life. When in 1926, Benno Reifenberg, editor of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, proposed a trip to Italy to report on the state of Fascism there, Roth replied that it would be cowardly to write about Mussolini whilst remaining silent about the “hidden dictatorship” in Germany. “I personally have too strong a conscience, as an oppressed German, to make the world aware of Italian oppression.”¹¹¹ That Roth observed a “hidden dictatorship” in Germany was partly the result of a flawed judiciary system in Weimar. After the war, despite the revolutions and attempts to build a democratic Republic, many elements of the old order remained in place. Friedrich Ebert, head of the new Council of People’s Commissars, depended on elements of the old army to maintain the new order, and judges of the old regime stayed in their posts. This resulted in a disproportionately severe punishment of left-wing criminals while those on the right were very often acquitted.¹¹² The reform of justice was therefore one of the most important political demands of many left-wing intellectuals during Weimar.¹¹³ This early critique of mass corruption and the failures of democracy and the printed word are repeated in *The Antichrist*: “When [...] justice is decided by numbers, it is injustice.”¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Michael Hofmann : «Introduction», in : Joseph Roth, *What I Saw. Reports from Berlin 1920-1933*. Translated by Michael Hofmann, London : Granta Books, 2003, p. 17.

¹¹¹ “... aber ich weiß, daß ein republikanischer Hindenburg schlimmer ist, als zehn Mussolinis. [...] Wir haben *nicht* das Recht, gegen einen fascistischen Diktator zu schreiben, solange wir eine verborgene, viel schlimmere Diktatur haben, Fememörder und Paraden, Richter, die Mörder sind und Staatsanwälte, die Henker sind. ICH persönlich habe ein zu starkes Gewissen, um als unterdrückter Deutscher die Welt auf italienische Unterdrückungen aufmerksam zu machen.” Joseph Roth in a letter to Benno Reifenberg dated 22 April 1926. Joseph Roth : *Briefe*, p. 88.

¹¹² “The civil servants and, worse, the judges of the old regime could stay in their posts, provided they signified their acceptance of the new order. This was a meaningless price to pay for retaining power – in fact, a majority of the judges had contempt for the republican and repaid its meekness with contemptuous disloyalty. The most distinguished democratic jurist of the Weimar period, Gustav Radbruch, understood what so many on the left decried: German courts in political trials meted out class justice.” Fritz Stern : *Five Germanys I Have Known*. New York : Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006, p. 58.

¹¹³ See for instance Istvan Deák : *Weimar Germany’s left-wing intellectuals: a political history of the Weltbühne and its circle*. Berkeley : University of California Press, 1968.

¹¹⁴ Joseph Roth : *The Antichrist*, p. 156.

Whereas during the early 1920s, Roth focused his attention mainly on the hopeless predicaments of homecoming soldiers, towards the end of the decade and into the next the plight of the Jews entered the foreground of Roth's reflections about justice and the increasingly worrisome political developments in Germany and Austria. Indeed, the argument that "thanks to their historical experience of suffering, many Jews gravitated almost naturally to the side of those who continued to suffer setbacks, in solidarity with their struggle for a better future" rings true for Roth, too.¹¹⁵

In *Job*, justice comes in the form of miraculous retribution. Yet, its much-debated "fairy-tale" ending has been criticized by admirers and scholars alike – it is, they say, an unconvincing literary plot. It has been called inappropriate, sentimental, and an expression of a rather unliterary sense of wishful thinking. Ludwig Marcuse found the ending "pompous" and in great contrast to Roth's otherwise "delicately intense pen."¹¹⁶ Others have read it as mockery and a vehicle for Roth's "ultimately bitter messages."¹¹⁷ This critique stems from a sense of skepticism in the face of the unbelievable: apparently Roth crossed an unwritten literary line, the border beyond which things stop being credible. If one reads Menuchim's miraculous return as a world-famous composer and Mendel's subsequent and wholesome redemption against the grim background of the times, it may indeed seem escapist or fanciful. A turn to the miraculous in the context of severe threats posed to human and Jewish existence was considered by many to be inappropriate; Roth was indeed the only writer who took up the *Book of Job's* happy ending. However, as I explain in more detail in chapter 7, miracles and wonders formed a conscious and crucial part of Roth's conception of reality. In his journalism, he often appeals to the imagination as a means to transcend the trials of reality. As such, the happy ending of *Job* is a profound illustration of his sense of human tragedy and wonder. However, as much as *Job's* supernatural ending may seem to overwhelm it, the tragedy of Mendel Singer's story should not go unnoticed, because tragedy and wonder go hand in hand in Roth's literary construction of human suffering. In other words, one of Roth's responses to the suffering of the righteous was the insertion of the miraculous into the daily lives of his literary characters.

¹¹⁵ Esther Benbassa : *Suffering as Identity. The Jewish Paradigm*. London : Verso Press, 2010, p. 15, paraphrasing Michael Löwy : *Redemption and Utopia: Jewish Libertarian Thought in Central Europe. A Study in Elective Affinity*, Stanford, CA : Stanford California Press, 1992.

¹¹⁶ David Bronsen, *Joseph Roth. Eine Biographie*, p. 386.

¹¹⁷ G.P. Butler, 'It's the Bitterness that Counts', p. 232.

Conclusion

To return to the question I asked in the introduction: did Roth suffer *because* he was a Jew? No doubt the fact of his Jewish birth contributed to the many instabilities that characterised his life, and it fuelled a desire for wandering due to the multiple lost homelands: Brody, the Monarchy, and Germany. It was the cause of expulsion and persecution. However, in his reaction to these historical and as such external developments, Roth did not speak out as a Jew or make an active, causal link between them. The only time he did so was in his responses to suffering. Indeed, it became a kind of “moral capital” that provided him with a sense of identity in the midst of increasing despair and loss.¹¹⁸ He transformed a sense of victimhood into a moral posture, from which he then proceeded to dispose off the blame. If indeed, God was not to blame for his afflictions, then perhaps women were? It is this “solution” to the question of suffering that is most disturbing about Roth’s intellectual journey of the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Thus, on the one hand, Roth’s focus on suffering fits the classic Jewish paradigm, as it provided him with a sense of identity. On the other hand, as I have tried to show, any analysis of Roth’s suffering should go beyond the “tragic” appeal of his life, as he developed a stubborn belief in miracles. Trying to defy the minor chord of his time, Roth appealed to the imagination as a means to subvert reality. In this way, his suffering includes a sense of hope for restitution and a better future, even if critics have called this phantasmagorical turn fickle. The suffering, however, was lasting. In the late 1930s, Roth exclaimed that “Wenn man eine Frau verraten hat dann hat man nie wieder Glück auf Erde!”¹¹⁹ Perhaps, as David Bronsen said, Roth compensated for the sickness of his wife by becoming sick like her.¹²⁰ Roth’s literary solution to the predicament of suffering, i.e. placing it right into the hands and bodies of women, is outright misogynist. However, this transference did not remove the guilt, and he actively donned the role of the suffering Jew; ironically, the only instance when he consciously reverted to his Jewish past and a Jewish text. Without wanting to seek recourse to fatalism, I believe that this turn to actively portrayed and lived suffering proved irrevocable. His misfortunes abided and while they

¹¹⁸ For the idea of suffering as “moral capital”, see Esther Benbassa, *Suffering as Identity*, p. 2.

¹¹⁹ Andre Spoor, “Wie een vrouw verraadt, wordt nooit gelukkig. Het leven en werk van Joseph Roth”, NRC, Friday 28 October 1994. Bronsen commented: “Er war völlig besoffen. Waren das Familiengeheimnisse, die man nicht zu hören hätte, war es ein Beichte? Er brauchte Mitleid. Er brauchte Geisteswärme, das suchte er, er fühlte sich heimatlos.” David Bronsen in his interview with Anton van Duinkerken. Dokumentationsstelle für neuere österreichische Literatur, Wien, Handschriftensammlung. Sammlung Joseph Roth / David Bronsen. Interview Bronsen – Van Duinkerken, on 11 October 1960, 18.1/3, p. 3.

¹²⁰ David Bronsen in the margins of one of his interviews. David Bronsen Archive, Dokumentationsstelle, Vienna.

grew, so did his belief in miracles and wondrous literary settings. Indeed, as Albert Camus has said in his novel *The Plague*, the plague itself may eventually pass, “but it will have changed men’s hearts.”¹²¹

¹²¹ See Guy Stern, ‘Job as Alter Ego’, p. 204.

V

“All Roads Lead to Brody.” Intellectual Heritage and Jewish Tradition

You are clever. I am not. But I see what you cannot see because your cleverness exempts you from seeing. You have the grace of reason, I the grace of misery.

Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig¹

Introduction

Posthumous fame, Hannah Arendt wrote, is “too odd a thing” to be explained by an era’s inability to recognise the genius of an artist in whose long dead hands it eventually falls. Nor is it the bitter reward of those who were ahead of their time – as if history were a competing field upon which “some contenders run so swiftly that they simply disappear from the spectator’s range of vision.”² On the contrary: many writers who receive posthumous fame were subject to the highest recognition of their peers and critics during their own lifetime. Posthumous fame seems to be the lot of the “unclassifiable ones”; of those whose literary position always carries an exception to the rule, always a “but” in the description of their oeuvre. It belongs to those whose style cannot be pinpointed or imitated. Society’s reluctance to give them its seal of approval obviously contributes to their belated recognition.

Roth has known such belated and renewed recognition during the last decade. In 2009 the copyrights of his work expired and interest in him soared, now moving beyond the traditional German-speaking academic context.³ But it is more than just copyrights; a newfound relevance is attributed to his thought. But what exactly are the aspects of his

¹ “Sie sind klug. Ich bin es nicht. Aber ich sehe, was Sie nicht sehen können, weil Ihre Klugheit eben Ihnen erspart, zu sehen. Sie haben die Gnade der Vernunft und ich die des Unglücks. Geben Sie mir keine Ratschläge mehr, helfen Sie mir, oden handeln Sie für mich. Ich gehe unter.” Roth in a letter to Stefan Zweig from Nice dated 13 July 1934, *Briefe*, p. 353.

² See Hannah Arendt’s introduction to Walter Benjamin’s *Illuminations*. London: New Left Books, 1973, pp. 2-3.

³ See the Introduction of this thesis for an overview of the recent upsurge in interest in Roth.

intellectual legacy that speak so vividly to our contemporary academic and literary audience? In order to answer these questions, it is crucial to examine what kind of intellectual Roth actually was. It is not enough, I believe, to state the ambivalence, non-conformity and “unclassifiability” of Roth’s persona in order to explain his hold over the contemporary intellectual imagination; nor can it just be the sense of the tragic that has created sustained attention in his life and writings. What, then, lies behind the ambivalence and eccentricity? How did his Jewish heritage influence his intellectual itinerary? Was Roth, as Stefan Zweig believed, indeed “little hampered” by tradition, or was he, as Kafka would have wanted, “fastened with his hind legs” to the tradition of his forefathers?⁴ Just as Steven E. Aschheim has examined the compelling reasons behind the “cult-status” of many German-Jewish émigré intellectuals in contemporary intellectual culture, tracing this fascination back to their transgressive personal and theoretical dislocations, I, in this chapter, aim to examine the legacy of Roth’s thought and fate as a Jewish intellectual.⁵

I will argue that the loss of Jewish tradition as an actively lived presence in Roth’s life influenced his assimilationist politics and contributed to the unclassifiable nature of his later political loyalties. The dislocation caused by the break with his Jewish heritage became a preferred ideological stance. Also, it fuelled his attempt, later in life, to place himself within a particular kind of (imagined) intellectual tradition, namely that of displaced but “gifted” Galician men who considered themselves part of a greater European intellectual tradition. The attempted and partial recovery of his Jewish roots, as well as the reestablishment of generational ties, can be analysed in Roth’s portrayals of his hometown Brody, especially in the long-planned but unfinished novel of his childhood, *Strawberries*.⁶ Most importantly, however, I hope to show that Roth’s individualist and eccentric stance, self-cultivated as well as posthumously imposed, was part of an intellectual context not untypical of the interwar years: a swaying back and forth between opposing parties and

⁴ Stefan Zweig wrote that the Jews of Vienna were its cultural centre and that “with their more mobile understanding, little hampered by tradition, they were the exponents of all that was new.” (Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, p.22). Franz Kafka wrote, “With their hind legs the Jews are fastened to the Jewish tradition of the fathers, and with their forelegs they get no ground under their feet. The despair thus ensuing translates into inspiration.” Quoted by Shaked in “Kafka: Jüdische Erbe und hebräische Literatur”, in *Die Macht der Identität. Essays über jüdische Schriftsteller* (Königstein: Jüdischer Verlag bei Athenaeum, 1986), p. 18, translation by Wolfgang Iser. See also chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁵ Steven E. Aschheim, *Beyond the Border: The German-Jewish Legacy Abroad*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007. Besides Hannah Arendt and Walter Benjamin, Aschheim analyses the contemporary intellectual appeal of thinkers such as Gershom Scholem, Martin Buber, Theodor W. Adorno, Franz Rosenzweig and Leo Strauss.

⁶ Joseph Roth, ‘Strawberries’, in *The Collected Stories of Joseph Roth*. Translated and with an Introduction by Michael Hofmann. New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002, pp. 138-165.

ideologies that resulted in temporary, but not necessarily tangential, political identifications.⁷

Jewish Intellectuals in Interwar Europe

What it means to be an intellectual has been subject of debate since the appearance of this new figure on the societal scene around the end of the nineteenth century. It is rather poignant that the origin of the term “intellectual” is connected to an infamous antisemitic episode, first coined as it was by Clemenceau in 1898 in order to describe the Dreyfusards, the defenders of Jewish army officer Alfred Dreyfus, who had been falsely accused of high treason. On 1 February 1898, the French newspaper *l’Aurore* published an article entitled “La protestation des intellectuels,” uniting 1200 writers, scholars and teachers in support of Emil Zola’s “J’accuse” about the Dreyfus affair. Thus, this event launched the term “intellectual” in France, connecting it from its earliest beginnings to politics and the desire for political influence. In 1890s Russia, the term *intelligentsia* had quite a specific social referent; namely, a figure alienated from and critical of society, far removed from the illiterate masses and politically opposed to the regime in power.⁸ In light of these early definitions of the intellectual as a cutting-edge figure in critical and active opposition to reigning political powers, the achievements and attitudes of the Weimar intellectuals during 1920s Germany, to which Roth at least in part belongs, pale significantly.⁹ Fritz Stern has called them a “shallow lot”; utopian, simplistic and ultimately ineffective in their visions and moralizing politics for a better future.¹⁰ The dominant argument nowadays is that Weimar failed because it did not manage to establish a strong democracy, the blame for

⁷ Jonathan Frankel’s article about Yosef Haim Brenner, ‘Yosef Haim Brenner, the “Half-Intelligentsia,” and Russian-Jewish Politics (1899-1908)’, has been instrumental in the development of my argument. See Jonathan Frankel, *Crisis, Revolution, and Russian Jews*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 98-130.

⁸ See chapter 1 of Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds. Intellectuals in Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

⁹ I would argue that Roth, instead of being a “Weimar intellectual”, only knew a partial intellectual passage through the early years of Weimar, coinciding with his residence in Berlin from 1920 until 1925. Weimar presented a brief but important phase in his intellectual itinerary, as during these years he confronted and reacted to its realities in his journalism, ranging from subjects such a technology and modernity to the Jewish ghetto and Walter Rathenau.

¹⁰ “The intellectuals of Weimar – and this needs to be said at a time when Weimar is often portrayed as some sort of Paradise Lost – were a shallow lot in their moralizing politics. Their views often seemed utopian and simplistic, pious and fiercely polemical by turns. They were cynical, as Herbert Marcuse once put it to me about himself, because they knew how beautiful the world could be. They lived in a world peopled by George Grosz caricatures and three-penny indictments of bourgeois falsehood. It is perhaps too simple to say that they lived off the bankruptcy of the old order, but they did rather revel in the crudity of their opponents. It is not good for the mind to have dumb, discredited enemies.” Fritz Stern, *Dreams and Delusions. The Drama of German History*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987, p. 38.

which is delegated to its intellectuals, who, for the most part, remained distant from politics. As Peter Gay has argued, Weimar intellectuals made an informal tacit agreement with the government that they would not criticize it in return for their freedom of thought.¹¹ German culture in the 1920s was subject to what Gay called a brutal anti-intellectualism; a world threatened by unreason in which appeals to the intellect were few and ineffective. Intellectuals concentrated on establishing an internal vision of a fair and just society that remained utopian exactly because it was disconnected from politics.

István Deák, in his study about the intellectuals of the radical left-wing publication the *Weltbühne*, identified this strong anti-intellectualism of Weimar politics as the main reason why its left-wing intellectuals were indeed “utterly unsuccessful” as politicians.¹² Their main creed was based on the legacy of the French revolution, focusing on socialism, democracy and a belief in the inherent goodness of man as means to create a world where peace, individual liberty and social equality would reign. Their goals to “debarbarize” society and “unromanticize” war were a direct result of the First World War and the fact that many elements of the old, pre-war militaristic order remained in place after 1918. Where Deák’s argument gains strength is in his analysis of the non-conformity of these intellectuals, tracing the German intellectuals back to what he calls a Central European phenomenon: “the journalist who was also a literary figure, an intellectual, a social critic, a reformer, and a revolutionary. They combined within themselves features of the bourgeois, the artist-intellectual, and the revolutionist – a volatile blend of personality ingredients which accounts for much of their personal and artistic ambiguity.”¹³ Did this volatile ambiguity, too, perhaps, account for their failure to exert political influence?

Furthermore, the Jewish heritage of many of these intellectuals is of crucial importance. Deák argues that during Weimar, Jewishness was a “publicly imposed condition” that considerably effected, albeit indirectly, the ideological itineraries of intellectuals of Jewish descent. He explains the high participation of Jews in German culture by pointing to the peculiarities of the Central European Jewish intellectual tradition, emphasizing its multifarious and multivocal nature, as well as the Jews’ historic exclusion from professions in the civil service, the army, the judiciary and the university. This exclusion explains the high number of Jews in the so-called free professions. Indeed, during the nineteenth century, Jews had been eager to demonstrate their ties to German

¹¹ Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture. The Outsider as Insider*. New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001 (1968), p. 72.

¹² Istvan Deák, *Weimar Germany's left-wing intellectuals: a political history of the Weltbühne and its circle*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968.

¹³ Istvan Deák, *Weimar Germany's left-wing intellectuals*, p. 9.

culture, and they acquired the education and *Bildung* that they, and others, believed necessary for complete assimilation. But in the greater pattern of upward mobility, Jews reached a barricade, as it proved impossible to enter the most respectable professions. Thus many Jewish intellectuals pursued what in nineteenth century Germany were regarded as bohemian professions: journalism, the arts, theatre, freelance writing, and radical politics. Journalism, where many Jewish intellectuals found their niche, was considered a “free trade,” the modern equivalent of the travelling salesman. As such, it was never far removed from antisemitic connotations of the Wandering Jew. Like merchants, journalists carried with them the tools of their trade, making them susceptible to suspicions of disrupting the moral order. Thus, this blend of professional definitions, or, for that matter, the lack of a clearly defined singular profession, combined with a varied and sometimes opposed personal background is what makes the Central European Jewish intellectual into a tradition of her own.¹⁴ In it in this light that I believe Roth can be most fairly and adequately assessed. Before I will analyse Roth’s unstable intellectual itinerary in more detail, however, some more reflections on the concept and the idea of the Jewish intellectual are needed.

A certain mystical aura, one that seems difficult to quench despite increasing socio-historical approaches to the subject, still clings to the concept of the Jewish intellectual.¹⁵ The term sparks connotations of rabbinical learning and evokes ideas of Jewish superior intelligence and the Jews as the quintessential people of the book. The connection between Jews and the Word goes back to the teachings of Johanan ben Zacchai of Yabneh, who moved the worship of God away from the destroyed Temple and into a study of the Torah in the Diaspora. Indeed, after the destruction of Jerusalem and the second Temple by the Romans in 70 CE, the Jews became known as “an exclusively intellectual people.”¹⁶ Often, these supposedly innate intellectual qualities are offered as a direct explanation for the proportionally large number of Jews amongst the modern *intelligentsia* of many Western societies; an essentialist view, which has been challenged by recent sociological and cultural analyses. Sociological explanations centre on the marginal position of the Jews, who, although leaving their traditional Jewish communities behind, never fully subscribed to the

¹⁴ For another study about the Central European Jewish tradition, see Michael Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia: Jewish Libertarian Thought in Central Europe. A Study in Elective Affinity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford California Press, 1992.

¹⁵ Paul R. Mendes-Flohr, ‘The Study of the Jewish Intellectual: Some Methodological Proposals’, in F. Malino and P. Albert (eds.), *Essays in Modern Jewish History*. London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1982, pp. 142-166.

¹⁶ David Aberbach, *Major Turning Points in Jewish Intellectual History*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p. xii.

conventional preconceptions of the gentile culture of which they are part. It is because of this that the so-called “non-Jewish Jew” is capable of transcending the dogmas of both Judaism and Christianity, becoming a kind of critical fence-sitter within its host society.

Cultural explanations, on the other hand, refer to the “psychic tension” in assimilated Jews that is caused by the diabolic predicament of simultaneously experiencing shame and resentment: shame in relation to the “backwardness” of their unassimilated eastern brethren who possess an orthodoxy of which they have long distanced themselves, and resentment towards the gentile society that criticises and sustains the stereotype of the Eastern Jew. It is this tension between shame and resentment so characteristic of assimilated Jews in the West that creates a mindset deeply prone to intellectualism and cognitive innovation. However, this seems to imply that a Jewish intellectual from the East who remains in the East is a contradiction in terms, as the tension necessary for the development of her intellect is based on the precondition of being in the West; allowing for shame when confronted with the more traditional image of the Eastern Jew. In all instances, however, a certain enigmatic character clings to the figure and idea of the Jewish intellectual; perpetually out of place, unsure of its origins yet disproportionately present, the Jewish intellectual has often been regarded as a treat to dominant gentile stability.¹⁷

This idea of the Jew as a possible threat to society is linked to developments in Germany towards the end of nineteenth century; also the period when the term “antisemitism” was first coined.¹⁸ During the 1870s, it had become increasingly clear that the so-called assimilation contract was about to fail. Barred from the most respectable professions in German society, Jews were now also confronted with increasingly visible and virulent antisemitism. The “Jewish Question” as it emerged from the fringes of society in a text by historian Heinrich von Treitschke voiced the unease about the effects of liberalism on German culture; in other words, antisemitism coincided with disillusionment about the promises of economic and political liberalism during Bismarck’s reign of the 1870s.¹⁹ Soon after, Bismarck took a turn to the right. Most middle-class Jews had aligned

¹⁷ Jonathan Frankel, ‘The Paradoxical Politics of Marginality. Thoughts on the Jewish Situation during the Years 1914-1921’, in *Crisis, Revolution, and Russian Jews*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 131-154.

¹⁸ The term “antisemitism” was coined by radical German journalist Wilhelm Marr in 1879.

¹⁹ Michael A. Meyer and Michael Brenner (eds.), *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, Vol. 3 (Integration in Dispute 1871-1918). New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, p. 206. The term ‘Jewish question’ or ‘Jewish problem’ as it is sometimes called (*Judenfrage* in German) emerged in Germany during the first half of the nineteenth century, after the Congress of Vienna and the emancipation of the Jews. In the four decades after 1815, 2500 works on the subject were published. The origins of the discourse as it developed during the first decades of the twentieth century in the context of intense assimilation can be found in this period. A seminal work on the topic is Ritchie Robertson, *The “Jewish Question” in German Literature, 1749-1939: Emancipation and Its Discontents*. Oxford: UOP, 1999.

with liberalism not only because this coincided with their material interests, but also because “their collective memory persuaded them to side with their enemies’ enemies.”²⁰ In this context the idea of the Jewish people as a chimera re-emerged, calling for a theological but also moral and ethical divide between Christians and Jews. Instead of a “question,” their presence was now increasingly defined in terms of a “problem.” They stopped being “German citizens of the Judaic faith” who were working towards full integration – something most Germans and Jews believed in, especially after the first emancipatory laws of 1808-1812 – and instead reverted back to being considered pre-modern, disruptive elements in a Christian German society. Judaism was positioned in clear opposition to Christianity and constructed as a religion that had stayed behind on the great path of progress. Whereas Christians had been working towards the betterment of the modern world, the argument ran, Jews had chosen a separatist stance. As a result they had ended up on the sidelines of history. Thus, the Jews’ “ephemeral” presence became increasingly problematic in the midst of nationalist wheels spinning in Western Europe; they were considered superfluous onlookers to an unstoppable and inevitable historical process.

In the discourse about Jewish literature, too, this assumed enigmatic quality is often put forward as one of its main characteristics. Here, the enigmatic quality of Jewish literature stems from the difficulty of defining what a Jew is. The idea of the Jewish people as an enigma is based on references to the existential rootlessness of the Jews as a people without a land. Indeed, as an entity that escapes clear (national) definition, the idea of the Jewish enigma cuts across opposite ideological fields. It functions both as an admirable basis for a cosmopolitan and worldly Jewish culture, and as the main characteristic of an aloof and distant people, thinking itself superior in its diasporic existence and as such forming a threat to the moral and political stability of national states. This latter image, needless to say, is often provoked in order to provide rationale for antisemitism. Although problematic, the concept of enigma is not considered an entirely negative one within Jewish studies.²¹ It is on the extreme ends of the enigma that things become tricky and potentially harmful: indeed, the romanticised image of the cosmopolitan Jew, the boundless thinker who transcends national boundaries and is at home in the entire world, is pitted against the rootless and potentially revolutionary Jew, a dangerous and unsettling element.

²⁰ Michael A. Meyer and Michael Brenner (eds.), *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, Vol. 3, p. 280.

²¹ In *What Is Jewish Literature?*, a collection of essays aimed at undermining an essentialist view of Jewish literature, Hana Wirth-Nesher, in her introduction, nevertheless admits to the “very enigmatic quality” of the subject, which, she says, accounts for some of its “liveliness.” At the same time, however, it creates a severe lack of accessibility to the debate for outsiders. Hana Wirth-Nesher (ed.), *What Is Jewish Literature?* Philadelphia and Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1994.

Apart from the difficulties in adequately assessing the concept of the Jewish enigma, there is also the problem of defining Jewish literature; especially, but not only, in the case of assimilated Jewish writers and intellectuals.²² One cannot assume a direct lineage between Jewish heritage and Jewish thought or elements in the literary, journalistic or political works of Jewish authors. Also, many Jewish writers grew up from a relative distance to the traditions of Judaism; some of them converted to Christianity. Even for those intellectuals who had a more visible Jewish background or identified with it, a direct connection cannot be made. Steven Beller has opted that there are two ways to approach the question: first, to look at what intellectuals themselves have to say about their Jewishness; and second, to try to gaze beneath the empirical surface in order to make connections on the level of some sort of Jewish element surviving in modern intellectual Jewish culture. It is about tracing the background from which they originated as well as the degree to which their traditions were transmitted, albeit in secularized form, to the attitudes of the assimilated community.²³ In a similar vein, Gershon Shaked has argued that what constitutes Jewish literature cannot be defined biographically, through Jewish descent or roots, nor linguistically, through the use of Hebrew or Yiddish, but most of all empirically: it consists of those texts written by individuals “who define themselves as having a dual identity.”²⁴ Many German-Jewish writers often addressed Jewish subjects in an implicit manner in their fiction, whereas more direct confrontations with their Jewish heritage can be found in their journalism, journals or letters (this is certainly true for Roth). It is a literature that expresses a “flight from identity, a burdensome identity that was imposed [...] as a stigma and then internalised by them. The conflict between identities, as well as the experience of lacking an identity, was negative and destructive, to such a degree that it could not be resolved by our authors’ literary plots.”²⁵ Here I would say that literature as redemption, as a homecoming in words, may not have been its main purpose; instead, what it provided was a space to experiment with temporary identifications in flux with the times through which a writer was able to uphold, although not always sustain, a sense of identity. Finally, the idea of tracing Jewish archetypes, such as Job and the prophets, as a means of identifying Jewish literature has been criticised, mainly because archetypes are timeless

²² On the topic of defining Jewish literature, see Steven Beller, *Vienna and The Jews, 1867-1938. A Cultural History*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and Gershon Shaked, ‘Shadows of Identity: A Comparative Study of German Jewish and American Jewish Literature’, in *What Is Jewish Literature?*, pp. 167-187.

²³ Steven Beller, *Vienna and The Jews*, p. 126.

²⁴ Gershon Shaked, ‘Shadows of Identity’, p. 167.

²⁵ Gershon Shaked, ‘Shadows of Identity’, p. 176.

whereas literature, on the contrary, is time-haunted.²⁶ Indeed, we can only make connections between a writer's origins and her work based on an analysis on the historical context; the "haunted," then, being all the more poignant in the literature of interwar Jewish writers.

To conclude, let us look at some of the epitaphs Roth earned during his long posthumous career: descriptions by friends and acquaintances in memoirs and recollections, by academics and scholars in search of a more historical understanding, and by admirers, fellow writers and translators. Roth has been called a "gloomy melancholic" and a "turbulent instable neurotic"²⁷; "ein alttestamentarischen Jude", an "Urbild eines Poeten" and a writer "on a flight from nothingness"²⁸; a man who lived in a "time out of joint"²⁹; "a stranger in the world"³⁰; "one of the most idiosyncratic critical journalists and prosaists of the period of the Weimar Republic" as well as "one of the most consequent defenders of the poor and oppressed"³¹; a man of "co-existent contradictions"³²; "a doomed drinker"³³; a "Trauer, die recht behielt"³⁴; a "wanderer on a flight from a tragic end"³⁵; an "escapist in fairy tales"³⁶; "the eternal passenger"³⁷; an "independent mind", "egomaniacal" and a "mono-maniacal pessimist"³⁸; a "phantast" and "ein rhapsodischer Mensch"³⁹; an

²⁶ Robert Alter, 'Jewish Dreams and Nightmares', in *What Is Jewish Literature?*, pp. 53-66, p. 58.

²⁷ Gershon Shaked, 'The Grace of Reason and the Grace of Misery: Zweig and Roth - A Correspondence,' *The Hebrew University Studies in Literature*, Volume 10, No. 2, Jerusalem, Autumn 1982, pp. 247-270.

²⁸ Hermann Kesten, 'Introduction,' in Joseph Roth, *Briefe*, pp. 15-16, and Hermann Kesten, 'Joseph Roth: Auf der Flucht vor dem Nichts,' *Der Monat*, Vol. 5, No. 59 (1953), pp. 473-477.

²⁹ Cedric E. Williams, 'Joseph Roth: A Time out of Joint,' in idem, *The Broken Eagle: The Politics of Austrian Literature from Empire to Anschluss*. New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1974, pp. 91-112.

³⁰ Leon I. Yudkin, 'A stranger in the world: Joseph Roth's fictional hero', *Jewish Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (1989), pp. 25-29.

³¹ Matjaz Birk, 'Zeitkritische Aspekte im Roman Die Flucht ohne Ende (1927) – Einem 'Bericht' von Joseph Roth,' *Neophilologus*, Vol. 80, No. 1 (January 1996), pp. 111-125.

³² Helen Chambers (ed.), *Co-Existent Contradictions: Joseph Roth in Retrospect. Papers of the 1989 Joseph Roth Symposium at Leeds University to Commemorate the 50th Anniversary*. Riverside, California: Ariadne Press, 1991.

³³ A.F. Bance, 'In My End is My Beginning: Joseph Roth's "Die Rebellion" and "Die Legende vom heiligen Trinker"' in B. O. Murdoch and M.G. Ward (eds.), *Studies in Modern Austrian Literature: Eight Papers*. Glasgow: Scottish Papers in Germanic Studies, 1981, pp. 33-44.

³⁴ Heinrich Böll, 'Die Trauer, die recht behielt: Leben und Werk von Joseph Roth,' *Die Deutsche Rundschau*, Vol. 83, No. 3 (March 1957), pp. 274-278.

³⁵ Otto Forst de Battaglia, 'Der Wanderer auf einer Flucht zum tragischen Ende,' *Wort in der Zeit*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (April 1957), pp. 39-43.

³⁶ Marcel Reich-Ranicki, 'Joseph Roths Flucht ins Märchen,' in idem, *Nachprüfung: Aufsätze über deutsche Schriftsteller von gestern*. Munich: Piper, 1977, pp. 202-228.

³⁷ Gustav Kiepenheuer, 'Eine Reverenz vor Joseph Roth,' in Hermann Kesten (ed.), *Joseph Roth. Leben und Werk. Ein Gedächtnisbuch*. Köln und Hagen, 1949, p. 40.

³⁸ Wilhelm von Sternburg, *Joseph Roth. Eine Biographie*, p. 242 and 194.

³⁹ Géza von Cziffra, *Der Heilige Trinker. Erinnerungen an Joseph Roth*. Frankfurt am Mainz and Berlin: ein Ullstein Buch, 1989, c1983.

“intellectual vagabond”⁴⁰; a “dreamer” and a “stubborn flighter” with an “overflowing temperament”⁴¹; “a poet of “Austroslavism”⁴²; an “ironic primitivist”⁴³; and finally, but not exhaustively, a “holy liar”.⁴⁴ This small selection indeed speaks for Roth’s eccentricity and shows that he remains a writer of irreconcilable internal paradoxes. Roth himself added to the paradox when he wrote the following, now famous, lines: “I yearn for Paris, I have not given it up, ever, I am a Frenchman from the East, a humanist, a rationalist with religion, a Catholic with a Jewish intellect, an actual revolutionary.”⁴⁵ Part of the appeal certainly stems from a fascination with the unclassifiable. But what, then, did being a writer and intellectual mean to Roth?

Marginality, Money and Embodied Observation

All evidence suggests that Roth made a clear distinction between being a writer, a “witness to his times,” and an intellectual. He played down the value of institutionalised knowledge and instead stressed the importance of lived, embodied experience as a source of knowledge about reality; immersion in a subject through passionate observation, not formal education, was his credo.⁴⁶ Furthermore, he was convinced he was on a solitary mission, stressing and often amplifying his lonely stance as a thinker. He remained, at least in his own eyes, an “intellectual outsider,” a renegade: “Ich bin mit Wonne ein Abtrünniger, von Deutschen *und* Juden und bin stolz darauf.”⁴⁷ The fact that Roth believed in, and even cultivated, his solitary position as a writer does not mean, of course, that he was not part of a greater historical context; one in which, indeed, marginality played a key role. In order to explain Jewish cultural creativity in the interwar years, instead of taking it to be some innate quality, scholars nowadays take recourse to the marginality argument.⁴⁸ It posits that Jews

⁴⁰ Andreas Herzog, “‘Der Segen des ewigen Juden’: Zur ‘jüdischen’ Identität Joseph Roths”, in *Habsburger Aporien? Geisteshaltungen und Lebenskonzepte in der multinationalen Literatur der Habsburger Monarchie*, edited by Eva Reichmann, Bielefelder Schriften zu Linguistik und Literaturwissenschaft 9, Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 1998, pp. 113-132, p. 125.

⁴¹ Matiyahu Kranz, ‘Joseph Roths Stellung zum Zionismus: Eine Ergänzung zu H. Aussenhofers Aufsatz ‘Joseph Roth in Widerspruch zum Zionismus,’ *Tribüne*, Vol. 14, No. 55 (Frankfurt am Main 1975), pp. 6376-6392, pp. 6380 and 6389.

⁴² Martin Kraft, ‘Joseph Roth: The Legend of the Holy Drinker,’ *Krakow Post*, 27 May 2009 (<http://www.krakowpost.com/article/1334>). Kraft points to the fact that some critics have recently called Roth a poet of “Austroslavism.”

⁴³ Ward H. Powell, ‘Joseph Roth, Ironic Primitivist’, *Monatshefte*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (March 1961), pp. 115-122.

⁴⁴ Fred Grübel’s remarks can be found in Von Cziffra’s memoir.

⁴⁵ Joseph Roth, in a letter to Benno Reifenberg dated 1 October 1926, *Briefe*, p. 98.

⁴⁶ Jon Hughes, *Facing Modernity: Fragmentation, Culture and Identity in Joseph Roth’s Writing in the 1920s*, p. 128.

⁴⁷ Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 14 August 1935, *Briefe*, p. 421.

⁴⁸ See, for instance, Péter Hanák, ‘Social Marginality and Cultural Creativity in Vienna and Budapest (1890-1914)’, in *The Garden and the Workshop. Essays on the Cultural History of Vienna and Budapest*. Princeton, New

were especially creative because of their double alienation or exclusion from society: the broken ties to the Jewish tradition could not be mended by a new host society that was reluctant to fully absorb them. However, marginality was a state of mind that could lead to the most varied intellectual responses, and as such it betrays more about the position of Jews in German culture than about their works necessarily. The marginality thesis is supported by the ebbs and flows of history, as creative output increased in times of heightened antisemitism and danger.⁴⁹ Roth, confronted with the forced marginal condition of being an Eastern Jew in the capital cities of Western Europe, took his marginality to an extreme, and it became an important part of his self-image. In his eccentricity, he managed to alienate himself from his surroundings, while at the same time it increased his visibility, thus undermining one of the main creeds of liberal assimilation, namely, invisibility or an inconspicuous merging in German society. Also, in the years of his political exile in Paris, while desperately seeking paid employment and worrying about the developments in Germany, as his drinking increased so did his literary output. Indeed, it reached feverish heights; and so, for Roth, at least temporarily, disaster fuelled creativity.

In regards to Roth's emphasis on solitary observation, it is meaningful to recall the role of the writer in the Jewish tradition: traditionally, she was a sharp-eyed observer of Jewish life; a self-styled solitary prophet who responded to the confusion she witnessed by "writing for the perplexed."⁵⁰ Indeed, being a witness to his time was of crucial importance to Roth. In the dispute over Roth's position as a feuilletonist at the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, he wrote to the editor: "Ich mache keine "witzigen Glossen". *Ich zeichne das Gesicht der Zeit*. Das ist die Aufgabe einer großen Zeitung. Ich bin ein Journalist, kein Berichterstatter, in bin ein

Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998, pp. 147-177; Jonathan Frankel, 'The Paradoxical Politics of Marginality'; and Michael A. Meyer and Michael Brenner (eds.), *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, Vol. 3 (Integration in Dispute 1871-1918), p. 334.

⁴⁹ "If one searches not merely for Jewish origins in an author or artist but also looks for some Jewish content in their work, one rarely finds it present in any obvious way. Jewish factors in personal biography generally remain separate from creativity. Rather the work of Jewish writers, musicians, artists, and intellectuals is, with certain exceptions to be sure, much more reflective of German, European, or worldwide cultural currents than of the Jewish background of the individuals who created it." Meyer and Michael Brenner (eds.), *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, Vol. 3 (Integration in Dispute 1871-1918), p. 334-5.

⁵⁰ See Jonathan Frankel, 'Yosef Haim Brenner, the "Half-Intelligentsia," an Russian-Jewish Politics (1899-1908)', p. 102. Here, Frankel quotes Menahem Brinker, *Ad basimtah hateveryanit: maamar 'al sipur umahshavah bijezirat Brener* (Tel Aviv: 1990) p. 20. For a discussion of Moses Maimonides and his *Guide to the Perplexed* in the context of Jewish scholars who self-fashioned their lives and work in the framework of 'solitary prophets,' see David N. Myers's *Between Jew & Arab. The Lost Voice of Simon Rawidowicz*. Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2008, pp. 34-35. Simon Rawidowicz's colleague Nahum Glatzer described him, ten years after his death, as "a link in the long series of lonely men, who, amid ruins, affirmed the idea of Israel, men who, in the midst of a burning Jerusalem, saw the vision of a new Jerusalem." This image of the solitary prophet resonates with Rawidowicz's own self-description in the pseudonym he used, the Hebrew "Ish Boded", or lonely man. According to Myers, Rawidowicz imagined his own life's work in the same vein as did his two Jewish heroes, Moses Maimonides and Nahman Krochman (to whom Rawidowicz dedicated much research and publications).

Schriftsteller, kein Leitartikelschreiber.”⁵¹ This function as a witness to his times also resonates most heavily in the contemporary admiration and relevance attributed to Roth. In retrospect, his clear-sightedness almost seems stunning. As a recent reviewer of *What I Saw* (the Berlin essays) writes: “He knows that he’s no expert, but “I only know what I see and suffer. And that’s sufficient authority” (amen to that). [...] This was a time, it hardly needs pointing out, during which it paid to be alert. It is the kind of time it is worth keeping an eye on now, and you can hope for no better observer, save perhaps Karl Kraus.”⁵² Contemporary critics turn to Roth’s insightful pieces about his own time in order to, it seems, find parallel ways of detecting the dangers that threaten our own.

Roth’s sharp vision mainly concerned itself with those on the margins of modern society, increasingly, after 1933, the Jews. Despite the liberal hopes of assimilation to German culture which he cherished during the early 1920s, Roth could not, or did not, deceive himself with the illusion of full immersion that so many of his Jewish contemporaries clung onto until the late 1930s. The naïveté that could still accompany some of Roth’s intellectual elders in their vision of the future after the expulsions and book-burnings of 1933 was not an option to him. This difference, generational as well as ideological, comes to the fore most poignantly in his relationship with Stefan Zweig.⁵³ Zweig, who admired Roth and even supported him financially, left him conspicuously absent from his memoir, *The World of Yesterday*. According to Gershon Shaked, this is because Roth, “a turbulent instable neurotic,” was clearly an outsider in the paradisiacal world that Zweig had constructed for himself. In their correspondence, which is extensive, they take on the respective roles of bourgeois father and self-deprecating son, playing on the opposition between uprooted Eastern Jew and assimilated Western Jew.⁵⁴ Whereas Roth had no illusions about the fate of the Jews, Zweig, who was proud of his a-political, humanist stance far above the messy reality of politics, refrained from taking a stance on the matter. Roth’s disillusion with Zweig became a central theme in their correspondence. Even after the Nazis searched Zweig’s residence in Salzburg, confusing him with another Zweig (presumably the novelist Arnold Zweig), Zweig refused to leave Austria. Roth,

⁵¹ Joseph Roth, in a letter to Benno Reifenberg dated 22 April 1926, *Briefe*, p. 88.

⁵² Nicholas Lezard, ‘Berlin echoes’, *The Guardian*, Saturday 8 May 2004.

⁵³ Gershon Shaked, “The Grace of Reason and the Grace of Misery: Zweig and Roth - A Correspondence,” *The Hebrew University Studies in Literature*, Volume 10, No. 2, Jerusalem, Autumn 1982, pp. 247-270. The paper, which is in the archives of the Leo Baeck Institute in New York, has a handwritten dedication from Shaked to Fred Grübel that reads: “To Dr. Grübel, Another point of view on your relative – J. Roth. Cordially Gershon Shaked.”

⁵⁴ This opposition is often played out in Roth’s novels, for instance between Dan, Bloomfield and Böhlaug in *Hotel Savoy*, Baranowicz and Franz Tunda’s family in the West in *Flight Without End*, Brandeis and the Bernheims in *Left and Right*, and Mendel Singer and his sons Shemariah and Jonas in *Job*.

infuriated, responded that it must be clear that one is punished, not only for the sins of those Jews whose name you share, but for the sins of all Jews. In the eyes of Goebbels, he wrote, all Jews are equally despised: “Man verwechselt Sie nicht, weil Sie Zweig heissen, sondern, weil Sie ein Jude sind, ein Kulturbolschewik, ein Pazifist, ein Zivilisationsliterat, ein Liberaler. Jede Hoffnung ist sinnlos.”⁵⁵

Furthermore, Roth was aware of the antisemitic connotations attached to the journalistic profession. In February 1933, he wrote to the Jewish publisher and intellectual Bela Horovitz: “... 3000 Jahre haben wir beide gewartet, bevor wir in der deutschen Literatur eine Rolle spielen durften. Dann: ich 12 Jahre, bevor ich einen guten konservativen Namen bekommen habe. ... Wenn man lebt, überlebt man. Das Dritte Reich auch.”⁵⁶ His self-conception as an artist included images of the itinerant tradesman, the wandering Jew and the “batlan,” a Hebrew term meaning “man of leisure” or “impractical man.” Historically, “batlan” was an honorific title given to a Jew who refrained from ordinary work and devoted himself to study, prayer, and community service. The term turned pejorative in later times when the value of men without a job or trade diminished; as a result “batlan” received its contemporary meaning, i.e. an idle person, ineffective, a loafer.⁵⁷ In the world of Eastern Jewry, the “batlan” was a well known figure, not a sage but a storyteller, and scholars assume that Roth was familiar with this figure.⁵⁸ Indeed, Roth actively connected his “free profession” with the status of “batlan”; to Roth, it meant a trade whose main calling it was to report on its times, to document all that was inhumane about modern urban life; and a trade that, moreover, was seemingly disconnected from practical concerns such as money and status, despite his dire need for it.

⁵⁵ And shortly afterwards: “Es ist ein Kampf auf Leben und Tod zwischen der europäischen Kultur und Preussen. Merken Sie das wirklich nicht?” Joseph Roth, in letters to Stefan Zweig dated 6 April 1933 and 7 November 1933, *Briefe*, pp. 261 and 287.

⁵⁶ Joseph Roth, in a letter to Bela Horovitz dated 18 February 1933, *Briefe*, p. 251.

⁵⁷ “In the Talmud (*Meghillah 3b*) a city is defined as one that had at least ten batlanim. The function of these men ranged from serving as a permanent minyan of ten men at synagogue services to rendering decisions on religious, legal and ethical questions. In later times, as the value of men who lacked a job or trade depreciated, the term became pejorative. Thus in Yiddish, a batlan (plural batlanim), came to mean first an idle person, a loafer, and later any clumsy or ineffectual person, a clod. This sense passed from the Yiddish to the Hebrew word. The literal meaning of *batlan* is ‘one who ceases doing;’ the root is *batel*, ‘to cease, stop, be idle.’” Sol Steinmetz, *Dictionary of Jewish Usage. A Guide to the Use of Jewish Terms*. Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005. Roth’s good friend, the Jewish scholar and journalist Joseph Gottfarstein, who was called a ‘batlan’ by his wife, explained the term as “ein Nichtstuer, a kind of Clochard.” Roth’s father was a ‘batlan’, and so is Andreas Kartak in *The Legend of the Holy Drinker* (see chapter 7).

⁵⁸ “Joseph Roth hatte die Kunst des Erzählens im Blut,” said Otto Forst de Battaglia. “Dem östjudischen Milieu, dem er entstammte, ist die merkwürdige Gestalt des ‘Batlan’ wohlvertraut, des Erzählers und Spaßmachers, der auf Hochzeiten und bei sonstigen Festlichkeiten die Teilnehmer durch seinen Erfindungsreichtum und sein Gestaltungstalent belustigt.” Otto Forst de Battaglia, ‘Der Wanderer auf einer Flucht zum tragischen Ende,’ *Wort in der Zeit*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (April 1957), pp. 39-43, p. 39.

The duty Roth felt to report on the confusion and disorder of his times is also reflected in another element of the Jewish condition of the interwar period: the feeling of being hunted (and the “time-haunted” quality of interwar literature). First, it plagues his literary characters, who, despite or perhaps because of the aimlessness of their daily lives, feel restless; hunted, indeed, by something inexplicable. The lost opportunities within a drastically changed postwar world create a vacuum that sucks the air from their chests. Roth also experienced this sense of being hunted; a constant sense of running out of time pervades his letters. He felt he was writing against the tides of time and of money running out; against deadlines and his faltering physical condition. “Sie wissen doch, was Zeit bedeutet,” he writes to Zweig. “Eine Stunde ist ein See, ein Tag ein Meer, die Nacht eine Ewigkeit, das Erwachen ein Höllenschreck, das Aufstehen ein Kampf um Klarheit gegen einen bösen Fiebertraum. Zeit, Zeit, Zeit haben das ist es, und ich habe ja keine.”⁵⁹ Very often he felt he was writing *against* something; against time, against deadlines, against lack of money, and against a failing health. Also, in his quest for honest reporting, he was, as a result of his social and intellectual marginality, very often writing “against the greats” of history.

Thus, the image of the reporter documenting the ailments of his time, someone whose goals are noble, characterises Roth’s self-conception as a writer. Also, he disconnected this upstanding mission from the need for paid employment, i.e. money. Now, the latter is an important theme in Roth’s life, possessing his thoughts and letters; he seems perpetually in dire need of it. True, after 1933 it became increasingly difficult to sustain an audience, with his German readership cut off, and the sizable book advances he was used to dried up. However, it is also a well-known fact that Roth maintained a lavish life-style, running up hotel bills for residence and liquor; some of them remain unpaid till this day. Despite this, Roth cultivated the impression that he lived from ‘Geist’ only, versus the mortal necessities of money and food. “Seit drei Jahren habe ich keine Mahlzeit zu mir genommen,” he claimed.⁶⁰ Contrary to what one may expect from someone in constant need of paid employment, Roth was known to be very generous, even careless, with his money.⁶¹ Also, two volumes of correspondence with his publishers are dedicated to the subject.⁶²

⁵⁹ Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated February 1936, *Briefe*, p. 451.

⁶⁰ David Bronsen, *Joseph Roth. Eine Biographie*, p. 373.

⁶¹ Herman Kesten underlines Roth’s generosity to his friends in need – a generosity that was financial but also given in time and conversation – to both ‘Würdigen und Unwürdigen, ohne Ansehn der Person.’ In Joseph Roth, *Briefe*, pp. 15-16.

⁶² Madeleine Rietra & Rainer-Joachim Siegel (eds.), *Geschäft ist Geschäft. Seien Sie mir privat nicht böse. Ich brauche Geld.’ Der Briefwechsel zwischen Joseph Roth und den Exilverlagen Allert de Lange und Querido 1933-1939*. Cologne:

In denying food and money as means to sustain himself, Roth donned a well-known and often antisemitic stereotype about the Jewish intellectual: namely that of the Jewish intellect as a spiritual entity unrelated to money. Hannah Arendt has analysed the tradition of spiritual learning in Jewish thought in which money is understood to be detrimental to one's intellectual credibility, strongly influencing and sometimes even disrupting the attitudes of Jewish intellectuals towards money.⁶³ In nineteenth century Germany, many Jews considered success in the free professions or in the domains of art and culture the ultimate mark of liberation from all the limitations and sordidness of the ghetto which had been imposed upon Jewry for centuries. At the same time, in the words of Stefan Zweig, it was an escape from "the morally dubious, the distasteful, the petty, the unspiritual, which is attached to all trade, and all that which is purely business." Entry into the world of culture, Zweig suggested, was an effort at auto-redemption in the Wagnerian sense, designed to redeem oneself and the entire race from the curse of money. What caused this desire, according to Robert S. Wistrich, was "a secret longing to resolve the merely Jewish – through flight into the intellectual – into humanity at large."⁶⁴

Humanity, or writing on behalf of man, was of great concern to Roth, and he dedicated himself to the plight of its least fortunate members by constant and fervent reporting. However, his attitude to money seems to have been based on an excessive amplification of the stereotype. His abuses of money are almost a conscious protest, or rebellion, against the stereotypical image of the Jew as stingy moneylender; a kind of 'auto-redemption' through the discarding of money while at the same time keeping it his muse, his source of torture. By consciously cultivating a careless attitude towards it, Roth aligned himself with the poor. Indeed, it seems fair to ask to what extent Roth's financial concerns were really the result of pressing material circumstances (especially before 1933), and to what extent they were fuelled by an internalisation of antisemitic stereotypes about money. Also, the fact that Roth wrote for newspapers of opposing ideological orientations is often seen as proof of his changing and conflicting political positions. Even if his convictions

Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2005; Madeleine Rietra & Theo Bijvoet (eds.), *Aber das Leben marschiert weiter und nimmt uns mit: Der Briefwechsel zwischen Joseph Roth und dem Verlag De Gemeinschaft*. Cologne: Kiepenheuer and Witsch, 1991.

⁶³ See Hannah Arendt's introduction to Walter Benjamin's *Illuminations* (London: New Left Books, 1973). See also Amos Morris-Reich, "The beautiful Jew is a moneylender: money and individuality in Simmel's rehabilitation of the "Jew"", in *Theory, Culture & Society* 20,4 (2003) 127-142; Sylvia Huberman Scholnick, "Money versus "mitzvot": the figure of the businessman in novels by American Jewish writers", *Modern Jewish Studies Annual* 6 (1987) 48-55; Sara Lipton, "The root of all evil: Jews, money and metaphor in the Bible moralisée", *Medieval Encounters* 1,3 (1995) 301-322.

⁶⁴ See Robert S. Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 646, quoting from Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday* (New York: Viking Press, 1943), pp. 11-12.

swayed during the 1920s – and this was not a rare occurrence during Weimar – what very often caused this was, indeed, a dire need for paid employment.⁶⁵

The Auto-da-Fé of the Mind (1933)

As the 1920s wore on and disillusionment with Weimar grew, Roth became increasingly more fervent about the moral duties of its writers. To Roth, Central European intellectuals, journalists and novelists of Jewish descent, “descendants of the old Jews,” formed *the* representatives not of German, but of European culture. He believed it was their moral obligation to speak up and out against the barbarism that was beginning to make itself visible on the right. Not unlike his colleagues of the *Weltbühne*, Roth was genuinely horrified by social injustice and the sufferings of the poor, but what mainly caused his opposition to emerging right-wing forces in society was the “triumph of nihilism” he foresaw.⁶⁶ Many of his friends and acquaintances were left-wing Weimar intellectuals, among others Hermann Kesten, Egon Erwin Kisch, Annette Kolb, Rudolf Leonard, Ludwig Marcuse, Hans Natonek, René Schickele, and Ernst Tollner. Many years before the dehumanizing forces of National Socialism were translated into actual political appointments, parties and laws, Roth expected from his colleagues, most of them Jews, that they translate their concerns into words and claim a moral-ethical engagement. Both during Weimar and the late 1930s, when Austria’s *Anschluss* to Nazi Germany was imminent, Roth condemned the refusal of its intellectuals to engage with the present. The role of the writer, he believed, was not to exercise politics via alignment with a political party, but to independently “explore and understand the society in which he was living and to draw attention to what was happening.”⁶⁷ As early as 1923, Roth criticised German writers for their silence “über alle Dinge, die Deutschlands Wohl und Wehe [betreffen], die Arbeit, das Brot und den Tod seines Volkes, ... über die barbarischen Formen des öffentlichen Lebens.”⁶⁸ He was horrified by the modern intellectual capacity to forget and discard historical continuities. Indeed, as Kati Tonkin has observed, Roth considered a

⁶⁵ Indeed, many postwar intellectuals in Weimar changed their politics in a “bewildering fashion” from a position on the extreme Left (the Republic meant a new beginning) to an apolitical or strongly anti-communist position towards the late 1920s. See Istvan Deák, *Weimar Germany’s left-wing intellectuals*, p. 18.

⁶⁶ Istvan Deák, *Weimar Germany’s left-wing intellectuals*, p. 21.

⁶⁷ Kati Tonkin, *Joseph Roth’s March into History*, p. 67.

⁶⁸ Joseph Roth, ‘Schweigen im Dichterwald’, *Prager Tageblatt*, 16 November 1923. Kati Tonkin, *Joseph Roth’s March into History*, p. 99, footnote 88.

proper examination between past and present as vital to the understanding of what ailed society.⁶⁹

The idea that the past is responsible for, and provides answers to, the ailments and evils of the present, comes to the fore most poignantly in Roth's essay "The Auto-da-Fé of the Mind," from 1933.⁷⁰ It is a reaction to the book burnings of May 1933 in Berlin and elsewhere, and a fierce attack on what he calls the "capitulation of the European mind"; a mind capitulating "out of weakness, out of sloth, out of apathy, out of lack of imagination (it will be the task of some future generation to establish the reasons for this disgraceful capitulation)." The Third Reich was persecuting its writers, those of intellect; banishing them from its midst and burning their books. Roth stressed the fact that almost all of these writers are Jews (he lists them, on two pages). This "literary antisemitism," however, was not new: it characterised Prussian rule from the days of Bismarck and into the present. Prussian militarism had placed the intellect in moral banishment and exile, even within Germany's own borders. In other words:

If you want to understand the burning of the books, you must understand that the current Third Reich is a logical extension of the Prussian empire of Bismarck and the Hollenzollerns, and not any sort of reaction to the poor German republic with its feeble German Democrats and Social Democrats. Prussia, the ruler of Germany, was always an enemy of the intellect, of books, of the Book of Books – that is, the Bible – of Jews and Christians, of humanism and Europe. Hitler's Third Reich is only so alarming to the rest of Europe because it sets itself to put into action what was always the Prussian project anyway: to burn the books, to murder the Jews, and to revise Christianity.⁷¹

The Jews, then, are central. They are the writers; the only people in Germany buying and producing books; they are the intellect that is now not only morally but also physically banished from Germany. Thus, Roth places "intellect" directly besides "Jew." This Jewish intellect, moreover, transcends the limits of time and place. First, he links the books written by Jewish authors directly to the Bible: "If the books of Jewish or supposed

⁶⁹ Kati Tonkin, *Joseph Roth's March into History*, p. 153.

⁷⁰ The phrase *auto da fé* refers to the ritual of public penance of condemned heretics by the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisition. *Auto da fé* in medieval Spanish means "act of faith." It appeared in French in the bi-monthly publication *Cahiers Juifs* (Paris, No. 5/6, September/November 1933, pp. 161-169). In the introduction, Albert Einstein wrote that the essays honoured "das Werk der deutschen Juden [...] in einer Zeit der Vervollung" and testified to "das Abendland den Juden, einerseits seine Religion und somit seine wertvollsten ethischen Werte, andererseits zu einem großen Teil die Wiedergeburt der Geistigen Welt der Griechen." Joseph Roth, 'The Auto-da-Fé of the Mind,' in *What I Saw: Reports from Berlin, 1920-1933*. Translated by Michael Hoffman. London & New York: Granta, 2004, pp. 207-217.

⁷¹ Joseph Roth, 'The Auto-da-Fé of the Mind,' p. 210.

Jewish authors are burned, what is really set to fire is the Book of Books, the Bible.”⁷² Here, Roth assumes a direct link between intellect, Jews, and their ancestral and biblical past. By reaching far into the holy past, he underlines the cruelty of the present. Secondly, the Jewish intellect is not a German entity, but an entirely European one. Indeed, what the Jews are punished for is “their Jewish blood and their European intellect.” To Roth, Jewish blood leads to, and is based on, European roots.

Roth was not the only writer who envisioned himself part of a greater community of European intellectuals. The writers of the *Weltbühne*, too, aimed for total assimilation not into Germandom, but into a community of progressive Europeans. An explicit focus on Jewishness contradicted their basic belief that they should be looked upon not as Jews, but as Europeans. However, this was tellingly more difficult to maintain in a context in which Jewishness was increasingly imposed, and negatively so, upon the minds and bodies of Jewish writers. Also, since no such community of European intellectuals existed, they felt themselves “homeless.”⁷³ Indeed, it is doubtful, Roth writes, that “German writers of the Jewish extraction” have ever felt at home in the German Reich. “There is a justifiable sense that German authors, of Jewish or non-Jewish origins, have at all times been strangers in Germany, immigrants on home ground, consumed with longing for their real fatherland even when they were within its borders.” From the time of Bismarck’s Second Reich onwards, German (read: Jewish) writers have been living in a situation of moral exile. The only free and independent people, the “only true revolutionaries in the proper sense,” are the writers. Therefore, long before Hitler they had been “émigrés and expatriates in that empire of technology, of corporals, of parades, and of standing at attention”; “the only representatives of Europe who are debarred from returning to Germany.” In addition to their free position in a society that had since long expressed a profound respect for academics while treating the independent writer with suspicion, they were also victims of the anti-Western sentiment in Germanic ideology. Indeed, left-wing intellectuals tended to be everything that German ideology traditionally despised: Francophile, Jewish, Western, rebellious, progressive, democratic, rationalist, socialist, liberal, and cosmopolitan. For Roth, these qualities, many of which he shared, all merged in the idea of the “European intellectual.”

⁷² Joseph Roth, ‘The Auto-da-Fé of the Mind,’ p. 212.

⁷³ As Istvan Deák has argued: “Homelessness’ might become an advantage if it allowed the individual the freedom of unemotional and uncommitted observation. But these intellectuals were neither unemotional nor uncommitted; nor were they allowed to be impartial observers. On the contrary, they were urged to alternately identify themselves as Jews and as Germans – being alternately chided, when they tried, for clannishness or for ‘infiltration.’” Istvan Deák, *Weimar Germany’s left-wing intellectuals*, p. 25-6.

One characteristic of German cultural ideology was its obsession with the irrational, i.e. the neo-romantic. In the 1920s, this tendency expressed itself in the idea of a return to “blood and soil”; to nature and youth; to organic poetry and adoration; to boy scouts and excursions. After the fragmentation and disillusion of war, Germany was looking for wholeness, and its right-wing parties appealed to the irrational as a source of unity.⁷⁴ Commenting on the disastrous results of the 1930 elections, when the National Socialists returned to Parliament as the second largest party, Fritz Stern noted that “Very few [...] understood that the real power of the National Socialists lay in their brilliantly organised pseudo-religious emotional appeal.”⁷⁵ Roth did not underestimate the force of the irrational; instead, he identified it as one of the main threats to European civilisation and the reasons for Europe’s descent into barbarism.

Thus, to conclude, Roth did not consider the events of 1933 – the book burnings, the boycotts of Jewish shops and the expulsions – to be an isolated incident or an aberration from the “usual” course of German history. On the contrary: they were embedded in a strong tradition of (literary) anti-Semitism and the urge for military power. Furthermore, they were not only a threat against Jews, but against European civilisation at large; and, ultimately, against God.⁷⁶ What set apart 1933 from 1914, when most Europeans, including Jews, greeted the First World War with naïve yet genuine enthusiasm, was the fact that in those years, people still bothered themselves with the horrors and outgrowths of bestiality. In 1933, the world was silent. “Und nicht rührt sich, in der ganzen Welt.”⁷⁷ No protest was heard; no voices raised. It was against this eerie silence that Roth protested and called upon his fellow “Europeans” to raise their pens. It was the “lack of imagination” partly responsible for Europe’s decline that he asked his colleagues to battle

⁷⁴ Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture*, p. 76.

⁷⁵ Fritz Stern, *Five Germanys I Have Known*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006, p. 78.

⁷⁶ In the first of a series of telling letters to Stefan Zweig, written at the end of March 1933, Roth wrote: “Man konnte das 6000jährige jüdische Erbe nicht verleugnen; aber ebensowenig kann man das 2000jährige *nicht jüdische* verleugnen. Wir kommen eher aus der “Emanzipation”, aus der Humanität, aus dem “Humanen” überhaupt, als aus Ägypten. Unsere Ahnen sind Goethe Lessing Herder nicht minder als Abrajam Isaac und Jacob. Im Übrigen werden wir nicht mehr, wie unsere Vorfahren von frommen Christen geschlagen, sondern von Gottlosen Heiden. Hier geht es nicht gegen Juden allein. Obwohl sie, wie immer, das schärfste Geschrei erheben. Hier geht es gegen die europäische Zivilisation, gegen die Humanität, deren Vorkämpfer Sie mit Recht und Stolz sind. (Und gegen Gott).” Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 22 March 1933, *Briefe*, p. 257.

⁷⁷ Roth admits that the “eternally eccentric Gide” and his “pathetic circle of snobs” are the only ones in the “Welt der schreibenden Menschen” who move their pens. The world of 1933 has accepted “die Dummheit, die Bestialität, den Wahnsinn,” and Roth wonders whether the time has come to isolate the world from the “der Kranken” by means of the word; to create a verbal wall in order to prevent the barbarism from spreading. But he fears it is too late: “... in dem Masse, in dem sich etwa ein krankes Tier vom Typ Goering von dem immer noch im Bereich des Menschlichen verbliebenen Wilhelm II unterscheidet: in dem Masse ungefähr unterscheidet sich 1933 von 1914.” Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 26 March 1933, *Briefe*, p. 259.

by means of their minds. In his vision, finally, the Jews, bearers of intellect and European tradition, were the forefathers of a European culture that not only included Judaism, but also Christianity and humanism. It was up to them, now, to defend this heritage.

Brody

While Roth placed his specifically Jewish intellectuals – now a unified group in the face of their expulsion and extinction at the hands of the Nazis – into the greater frame of European tradition and civilisation, he also made a more concentrated movement away from geographical grandeur and towards the small region at the easternmost edge of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, now in the Ukraine: Galicia, and his hometown, Brody. The “contortions of the spirit” that characterise Roth’s Jewish intellect are also present in, and perhaps traceable to, the reputation of Galicia.⁷⁸ As Ezra Mendelsohn has argued, the contradictory opinions and assessments of Galicia are important when we try to understand the lives and works of the many brilliant Jewish writers and artists it brought forth.⁷⁹ On the one extreme, Galician Jewry suffered the worst press of all Jews; they have been portrayed as a cunning, shrewd and deceptive people, an image caught in the figure of the ‘galitsianer’ – in Mendelsohn’s words, “one with whom it would be ill advised to do business.” On the other extreme, Galicia has been seen as the location of the purest and most “authentic” form of Judaism, of folklore and traditions untainted by urban developments in the West. These two very different perceptions of Galicia, equally strong and pertinent, have persisted side by side in the minds of Jews and non-Jews alike.

It was one of Galicia’s own, the writer Karl Emil Franzos, who catapulted the negative image of Galician Jewry into a wider scope. His literary depictions of Jewish life convey strong impressions of poverty and wretchedness, disorder and religious fanaticism; images which gained weight because of his own Galician roots. It was Franzos, too, who characterised Galicia as “halb-Asien,” placing it on the oriental side of the map and aligning it with “barbaric” Russia as opposed to the more enlightened and occident capitals of the empire, Budapest and Vienna. Also, most Galician Jews were Hasidic, which, in the eyes of

⁷⁸ David Bronsen coined the expression “contortions of the spirit” when he described what he called Roth’s “torn identity,” his predicament of being both Jew and German. David Bronsen, ‘Austrian vs. Jew’, pp. 220-226.

⁷⁹ Erza Mendelsohn, *Painting a People. Maurycy Gottlieb and Jewish Art*. Hannover and London: Brandeis University Press, 2002. A recent conference addressed the question of Galicia’s reputation and meaning as a historical region: *Galicia in the 20th Century. A Region in the Shadow of Empires*, 3-5 June 2010, Center for Urban History of East Central Europe, Lviv, Ukraine.

many Haskalah Jews eager to prove their enlightened spirit often evoked images of obscurantism, fanaticism, irrationalism and a backward adulation of the miracle rabbi.

On the more positive side, Galicia was sometimes thought of as a “relatively liberal oasis in the midst of autocratic Eastern Europe.”⁸⁰ Because there existed relative harmony among the different nationalities in Galicia, mostly Ukrainians, Russian, Poles and Jews, compared to, for instance, Russia or Romania, Galicia was seen as an exemplar of tolerance in the face of festering national conflicts elsewhere. Galicia was also one of Europe’s most important centres for Zionism. Thus, as disillusionment with modernity grew in Jewish milieus in the West, many authors turned to the imagery of the East to represent what they felt was lacking in the urban world: a sense of wholeness and genuine connection to one’s past and spirituality. As Michael Brenner has shown, many Jewish writers in the interwar period portrayed the assimilated “non-Jewish” German-Jew in a negative light and instead searched for “fictitious counterimages” of what they believed to be the authentic Jew. “What made those characters look authentic in the eyes of acculturated German Jews was that they appeared to be unaffected by Western civilization. By speaking a Jewish language, being well-versed in religious traditions, and proudly displaying their Jewishness, the characters symbolised a direct link with their ancestors. Their interpretation of their ancestors’ tradition could lead to internal conflict and even revolt – as was the case with Jewish heretics – but never to the shallowness that many German-Jewish writers identified with modern Judaism in the West.”⁸¹

In his idealised representations of the *Ostjude*, especially in *The Wandering Jews* (1927), but elsewhere, too, we find proof of Roth’s attempts to re-connect himself with the tradition of his ancestors, even if these efforts remained within the domain of the literary.⁸² Roth portrayed Eastern Jewry as a spiritual community where honesty and warmth could still be found; a community that had been spared the march of modernity and where, unlike the falsified ties and traditions of the West, family ties were still genuine. Roth’s loving portrayal of Eastern Jews was part of a greater rediscovery of the *Ostjude*; a tendency that crystallised with Martin Buber, who collected Hasidic tales and claimed that the “real soul” of world Jewry could be found in the Hasidic communities of Eastern Galicia and the

⁸⁰ Erza Mendelsohn, *Painting a People*, p. 18.

⁸¹ Michael Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1996, p. 130. See especially chapter 5, ‘The Invention of the Authentic Jew: German-Jewish Literature’, pp. 129-153.

⁸² The main interpretation of *The Wandering Jews* in Roth scholarship is that Roth envisioned this communal warmth and spirituality for other Jews; never for himself. He remained in the modernized West despite his increased disillusionment and never made any active or realist attempt (i.e. travel to Brody or conversion) to reconnect to his Eastern Jewish heritage. It remained a literary, mental construct.

Russian Ukraine.⁸³ Buber, Roth and other Western Jews agreed that the Eastern Jew was often homeless and miserable due to oppression and economic uncertainties, but “at least he had remained true to his own identity, his tradition, his ceaseless dialogue with God, and his sense of belonging to an unbroken chain of generations.”⁸⁴ By consciously portraying Eastern Jews in a positive light, Roth was writing against their stigmatisation; something he, as a Jew from the East, was well aware of: “The more Western the origin of a Jew, the more Jews are there for him to look down upon. The Frankfurt Jew despises the Berlin Jew, the Berlin Jew despises the Viennese Jew, the Viennese Jew despises the Warsaw Jew. Then there are still the Jews from way back in Galicia, upon whom they all look down, and that’s where I come from, the lowest of all Jews.”⁸⁵ But, in an early letter from 1917 to his cousin Paula Grübel, written during the war while he was stationed in Galicia, Roth referred to his regiment’s stables as an “ostgalizischen Augiasstall” with a couple of “Judengeschäfte” where everything swims when it rains and smells when the sun shines.⁸⁶ These were the observations of a young man who, in 1917, pen in hand, still cherished the hope of assimilation into the great tradition of German writers such as Goethe and Schiller. “The Auto-da-Fé of the Mind” was, literally, too far from his mind and could not have been written if it had not been for that crucial Weimar decade when his dreams of assimilation were shattered and replaced by a fervent, self-proclaimed “a-political observation” in the name of those on the margins.

Roth’s unfinished novel *Strawberries*, the story of his childhood, was meant as a literary return to Galicia, yet the effort remained unfinished and the text incomplete. Roth began writing it in 1929, but a lack of funds forced him to use the material for the novel *Weights and Measures* (1936) instead.⁸⁷ But this unfinished novel, the “great novel” of his childhood, hunted him. On 21 August 1935 he wrote to Stefan Zweig: “... und ich will den Roman, den “großen” von den “Erdbeeren” beginnen...,” and asked him to look for a publisher.⁸⁸ And a year later, on 29 May 1936: “Ich habe aber immer noch einen Lebensinstinkt, ich

⁸³ Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers. The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800-1923*. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982.

⁸⁴ Robert S. Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph*, p. 658.

⁸⁵ David Bronsen, ‘Austrian vs. Jew’, p. 223.

⁸⁶ Joseph Roth, in a letter to Paula Grübel dated 24 August 1917, *Briefe*, p. 35.

⁸⁷ Roth wrote to Stefan Zweig, “Ich korrigiere meinen ersten Roman, dann schreiben ich am zweiten. Da werfe ich schnell alles hinein, was ich an Materie für den groß-angelegten Roman *Die Erdbeeren* hatte. Schade, aber was soll ich tun?” The reasons for this were financial, as Roth was living from the remains of the book advances he received for both as yet unfinished novels. Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 4 May 1926, *Briefe*, p. 469.

⁸⁸ Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 21 August 1935, *Briefe*, p. 425.

will schreiben, die "Erdbeeren", ich will nicht so jämmerlich umkommen. Ich möchte so gerne 6 Monaten aufatmen."⁸⁹

Brody, the place that critics believe gave Roth his perpetual sense of "Randexistenz," was a small town of ten thousand inhabitants, mainly Jews, located "... mitten im Flachland, von keinem Berg, von keinem Wald, keinem Fluß begrenzt."⁹⁰ Until 1880 it had a blooming market and trade network, when, due to political and fiscal reasons, the decree of free trade was repealed. Pogroms in Russia in 1881-1882 turned Brody into a proper immigrant camp, with temporary shelters and aids set up by the local population (Roth repeated this effort in Paris in 1938, when he set up shelter and food for refugees from Nazi Germany). Emigration from Galicia towards Vienna and to a lesser extent the German empire was much higher than from the other crownlands, Bohemia and Moravia, as poverty and population increase were most rampant there. As a result of pogroms and poverty, 2.750.000 Eastern Jews left Europe to go overseas, mainly the United States, between 1880 and 1914.⁹¹ In 1900, when Roth was six years old, 71 percent of Brody's population was Jewish, and he grew up in the orthodox milieu of the town that, despite rabbinical resistance to the educational reforms of the Emperor, also had one of the few German-language Gymnasias in the region, which Roth attended. Besides Jews, Brody was also home to Poles and Ruthenians, and the linguistic diversity of his hometown, mixing German, Yiddish, Polish, Ukrainian and Russian, made a lasting impression on Roth. This polyglot character of Brody can be traced in the polyphonic character of Roth's novels; in opposing voices and opinions as well as characters. However, the story of the Jews in the crownlands is that of Jews ceasing to be German, as they increasingly adhered to the linguistic uniformity imposed by the local governments, mainly Polish and Hungarian, but also Ukrainian. Some, like Roth, found German the more attractive language, but it is indeed important to remember that "allegiance to German culture did not necessarily entail identification with German nationalist politics."⁹² The final destruction of the Brody came in World War Two, as a result of which the town is now incomparably altered and unrecognisable from the old border town we find in Roth's pages.

The opening pages of *Strawberries* reveal a world in which contradictions coexist; a tale that takes up many of the themes Roth had previously treated elsewhere, testifying to the ongoing cacophony or polyphony of his work. There is the rich Jew returning home to

⁸⁹ Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 29 May 1936, *Briefe*, p. 476.

⁹⁰ Verena Dohrn, "Verfallen wie in Brody", p. 53.

⁹¹ Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers*, p. 37.

⁹² Michael A. Meyer and Michael Brenner (eds.), *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, Vol. 3, p. 174.

visit the grave of his father, the mad alcoholic father, dealers in false papers, and poor people “sustained by miracles.” Roth compares Brody to a “fertile womb” and stresses its tradition of great Jewish men or “gifted people”; not unlike, as we may recall, the subsequent historiography about Brody as outlined by Ezra Mendelsohn.⁹³ Of the ten thousand people living there, “3000 of them were insane,” thus leaving an imprint of madness on the image of home. But despite this rampant madness and an insane father, a coachman, the narrator maintains that “where I came from, we lived at peace. Only near neighbours were enemies.” Thus, in the context of the threat of war pressing heavily on the temperament of the 1930s, Brody became, at least in Roth’s mind, an imagined remnant of the “peaceful” Habsburg monarchy. In this way, it may indeed be correct that after the disillusionments and threats he encountered in the West, Roth reclaimed Brody as a “found-again utopia.”⁹⁴ Michael Hofmann has argued that what caused the novel’s incompleteness was a literary quandary, namely, the inability to move beyond the contradictions that comprise its first pages.⁹⁵ There is indeed poignant irony in the fact that Roth never finished what can convincingly be called his literary homecoming; his anchorage in Brody and the (imagined) tradition of his Jewish grandfathers. The narrator of *Strawberries*, the self-proclaimed conman Naphtali Kroy, tells us what it’s like to live with this broken heritage:

Now I was born nowhere and belong nowhere. It’s a strange and terrible thing, and I seem to myself like a dream, without roots and without purpose, with no beginning and no end, coming and going and not knowing whither or why. It’s the same with my compatriots, too. They have been scattered all over the wide world, they grip foreign soil with their frail roots, lie buried in foreign soil, have children who don’t know their father’s birthplace, and to whom their grandfather is a mythical figure.⁹⁶

Faced with a predicament of increased antisemitism, persecution and homelessness, the roots of which he believed lay in the German past, after 1933, Roth, now very conscious of

⁹³ The actual comparison with a “fertile womb” is made in another unfinished fragment of the novel, called “This Morning a Letter Arrived” (*The Collected Stories of Joseph Roth*, pp. 166-172): “It was a fertile womb, from which many individuals, striking individuals, were cast out like seeds on the broad fields of the world.” (p. 166).

⁹⁴ Michael Bienert called it a “wiedergefunden Utopie.” See Bienert, “Von der Humanität durch Nationalität zur Bestialität.” Europa als Thema Joseph Roths’, in Fausto Cercignani (ed.), *Studia Theodisca*. Milan: Ed. Minute, 1996, pp. 9-26, p. 13.

⁹⁵ “One can only conjecture, of course, why Roth got no further than this with his “Galicia novel”; the contradictions that make it such a magical fragment perhaps also prevented it from growing beyond that: the contradictions between static and picaresque, intimate and distant, personal and essayistic, lyrical and comedic.” Michael Hofmann, *The Collected Stories of Joseph Roth*, p. 165.

⁹⁶ Joseph Roth, “This Morning a Letter Arrived”, *The Collected Stories of Joseph Roth*, pp. 166-172, p. 167.

his self-proclaimed role as a European intellectual, turned to that other past, i.e. his own, in times of crisis. Indeed, a theme that occurs time and again in Roth's work is the "chain of generations" that links the uprooted males of his novels to their forgotten and neglected Jewish ancestors.⁹⁷ This chain is made up of words and of memories; in Jewish history, this remembering was meant to keep the Jewish community together in the face of dispersion, threats and conversions. Also, as Esther Benbassa has shown, the Jewish historical imagination centred itself on suffering and the remembrance of past catastrophes, calamities and crisis as a means to conjure up a sense of generational affinity: "By combining the most recent calamities with their archetypal models, it presents the Jewish people as a single organism. This discourse of suffering is also transformed into a didactic tool: it carries present generations back to the suffering of past generations and established a tie between them, thereby strengthening Judaism, which might otherwise falter in the face of new ordeals."⁹⁸ Thus the connection to previous generations was established by notions of past suffering and an imagined shared heritage; rooted, ultimately, in the Torah.

Hotel Savoy (1924), Roth's second novel, deals extensively with the theme of chained generations. In the microscopic world of the hotel, the imminent arrival of the Jewish millionaire Henry Bloomfield causes excitement. Bloomfield returns from America not to exhibit or share the wealth he has acquired overseas with his poor eastern cousins, but to visit the grave of his father, who is buried there in the border town "at the gates of Europe" that forms the setting of *Hotel Savoy*.⁹⁹ Bloomfield returns each year to visit the grave, because, he says, as an *Ostjude*, he is at home "wherever we have our dead." In response the narrator, Gabriel Dan, thinks to himself that "life is so visibly bound to death and the living with his deceased. There is no end here, no break – always continuation, linking-on."¹⁰⁰ According to Sidney Rosenfeld, this narrative shift, enabled by the ambiguity of *erlebte rede*, indicates that the voice speaking here is not the narrator's but the author's: "Perhaps even unawares [Roth] has formulated an ethos of Jewish existence: that were the individual stands, others stood before him; that he is bound up with his origins and

⁹⁷ Sidney Rosenfeld, 'The Chain of Generations: A Jewish Theme in Joseph Roth's Novels,' in *Yearbook 18 of the Leo Baeck Institute*, Robert Weltsch (ed.), London: Secker & Warburg, 1973, pp. 227-231. On a related note, the *Kaddish*, the Jewish mourner's prayer, has been described as a "handclasp between the generations" that seeks to maintain the bond of one's family to all Israel. See Maurice Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*. New York: Jonathan Davis Publishers, 1969, p. 161.

⁹⁸ Esther Benbassa, *Suffering as Identity*, pp. 28-29.

⁹⁹ Joseph Roth, *Hotel Savoy*. Translated from the German by John Hoare. Woodstock & New York: The Overlook Press, 2003.

¹⁰⁰ Joseph Roth, *Hotel Savoy*, 107.

through remembrance sustains his personal ties with them.”¹⁰¹ Roth grew up fatherless, and it is not known where Nachum Roth is buried. Roth’s maternal grandfather, Jechiel Grübel, was a tradesman, deeply rooted in the Orthodox Jewish tradition of Brody.¹⁰² Jewish grandfathers, then, also play an important role in Roth’s work. Tellingly, Trotta, in *The Radetzky March*, returns not to his own, but to the Jewish doctor Demant’s grandfather, who lives in Galicia. Characters such as Dr. Demant, Anselm Eibenschütz in *Weights and Measures* and other Jewish figures are possible points of connection for Roth’s otherwise rootless characters.¹⁰³ Furthermore, in *Zipper and His Father*, Roth examined the failed relationship between fathers and sons; between the pre-war and the postwar generation. This preoccupation with broken relationships between fathers and sons is an important theme in Jewish literature; the most famous example, of course, Kafka’s letter to his father.¹⁰⁴ Thus, the theme of generations (read: male generations, i.e. fathers and grandfathers) provided Roth with a persistent narrative structure that fuelled his fiction as well as his personal stories; a kind of male anchorage, as well as a testimony to the Jewish ancestry of his thought.

Apart from the location where Roth’s characters re-establish the links to their Jewish past, Galicia also functions as a literary stage-setting; its swamps and fields often form the backdrop to their wanderings and quandaries. It is the stage for that figure so typical of the East European Jewish world, the “Luftmensch.”¹⁰⁵ Ghostlike figures wander the streets of

¹⁰¹ Sidney Rosenfeld, ‘The Chain of Generations’, p. 228. Rosenfeld makes the connection between this episode in *Hotel Savoy* and Martin Buber’s examination, nine years later, of the principle of Jewish peopledom, which he called the “chain of generations”: the vast historical perspective of a Jewish sense of belonging which connects the singular Jew, standing at the grave of his forefathers, vertically through the ages with his biblical ancestors and horizontally in the community of the living. This chain is preserved through the act of personal remembrance. Martin Buber spoke in the Stuttgart *Jüdisches Lehrhaus* in 1933 recalling his visit to the ancient Jewish cemetery in Worms, saying: “Down below there is not an iota of form; one has only the stones and the ashes beneath the stones. One has the ashes, however much they have disintegrated. One has the corporality of the people who have turned into them. One has it. I have it. I do not have it as a corporality within the confines of this planet but as the embodiment of my own memory reaching into the depths of history, right up to Sinai. I stood there, united with the ashes and through them with my forefathers. This is the memory of the encounter with God which is given to all Jews... I stood there, and experienced everything myself. I suffered all the deaths: all the ashes, all the destruction, all the silent lamentation is mine; but the covenant was not withdrawn from me.”

¹⁰² “Mein Grossvater hat – wie alle Juden – gesagt: Wenn ein Dummkopf einen Stein in den Garten wirft, können ihn tausend Weise nicht entfernen,” Roth wrote in a letter to Zweig about the criticism the latter received from Ludwig Marcuse about his book on Erasmus. Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 26 August 1934, *Briefe*, p. 374.

¹⁰³ They are “möglichen Kontaktpunkte der Gegenwart für den seine Wurzeln suchenden Roth-Protagonisten – oder eigentlich eher für den diese Fiktion schaffenden Roth selber!” Sarah Fraiman, “Joseph Roth: Dichter des Offenen,” *Bulletin of the Leo Baeck Institute* 76 (1987), pp. 35-50, p. 45.

¹⁰⁴ Franz Kafka, *Letter to His Father*. Bilingual edition. New York: Schocken Books, 1966.

¹⁰⁵ Max Nordau, in 1901, popularized that “peculiarly Jewish notion of the *luftmensch*. Today it has come to mean a kind of spiritual, rootless intellectual figure, but this is not the meaning that Nordau originally gave to it. The *luftmensch* was a specifically East European Jewish phenomenon. *Luftmenschen* were an entire class of

poor towns and villages, embodying the bleakness and poverty of Jewish life as it persisted in Eastern Europe long after emancipation in the West had taken place. In *Hotel Savoy*, Gabriel Dan reflects: “The people pass one another like mute shadows. It’s a congregation of ghosts. Men long since dead walk about here. For thousands of years this people has been wandering in narrow alleys.” Roth here refers to the two millennia of Jewish wandering in the Diaspora, something he judged positively as opposed to life in a nation state. Almost without exception, he portrayed the Galician landscapes and the people who inhabited it sympathetically.¹⁰⁶ His “Jewish themes,” then, are indeed hiding in the details – dealt with, in accordance with the main tendencies of interwar Jewish literature, in an implicit manner – such as the Slavic landscapes, Potemkin villages, Jewish beards, Galician “borderline” characters and Jewish trades and names.¹⁰⁷ According to David Bronsen, Roth

grown, tolerably healthy men who were unemployed and wandered around in the hope of obtaining a piece of bread by the end of the day. Nordau was careful to distinguish the luftmensch from other marginal and itinerant social types such as the English loafer and the Neopolitan *lazzarone*. Unlike them, the luftmensch was honest and able to work but simply lacked the opportunity. The Jews of the ghetto had become a *Luftvolk* – they had no capital for the present and no reserves for the morrow.” Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers*, p. 87. See also Heiko Haumann (ed.), *Luftmenschen und rebellische Töchter. Zum Wandel ostjüdischer Lebenswelten im 19. Jahrhundert*. Köln: Böhlau, 2003; Murray Baumgarten, ‘Language, Luftmenschen, Catastrophe: Some Themes of Sholem Aleichem’, *Yiddish* 2, 4 (1977) pp. 28-54; Nicolas Berg, ‘Bilder von “Luftmenschen”: über Metapher und Kollektivkonstruktion’, *Synchrone Welten* (2005), pp. 199-224.

¹⁰⁶ Literature on the subject of Brody and the “Grenzländer” of Roth’s youth include Chris Thornhill, ‘Grenzfälle: Galician Jews and Austrian Enlightenment’, *German Life & Letters*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (1996), pp. 171-181; Edward Timms, ‘Joseph Roth, die Grenzländer und die Grenzmenschen’, in Ilona Slawinski and Joseph Strelka (eds.), *Viribus Unitus: Österreichs Wissenschaft und Kultur im Ausland. Impulse und Wechselwirkungen*. Bern: Peter Lang, 1996, pp. 419-432; J. Colin Fewster, “‘Es ist eine Luege!’ Habsburg Potekim Villages in Joseph Roth’s Radetzky Marsch’, *Seminar*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (September 2007), pp. 318-336; and Edward Timms, ‘Doppeladler und Backenbart: Joseph Roth und der österreichisch-jüdischen Symbiose bei Joseph Roth’, *Literatur und Kritik* 25 (1990), pp. 318-324; Verena Dohrn, ‘Verfallen wie in Brody: Joseph Roth und Isaak Babel: Schriftsteller im Grenzland’, *Die Deutsche Rundschau*, Vol. 101, No. 2 (1990), pp. 53-62; Verena Dohrn, *Reise nach Galizien. Grenzlandschaften des alten Europa*. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1991 (Neuaufgabe Berlin: Philo, 2001), pp. 87-104; Maria Klanska, ‘Die galizische Heimat im Werk Joseph Roths’, in Kessler and Hackert (eds.), *Joseph Roth. Interpretation. Rezeption. Kritik. Akten des internationalen, interdisziplinären Symposiums 1989, Akademie der Diözese Rottenberg-Stuttgart*. Tübingen: Stauffenberg Verlag, 1990, pp. 143-156.

¹⁰⁷ In recent years, many articles examining these “Jewish themes” have appeared. See, for instance, Wolfgang Müller-Funk, ‘Landnahme und Schiffbruch: Carl Schmitt, Theodor Herzl, Joseph Roth’, *Judentum und Antisemitismus* (2003), pp. 32-47; Wolfgang Klimbacher, “‘Melodien von trauriger Größe, besessener Liebe’: jüdische Identitäten in Joseph Roths Roman “Hotel Savoy”’, *Das Jüdische Echo*, Vol. 49 (2000), pp. 252-258; David Horrocks, ‘The Representation of Jews and of Anti-Semitism in Joseph Roth’s Early Journalism’, *German Life & Letters*, Vol. 58, Issue 2 (April 2005), pp. 141-154; Edward Timms, ‘Joseph Roth, die Grenzländer und die Grenzmenschen’, in Ilona Slawinski and Joseph Strelka (eds.), *Viribus Unitus: Österreichs Wissenschaft und Kultur im Ausland. Impulse und Wechselwirkungen*. Bern: Peter Lang, 1996, pp. 419-432; J. Colin Fewster, “‘Es ist eine Luege!’ Habsburg Potekim Villages in Joseph Roth’s Radetzky Marsch’, *Seminar*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (September 2007), pp. 318-336; Edward Timms, ‘Doppeladler und Backenbart: Joseph Roth und der österreichisch-jüdischen Symbiose bei Joseph Roth’, *Literatur und Kritik* 25 (1990), pp. 318-324. Older literature includes David Bronsen, ‘Austrian vs. Jew: The Torn Identity of Joseph Roth.’ Lecture delivered at Joseph Roth Symposium, 29 December 1970 (microfilm, LBI New York) *Yearbook 18 of the Leo Baeck Institute*, Robert Weltsch (ed.), London: Secker & Warburg, 1973, pp. 220-226; Sidney Rosenfeld, ‘Die Magie des Namens in Joseph Roths “Beichte eines Mörders”’, *German Quarterly* Vol. 40, No. 3 (1967), pp. 351-362; Victoria Lunzer-Talos & Heinz Talos, ‘Ein Jude wider Willen? Joseph Roth zum hundertsten Geburtstag’, *Das Jüdische Echo*, Vol. 42 (1994), pp. 197-202; Mattiyahu Kranz, ‘Juden und ihre Berufe in Joseph Roths Werk’, *Tribüne*, Vol. 63 (1977), pp. 55-82; Jacob Allerhand, ‘Jüdische Elemente in den Werken A. Schnitzlers, F. Kafkas, J. Roths und P. Celans’, *Kairos*, Vol. 27, No. 3-4 (1985), pp. 288-329; Martin Kranz, ‘Jüdische

differed from many of his German-Jewish contemporaries in that he had a detailed knowledge of the Jewish tradition.¹⁰⁸ Some critics even say that Roth possessed all the sadness, grace and melancholy of Galicia.¹⁰⁹ As Ezra Mendelsohn has pointed out, many scholars when writing about Galician artists emphasize the wretchedness and poverty of their early years.¹¹⁰ Wilhelm von Sternburg, in his recent biography of Roth, repeats this stereotype when he characterises Galicia as “das Armenhaus Europas”; a place where “the wind that blew over Galicia was Russian.”¹¹¹ Of course we do not know what Roth’s ultimate attempt at restoring the broken chain of generations, in the shape of the novel *Strawberries*, would have looked like. But from the evidence left behind it is clear that this re-connection could not have happened anywhere else but in Brody. Perhaps Roth’s wife Friederike Reichler was right when, after an unexpected encounter with a long lost family member, she wrote that “... all roads lead to Brody.”¹¹²

Conclusion

Thus, what kind of intellectual was Roth? From the analysis in this chapter it becomes clear that he adhered to the idea of “a-political observation”; an individual stance based on empathetic immersion with his subject; always, it needs to be stressed, those on the margins of society. Despite this so-called a-political nature of his profession, his individuality and refusal to commit himself ideologically to any party or group, Roth was a highly political writer. He felt a deep distrust for learned men and institutionalised knowledge, the typical German preoccupation with academic titles and degrees, and instead focused on the “experienced” nature of reality and truth. To possess “the grace of misery” was far more important than to possess the grace of reason, and this was one of the ways in which Roth distinguished himself from his intellectual elders. Also, by emphasizing lived

Namen in Joseph Roths Werk’, *Emuna/Israel Forum*, Vol. 1 (1977) 38-44; Matiyahu Kranz, ‘Joseph Roths Stellung zum Zionismus: Eine Ergänzung zu H. Aussenhofers Aufsatz ‘Joseph Roth in Widerspruch zum Zionismus,’ *Tribüne*, Vol. 14, No. 55 (1975), pp. 6376-6392.

¹⁰⁸ “And also unlike his *confrères*, Roth affords ample testimony in his novels, essays and journalistic work of his familiarity with Jewish tradition.” David Bronsen, ‘Austrian vs. Jew’, p. 222.

¹⁰⁹ And Heinrich Böll writes about Roth that “... alle Weisheit des Judentums war in ihm, dessen Humor, dessen bitterer Realismus; alle Trauer Galiziens, alle Grazie und Melancholie Austrias.” Heinrich Böll, ‘Ein Denkmal für Joseph Roth. Über Joseph Roth “Werke in drie Bänden”’, in Böll, *Werke. Band 10, 1956-1959*. Köln, 2005, p. 61.

¹¹⁰ Ezra Mendelsohn, *Painting a People*, p. 19.

¹¹¹ Wilhelm von Sternburg, *Joseph Roth. Eine Biographie*, p. 58.

¹¹² Roth’s wife Friederike Reichler, upon discovering a family connection (Roth’s uncle, Paula Grübel’s father, had told Friederike about an encounter with the jewel merchant Pume Torczyner, not knowing that this woman was Friederike’s grandmother), wrote: “Alle Wege führen nach Brody.” Joseph Roth, Friederike Zweig in a letter to Paula Grübel dated 28 December 1921, *Briefe*, p. 38.

reality as a means to come to terms with and to understand, through writing, the past and the present, Roth defied the idea of the Jewish intellectual as a figure of the word detached from the messiness and realities of life. In other words, Roth's politics consisted of an embodied immersion in lived reality and the lives of the marginalised (including himself) in order to understand the present based on neglected contingencies with the past.

Secondly, Roth amplified his own marginality and increasingly concerned himself with the fate of the Jews; so much so that, in the early 1930s, he defined "the intellect" in Jewish terms. Confronted with the increasingly narrow world of European Jewry in the 1930s and the stigmatisation that now became visible to all, Roth returned to his own past and tried to place himself in a tradition of gifted and displaced Galician men; in the process aligning himself with the poor in his attitudes towards money. *Strawberries*, then, as the final attempt to restore his own broken chain of generations, represents an unfulfilled return; as an incomplete fragment, the text documents Roth's own perpetually postponed and ultimately unfulfilled spiritual homecoming. It also represents heritage as a literary construct. Notwithstanding his idealisation of the world of East European Jews, Roth remained in the modernized West despite his increased disillusionment with it; he never made an active attempt to travel to Brody or to convert to Judaism. Indeed, the tension of being an Eastern Jew in Western Europe fuelled many of his observations. Thus, the attempted re-establishment with his roots remained a literary and mental construct. Steven E. Aschheim has described Eastern European Jewish writers as "transplanted intellectuals," and this seems indeed the most adequate description for Roth, too.¹¹³

It remains difficult to say what created the relevance that contemporary critics attribute to Roth's thought and work. Perhaps a clue can be found in the constant dangers and threats (both imagined and real) to our postmodern existence, and critics search for those observational skills that can detect as well as verbalise danger in the work of one of the most critical observers of the interwar period. His individual yet engaged stance offers a way out of today's moral and ethical relativism. However, these are issues that are difficult to grasp and are outside the scope of this thesis. What is clear, nevertheless, is that to Roth, posthumous fame was an immaterial luxury infinitely subordinate to the pressing demands of daily life: "Lieber ist es mir doch, ein paar Novellen zu verkaufen und zu leben, als einen Vertrag zu machen, der vielleicht meinem Namen mehr nützt aber erst nach meinem

¹¹³ Steven E. Aschheim, 'The Cult of the Ostjuden. War and Beyond,' *Brothers and Strangers*, pp. 185-214.

Tode.”¹¹⁴ Material survival, in other words, no matter how short-lived, mattered more to him than a literary afterlife; yet he got it, after all.

¹¹⁴ Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 12 November 1935, *Briefe*, p. 436.

VI

Prophecies of Unrest. Europe in the Claws of the Antichrist

Europe, inasmuch as it breathes and lives at all, chatters or is silent, and only from a few isolated graves is its truth still spoken. It is about to become a cemetery, because it paid insufficient attention to its own; a mass grave, because it did not honor its graves; it is about to die in fear, because it has failed to show respect.

Joseph Roth (1939)¹

Introduction

“So prophetic, so trenchant, so ultimately haunting were his perceptions of a world ‘about to become a cemetery’ that he resorted increasingly to drink to douse his vision of a conflagration that could not be averted,” translator Michael Hofmann wrote about Roth in 2004.² Hofmann calls Roth’s collected essays “a swan song to a lost European order” while Roth himself possessed “the wisdom of a lost generation, distilled in a bottle of Calvados.” Locked within the posthumous confines of his cherished but embattled continent, Roth’s voice has, in recent years, increasingly been identified with the lost culture of interwar Europe. This idea is very often expressed from the viewpoint of continental distance, i.e. by critics and scholars from across the Channel or the Atlantic, but not exclusively so. Yet, while the identification with interwar Europe is a strong current in his critical reception, there is also a soaring interest in Roth that points to a renewed relevance of his words, especially in relation to contemporary discourses about Europe. This in itself shows that

¹ Joseph Roth, ‘Clemenceau’ (abridged version, 1939), in *Report from a Parisian Paradise. Essays from France 1925-1939*. Translated and with an introduction by Michael Hofmann. New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004, pp. 256-275, p. 258. Original text: “Europa schweigt oder schwätzt, soweit es atmet und lebt, und nur aus vereinzelt Gräbern spricht seine Wahrheit. Es ist im Begriff ein Friedhof zu werden, weil es seine Gräber nicht ehrt, in der Furcht zu sterben, weil es die Ehrfurcht nicht kennt.” Joseph Roth. ‘Clemenceau (1939)’, in Joseph Roth. *Werke*. 6 Bde. Hg. Fritz Hackert/Klaus Westermann. Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch; Amsterdam: de Lange, 1989-1991, Bd. 3, pp.955-1007, p. 956.

² Michael Hofmann, quoted from the back cover text of Joseph Roth, *Report from a Parisian Paradise*.

Roth's thought speaks to the contemporary world in myriad ways and should therefore not be considered the work of an incurable nostalgic.³

With hindsight we see that Roth's life and the interwar decades follow a strikingly similar trajectory: in the hopes, dreams and disillusionments for the continent after a devastating world war that left Germany crippled with blame and its people without an empire; during the volatile years of the Weimar Republic where political affiliations and ideologies changed rapidly; and after 1933, when Roth, the Jews of Germany as well as their dreams for European peace went into exile. Roth's death on 27 May 1939 seems to anticipate, with only a few months, the collapse of the European world as it existed in his lifetime. This posthumous identification of Roth's life with the fate of the continent, if analysed critically, brings forth an intense, even fatalistic picture; a picture I believe calls for an exploration of the intricacies that kept him there; rooted, as it were, amidst the geographical and ideological borders of the Europe he inhabited.

Roth's thought about the fate of the Europe was fuelled by growing fears for its future. His observations about what lay in wait on the European horizon had a prophetic quality, and as the years wore on, his reflections grew darker and more pronounced. By distancing himself from Germany's intellectual climate and aiming for a debate that took place on the European level, I believe Roth meant to place himself in an imagined community of European intellectuals; a community, sadly, as Istvan Deák has noted, that did not exist.⁴ Therefore, in this chapter, I aim to trace the development of Roth's disjointed philosophy of Europe as it crystallised around the mid-1930s by looking at his controversial text *The Antichrist* (1934), which addresses these issues of fate, fear and dispersion in a rather unholy manner. I explore the idea that Roth, faced with an existential chaos that sprang as much from his own persona as his historical times, and contrary to most interwar attempts at understanding the world – many of which resulted in monolithic political systems – tried to develop an ordering principle for human life that, although aimed at order and stability, left space for the imperfect and the anxious.

³ See chapter 3 of this thesis. My argument runs against the dominant interpretation of Roth as a nostalgic writer. In characterising Roth as a voice from a lost European world based on nostalgia only, there is the danger of locking him in this vanished world and limiting the significance both of his life and his work in contemporary scholarship on Europe. My thesis, therefore, could be considered an attempt to "open up the crypt" that is Roth's literary and intellectual legacy.

⁴ Istvan Deák, *Weimar Germany's left-wing intellectuals: a political history of the Weltbühne and its circle*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968, pp. 25-26.

The Ideological Limits of Europe

The aim of placing Roth's ideas about Europe in a broader perspective lies not in defining its borders but in understanding his motivations for remaining on the troubled continent. On 2 June 1926, in a letter to the editors of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, Roth voiced his opinion about Russia and America.⁵ His preference clearly lay with the former; the events unfolding in Russia, he believed, where change was imminent, were much more relevant for Europeans than those in America, a country which in the worst case "could only get more American." Despite the fact that Roth experienced Russia first hand while America remained a fiction, both functioned as powerful conceptual extremes in his thought. It is safe to say that they influenced his self-perception as a European as much as did the internal discourses on the continent.

Roth wasn't alone in his trajectory to the North. The mid-1920s were a time when many German-Jewish intellectuals travelled to the Soviet Union to see with their own eyes what the Russian promises of a new social world entailed.⁶ With Palestine, it was the most preferred travel destination for Jewish intellectuals during these years. Besides Roth, also Stefan Zweig, Arthur Holitscher, Walter Benjamin, Egon Erwin Kisch, Ernst Toller, Friedrich Wolf, Otto Heller, Alfons Goldschmidt, Ismar Freund, Arthur Ruppin, Berta Lask, Emil Gumbel, and Bertha Pappenheim travelled to Russia; Roth would encounter many of them again in Ostende in the summer of 1936. Some came back inspired; others returned disappointed, disillusioned, or even embittered at the discovery of a reality that was far worse than the one they had left behind. Walter Benjamin, who spent two months in Moscow during the winter of 1926-27, decided, despite the richness of "non-theoretical impressions" the country had given him, after a deep inner struggle against becoming a member of the communist party. His *Moscow Diary* contains a haunting description of his meeting with Roth in Moscow late one December evening. His entry for 16 December 1926 reads:

Later, back home, I managed to reach Roth by telephone with Reich's assistance. He informed me that he was leaving town the following afternoon and, after some deliberation, I had no other choice but to accept his invitation to come dine at his hotel at eleven-thirty. Exhausted,

⁵ The editors had proposed these travels as compensation for not making Roth their Paris correspondent. America could "... auch im nächsten Jahr noch Amerika, schlimmstenfalls noch amerikansicher sein könnte." Joseph Roth, in a letter to the *Frankfurter Zeitung* dated 2 June 1926, *Briefe*, p. 92. In a poignant twist of fate, the position was given to the nationalist journalist Friedrich Sieburg.

⁶ Katharina L. Ochse, '1918. German-speaking Jewish writers visit the Soviet Union and encounter and report on Eastern Jewry in the light of Lenin's decree abolishing anti-Semitism,' in Sander L. Gilman and Jack Zipes (eds.), *Yale Companion to Jewish Writing and Thought in German Culture, 1096-1996*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997, pp. 363-367.

I got into a sleigh around a quarter to twelve [...] The sleigh ride refreshed me considerably. Roth was already sitting in the spacious dining room. With its blaring band, its two great palms only half the height of its ceiling, its brightly colored bars and buffets, and the sober refinement of its table settings, the place received its guest like a European luxury hotel that has been transplanted far to the east. For the first time in Russia I drank vodka, we ate caviar, cold meat, and stewed fruit. When I look back over the entire evening, Roth makes a worse impression on me than he did in Paris. Or rather – more likely – I was already aware of these things in Paris, though they were still hidden, whereas this time they struck me as clear as day. The conversation we had started at dinner turned more intense when we went up to his suite. He began by reading me a long article on the Russian educational system. I looked around the room, the table was littered with the leftovers of what appeared to have been a lavish tea which must have been served to at least three people. Roth apparently lives in grand style, the hotel suite – which is just as European in its appointments as is the restaurant – must cost a great deal, as did the fact-gathering tour that took him all the way to Siberia, the Caucasus, and Crimea. In the conversation that followed his reading, I pressed him to put his cards on the table. The long and the short of it: he had come to Russia as a (nearly) confirmed Bolshevik and was leaving it a royalist.⁷

Benjamin believed that this bent for disillusionment among Western European intellectuals was caused by the initial weakness or fallibility of their political convictions; that, in other words, much of their left-wing sentiments were fashionable rather than genuine. “As usual,” he wrote, “the country is left footing the bill for the change in color that occurs in the convictions of those who arrive here as scintillating reddish-pink politicians (under the

⁷ Walter Benjamin, *Moscow Diary*. Edited by Gary Smith, translated by Richard Sieburth. Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1986, pp. 28-31. Bernard Reich, with whom Benjamin had a “rather tense relationship,” was the former director of the Deutsches Theater in Berlin. Roth’s article on Russian education was ‘Die Schule und die Jugend’ which appeared in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* on January 18, 1927. Original text: “Nachher, zu Hause, gelang es mir endlich, [Joseph] Roth telefonisch durch Vermittlung von Reich zu sprechen. Er erklärte am folgenden Nachmittag abzureisen und nach einigem Überlegen blieb nichts übrig, als eine Einladung zum Abendessen um ½ 12 in seinem Hotel anzunehmen. Anders hätte ich kaum mehr darauf rechnen können ihn zu sprechen. Sehr ermüdet setzte ich mich gegen viertel zwölf in den Schlitten. [...] Die Schlittenfahrt erfrischte mich sehr, Roth saß bereits im geräumigen Speisesaal. Mit lärmender Musikkapelle, zwei Riesenpalmen, die nur bis zu halber Höhe des Raumes hinaufreichten, mit bunten Bars und Büfets und farblos, vornehm angerichteten Tischen empfängt er den Besucher als weit nach dem Osten vorgeschobenes europäisches Luxushotel. Ich trank zum ersten Mal in Russland Wodka, wir aßen Kaviar, kaltes Fleisch und Kompott. Wenn ich den ganzen Abend über schaue, macht Roth mir einen weniger guten Eindruck als in Paris. Oder – und das ist wahrscheinlicher – ich wurde in Paris derselben, damals noch verdeckten, Dinge inne, deren zu Tage liegende Erscheinung mich diesmal frappierte. Wir setzten ein bei Tisch begonnenes Gespräch intensiver auf seinem Zimmer fort. Er begann damit, mir einen großen Artikel über russisches Bildungswesen vorzulesen. Ich sah mich im Zimmer um, der Tisch war bedeckt mit den Resten eines scheinbar ausgiebigen Tees, den hier zu mindest drei Personen mussten eingenommen haben. Roth lebt scheinbar auf großem Fuße, das Hotelzimmer – ebenso europäisch wie das Restaurant eingerichtet – muss viel kosten, ebenso seine große Informationsreise, die sich bis nach Sibirien nach dem Kaukasus und der Krim ausdehnte. In dem Gespräch, das auf seine Vorlesung folgte, nötigte ich ihn schnell, Farbe zu bekennen. Was dabei sich ergab, das ist mit einem Wort: er ist als (beinahe) überzeugter Bolschewik nach Rußland gekommen und verlässt es als Royalist.” Walter Benjamin, ‘Moskauer Tagebuch,’ in *Gesammelte Schriften*. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (eds.), with collaboration from Theodor W. Adorno und Gershom Scholem. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972-1999, Bd. VI, pp. 292-409, p. 310-311.

banner of “leftwing” opposition or idiotic optimism).” Implicit, too, is the idea that Roth transposed his high Western living standards onto poor Russia; that, indeed, he showed an imperialistic attitude to this “fact gathering tour.” The luxury, however, could not hide Roth’s physical deterioration: “His face is all creased with wrinkles and has the unpleasant look of a snoop. I was struck the same way when I again met him at the Kameneva Institute (he had delayed his departure). I accepted his offer of a sleigh and was driven back to my hotel around two. There are bits of nightlife in the streets, in front of the big hotel and in front of a café. People band together in these spots, huddled against the cold.” It was the only and the last time the two men, whose ideas about modernity, as I will explain below, are more similar than previously acknowledged, met.

As for Roth, the Russian experience had an elucidating effect. “Everything, which Toller and Kisch write about Russia, is false... The problem here is not political, only cultural, spiritual, religious, metaphysical,” he wrote from Odessa to his friend Bernard von Brentano, contradicting the opinions of his communist friends Egon Erwin Kisch and Ernst Toller.⁸ “Without doubt,” he said, there is a new world in the making in Russia, and he was glad to have seen it, but it was not the humanist paradise it made itself out to be. As a result the visit confirmed, in a way, Roth’s European “roots.” In the same letter to Von Brentano, he writes, “Es kommt mir vor, daß ich schon ein halbes Jahr aus Europa weg bin. So viel erlebe ich und so sehr fremd ist Alles. Niemals habe ich so stark gefühlt, daß ich ein Europäer bin, ein Mittelmeer-Mensch, wenn Sie wollen, ein Römer und ein Katholik, ein Humanist und ein Renaissance-Mensch. [...] Es ist ein Glück, daß ich nach Rußland gefahren bin. Ich hätte mich niemals kennen gelernt.” By defining himself, albeit temporarily and in stark contrast to the world of the north, as a Mediterranean man, a Roman and a Catholic, Roth linked his identity to that of the south: to the white cities on the coast of France, to humanism and the legacy of the French Revolution; i.e. to the equal rights of man in freedom, not under communist dictatorship. The trip to Russia washed away any hopes he may have cherished for a utopian red world, and as a result he turned away from a communist solution to the troubles of the continent and instead focused increasingly on the south: France.

⁸ “Alles, was Toller und Kisch über Rußland erzählt haben, war falsch. [...] Das Problem aber ist hier keineswegs ein politisches, sondern ein kulturelles, ein geistiges, ein religiöses, ein metaphysisches.” Joseph Roth, in a letter to Bernard von Brentano dated 26 September 1926, *Briefe*, pp. 94-96.

In the following year, 1927, Roth described America as “the land of unlimited inhumanity.”⁹ Especially in his journalistic work, America suffers greatly from negative and harsh imagery. It is a sentimental, fake, commercial and corrupted place, home to one of the most inhumane enterprises the world has known, namely the “factory of shadows,” i.e. Hollywood. This negative perception of America was common among intellectuals in Weimar, who, partly because of their uncertainty about the future of capitalism, considered it the capitalist country par excellence. Roth only knew scorn.¹⁰ His friend Joseph Gottfarstein said that “He hated abbreviations. Once he told me he could never go to America because it was called U.S.A. Wie kann ein Staat U.S.A. heissen? Die Kerle nehmen sich nicht einmal die Zeit den Namen ihres Landes richtig auszusprechen.”¹¹ But beneath the mockery lay, perhaps, a more profound and personal reason. “Roth maintained he would never go to America. ‘I want to die here.’ He said he would not be able to adapt to America. He was too European.”¹² Despite fears that Europe was heading for its own annihilation, Roth felt that his place was on the continent. Just like the Russian intellectual and historian S.M. Dubnov, who, despite being in favour of Jewish immigration to the U.S. and invitations to do so himself, also remained in Europe, Roth felt his duty was in the present, i.e. in Europe; indeed, it was there “where the present was organically integrated with the past, the new with the old – rather than in America, which belonged to clearly to the future.”¹³

Only once, in a moment of panic, did Roth consider immigration to the U.S. When asked by the French authorities in Paris in 1928 to prove his legal citizenship, Roth, in despair, said he wanted “to flee, to be alone and free for a year – to America, if not Siberia.”¹⁴ The question of documents, visas and passports was of course a recurring plight for many exiles, but Roth went neither to America nor to Siberia. He arranged his papers and stayed in Paris. However, the need for a way out of the European predicament was still

⁹ Joseph Roth, ‘Emile Zola – Author Away from His Desk’ (*Die Neue Bücherschau*, 1927), in *Report from a Parisian Paradise*, p. 189-191, p. 189.

¹⁰ “Er sprach nur spöttisch darüber.” Ludwig Marcuse in an interview with David Bronsen. Dokumentationsstelle für neuere österreichische Literatur, Wien, Handschriftensammlung. Sammlung Joseph Roth / David Bronsen, Interview Bronsen - Ludwig Marcuse on 18 January 1961, p. 1: JR/DB 20.1/11.

¹¹ Joseph Gottfarstein in an interview with David Bronsen. Heinz Lunzer, *Joseph Roth. Im Exil in Paris 1933 bis 1939*. In Zusammenarbeit mit Victoria Lunzer-Talos. Vienna: Zirkular, 2009, p. 186.

¹² Hans Natonek in an interview with David Bronsen. Dokumentationsstelle für neuere österreichische Literatur, Wien, Handschriftensammlung. Sammlung Joseph Roth / David Bronsen, Interview Dennis Greene - Hans Natonek in July 1963, p. 3: JR/DB 19.2/30.

¹³ Jonathan Frankel, ‘S. M. Dubnov. Historian and Ideologist’, in *Crisis, Revolution, and Russian Jews*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 239-275, p. 273.

¹⁴ “Muß ich selbst ein neues Leben beginnen. Es ist wieder einmal die Zeit, in der ich meine Existenz vollkommen umändern muß. Wegfahren, ein Jahr frei und allein sein – ich will nach Amerika, wenn nicht nach Sibirien. Ich bin sosehr an das Reale gebunden, daß ich im billigsten Sinn des Wortens erleben muß, um zu schreiben.” Joseph Roth, in a letter to Benno Reifenberg dated 30 July 1928, *Briefe*, p. 136.

on his mind in 1929. If it wasn't for the "small-town narrowmindedness" of the German people that prevented them from identifying as Europeans, assimilation to American culture may have been possible.¹⁵ But appropriating American identity was neither possible nor desirable for people burdened with this particular Germanic cultural heritage, a narrow national identification based primarily on Prussia; a heritage that Roth also recognised in himself. This was, he believed, the "German misfortune."

That the road to America was blocked, and the Atlantic impossible to cross, has been previously examined.¹⁶ Roth stood on the shores of a continent in distress, gazed across the waters and decided to stay. Emigration was an option – after his death, an invitation from the American PEN Club was found among his papers – but Roth, so adjusted to railway travel that it had become a way of life, never took this leap. Michael Hofmann, too, keeps Roth locked into the confines of the continent: "It is tantalizing but ultimately impossible to imagine him taking ship to the New World, and continuing to live and write: His world was the old one, and he'd used it all up."¹⁷ Although a fatalistic reading of Roth's death in Europe as preconditioned and inevitable reduces the ambivalence with which he confronted the question of physical and intellectual belonging, it is clear that for Roth the future could not be imagined in communism or emigration to America, as was the case for many other Jewish intellectuals. He could not imagine his own future, nor that of the civilisation he so sorely cherished, outside of the geographical and ideological borders of Europe. Even if, as I will explain below, Paris became the spiritual centre of his Europe, it was through the perils of Berlin that he arrived there, the city that was "the altar on which his spontaneous humanity, his left-leaning politics, and his belief in progress were sacrificed."¹⁸ It was in Berlin that Roth lost his belief in the possibility of Jewish assimilation, a discovery that eventually led him to return to the multivocal character of Galicia as the ideal representation of freedom. But despite the tendency, in his youth until the early 1920s, to act by the liberal creed of equality and complete assimilation of Jews, Roth was not prone to illusions. His thought about Europe is characterised by a multiplicity of warning signals, those visions I call "prophecies of unrest." Thus, in what

¹⁵ Roth described the German people as 'ewiger Kleinstädter' and identified their narrowmindedness as that which saves Germany "... vor der endgültigen Amerikanisierung. Wir schämen uns, noch Europäer zu sein und sind nicht imstande, Amerikaner zu werden. (Das ist ein Teil des deutschen Unglücks.) Joseph Roth, in a letter to Pierre Bertaux dated 26 Januar 1929, *Briefe*, p. 143.

¹⁶ Reiner Frey, *Kein Weg ins Freie: Joseph Roths Amerikabild*. Frankfurt am Main and Berne: Peter Lang, 1983. But even the channel to England turned out too great an obstacle. Roth often expressed his fear and hatred of London to Stefan Zweig (see *Briefe*, pp. 438 and 456).

¹⁷ Michael Hofmann, in Joseph Roth, *What I Saw. Reports from Berlin 1920-1933*. Translated by Michael Hofmann. London: Granta Books, 2003, p. 226.

¹⁸ Michael Hofmann in Joseph Roth, *What I Saw*, p. 19.

follows I will examine the concept of prophecy, both in relation to Roth's thought about Europe and in his contemporary reception.

The Concept of Prophecy

For the Polish intellectual and essayist Jerzy Stempowski (1893-1969), whose lifelong exile, starting in 1939, took him from Cracow and Warsaw to Berne, Switzerland, prophesy was very important.¹⁹ He expressed the fear that intellectuals of the 1920s were more like state-bureaucrats than prophets, defining the latter as artists who spoke obscurely but who had more truth to their words than those who knew the so-called facts of state reality; people who, in spite of everything, were not afraid of ridicule. To do justice to these intellectuals, Stempowski devoted what became one of his most famous essays to the fate of the scholars, poets and writers of the interwar period who possessed this gift of foreseeing, in all accuracy, the catastrophic future.²⁰ According to Stempowski, the ability to properly foresee future political developments was not an uncommon phenomenon. "In the interwar period I heard premonitions that were later fulfilled to the last detail," he said, for instance by the Polish scholar Szymon Askenazy who told him, sitting on a bench in Warsaw in 1932: "I can almost see German planes dropping bombs on the city." Or the journalist Robert Dell, who in 1922 acknowledged that the order of 1919 lay in ruins: "The future of Europe will be decided by the Germans," he said. Europe, which used to be the "laboratory of critical thought," was now marching en masse to the slaughter house.

Stempowski, writing in 1950, is part of a bigger trend in the historiography of Jewish intellectuals of the interwar period in the sense that he ascribes them with a "visionary eye."²¹ This is clearly the case in the posthumous reception of Roth, Benjamin, and Franz Kafka, among others.²² While we must remain weary of grand sweeping

¹⁹ I want to thank Lukács Mikolajewski, who is currently writing his dissertation about conceptualisations of Eastern Europe in the works and lives of three exiled Polish intellectuals, amongst them Stempowski, at the EUI in Florence, for introducing me to him.

²⁰ Jerzy Stempowski, 'Essay for Cassandra', in *Four Decades of Polish Essays*, edited by J. Kott. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1990, pp. 20-36.

²¹ Els Andringa has noted that many Jewish intellectuals have been given this "visionary eye" in their posthumous reception; not only Roth, but Franz Kafka, too. She writes: "Ein direktes Beispiel ist in Orson Welles' Verfilmung von Kafkas *Der Prozess* aus 1962 zu finden, in die Welles Bilder aus Nazi-Lagern einmontiert hat. Doch auch Primo Levi, selbst Überlebender der Holocaust, der diesen Roman ins Italienische übersetzte (1983) berichtete in den Interviews in *The Voice of Memory* (2001: 156), dass er Kafka gegenüber eine Feindseligkeit empfand, weil er ihn fürchtete 'like a great machine that crashes in on you, like the prophet who tells you the day you will die.'" Els Andringa, 'Eine Sprache alttestamentarischer Pracht. Joseph Roth als jüdischer Autor in der niederländischen Rezeption', Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2010 (in print).

²² For a critical analysis of the posthumous fame of many German-Jewish intellectuals, see Steven E. Aschheim, *Beyond the Border: The German-Jewish Legacy Abroad*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007.

statements claiming posthumous clarity, some intellectuals indeed read the signs of their times more accurately than others; whether or not we can call this prophecy as such is a matter of discussion. In the case of Roth, his ability to correctly foresee personal and political events was already noticed by friends and critics. In his first novel, *The Spider's Web* (1923), Roth ended his depiction of the political situation in Weimar with a fictional coup by right-wing radicals.²³ Two days after the novel's final instalment in the Viennese *Arbeiter Zeitung* on 8 and 9 November 1923, Hitler and Ludendorff attempted their failed coup in Munich. Prophecy, however, wasn't the first concept that sprang up in the minds of contemporary readers. According to one critic, the novel was written with the imaginative force of a "well informed journalist"; a sober judgement far removed from the wild gesticulations of a prophet.²⁴ There are more instances of Roth's accurate alignment with his times. A year before the book burnings of 10 May 1933, Roth wrote to his cousin Fred Grübel: "Es ist zeit, wegzugehen. Sie werden unsere Bücher verbrennen und uns damit meinen. Wenn einer jetzt Wassermann heisst, oder Döblin oder Roth, darf er nicht länger abwarten. Wir müssen fort, damit es nur bücher sind, die in Brand gesteckt werden"²⁵ And on 6 April 1933, he wrote to Stefan Zweig: "Was ich Ihnen schon geschrieben habe, ist wahr: unsere Bücher sind im Dritten Reich unmöglich. Nicht einmal inserieren wird man uns. Auch nicht im Buchhändler-Börsenblatt. Die Buchhändler werden uns ablehnen. Die SA Sturmtruppen werden die Schaufenster einschlagen."²⁶ In citing these examples, it is not my intention to portray Roth as a prophet, but to demonstrate how his often correct assessments of the fate and condition of Europe influenced his thought and contributed to his increasingly polarised world-view. But perhaps it is true, after all, that "insight into one's own time is only given to the very few."²⁷

A lot, too, has been said about Roth's early flight from Nazi Germany, which, according to most accounts, happened on the night of 30 January 1933, the day Hitler became Chancellor. What now looks like an unusually sharp judgement of the way contemporary events were to unfold needs to be assessed in the context of the promises and dangers that Weimar Germany held for German Jews in its late years. While

²³ Joseph Roth, *The Spider's Web*, 1923. It was published as a serial publication in the Viennese newspaper *Der Arbeiter Zeitung*, running in instalments from 7 October until 6 November 1923.

²⁴ Margarita Pazi, 'Exil-Bewusstsein und Heimat-Illusionen bei Joseph Roth', in Sigrid Bauschinger and Susan L. Cocalis (eds.), *Wider den Faschismus: Exilliteratur als Geschichte*. Tübingen and Basel: Francke, 1993, pp. 159-90, p. 166.

²⁵ David Bronsen, *Eine Biografie*, p. 419.

²⁶ Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 6 April 1933, *Briefe*, p. 261.

²⁷ "Het inzicht in de eigen tijd is slechts aan weinigen gegeven," Dutch journalist Koos van Weringh wrote. See Koos van Weringh, 'Joseph Roth was echt een groot schrijver' *Het Oog in 't Zeil*, thematic issue dedicated to Roth, Volume 6, No. 4 (April 1989), Amsterdam 1989, p.1. For Van Weringh, Roth was "the most important observer of the interwar period."

antisemitism was prevalent in the years immediately following the First World War, when, fuelled by the “stab in the back” theory of why Germany lost the war the dominant drive was to find a scapegoat in those who were considered the most ‘foreign’ element in German society, i.e. the Jews, by 1924 its most virulent forms had subsided, giving the impression of a stable society. Many Jews imagined themselves at home in Germany and, encouraged by the high number of Jewish artists, intellectuals and scholars in Weimar, believed they had reached the pinnacle of their emancipation. However, the massive flight of Jewish emigration during the first few months of 1933, mainly of unmarried Jews and those who were politically ‘suspect,’ contradicts the idea that the threat of National Socialism was commonly downplayed. 40 000 Jews fled in 1933, a number unsurpassed until 1937.²⁸ If anything, this is an indication that many Jews recognised the dangers inherent in Hitler’s accession to the Reichstag, and thus in his early departure Roth was certainly no lonesome visionary.

However, it is true that the majority of German Jews remained in Germany; many Jews emigrated as late as 1938 and some, especially the elderly, never did. Confronted with this fact, historians have tried to explain what has sometimes been called Jewish complacency.²⁹ Some have argued that the various illusions held by German Jews about their status in Germany caused them to underestimate the new threat to their existence; a threat that, furthermore, may not have seemed so shocking or new considering their long history of persecution and antisemitism.³⁰ Others instead have focused on Hitler’s image, arguing that the silence and disbelief that followed his accession to power was a rational response; a rationality that deluded people into thinking that his early measures against the Jews would be his last, that they were, indeed, only concessions to his more radical followers.³¹ What most historians agree upon, however, is that the oft-heard notion that Hitler, in 1933, was the first to remind German Jews of their Jewishness cannot be upheld, as there were plenty of danger signals in Weimar Germany.

²⁸ Michael A. Meyer and Michael Brenner (eds.), *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, Volume 4, ‘Renewal and Destruction 1918-1945’, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, p. 232.

²⁹ One of the aims of German-Jewish historian Fritz Stern is to counteract the image of a passive and complacent Jewry in Weimar Germany, whose desire for assimilation has indirectly been linked to their fate in Nazi Germany.

³⁰ Peter Pulzer, *Jews and the German State: the Political History of a Minority 1848-1933*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992, p. 345. Pulzer writes: “They were, for better or worse, at home. It was the very imperfection of their existence that made them initially complacent about surviving even under Hitler. Here was another bout of hep! hep! that would come and go. That the only sane thing to do was to get out dawned on only a few after the April boycott of 1933 and the setting-up of the concentration camps.” (p. 349).

³¹ Fritz Stern, *Dreams and Delusions. The Drama of German History*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987, p. 13.

The lack of reaction to Hitler's terror and selective extrusion in the years following 1933 was a strong warning in itself.³² But, going back to the early years of Weimar, there were plenty of other signals besides the surge in antisemitism, such as Walter Rathenau's assassination in Berlin in 1922, Hitler's first bid to power in Munich in 1923, and the pogrom-like agitation against the Eastern Jews who now increasingly populated the streets of Berlin, Munich and Frankfurt. These are all topics that Roth dealt with extensively in his journalism. Fritz Stern has pointed out that the promise of violence in National Socialism was prominent from the very beginning. About the publication of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* in 1925, the uniforms and the clubs, the flags and daggers, and the violent presence of the SA, the Nazi paramilitary or "brown shirts," in the streets, he writes: "There were enough signs that any observer with his eyes half-open could not miss and that must have made clear that the Third Reich, if it were to come about, would impose a reign of terror on Germany."³³ If Jewish attitudes in 1933 were indeed "a mixture of illusion and realism," as Peter Pulzer has argued, can we then, based on Roth's early flight from Nazi Germany, infer that he cherished no illusions whatsoever about the possibility of a German-Jewish symbiosis? That, like Albert Einstein, he felt a deep hatred for everything German after 1933? While an early departure may indeed be indicative of a realistic view on political events, it is nevertheless the case that many Jews took with them into exile a cultural identification with their German heritage, based on the fact that Germany had been a cultural nation before it became, belatedly, a political one.³⁴ This also explains why most Roth scholars have argued that he was Jew deeply rooted in the German cultural tradition; something which I believe is only partially true. Already in 1925 he felt the desperate urge to leave Germany and begged his editor to let him stay in France. This is why, too, the fact that he did not get the job of Paris correspondent for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* was such a great blow. It did not, however, keep him from making Paris his permanent home from the mid 1920s onwards.

The Antichrist (1934)

It is in Paris, in January 1934, at the end of his first year in exile, that Roth sits in the lobby of Hotel Foyot or across the street at his table in café Le Tournon and works eight to ten

³² Fritz Stern wrote that "Perhaps the Jews of Germany should have noted the silence with which their initial extrusion from public office was accompanied." Fritz Stern, *Dreams and Illusions*, p. 13.

³³ Fritz Stern, *Dreams and Illusions*, p. 149.

³⁴ See, for instance, Richard Dove, *Journey of No Return: Five German-speaking Literary Exiles in Britain 1933-1945*. London: Libris, 2000.

hours a day on a new book. This is neither a novel nor a *feuilleton*; he would later admit, confronted with rather unfavourable reviews and even worse sales, that the book was written hastily and against his “literary rhythm.”³⁵ Friends come and go as he sits, writes and drinks at his table. A year has passed since Roth got on a Berlin train that took him out of Germany forever. As a result of the Nazi effort to remove all Jewish authors from the German intellectual landscape, executed in boycotts, book burnings and the slow destruction of Jewish publishing houses, Jewish writers lost their main source of income, namely their German readership. Roth too experienced the financial pressures and despair in the wake of the events of 1933, and he spent feverish efforts trying to sell his books to other publishers. From Paris, the city that would remain his home until his death in 1939, Roth managed to secure a new home for the book he was writing with Dutch exile publisher Allert de Lange, whose Amsterdam offices he would visit often during the years 1933-1939. In the early winter months of 1934, Roth was writing *The Antichrist*.

The book, which earned the praise of Albert Einstein but also the critical disapproval of many of his friends, remained out of print in English for seventy years. It is Roth’s least known work but perhaps also his most interesting, as it offers, in the words of translator Richard Panchyk, “valuable insight into the persona of Joseph Roth.”³⁶ But more so than a possible psychological vista into the mind of its author, the work, which is stripped bare of the more intricate plots of his novels, occupies a uniquely political and cynical stance in Roth’s oeuvre. It is, according to one French review, “one of the most vehement protests of human conscience against that which reduces and destroys it.”³⁷ What seems paranoid or bizarre at first becomes, in the words of Panchyk, “less outrageous as one realizes the scope of Roth’s prescience.” To counterbalance the idea of contemporary relevance, not to refute it but to embed it in the historical contexts of its creation, I will trace analyse the book’s main themes, its historical and ideological contexts, and its warnings about a continent on the slide.

³⁵ This wasn’t an isolated occurrence. Reviewers, too, questioned the pace of Roth’s literary output. Dutch journalist Siegfried van Praag, for instance, in his review of *Tarabas* (1934), wrote: “Schreiben die Emigranten unter dem Zwang ihrer Not oder desorientiert durch ihre Entwurzelung nicht etwas viel Bücher oder zu schnell?” Hans M. Würzner, ‘Joseph Roth in den Niederlanden. Ein Beitrag zur Wirkungsgeschichte,’ in Michael Kessler and Fritz Hackert (eds.), *Joseph Roth. Interpretation, Rezeption, Kritik. Akten des internationalen, interdisziplinären Symposions 1989, Akademie der Diözese Rottenberg-Stuttgart*. Tübingen: Stauffenberg Verlag, 1990, p. 439-448, p. 441.

³⁶ Richard Panchyk, ‘Introduction,’ in Joseph Roth, *The Antichrist*. London: Peter Owen Ltd., 2010, p. 9. The original book was published in the autumn of 1934 by Dutch exile publisher Allert de Lange. At the end of 1934, only 3578 of the 6000 copies had been sold. In 1935, New York’s *The Viking Press* published an English edition (translated by Moray Firth), as well as London’s William Heinemann.

³⁷ Joseph Roth, *The Antichrist*, p. 11.

In *The Antichrist*, Roth embarks on a vehement criticism of his own times; or, more precisely, of the kind of man inhabiting it. The book takes the author on an arduous journey that starts with a childhood experience of the cinema, where he identifies modern mass media as the source of modern evil, and ends, after manic travels through Russia, America, and Europe, in his fate as a solitary and rejected thinker living in a hotel and visited by “tempters”: men trying to convince him of truths he knows are falsehoods. The message is conveyed in parables: “the red earth” where people “wiped clean the heavens” with revolution and human reason and where the machine is the new golden calf, stands for Russia; “the factory of shadows” where people go to sell their souls for fame is Hollywood; mining, modern architecture and oil represent the various faces of capitalism; and, finally, the country of “the iron God” where Nazis rule and people worship a “crooked and distorted cross” is Germany. The text, mixing fable with irony, has the “visionary imagery” of the Old Testament prophets, a tone and style Roth knew well. Although facts about Roth’s childhood are sparse, it is known that he became thoroughly acquainted with the traditions of Judaism through the efforts of private teachers, who began visiting the house when Roth was four years old, and who educated him in the Bible, commentaries on the Talmud, Jewish prayers and Cheder.³⁸ Despite addressing an entire range of modern evils and ailments, such as the lack of authenticity in modern culture and the lack of truth in the printed word, Roth, unsurprisingly considering his recent exile, identifies Germany as the country that most threatens Europe’s fragile equilibrium.

The Antichrist, whom Roth portrays as a force, not a person, nevertheless comes in the guise of man. He is the kind old gentleman offering cigarettes and chocolates to the unemployed, the army commander, publishing director and medical doctor, all working together to create a Kafkaesque universe of claustrophobia and fear. Fear is at the core of Roth’s critique of modern society: the Antichrist has installed fear in the hearts of men, causing them to distrust and hate each other, thereby creating nothing short of an imminent and self-destructive implosion. Roth takes up the medieval motif of the Antichrist as bringer of the end of the world; a world that will die a “slow, cold death” caused not by natural disasters but by the lopsided application of God-given human talents. Mankind’s disastrous urge to believe itself master of the universe is what has brought this evil into the world, and as a result, the Antichrist roams the earth as a hypocrite wearing the

³⁸ According to Roth’s first biographer David Bronsen *The Antichrist* has the “visionären Bildsprache” reminiscent of the Old Testament prophets, a view repeated by biographer Wilhelm Von Sternburg in his 2009 biography of Roth. See David Bronsen, *Joseph Roth: Eine Biographie*. Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1974, p. 437-440; Wilhelm von Sternburg: *Joseph Roth. Eine Biographie*. Cologne and Berlin: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 2009, p. 416.

mask of God's emissary. He is someone who has since long been in our midst but who moves in such phony disguises that we, "who have been expecting him for years, do not recognise him." In the Bible, the Antichrist only appears in the *Book of John*, where it indicates a person who spreads a false faith about Jesus Christ. This was seen as a sign of the apocalypse, of the coming of the end of the world.³⁹ The purpose of calling his book *The Antichrist*, then, was to portray his sense of urgent worry about Europe's cultural and political disintegration, as well as to indicate the sources of this decline. The book ends with the narrator, called "Joseph Roth," watching himself on a cinema screen. In this final scene, the camera, which has projected and amplified his image upon the screen, becomes a murder weapon, killing all authenticity, and what remains are only figments and shadows of human selves. "He had robbed me of my shadow," the narrator calmly observes in the book's last sentence. "So I left the theatre."⁴⁰

In a letter to Stefan Zweig, Roth described *The Antichrist* as an honest work which he wrote "in great personal distress." He is in a jubilant mood. Writing it, he said, showed him how saints must have felt, because the book almost seemed to write itself. It was as if it was dictated to him: "I do not have the right, now, to do more but correct the typographical errors."⁴¹ A friend, the Dutch Catholic poet Anton van Duinkerken, objected: "It wasn't his best book, but it was a key to his work. Falsity was a sin to him."⁴² But it is not only the book's prophetic tone that is of interest. Its diverging narrative form, lingering between speech, essay and homiletics, also required attention. For other intellectuals of Roth's generation, such as Robert Musil and György Lukács, for instance, the essay as narrative choice implied a sceptical stance towards the world as well as an acceptance of the essential

³⁹ The *Book of John* I, 2:18, 22 and 4:3; and the *Book of John* II, 7. *NBV Studiebijbel*. De Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling met uitleg, achtergronden en illustraties. Heerenveen: Uitgeverij Jongbloed, 2010 (2008), p. 2222.

⁴⁰ Joseph Roth, *The Antichrist*, p. 168.

⁴¹ "Ich selbst glaube, daß mein Antichrist ein ehrlicher Schrei ist, kein Buch ist, ich weiß, wie bitter mir das Leben wird, aus allgemeinen Gründen – und leider auch aus privaten – aber es ist im Grunde dasselbe; und ich habe den Antichrist in der *persönlichen* Not geschrieben. In einer sehr *persönlichen* Not [...] Ich bekam eine leise Ahnung davon, was ein Heiliger empfindet, wenn er sich einmal herabläßt, zu schreiben. Ich war grimmig und selig zugleich. Wahrscheinlich ist Zufälliges und Nebensächliches dazwischen geraten. Aber ich habe die Empfindung, daß dieses Buch nicht von mir ist und als hätte es mir Jemand diktiert. Ich habe nicht das Recht, mehr, als die Druckfehler zu korrigieren." Joseph Roth in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 26 March 1934. Joseph Roth, *Briefe 1911-1939*. Edited by Hermann Kesten. Cologne: Kiepenheuer and Witsch, 1970, p. 339.

⁴² "Es war nicht sein bestes Werk, aber ein Schlüssel für sein Schaffen. Sünde war ihm Falschheit." Dokumentationsstelle für neuere österreichische Literatur, Wien, Handschriftensammlung. Sammlung Joseph Roth / David Bronsen, Interview Bronsen - W. J. M. A. Asselbergs (Pseud: Anton van Duinkerken) on 11 October 1960, p. 3: JR/DB 17/18.1/2. Van Duinkerken wrote the introduction to the Dutch translation of *The Antichrist*.

uncertainty of life.⁴³ As such, the essay would not be the most suitable form for the deliverance of a sure and sound prophecy, unless, indeed, these were prophecies of unrest. As Roth explained two years later, his choice of narrative form was elicited by the needs of the present, as it was of such moral urgency that only a form stripped bare of the descriptive tools of the belletrist would be able to describe its convulsions and confusions.⁴⁴

To those so disposed, the picture that emerges is tragic: we see Roth, a cornered man, enlivened with drink, fuelled by paranoia, and in the midst of an uncertain exile, writing feverishly and conjuring up a disturbing image of a twentieth-century Antichrist. It is not difficult to see why some critics have conflated the uncomfortable claims of the book with its author's assumed psychological decay or spiritual confusion. Ludwig Marcuse, a fervent admirer, maintained that it was an "absolutely terrible book"; a Jewish reviewer of the *Jüdischen Welt-Rundschau* saw the book as proof of Roth's mental "derangement."⁴⁵ But despite the physical decay and neglect that followed from his alcoholism, many friends testify to Roth's mental sobriety.⁴⁶

Furthermore, even if his tone alienated some readers, his ideas resonated with those of other European intellectuals. "There will be no peace in Europe until fire falls from the sky and burns down the place called Germany," journalist Robert Dell told Jerzy Stempowski in 1922.⁴⁷ Dutch literary critic Menno ter Braak also shared Roth's vision of a fast approaching European disintegration, a demise fuelled by the fact that people's apocalyptic need for redemption was stronger than their reason. "I would not be bewildered," Ter Braak wrote, "if soon a big, bloody and completely unexpected comet appears in the nightly skies, greeted by a moaning Europe as the irrefutable sign of the coming apocalypse, as the annunciation of the Antichrist himself; because the thousand-year Reich that the Führer predicts needs to be preceded by disasters, if one believes the chiliastic prophecies."⁴⁸ Roth certainly did not believe in the idea of a thousand years of

⁴³ I am grateful to Lukács Mikolajewski for bringing to my attention the philosophical implications of the speech and essay as conscious narrative choices.

⁴⁴ Joseph Roth, 'Glauben und Fortschritt,' *De Gemeinschaft*, No. 12, December 1936, p. 593-606.

⁴⁵ Ludwig Marcuse called it "ein absolut schlechtes Buch" and the reviewer of the *Jüdischen Welt-Rundschau* referred to "... die Spuren den beginnender geistiger Umnachtung." David Bronsen, *Joseph Roth. Eine Biographie*, p. 439.

⁴⁶ See the many testimonies of friends and acquaintances who knew Roth during his Parisian exile of 1933-1939 in the interviews, many of which remain unpublished, that David Bronsen conducted in the 1960s and 1970s for his Roth biography. The archives are kept in the Dokumentationsstelle für neuere österreichische Literatur, Wien, Handschriftensammlung. Sammlung Joseph Roth / David Bronsen.

⁴⁷ Jerzy Stempowski, 'Essay for Cassandra,' pp. 20-36.

⁴⁸ "De macht van de formule is voor de zooveelste maal niet bestand gebleken tegen de apocalyptische behoefte aan verlossing van een volk, dat in Hitler den 'vredeskeizer' huldigt en in de Joden de speciale werkzaamheid van den Antichrist meent te bespeuren. Het zou mij niet verwonderen, als binnenkort een

happiness, but, in 1934 as in 1923, when he wrote *The Spider's Web*, he clearly understood Europe's harrowing predicament and the catastrophes threatening its peace, sanity and civilisation. True to his conviction that it was an intellectual's duty to report on the injustices of his time, Roth set out to find the roots of the disaster, focusing not on the political but the human motives underlying it. He felt it to be his duty to 'report' on the state of the world:

Ich bin ein schwacher Mensch, aber das Einzige, was mir Gott gegeben hat, damit ich dartue, dass ich sein Ebenbild bin, ist die Fähigkeit: den Bösen zu erkennen. Nachdem ich nun den Bösen erkannt habe, nämlich Deutschland, bin ich verpflichtet, seine Leitartikler, die Leitartikler des Antichrist, zu hassen – und, wenn es geht, sogar materiell auszurotten.⁴⁹

A great physical malaise followed the completion of *The Antichrist*, and Roth lay ill in bed for days, dictating his letters, as he was too weak to write. In addition to fears about the fate of Europe, Roth was also overtaken by a pervasive sense of his own early end. "... Ich bin nicht mehr zu reparieren," he wrote on 20 July 1934.⁵⁰ Friends remember how in the space of a few short years, Roth became an old man.⁵¹ This was mainly the result of the suffering that accompanied the plight of Roth's wife, who was descending rapidly into

groote, bloedige en geheel onverwachte komeet aan den nachtelijken hemel verscheen, die door een jammerend Europa werd begroet als het onweersprekelijke teeken van den komenden ondergang, als de verkondiging van den Antichrist in eigen persoon; want aan het Duizendjarige Rijk, dat door den Führer voorspeld is, behooren rampen vooraf te gaan, wil men de chiliastische profetieën gelooven." Menno ter Braak, 'De Antichrist,' in *Over Waardigheid en Macht. Politiek-Culturele Kroniek*. Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 1945, pp. 62-71, p. 64.

⁴⁹ Joseph Roth, in a letter to René Schickele dated around the end of 1933 or the beginning of 1934, *Briefe*, p. 301.

⁵⁰ Roth's letters are full of premonitions, lamentations, and a pervasive sense of an early death (all quotations from Joseph Roth, *Briefe*): "Ich will, wenn mein Leben nicht allzu grausam verkürzt werden soll, von heute in einem Jahr ein Freier Mensch sein." (27 February 1929, p. 145); "Vielleicht kann ich sie erst nach zehn Jahren schreiben, wenn ich dann noch ein Schriftsteller bin." (7 March 1929, p. 148); 8 October 1931, he wrote, "Meine Gegenwart ist trübe und meine Zukunft finster." (8 October 1931, p. 211); "Ich glaube nicht, dass ich jemals die Möglichkeit habe, dies Alles zu überleben." (14 July 1933, p. 269); "Ich tröste mich mit dem (feigen) Gedanken, dass ich weniger Jahre zu leben habe, als die *Würdigen*. Ich habe keinen Lebensplan. ... ICK KANN NICHT SO LEBEN." (1933, p. 230); "Und dieses Gefühl, von Dämonen verfolgt zu werden." (25 October 1932, p. 238); "Ich gehe so wie so unter. Ich benenne in meinem Testament genau Alle, denen ich misstraue. (Ich schicke Ihnen eine Abschrift) ... Ich vernichte alle meine Manuskripte. Ich mache ein Testament. Kein Mensch wird was davon haben, wenn ich kreperte." (13 July 1934, p. 354); "Wollen Sie mir, lieber, einen Nekrolog schreiben? So wie so fühle ich mich am Ende... Ich schicken Ihnen mein Testament." (Summer 1934, p. 356); "Ich gehe unter, es ist ganz klar. ... Es ist zu spät, in dieser Welt mag ich nicht mehr." (19 July 1934, p. 360); "Kommen Sie bald, bevor ich krepere bin." (30 September 1934, p. 384); "Wenn mir Huebsch das Geld nicht geschickt hätte, hätte ich in jener schrecklichen Wohnung Selbstmord begehen müssen." (15 February 1935, p. 403); "Ich bitte Sie, ich bitte Sie, retten Sie mich, ich gehe bestimmt unter..." (late October 1935, p. 432); "Ich kann nur noch ins Kloster, weil ich mich doch nicht töten kann." (25 March 1936, p. 459); "Sehen Sie denn nicht, Sie Mensch, Freund, Bruder ... dass ich binnen kurzem krepere." (30 April 1936, p. 467); "Ich fürchte, meine Matratzengruft wird in Holland stehen." (26 May 1936, p. 474); "Ich schrieb Ihnen schon längst, dass ich am Ende bin. Das Ende zieht sich leider. Das Krepieren dauert länger, als das Leben." (2 August 1937, p. 501).

⁵¹ See the documentary *Joseph Roth. Das Portrait* (WDR, 1970).

madness, but in addition to this it must have been mentally and physically demanding to see the Antichrist everywhere – in the Vatican, in the cinema, in money, in golden telephones, even in himself – and to feel constantly hunted by these embodiments of modern evil. The vitriolic intensity with which he used the Antichrist as a means to address Europe’s problems diminished in the years that followed, but the quandary remained, as well as Roth’s critical output concerning its remedies.

Paris: or the Quest for Universal European Values

Roth spent the last six years of his life, with the exception of a few short trips to the Netherlands and Belgium, in Paris; he died, and is buried, in Paris. It was the city he felt represented the European spirit par excellence; a place where his spiritual Jewishness could exist without contradiction: “Paris is Catholicism at its worldliest, while remaining a European expression of universal Jewishness,” he wrote in 1925.⁵² What this “universal Jewishness” entails exactly, Roth leaves undefined, but what is clear is that Paris allowed him to feel unburdened by his Jewish heritage. Many intellectuals, artists and writers had been drawn to Paris before him, but in the interwar period, in the light of the events in Germany, the pull to the French capital tightened. It is indeed most likely that in the eyes of a disillusioned and, at the time only mildly embittered Jewish son of the crumbling Weimar republic, France, the republic of revolution, appeared as a much lighter and ideologically more befitting place to be than the Germany from which he emerged.⁵³ Indeed, the influence of the revolutionary magnetism of the French state on Roth’s conceptualisations of Europe cannot be underestimated.

Yet, while Paris allowed him a sense of “universal Jewishness” which would have been unthinkable in Germany, Roth’s attraction to France also signalled the beginnings of his “Catholicism,” his “lively relationship” to religion that has perplexed, frustrated and even divided friends and scholars since his death.⁵⁴ David Bronsen came close when he

⁵² Original text: “Paris ist katholisch im weltlichsten Sinn dieser Religion, zugleich europäischer Ausdruck des allseitigen Judentums.” (Translation by Michael Hofmann). Joseph Roth, in a letter to Benno Reifenberg dated 16 May 1925, *Briefe*, pp. 45-46.

⁵³ Michael Hofmann, ‘Introduction’, in Joseph Roth, *Report from a Parisian Paradise*, pp. 11-21, p. 15.

⁵⁴ David Bronsen, in the margins of his interview with Toberg, noted that Roth had a “lebendige Beziehung” towards religion. Mr A.D.J. Kroonenburg (box 12: 19.2/8) said in his interview with Bronsen, “Roth became a Catholic out of gratitude for Austria: damit könnte Europe gerettet werden. Roth said “Das ist das Beste für die Menschen” about the Church, but did not himself go much to church.” David Bronsen Archive, Literaturhaus, Vienna. Dokumentationsstelle für neuere österreichische Literatur, Wien, Handschriftensammlung. Sammlung Joseph Roth / David Bronsen, Interview Bronsen - Friedrich Torberg on 17. Juli 1961, p. 1: JR/DB 18.2/31.

scribbled in the margins of one of his interviews that “Roth was a monarchist because the Kaiser protected the Jews in the pogroms (his Catholicism stemmed from his Jewishness, one of the many paradoxes of his life)”; proof, indeed, of the lasting critical nostalgia for the Habsburg Empire.⁵⁵ Michael Hofmann, too, believes that Roth’s Catholicism was a “local variant or else the permissive, universal vehicle for Judaism.”⁵⁶ Thus the at first sight bipolar and contradictory character of Roth’s ‘religion’ fades when you go beyond the either/or approach – the Catholics and Jews quarrelling at his grave for the last word on the matter – and instead focus on the specific contents of his religious-spiritual thought. In the context of Roth’s responses to catastrophe, then, it makes more sense to try to understand how the universalist tendencies of his thought are connected to the political and humanist disasters unwinding in Europe in those years.

In the same year he wrote *The Antichrist*, Roth also confronted the question of the virulent nationalisms that had flared up in the wake of the First World War and were a main cause of his exile. He asked how nationalism affected the continent at large, and his verdict was rather bleak:

There is still – even today – a yearning, a nostalgia for European cultural solidarity. The solidarity itself no longer exists, except perhaps in the hearts and minds and consciences of one or two great men in individual nations. The sense of Europe – one might call it a “conscience of European culture” – started to fade in the years when a sense of nationhood awoke. One might say: *Patriotism has killed Europe*. Patriotism equals particularism. The man who loves his “fatherland,” his “nation,” above all else, has cancelled any commitment he might have to European solidarity.⁵⁷

Nationalist pride, that “imbecile love of the soil” which Roth equates with patriotism – the patriotism of the multinational Habsburg Empire seemingly a thing of the past – has wrecked the feeling of European universality. He is clear about what stands in the way of European solidarity: Germany, or, the Third Reich – he makes no distinction.⁵⁸ Roth

⁵⁵ David Bronsen, Dokumentationsstelle für neuere österreichische Literatur, Wien, Handschriftensammlung, Sammlung Joseph Roth / David Bronsen.

⁵⁶ “I have a sense that, in a cultural if not in a doctrinal way, he equated Catholicism with Judaism, so that Catholicism is either the local variant or else the permissive, universal vehicle for Judaism. [...] At times “Catholic” almost seems to me his personal code for “Jewish,” just as his “Phoenicians” – heroic traders, people of deep culture, “noisy, enterprising, quick-thinking ready reckoners and cosmopolitans,” with “open and questing minds” – also come from the Jewish lexicon. And certainly what later provokes Roth’s ire [...] is the failure of Catholicism to remain universal, its reversion or perversion to schism and racism (no better than Germany), and the collapse thereby of his deeply desired, eccentric personal equation: Catholicism = Judaism.” Michael Hofmann, ‘Introduction’, in Joseph Roth, *Report from a Parisian Paradise*, pp. 11-21, p. 18.

⁵⁷ Joseph Roth, ‘Europe Is Possible Only Without the Third Reich’ (*Die Wahrheit* (Prague), December 20, 1934), in *Report from a Parisian Paradise*, pp. 226-229.

⁵⁸ When he is on the defence for the morals and values of the greater European tradition, Roth makes no distinction between the German cultural tradition at large and Nazi Germany. However, he does reserve for

suggests that Germany be quarantined and that the League of Nations “throw out” any nation that does not declare all people equal. The fact that Nazi Germany, using the trope of their “special historical destiny,” is building on the legacy of Germany’s more illustrious predecessors, infuriates him. “They might tend to the graves of Lessing and Schiller in their cemeteries, but that doesn’t make them the heirs of Lessing and Schiller”; the heirs, in other words, of the Enlightenment, the belief in reason, progress, and the equality of man.⁵⁹ There is no way for Germany to reclaim this heritage in the light of the Nazi’s ascent to power. Thus, without Germany, this “depository of hell on earth,” Roth concludes, “*Europe is a force.*”⁶⁰

Elsewhere on the continent, too, there were outcries for a transnational, “European” literature of high quality that exceeded the nationalist creed.⁶¹ During the interwar years, various discourses about Europe converged as a result of the influence of exiled writers now adding their opinions to the national debates about the role and function of literature in neighbouring countries such as France, Belgium and the Netherlands. On the one hand, Europe is seen as a cultural tradition “composed of longing, whose boundaries are dissolving and which is threatened with decline,” and, on the other hand, as a transnational ideal “of top artistic and intellectual achievements which also points the way ahead for the future.”⁶² There is a strong emphasis on a shared cultural heritage as a counterweight against threatening nationalism; the idea that Europe – pitted against Russia or the United States – has a distinct cultural tradition of its own that can overrun the separate nationalist claims of the peoples it harbours. Roth, too, argued that

himself a place in the more venerable German tradition of Goethe and Schiller when he confronts his own position as a German writer of Jewish descent. Here we find a clear instance of the duality that characterises much of German-Jewish thought on the subject of heritage, and as much as Roth distanced himself from Germany on ideological-political grounds, he was not willing to desert what he considered the better parts of this tradition; elements, moreover, that formed a crucial part of his intellectual upbringing.

⁵⁹ The same use of the past can be seen in the Weimar Republic, whose very name seems to be an attempt to defy the chaos, insecurity and political volatility of its reality: naming the government after a town with a clear literary precedent was a reminder of Germany’s finer traditions. Michael Hofmann in the ‘Introduction’ to Joseph Roth, *What I Saw*, p. 11.

⁶⁰ Joseph Roth, *Pariser Tagblatt*, 6 July 1934.

⁶¹ Menno ter Braak, ‘Emigranten-Literatur’, *Das Neue Tage-Buch*, No. 2, Vol. 50 (1934), pp. 1244-1245. Original text: “...den Ruf nach einer transnationalen, ‘europäischen’ Literatur hoher Qualität, die jeglichen Nationalismus übersteigen sollte.”

⁶² Els Andringa, ‘Die Sesshaftigkeit hat in Europa aufgehört.’ *Rezeption und Reflexion der deutschen Emigrantenliteratur im niederländischen Polysystem der dreißiger Jahre*, *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur (IASL)* 33, 2008, 2, pp. 145-183. The page numbers in my copy range from 1 to 44. Original texts, translation mine: “Verschiedene Europa-Diskurse kreuzen sich also in diesen Jahren in der literaturkritischen Debatte. Von den Erfahrungen der Exilanten und von politischen Positionen überlagert, wird Europa einerseits gesehen als eine von Sehnsucht erfüllte und vom Untergang bedrohte entgrenzte kulturelle Tradition, andererseits als ein übernationales Ideal künstlerischer und geistiger Spitzenleistungen, das auch für die Zukunft richtungweisend sein soll.” (38) “Entgrenzung sieht man dann auch in den Europa-Diskursen, in denen Internationalisierung und die Betonung des gemeinsamen kulturellen Erbes das Gegengewicht zum bedrohenden Nationalismus sind.” (41)

the roots of European culture were much older, and went far beyond the concept of, the nation state. He names them: “Greece, Rome, Israel, Christendom and Renaissance, the French Revolution and Germany’s eighteenth century, the polyglot music of Austria and the poetry of the Slavs: These are the forces that have formed Europe. These forces have combined to form European solidarity and the cultural conscience of Europe. None of these forces was bounded by a national border. All are naturally opposed to the barbarity of so-called national pride.”⁶³ *The Antichrist* was written in exactly this context of vitriolic anti-nationalist sympathies. It is against this background of intellectual debates concerning possible counteractions against the political events in Germany, threatening to destroy all that was moral and just about European culture, that we can understand Roth’s quest for universal European values as well as his interest in Catholicism.

In Roth we see a coalescence of the terms “Catholic,” “universal” and “French.” These terms are used interchangeably and uncritically, yet they designate the same thing: a universal and humanist world for mankind to inhabit safely and justly. Roth resorted to faith as the best means to fight barbarism; as the only possible reaction to a world in which reason has failed: “Da die Dreckkerle an die Hölle glauben, können wir Ihnen nicht mit der raison begegnen, sondern mit dem Glauben, dem Glaubel, an den Himmel,” he wrote in October 1934.⁶⁴ Roth’s particular brand of Catholicism – or, more accurately, his eccentric logic that merged monarchism, Habsburg Catholicism, multi-nationality, France and freedom into one – can best be understood as a reaction *against* something: against communism, barbarism, Nazism and Hitlerism. A worldview, in other words, that came to life out of dejected necessity and as a response to the overarching catastrophe of Nazism that had destroyed the moral faculties of man. “After his return from Russia,” his friend Joseph Wittlin remembered, “Roth discovered his conservatism.”⁶⁵ What Wittlin means here by “conservatism” is Roth’s increasing critique of modern society and its “evils,” the monarchism of his later years, as well as his rejection of communism and socialism as means to govern nations and create order in the chaos. I do doubt, however, whether this rejection of left-wing ideologies as solutions to the present qualifies as “conservatism,” because Roth equally rejected wholesale ideologies on the right. Instead, it signalled a refusal to identify with extreme politics versus a call, naïve perhaps in the eyes of his

⁶³ Joseph Roth, ‘Europe Is Possible Only Without the Third Reich’, pp. 226-227.

⁶⁴ Joseph Roth, in a letter to Ernst Křenek dated 31 October 1934, *Briefe*, p. 391.

⁶⁵ Joseph Wittlin in an interview with David Bronsen, June 3, 1960. Dokumentationsstelle für neuere österreichische Literatur, Wien, Handschriftensammlung. Sammlung Joseph Roth / David Bronsen, Interview Bronsen - Józef Wittlin am 4. September 1963, S. 1: JR/DB 5.1/29.

contemporaries, for the power of imagination and human freedom based on a multiplicity of identifications. It coincided with his discovery of France, the place of “humane landscapes” where he hoped individual freedom could still exist without spiralling down into horror the way it had in Germany.⁶⁶ It also earned a place in his autobiography, the short resume of his life he sent to Blanche Gidon in February 1934: “1922 France = la lumière, la liberté PERSONELLE, (pas une “phrase”!)”⁶⁷ However, identification with the traditions of France was not in itself an eccentric trait; on the contrary, it was widespread among the intellectuals of Weimar. The writers of the radical left-wing journal the *Weltbühne*, for instance, sought friendship with France “... for the beneficial effects that French culture might have on the Germans. With a nostalgia, envy, and admiration so characteristic of the Central European literati, [they] looked to Paris for salvation. They envied in the French their civil liberties, Latinity, *savoir vivre*, gaiety, and humanism; they admired the French for their artfulness in juxtaposing pedantry and disorder; they saw in France the mirror of democracy, intelligence, anticonformism, good taste, artistic refinement, and progressive literature – in short, they admired the French for all that they felt the Germans lacked.”⁶⁸ Roth certainly shared this dichotomised view of France and Germany.

Recent scholarship has argued that the turn to Catholicism of many atheist, liberal, Jewish as well as non-Jewish intellectuals during the interwar years – whether through baptism or mere confused flirtation – was an anti-modernist response to the Great War.⁶⁹ This was a time of conceptual disorientation in intellectual responses to the war, and Christianity was one ideological source that seemed to offer a humane solution to the problem of a divided Europe. Indeed, some intellectuals believed that Europe could be saved through its re-Christianization, based on a religious definition of the European spirit. It meant reviving Christianity as the essence of the West, as well as creating a future based

⁶⁶ “Mein bescheiden privates Verhältnis zu “Frankreich” (ich muß jedes zweite Wort in Anführungszeichen setzen, so mißbraucht empfinde ich die Worte) is ungefähr: die liebevolle Hoffnung, daß in diesem Land die schlichte menschliche Freiheit nie untergehen wird, wie in andern. Und vielleicht kann ich dem und jenen jungen Franzosen eine Ahnung vermitteln, wie schrecklich die individuelle Unfreiheit sine kann. Eine Warning!” Joseph Roth, in a letter to Félix Bertaux dated 27 February 1929, *Briefe*, pp. 146-147.

⁶⁷ Joseph Roth, in a letter to Blanche Gidon dated 16 February 1934, *Briefe*, p. 314.

⁶⁸ Istvan Deák, *Weimar Germany's left-wing intellectuals: a political history of the Weltbühne and its circle*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968, p. 86.

⁶⁹ The idea that images of Europe have changed since the 1920s is one of the arguments that Menno Spiering and Michael Wintle put forward in their book *Ideas of Europe since 1914: The legacy of the First World War*. Although Eurocentrism lies at the heart of many of these images, they by no means always testify to feelings of assertiveness or confidence. After the Great War, Europeans became more aware of their pitfalls, and the unthinking pre-war arrogance had possibly gone forever. The argument, then, is that the Great War killed this arrogance. Menno Spiering and Michael Wintle (eds.), *Ideas of Europe since 1914: The legacy of the First World War*. Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002, p. 8.

on Christian values. The Great War had “killed the arrogance” and the optimistic belief in human rational progress that so deeply characterised the pre-1914 years, and instead a return to more traditional values now seemed in place.

While many of Roth’s novels describe this post-war ideological and intellectual confusion, Catholicism only enters his literary world during the mid-1930s, especially in the novel *Tarabas. A Guest on Earth* (1934) and the novella *The Legend of the Holy Drinker* (published posthumously in 1940).⁷⁰ It does feature more heavily in his journalism and letters, starting around 1925, the time of his first visit to France. It also plays a role in his redefinition of the European spirit, a question that became a burning necessity after 1933. His Jewish heritage, however, is never far away in his conflated vision: “Man hat – wie ich Ihnen schon sagte – eine Verpflichtung gegen Voltaire, Herder, Goethe, Nietzsche, wie gegen Moses und seine jüdische Väter. Es ergibt sich daraus die Verpflichtung: das Leben zu retten, wenn es durch Bestien gefährdet ist und sein Schreiben.”⁷¹ The “Catholic roots” of Roth’s Europe, then, seem impure at best. Roth tried to find the solution to the cultural and political crisis of the continent within Europe’s spiritual confines, excluding emigration to America and Soviet communism, and focusing instead on the humanist legacy of France as an enlightened and free republic – all, it must be remarked, in quotation marks due to the anti-absolutism of his intellectual mindset. But the European continent, to which had Roth confined himself by choice as well as conviction, was ready to implode.

God and the Jews

During the 1930s, especially after 1933’s political exile, Roth’s discourse about God and the fate of the Jews intensified significantly. “The Christian God,” he wrote in September 1934,

on account of His kinship with Judaism, has been degraded to a second-class citizen at best. [...] Since God, while omnipresent, is also invisible, it isn’t possible to secure His expulsion from the Third Reich. But one may assume – inasmuch as a poor mortal is capable of divining the ways of the Almighty – that He turned his back on the leaders of the Third Reich some time ago. Since the Christian faith is descended from the Jewish, its priests and congregations suffer persecution. [...] It took a long time before it was understood in Germany that banning atheists and persecuting Jews wasn’t enough to qualify as a Christian state. [...] What about the people of the Third Reich, who are no longer afraid of God, but of everyone else, including even the Jews?! The Third Reich will win

⁷⁰ For instance in *Tarabas* (1934) and *The Legend of the Holy Drinker* (1940)

⁷¹ Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 26 March 1933, *Briefe*, p. 260.

only one victory – which it has already won: against the Jews. It's a victory against the children, the blessed, the accursed, of God.⁷²

God, according to Roth, was on the side of the Jews because of their original kinship with the Lord, who created a world that was just and good in its original template. Because of the inherent justice of God's creation, He had now left Germany, where so many crimes were being executed. In *The Antichrist*, too, Roth reflects about God and the function of Jewish dispersion. He mourns the loss of what he calls "the grace of reason," an essentially noble gift which God bestowed upon man in order to cultivate the capacity of invention but which has, in modern times, acquired an evil purpose through moral abuse – in dictatorial regimes and capitalism respectively. Mankind's yearning to become God has resulted in a belief that it is at home in, or on top of, the world, but Roth argues that the contrary is true: homelessness is still man's fate. This is important. Although Roth speaks of mankind as such, his implicit focal point is the Jews. The seemingly general question "who is mankind to imagine itself (at) home?" is asked from a position of homelessness and a predilection for multiplicity that stems from the perspective of an uprooted Eastern Jew in the Diaspora. Furthermore, it is a question that has more severe implications for the Jews, who are the most preeminent itinerants. Here, Roth seems to make the connection between uprootedness and Jewishness almost intuitively.

This question of Jewish belonging is embedded in debates among Jewish intellectuals during the 1930s who, faced with increasing threats to their lives and religion, discussed the justifiability of a Jewish homeland. Although the origins of the debate go back to the 1890s, when Jewish assimilation in Germany was called into question, first by nationalist antisemites and then by Jews themselves, it acquired a mortal urgency in the context of the expulsion of Jews from Germany following 1933. Many looked towards Zion as a guaranteed safe haven, not just for the impoverished and persecuted East European Jews, but for all Jews. Following the pogroms in Russia and the Ukraine in 1881-1882, a wave of Jews left Europe and resettled in the U.S. Also, there was fierce debate about whether a return to Palestine, as the Holy Land of the Jews, would not undermine the fate of the Jews in the Diaspora and only increase antisemitism for those Jews who

⁷² Joseph Roth, 'God in Germany' (*Das Neue Tage-Buch* (Paris), September 8, 1934), in *Report from a Parisian Paradise*, pp. 223-225.

chose to remain in their adopted home countries. From its beginnings, then, the Zionist movement was riddled with internal conflict.⁷³

Roth took part in this debate in the form of many impassioned articles about the role of the Jews and Zionism, positioning the latter directly against diaspora. His reasons to disapprove of Zionism were many, but the argument put forward in *The Antichrist* is that a national homeland for the Jews runs counter to the divine law of God, based on the messianic idea that the solution to the Jews' predicament lay in God's hands only. One does not hurry the coming of the Messiah. Indeed, if wandering is still man's fate, as Roth argued, including but not limited to the Jews, and man cannot undo the word of God until He does so Himself, then the creation of a Jewish homeland is nothing less than a blasphemy. It is the "secret will of history" that the Jews own no land.⁷⁴ Here, Roth's thought shows traces of the Jewish orthodox view that "the struggle for national freedom was irrelevant and even pernicious – the return to the Promised Land lay in the hands of God and could occur only when the Messiah appeared."⁷⁵ Thus, in not so many words, in *The Antichrist* Roth accepted God's law from the standpoint of a Jew who bears his dispersion as a divine mark. Man's fault lies in thinking it has created and improved the human world whereas instead it has only damaged it.

However, the text also bears proof of the fact that Roth's scorn for a Zionist Palestine was not solely based on a traditional acceptance of God's law of dispersion. It was also a reaction to the nationalist dangers whose rapid emergence he had witnessed from the 1920s onwards. Roth's main claim was that the Jews, by wanting to be the masters of their own country, echoed the discourse of their oppressors. Similar arguments can be found in *The Wandering Jews* (1926); itself proof of the fact that the ideas expressed in *The Antichrist*, even if they appear in a more inflammatory guise, are not as anomalous within Roth's thought as they have been made out to be. Furthermore, the text betrays a heightened sensitivity to the question and fate of the Jews. The narrator, in response to a request by the publishing director, who is called the "Master of a thousand tongues," to describe the differences between the various peoples he encounters on his travels, refuses to do so. In what is a parable for the separatist politics of newspapers and nations, "Joseph Roth" argues that he will not describe the peoples' distinct characteristics because it is only

⁷³ See, for instance, Jonathan Frankel, "The 'Yitzkor' Book of 1911: A Note on National Myths in the Second Aliyah' and 'The Bundists in America and the 'Zionist Problem'", in *Crisis, Revolution, and Russian Jews*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 183-215 and 216-235.

⁷⁴ Joseph Roth, 'Wailing Wall' (*Das Tagebuch*, September 14, 1929), in Joseph Roth, *What I Saw. Reports from Berlin 1920-1933*. Translated by Michael Hofmann, London: Granta Books, 2003, p. 45-50, p. 47.

⁷⁵ Robert S. Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph*, p. 662.

the similarities that matter; God breathed life into all people simultaneously. In this context of shared human fate, he brings up the example of the Jews, who humbled themselves in accommodating the Saviour's coming through their denial of him. "Therefore, whoever believes in Jesus Christ but hates, or even has low esteem, for the Jews, his earthly womb, is the brother of the Antichrist."⁷⁶ Just as in his response to the question of human belonging, denying the rationale behind a national homeland or a national sense of belonging, here too, when arguing for the common origins of man, Roth takes recourse to the Jews and to Jewish tradition in general.

Both his rejection of Zionism and the acceptance of the holy ordeal of Jewish dispersion as a predicament that should not be made undone by man, have received criticism from Zionist scholars. Their criticism centres on the idea that Roth accepts wandering and homelessness, as well as the suffering it brings, as a Jewish fate, and that, moreover, in suffering, Jews reach "a partial fulfilment of their divine task."⁷⁷ While it is true that suffering plays a central role in Roth's conception of Jewish identity, including his own, what he found most disturbing about nationalist politics was its claim that a nation would bring happiness. Convinced that national temperaments would only lead to destruction and war, Roth, contrary to many Zionist Jews, put forward the concept of an earth ("Scholle") that was changeable and moveable; an idea of home that was not confined to, or hampered by, national borders. This belonging within multiplicity contains echoes of the linguistic and ethnic plurality of the lands of his youth; those Slavic borderlands of Galicia where Jews, Ukrainians, Poles and Russians lived together in relative – and often imagined – peace. Furthermore, in the absence of an authoritative male figure that would be able to bring order to the chaos – with emperor Franz Joseph buried in Vienna's Kapuzinergruft, the political leadership of Weimar an indecisive caboodle, and his own father lost in the maze of insanity – Roth professed an acceptance of divine law in the desire to create an organisational system through God. But more so than a psychological need for order in a dramatically unstable period in European history, it appears that behind Roth's acceptance of Jewish dispersion lay the painful recognition that there was no other choice: if a Jewish homeland would lead to nationalism and war, and complete assimilation into German society (or any other society, for that matter), was a myth, then one had to create a liveable situation of home and belonging within a predicament of dispersion. By consciously arguing for a non-national, itinerant fate for mankind, Roth took the

⁷⁶ Joseph Roth, *The Antichrist*, p. 136.

⁷⁷ Matiyahu Kranz, 'Joseph Roths Stellung zum Zionismus: Eine Ergänzung zu H. Aussenhofers Aufsatz 'Joseph Roth in Widerspruch zum Zionismus,' *Tribüne*, Vol. 14, No. 55 (Frankfurt am Main 1975), p. 6376-6392.

perspective of the Jewish diaspora within supranational dispersion and transferred it back onto entire mankind as a solution to the nationalist divisions tearing at the fabric of Europe. It was his attempt, in other words, to try to fit the essentially Jewish homelessness he considered fatal into a greater existential and organisational system.

Autobiography and Contemporary Echoes

That Roth remained, at least in his own mind, a solitary thinker amongst Jews and non-Jews alike, is evident from the ominous ending of *The Antichrist*. Towards the end of the text, the narrator finds himself in a hotel room visited by what he calls “tempters”: a righteous and an unrighteous man, a Jew and an antisemite, a patriot and a pious man. To the patriot, who declares that he loves his country even if evil is perpetrated there, he replies that God has given man feet so he can flee from persecution; the rationale, it seems, behind the divine advocacy of an itinerant life. This takes us back to Roth, sitting at his café table in Paris in the winter of 1934, angry and worried about those friends and colleagues who stayed behind in Germany, thinking that catastrophe could still be averted. His openly expressed anger was one of the acute circumstances that influenced the creation of *The Antichrist*. Roth “crossed out” those friends who refused to leave Germany, and he even ended his longstanding friendship with Benno Reifenberg, editor of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. Roth understood the deplorable risks of mankind believing itself to be God, and the Nazis’ attempts to undo creation itself, the scale of which was only fully revealed nine years later, was the clear mortal threat he confronted with a most venomous tongue in *The Antichrist*. It was therefore incomprehensible to him that others, especially his friends, did not see the dangers of Nazism, or, if they did, gravely underestimated them.

On 16 November 1935, a year after the publication of *The Antichrist*, Roth wrote to Stefan Zweig from Paris: “No one lives as reduced as I. As lonely as I am, in the café, where I write, is hardly any prisoner in his cell. I don’t need seclusion. I am *secluded*.”⁷⁸ Yet it was from this lonely position, which was partly a result of the narrowing world of exile but also a consequence of his self-inflicted intellectual isolation, that Roth set out to describe the world as he saw it. The singularity of *The Antichrist* has invited just but

⁷⁸ “So eingeschränkt, wie ich, lebt keiner. So einsam, wie ich im Café, wo ich schreibe, ist kaum Einer in einer Zelle. Ich brauche keine Abgeschlossenheit. *Ich bin abgeschlossen*.” Joseph Roth in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 16 November 1935. Joseph Roth : *Briefe*, p. 438.

somewhat schmaltzy comparisons with Jeremiah, aimlessly calling out in the desert.⁷⁹ But, despite the lack of understanding that followed its initial publication, *The Antichrist* is a work of alarm in which nostalgia for the past is abruptly set aside and replaced by urgent warnings about the present and future; a work that catapults itself out of the time in which it was written and all the more forcefully into our own.⁸⁰ This contemporary relevance, mirrored against the lukewarm reception of the book upon publication, is reminiscent of the posthumous fame Hannah Arendt described so beautifully when speaking of Walter Benjamin: fame bestowed upon those who are and remain intellectually “unclassifiable.”⁸¹ Indeed, much of the contemporary relevance attributed to Roth is reminiscent and perhaps also based on his critical kinship with Walter Benjamin. In believing modern technology to be the destroyer of all that was true, human and genuine in this world, Roth and Benjamin thought alike. Benjamin’s critical plea, in his famous essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” for the lost soul of art which evaporates due to its endless duplicity, is not too different from Roth’s idea of the camera as a murder weapon, stealing the souls of those portrayed on the cinema screen.⁸² The fabric of tradition, which the aura of art had for centuries been woven into, had started to unravel with the onset of modernity, and the concepts of authenticity, uniqueness and permanence, so dear to both Benjamin and Roth, were sacrificed in a world increasingly focused on personal gain, extreme politics and militaristic ideologies.

According to Roth, the ultimate triumph of the Antichrist was most visible in Hollywood, where people gladly traded their human souls for a celluloid existence. This concept of living shadows, of fake human lives, is, as I have argued in chapter 3, a common image in Roth’s depiction of humanity. What was present in his earlier works as a critique of consumer society, he identifies in 1934 as the main characteristic of his Antichrist and the modern world in general: a celebration of fake.⁸³ He believed that the omnipresent

⁷⁹ “Als de Jeremia van de jaren dertig roept hij dat de machten der duisternis de wereld beheersen en het verstand van de mensen verduisteren.” (“Like a 1930s Jeremiah [Roth] calls out that there are forces of darkness controlling the world and beclouding the reason of man.”) Koos van Weringh & Toke van Helmond, *Joseph Roth in Nederland*. Amsterdam: De Engelbewaarder, 1979, p. 52.

⁸⁰ Joseph Roth, *The Antichrist*, p. 15.

⁸¹ Hannah Arendt, ‘Introduction,’ in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations. Essays and Reflections*. Edited and with an Introduction by Hannah Arendt. Translated by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1968. See also chapter 5 of this thesis.

⁸² Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,’ in *Illuminations*, p. 217-251, p. 220.

⁸³ The Hungarian businessman Lakatos, for instance, who appears, in true polyphonic fashion, in several of Roth’s novels, is a true incarnation of the modern Antichrist, as he represents the triumph of fake over authenticity. In ‘The Leviathan’, too, it is the fake corals that ultimately cause the death of the Jewish coral merchant Nissen Piczenik. Joseph Roth, ‘The Leviathan’, in *The Collected Stories of Joseph Roth*. Translated and with an Introduction by Michael Hofmann. New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002, pp. 248-276.

“Weltuntergangsgefühl” of the interwar years was caused by the fact that people had become incapable of recognising true from fake, day from night, good from evil. They had become helpless in the face of the present; left without the moral and ethical skills needed in order to fight the catastrophe, which, in many ways, took place on the ideological plane. Mankind in the interwar period was a species imprisoned; or, in Roth’s words, a “mankind in cages.”

Roth’s vision of a Europe on the brink of disaster was delicately erected upon a barely concealed layer of angst. By conjuring up a haunting and irrational image of a twentieth-century Antichrist, Roth addressed the failure of modern political systems and ideologies to adequately order, and explain, the world. While it is true that modern laws and scientific explanations, aimed at neatly systematising the cosmos, removed some of the existential angst that grasped mankind so tightly by the throat in medieval times, they did not wholly succeed in eradicating these old fears. Even if history, in the words of Menno ter Braak, “lost much of its bloody and most disagreeable disorderliness after philosophers of history clarified that behind all the tumult and murder lay a developing principle that is not in the slightest impressed by tumult and murder,” it did not remove the chaos.⁸⁴ The tumult and murder of the interwar years did not leave Roth blinded; neither could the white gleam of technological progress gloss over the darkening clouds that were appearing along the edges of the European sky. It is typical of Roth that his critique of technology ends on a spiritual level, i.e. with the theft of his soul. As such, it could be said that *The Antichrist* reflects a heightened sensitivity towards the supernatural; a result, some critics have argued, of Roth’s East European Jewish roots, a culture traditionally believed to be more receptive or inclined towards the supernatural. A world, perhaps, “of holy men and miracles.”⁸⁵

To conclude, it is safe to say that *The Antichrist* closely follows Roth’s own itinerary, from childhood experiences, war and post war unemployment, to journalism, extensive travels and his predicament as a Jew, to, finally, his solitary hotel life and singular position as a

⁸⁴ “De geschiedenis verliest veel van haar bloederige en zeer onstichtelijke wanordelijkheid, wanneer geschiedphilosophen ons hebben duidelijk gemaakt, dat aan al het rumoer en gemoord een ontwikkelingsprincipe ten grondslag ligt, dat zich door rumoer en moord in het geheel niet laat imponeren.” Menno ter Braak, ‘De Antichrist,’ p. 63.

⁸⁵ Benjamin Moser, *Why This World. A Biography of Clarice Lispector*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, p.5. As David Bronsen noted in his interview with Dutch art historian Frans Hannema, who knew Roth in the late 1930s: “The East European world is receptive to the supernatural – as – Roth’s belief in the supernatural. Hence his belief in the Antichrist. Mention this in background on East Europe in biography. Roth was convinced he had recognised the Antichrist. Er hat es auf einmal gewusst.” David Bronsen in an interview with Frans Hannema, October 27, 1960, no. 10/94/19.2/13, p. 7.

thinker. If we follow this line of thought and accept the idea that Roth envisioned his own life as a blueprint for the book, then the end betrays a lot about his conception of self during the mid 1930s: an isolated and misunderstood seeker of truth, confronted with falsehoods he ardently rejects and estranged from friends and colleagues. Indeed, estrangement was a sentiment of central importance to Roth's conception of the world and his own identity. In his letters, he often expressed the fear of being ignored or rejected by his friends; silences on their part would throw him into an unprecedented panic. He also believed, not without reason, that the postal services were controlling his correspondence.⁸⁶

A similar lonely stance, cultivated both by the man himself as well as his critics, characterised Albert Einstein.⁸⁷ With Roth, he shared a great unease about Germany long before 1933 and a predilection for multiple, shifting loyalties, qualities that were not always understood by his contemporaries. He was, in the words of Fritz Stern, "the antithesis of an organisation man." He was also the man who paid the most heartfelt tribute to *The Antichrist* soon after it was published. On 24 February 1935, Einstein wrote from Princeton to Roth's publisher, B.W. Hübsch of New York's The Viking Press:

Ich bin Ihnen wirklich dankbar, daß Si emir dieses trostreiche Buch eines echten Menschen und Dichters gesandt haben. Beim Lesen teilt man den Schmerz über die durch die Seelenblindheit der Gegenwart geschaffenen Härten und Schmerzen einer klaren und gütigen menschlichen Seele und man wird seltsam befreit durch jene Objektivierung, deren nur ein begnadetes künstlerisches Temperament fähig ist. Freundlich grüßt Sie, Ihr [A. Einstein]. P.S. Ich bitte Sie, dieser Brief auch dem verehrten Autor zukommen zu lassen und erlaube Ihnen gerne, von demselben in einer der Verbreitung des Buches förderlichen Art Gebrauch zu machen.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Time and again Roth expressed a great distrust of the postal services and asked his friends and colleagues at the *Frankfurter Zeitung* to confirm the reception of his letters and *feuilletons*. One pinnacle of these worries comes already in the summer of 1925, while travelling through the south of France. The tone of his letters to Benno Reifenberg is pressing, as Roth is deeply worried that seven *feuilletons* have been lost. While waiting for a reply, the underlying concern of his worries becomes clear: Roth is afraid he has run up against an "unwritten Hindenburg law" and fears that his post is intercepted due to the tone, not so much the content, of his writing. He understands, with usual irony, that "man in einem Hause, in dem es brennt, keine Brandstifter brauchen kann" (*Briefe* pp. 54-55). Roth wasn't the only one who feared for the fate of his letters. Walter Benjamin, writing from Moscow to his long-time female companion Julia Radt, had similar fears about the disappearance of his correspondence. Upon finally receiving word from her, he replies: "I had thought that all the letters were getting lost. But the mail seems to be reliable" Walter Benjamin in a letter to Julia Radt from Moscow written on 26 December 1926. Walter Benjamin, *Moscow Diary*. Edited by Gary Smith, translated by Richard Sieburth. Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1986, p. 127.

⁸⁷ Fritz Stern, 'Einstein's Germany,' in Fritz Stern, *Dreams and Delusions. The Drama of German History*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987, pp. 25-50.

⁸⁸ Albert Einstein, in a letter to B.W. Hübsch dated 24 February 1935, in Joseph Roth, *Briefe*, p. 405.

There is a sad irony in the observation that the “true man and poet” who wrote *The Antichrist* did not gain much strength from his own passionate warning for the continent. The “slow suicide” that Europe was committing in the 1930s mirrors Roth’s own slow but determined decline; a torrid alcoholism that gave rise to rumours that he took his own life, indeed, like so many of his contemporaries and friends at the onset of World War Two.⁸⁹ The psychosis of the continent and the humanist worldview he so sorely cherished may have had a worsening effect on his drinking, as it increased while the continent crumbled. In 1939, five years after he wrote *The Antichrist* and just months before his death, Roth still held the conviction that Europe was “about to die in fear, because it has failed to show respect.” The community of European intellectuals he wished to belong to with the aim of safekeeping a tradition of humanism and equality, ultimately proved unattainable; contributing, most certainly, to his ongoing sense of isolation.

Conclusion

It is not difficult to see why Roth’s “prophecies of unrest” resonate more deeply today than they did in the 1930s. Historical events have proven Roth right, and fear seems to play an ever greater role in human relations and politics today as it did then. The instalment of fear in the hearts of man has become a political tool used by the world’s greatest powers, and this may very well be the biggest threat to the safety of mankind yet. What lies behind the many expressions of renewed relevance and interest in Roth may partly be explained by his throat-cutting analysis of fear, whether it be the devil, postmodernity or something else at work, which in today’s culture of superficiality and instant gratification seems to ring all the more true. Indeed, we have become so used to the presence of “Doppelgängers” and shadows in our midst that we often confuse them with the original.

However, in a self-defeating exercise that was symptomatic of his individualist and multivocal stance, Roth’s attempt at creating an ordering principle for his instable interwar world was undermined, if not wholly undone, by his deeply pessimistic vision of the modern world; a vision, moreover, that could not be denied despite the urgent wish to save the present and envision a future. According to people who knew Roth during his first

⁸⁹ Susan Miron, for instance, calls Roth’s death “an unsuccessful suicide attempt.” However, if one considers chronic alcoholism as slow suicide, then indeed his binge-drinking on the night when he heard about Ernst Toller’s suicide in a New York hotel room may be considered an unsuccessful suicide attempt. “His death has been attributed to chronic alcoholism and heart disease; judging from his fiction, Roth has been heartsick if not heartbroken for years.” See Susan Miron, ‘On Joseph Roth,’ *Salmagundi*, No. 98-99 (Spring – Summer 1993), pp. 198-206, p. 200.

years of exile, he lived in a state of constant panic and “mental high tension,” convinced that he had seen, recognised and diagnosed the Antichrist.⁹⁰ From correspondence around the time of its creation it is clear that Roth invested *The Antichrist* with hopes that bordered on the messianic, comparing himself to saints who were dictated the divine word. We can only imagine the disappointment, quickly brushed off with excuses about the ill tempo in which it was written, when his words fell on deaf ears and were relegated to the domain of the unsound.

Despite this, however, *The Antichrist* is a historical critique of the moral disintegration that took place in Western Europe during the 1920s and 1930s. Roth’s Antichrist, as a concept signalling the moral and physical threat to European civilisation, is embedded in the interwar years in the sense that its presence was a direct result of man’s greed, moral decay, godlessness and worship of the mass media; all, it needs not be stressed, specifically modern phenomena. Roth, fuelled by the republican tradition of Paris which presented a much more enlightened alternative to the darker forces at work in Germany, had the intention to argue on behalf on entire mankind – limited, perhaps, to the European continent – but in his predilection for wandering as God’s law and a severe disdain for all forms of nationalism, Roth was speaking from the perspective of an uprooted East European Jew who found a safe haven in the Francophone West. Indeed, Roth’s wanderings in a world that seemed to be sliding more and more off the moral scale may have led him to the subject of the Antichrist. And since he knew the earth would not move for him, Roth moved restlessly across the earth in the hope that his message struck home somewhere.

⁹⁰ According to Dutch art historian Frans Hannema, Roth lived in a constant state of “geistige Hochspannung”: “Roth was convinced he had recognised the Antichrist. Er hat es auf einmal gewusst.” Dokumentationsstelle für neuere österreichische Literatur, Wien, Handschriftensammlung. Sammlung Joseph Roth / David Bronsen, Interview Bronsen – Frans Hannema am 27. Oktober 1960, S. 1: JR/DB 10/94/19.2/13.

VII

Speaking from a Jewish Void. Exilic Performance and Masquerade as Strategies of Resistance

Roth [is] the most perfect example of a highly developed, beautifully executed, really perfect phony.

Peter de Mendelssohn¹

I only know the world, I think, when I write, and when I put the pen away, I am lost.

Joseph Roth²

Introduction

Joseph Roth was a man who came in many guises. Already during his lifetime a wealth of stories circulated about his origins and family heritage. These stories were mainly self-fabricated. No doubt this fact of Roth's so-called "mythomania" added to the myth of the man that emerged posthumously.³ Famous is the anecdote of Roth's funeral, some days after his death on 27 May 1939, at the Thiais Cemetery in Paris, where Jews, Christians and Austrian monarchists competed for the last word on the identity of the deceased. Roth himself never tried to unravel these myths, never uttered a final word: on the contrary, it seems as if the confusion he caused among friends and colleagues only further fuelled his imagination. As he lay there, silent, amidst his quarrelling friends, he entered a posthumous existence that would prove to be as tumultuous in the way of ambiguity as were the 44 years of his short life. Since his death, critics and scholars have been puzzled, frustrated and divided over Roth's "true" identity. The dominant reading is that he was a sentimental and nostalgic Jewish son of the bygone Habsburg Empire, an assimilated German-Jewish writer

¹ German-Jewish writer Peter de Mendelssohn in an interview with David Bronsen. Dokumentationsstelle für neuere österreichische Literatur, Vienna, Handschriftensammlung. Collection Joseph Roth/David Bronsen, Interview Bronsen – Peter de Mendelssohn on 5 May 1961, p. 6: JR/DB 17/18.1/30.

² "Ich kenne, glaube ich, die Welt nur, wenn ich schreibe, und, wenn ich die Feder weglege, bin ich verloren." Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 17 February 1936, *Briefe*, p. 452.

³ It was Roth's first biographer, David Bronsen, who coined the term "mythomaniac." Bronsen unravelled many of the myths surrounding Roth in his 1974 biography *Joseph Roth: Eine Biographie* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1974).

now safely locked into the confines of Austrian literary history. Although recent attempts have been made to do justice to Roth's multiplicity as a thinker, little has been done to understand Roth's intellectual heritage and personal biographies in the light of his proclivity for self-invention; to take, as it were, his performances of self, i.e. the ways in which he constantly created new roles, histories and stories for himself, he as the starting point of the analysis.⁴

This chapter, then, works from the premise that Roth's multiple configurations of his uprooted self were based on a positive assessment of exile; on the idea, in other words, that homelessness was a not an exception or a lamentable fate, but instead a critical existential position for all men. I will examine the relationship between mythomania and language, the main tool of all writers, as well as the connections between Roth's particular linguistic innovations and his historical present. Also, I will address the risks and possibilities of self-invention, of Roth's multiple attempts to find a way out of the void; indeed, to fill it with myths. In addressing the risks, especially Roth's decline and self-annihilation through alcoholism, I will discuss the posthumous novella *The Legend of the Holy Drinker* (1940).

It may be clear that the aim of this chapter is not to provide a definite answer to the question of Roth's identity, but to understand this peculiar fact of exaggerated self-invention in the context of his historical predicament as an uprooted East European Jew. I will try to show that what both caused and facilitated Roth's mythomania was a defined lack of anchorage, visible in his trajectory of assimilation, estrangement, and exile; phenomena that were all a direct result of the fact of his Jewish birth. The difficult route of assimilation to German culture and the subsequent expulsion from it was a fate Roth shared with many contemporaries, not all of whom turned into infamous manipulators of the truth. Thus it is here, in the encounter between shared historical circumstance and individual biographical particularity that historical research has the potential, in the words of Fritz Stern, to "recapture something of the spirit of the age."⁵ It may, too, shine a light on the rather obscure occurrence of what I have called exilic performance.

⁴ Recent critical studies that address Roth's modern identity are Jon Hughes, *Facing Modernity* (2006) and Kati Tonkin, *Joseph Roth's March into History* (2009). The quality of both books notwithstanding, neither focuses much on the role of Roth's Jewish heritage in his life and work.

⁵ Fritz Stern, *Dreams and Delusions. The Drama of German History*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987, p. 5.

The Quest for Exilic Belonging

This chapter is based on the idea that Roth's conceptions of home, belonging and self were conceived within and started from a positively charged condition of exile. It argues against the common interpretation in Roth scholarship that both the author and his literary characters were prone to, and structured by, a nostalgic desire to return to a lost home. Indeed, the impossibility of such a return lies inadvertently embedded in the structure of Roth's tales, as homecomings remain unfulfilled and characters linger in a state of incessant wandering or perpetual exile. Their sense of belonging is found in the disentanglement from tradition, even if this does not end in material or emotional well-being. But despite the recognition that aborted homecomings are a structural landmark in Roth's work, the desire for a return home has nevertheless been posited as a basic explanatory factor in the psychology of Roth and his characters. What makes this focus on homecomings problematic is the fact that his images of home had already vanished as real possibilities by the time Roth created them, thus immediately turning them into retrospective illusions. The Habsburg monarchy, for instance, came into focus as a lost home only after 1918, its demise being a crucial precondition for its literary reappearance. Brody, the border-town with almost metaphysical qualities, lost its function as the cradle of multiple nationalities after the empire collapsed, and it became part first of Poland, then of the Ukraine. Finally, a stable family life as a possible image of home had never even been known to Roth, as he grew up a fatherless child, living in his uncle's house with his mother and grandfather. Another reason that a focus on homecomings is problematic is that it often results in interpretations of Roth as a nostalgic author whose main aim was the creation of a "backward-looking utopia."⁶ This view neglects Roth's critical concern for his contemporary world and relegates him to the domain of the sentimental. It also forecloses any further understanding of his reactions to exile as well as the strategies of resistance he developed in the face of multiple displacements.

So far, few voices in Roth scholarship have formulated a more critical understanding of Roth's ideas about home and self. Borton W. Browning was the first to argue that Roth, having plunged into the depths of despair, developed a notion of the exile experience as "bliss," thus reversing the expected emotional itinerary of loss and death and

⁶ The notion of "rückwärtsgewandte Utopie" as a structuring element in Roth's life and work was developed by David Bronsen in his *Joseph Roth und die Tradition Aufsatz- und Materialiensammlung* (Darmstadt: Agora Verlag, 1975).

directing his almost messianic hopes towards a better future.⁷ Eva Reichmann has argued that Roth's "home" can be found not in any fixed geographical location, but in the condition of "homelessness" as such.⁸ Reichmann places this idea, of being at home in a situation of homelessness, in the context of the historical situation of the interwar years, decades that were characterised by an unprecedented restlessness and instability. She furthermore argues that the lack of a stable geographical home forms a strong incitement for an inner personal development, a kind of *Bildung* that would not have been possible otherwise. However, despite an historical situation that accommodates or accelerates a pre-existing personal inclination for displacement, homelessness is still a voluntarily chosen fate. In a similar vein, Telse Hartmann has refuted the idea that a stable cultural identity always needs to be based on a home or a native land.⁹ She contests the idea that a desire for home underlies all intellectual and physical movement, and thus deconstructs the idea of "home" as a precondition for a stable cultural identity. Hartmann is weary of the "crisis and loss" interpretations that result from this; i.e. the idea that a loss of origin necessarily results in an identity crisis.

Andreas Herzog agrees with the idea of a basic lack of anchorage in Roth's identity, but locates the source of this lack in the permanent non-belonging or non-attachment of the Jews.¹⁰ Roth's conscious efforts to remain uprooted, Herzog argues, were fuelled by a belief in the transnational mission of the Jews. I will return to this in my discussion of Roth's self-conscious itinerant fate below. Finally, then, Kati Tonkin also stressed the link to Roth's Jewishness, as she argues that Roth's solution to his historical predicament was wandering itself: "Having rejected *Heimat* as a category of identification and a value due to

⁷ Borton W. Browning, 'Joseph Roth's *Die Legende vom heiligen Trinker*. Essence and Elixir', in *Protest - Form - Tradition: Essays on German Exile Literature*, edited by Joseph Strelka, Robert F. Bell and Eugene Dobson. University of Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1979, pp. 81-95, "Roth's particular personal vision of the exile phenomenon was one granted to or, perhaps more properly, one visited upon few men. From his background he extracted an essence containing all the implications of homelessness, loss of identity, economic need, and ever-present fear of expulsion. Employing this essence he then formed an elixir embodying the reverse of this experience, the exile experience as a bliss that perhaps can be envisioned only by those who have plumbed the depths of despair." (p. 93).

⁸ Eva Reichmann, "Heimatlosigkeit als Heimat in Werk Joseph Roths", in *Habsburger Aporien? Geisteshaltungen und Lebenskonzepte in der multinationalen Literatur der Habsburger Monarchie*, edited by Eva Reichmann, Bielefelder Schriften zu Linguistik und Literaturwissenschaft 9, Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 1998, pp. 133-147. Reichmann talks about a "charakterliche und innerliche Weiterentwicklung" and a "freiwillig gewählter Lebensweg."

⁹ Telse Hartmann, 'Zwischen Lokalisierung und Deplazierung. Zur diskursiven Neuverhandlung kultureller Identitäten in den Kulturwissenschaften', *Germanistische Mitteilungen. Zeitschrift für deutsche Sprache, Literatur und Kultur*, Vol. 50 (1999), pp. 17-40 (my references are to the online version, <http://www.kakanien.ac.at/beitr/postcol/THartmann1/>, pp. 1-11).

¹⁰ Andreas Herzog, "'Die Mission des Übernationalen.'" Zu den Judentumskonzeptionen einiger deutschsprachiger jüdischer Schriftsteller (A. Wolfenstein, A. Ehrenstein, R. Keyser, L. Feuchtwanger, J. Roth)', *Das Jüdische Echo, Zeitschrift für Kultur & Politik*, published by den Jüdischen Akademikern Österreichs and the Vereinigung jüdischer Hochschüler Österreichs, 1996, Vol. 45 (Oktober 1996), pp. 155-161.

its connection with the nationalism he condemns in such absolute terms, Roth finds that the only alternative is to embrace the condition of being permanently ‘auf Wanderschaft.’”¹¹ However, the link between a condition of voluntary homelessness and a predilection for masquerade has not yet been examined. Nor has the fact of Roth’s Jewish birth been addressed in the context of his incessant self-invention. The idea of the self, which after Freud and modernity was catapulted into irreparable fragments, suffered in the 1920s from a desire to return to a state of “wholeness” – explaining the appeal of extreme ideologies pretending to guarantee this organic, complete self.¹² In what follows I will argue against this idea of a desire for a “whole” self or a homecoming in a fixed and stable identity. In this context, too, it needs to be stressed that 1933, as the historical date signifying the beginnings of political exile, should not be considered a turning point or the onset of Roth’s wanderings. What I will confront here is a predilection for mythmaking that stemmed from a predicament of uprootedness that went far beyond, but was connected to, 1933; rooted, as I will argue, in the historical fact of an East European Jewish birth.

Exile before Exile: pre-1933 Homelessness

It is difficult to assess whether Roth’s early predilection for wandering was in any way the result of his upbringing in Brody. Some have argued that the experience of Brody’s multi-linguistic community left a decisive mark on Roth’s self and identity as rooted in multiplicity.¹³ What can be stated is that Roth’s wanderings, his “inner exile” or estrangement, was to a high degree self-inflicted, despite historical forces that would later meet him halfway. His preference for hotel rooms, based on an abhorrence of domesticity, materialised long before the enforced political exile of 1933 and can be considered a form of self-chosen exile from the normality of daily life in which most people tend to be rooted. It is important to note that Roth did not consider his itinerant lifestyle to be anything out of the ordinary:

Seit meinem achtzehnten Lebensjahr habe ich in keiner Privatwohnung mehr gelebt, höchstens eine Woche als Gast bei Freunden. Alles, was ich besitze, sind drie Koffer. Und das erscheint mir gar nicht merkwürdig.

¹¹ Kati Tonkin, *Joseph Roth’s March into History*, p. 32.

¹² Peter Gay, ‘The Hunger for Wholeness: Trials of Modernity’, in *Weimar Culture. The Outsider as Insider*. New York: Harper, 1970, pp. 70-101.

¹³ See Jon Hughes, *Facing Modernity* (2006) and Kati Tonkin, *Joseph Roth’s March into History* (2009).

Sondern merkwürdig “romantisch” kommt mir ein Haus vor, mit Bildern und so weiter.¹⁴ (1929)

Ich habe keine Heimat, wenn ich von der Tatsache absehe, daß ich in mir selbst zu Hause bin und mich bei mir heimisch fühle. Wo es mir schlecht geht, dort ist mein Vaterland. Gut geht es mir nur in den Fremde. Wennich mir nu einmal verlasse, verliere ich mich auch. Deshalb achte ich peinlich darauf, bei mir zu bleiben.¹⁵ (1930)

In Roth’s view, the wanderer’s destination was more important than her point of departure, and he dismissed the mythology of ultimate return that often accompanies notions of exile. Nor did he appreciate those things which a traditional home tends to entail: “Ich habe noch nie – lange vor der Katastrophe – die Fähigkeit gehabt, Möbel und dergleichen zu verstehen. Ich scheisse auf Möbel. Ich hasse Häuser.”¹⁶ But even if Roth developed a notion of exile based on living within a condition of homelessness, oriented more towards the future than the past, long before 1933, it is important to keep in mind the material circumstances of exile. In other words, if we accept the proposition that Roth’s exile was mainly a self-inflicted predicament originating from his early experiences of loss and homelessness, then any account of his exilic itinerary must be formulated within the tensions between real and metaphorical displacement, between exile as a reality and exile as a metaphorical or ideological concept.¹⁷ To what extent was the concept of homelessness a structural element in Roth’s worldview? What kind of homelessness? And, most importantly, what kind of void did he speak from?

One specific and fashionable figurative use of exile is the idea of the exile experience as a model for an intellectual ethics. This is not without problems. What is problematic about positing exile as an ideal intellectual vantage point are the ways in which, in the words of Sebastiaan Faber, “it minimizes or masks the extent to which exile involves concessions, contaminations, complicities, negotiations and, in general, institutional dependency.”¹⁸ It almost completely ignores the material circumstances of life in exile; it does not address issues of employment, legal status, housing, or access to the means of intellectual production, such as publishers and media outlets. Instead of a morally superior position from which to critically reflect upon the world, which this figurative use of exile encourages, exile is a condition that causes loss, contamination and the sacrifice of ethical

¹⁴ Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 27 February 1929, *Briefe*, p. 145.

¹⁵ Joseph Roth, in a letter to Gustav Kiepenheuer, date unknown, 1930, *Briefe*, p. 165.

¹⁶ Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 10 October 1938, *Briefe*, p. 524.

¹⁷ Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996.

¹⁸ Sebastiaan Faber, ‘The Privilege of Pain: The Exile as Ethical Model in Max Aub, Francisco Ayala, and Edward Said,’ *Journal of the Interdisciplinary Crossroads*, thematic issue “The Limits of Exile” (eds. D. Kettler and Z. Ben-Dor), Vol. 3, No. 1 (April 2006), pp. 11-32.

principles for the sake of survival. Faber therefore warns against deriving an ethical example from any type of suffering. Caren Kaplan, too, has argued that displacement is in dire need to be historicised.¹⁹ Moreover, it is "... imperative to anchor exile historically and to disallow conceptual obfuscation or mythologization."²⁰

In the context of these ideas, and taking into account the fact that Roth's exile is often romanticised, I would like to argue for a material, embodied and historicised interpretation of it. How, in other words, did the harsh realities and daily struggles created by the lack of anchorage and loss of readership affect Roth's intellectual mindset? It is telling that Roth's exilic concerns were clearly centred on financial matters, forming a top priority in his daily life, correspondence, and mental preoccupations. Two of the three existing volumes of letters are dedicated solely to correspondence with publishers, documenting his efforts and schemes to make money. His life in exile, including to some degree his voluntary displacement of the 1920s, was a confrontation with the messy reality of everyday life; not, as some claim, a condition of renunciation and social detachment. Roth's loyalties were never fixed, and many of his choices regarding publishers, newspapers and jobs were pragmatic. Indeed, he had a family to feed, including, in the 1930s, Andrea Manga Bell and her two young children, so he couldn't be picky.²¹ Thus what we detect in Roth is a kind of radicalisation of "ethical probity": his loyalties were constantly and consciously blurred as a result both of a personal inclination for shifting identifications and a pressing need to make a living. His work is devoid of glorifications of abstract intellectual distance and truth vis-à-vis reality. Indeed, it is very true that a "free-floating transnational existence is illusory, because the exile, by definition, is grounded in a historical, political world that caused the conditions of his or her exile"; in Roth's case, the volatile and politically polarised climate of the interwar years in which he, a Jew from the East,

¹⁹ Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel*, p. 4.

²⁰ Johannes F. Evelein (ed.), *Exiles Traveling. Exploring Displacement, Crossing Boundaries in German Exile Arts and Writings 1933-1945*. Amsterdamer Beiträge zur Neueren Germanistik 68. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2009. In the light of the contemporary intellectual "erosion" of the concepts exile and travel, this study examines whether these terms still have any validity in our postmodern era of cosmopolitanism, ever increasing mobility and tourism, and the embrace of otherness.

²¹ During the years 1933-34, Roth repeatedly mentions that he is responsible for the (financial) wellbeing of eight people. He calls it a "family" (in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 2 August 1934, *Briefe*, p. 368). And in a discussion with Zweig about selling the foreign rights of his novels he writes: "Und ich habe eine Frau und zwei Kinder. (Meine legitime Frau is jetzt umsonst in einer Badener Anstalt. Aber das Sanatorium [...] verlangt jetzt etwa 7000 Schilling. Die Kinder kann ich nicht umsonst unterbringen. Ich kann auch nicht eine kleine stinkige 1½ Zimmerwohnung nehmen, und mit dem ganzen Ziskus zusammenleben. ... Meine Liebe gehts durchs Gewissen, ebenso wie bei vielen durch den Magen." (in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 1 September 1935, *Briefe*, p. 248)

navigated a life.²² Tied to reality, it seems that physical survival and not intellectual legacy was his main priority.

The Logic of Itinerancy: Wandering as a Moral Imperative

It is with the above reflections in mind that we can better aim to understand the various roles Roth created for himself during his lifetime. The three most important ones are that of Austrian officer, suffering Jew, and itinerant hotel patriot or wandering Jew. The role of Austrian officer has its roots in Vienna. When his first essays began to appear in Viennese newspapers directly after the First World War, Roth shed his original name, Moses. He may have found the name too obviously Jewish, but one could argue that the remains, Joseph Roth, were not too convincingly German either, if indeed that had been the objective. During the early 1920s he sometimes signed his *feuilletons* “Der rote Roth,” a reference to his short-lived flirtation with socialism. In private letters to his family, however, he continued to use the name Moses, or its abbreviations, Muniu or Mu. Thus, it appears that in the private sphere of his correspondence the marker of his Jewish name could still exist free from irony and scorn. Meanwhile, in Vienna, Roth cultivated the appearance of an Austrian army officer, complete with coat, tight-fitting trousers, cane, monocle and medal - “bought at Trödler’s,” as the sharp-tongued journalist Egon Erwin Kirsch commented. The final touches of his costume consisted of a highly cultivated Viennese accent as well as elaborate hand kissing, a main social custom among the Viennese aristocracy. Roth was sharp enough to realise that Jews could indeed climb to the rank of officer in the Hapsburg army, something that was unthinkable elsewhere, and in this context his performance may have been an ironic tribute to the lost values of the collapsed Empire.²³ It also lent support to his claim that he had been a lieutenant during the war, when in reality he had worked for the army newspaper while stationed in Galicia. During these immediate postwar years in Vienna and later in Weimar Berlin, Roth’s identification with the bygone Habsburg Empire was of overriding importance in his presentation of self.

This emphasis on exaggerated Austrian roots was partly a result of the composition and psychological structure of the old Empire. Austrian Jews had a sense of loyalty to a supranational dynasty rather than a new nation, as was the case for German Jews. It was an

²² Sophia McClennen, *The Dialectics of Exile: Nation, Time, Language, and Space in Hispanic Literatures* (West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 2004, p. 223), quoted in Sebastiaan Faber, “The Privilege of Pain”, p. 31.

²³ For the subject of Jews in the Habsburg army, see Robert S. Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 174.

identification based on plurality, on the existence of various people and nationalities within the Empire's borders, contrary to an ever narrowing definition of belonging to the German *volk* in Germany. In this way, Austrian identity in the Empire-wide sense of the term was a bulwark against antisemitism and national chauvinism.²⁴ Franz Joseph's initially benevolent position towards the Jews of his Empire determined his reputation even when his politics changed, and in retrospect the Empire became somewhat of a lost Paradise for many of its orphaned "Jewish children."²⁵ The pogroms in Russia from the 1880s onwards which sent floods of Jewish refugees over the border into Brody only enhanced the Emperor's reputation of a monarch of peace. Jews mourned the loss of the monarchy for different reasons: liberal Jews – those who considered themselves Austrian by political identity, German, Czech or Polish by cultural identity, and Jewish by ethnic attachment – because of the loss of this tripartite identity, and Zionist Jews because they felt support for their nationalist cause would be easier to gain under monarchist than under national rule.²⁶ While Roth's monarchism returned towards the end of his life as a reaction to the looming catastrophe of the Second World War, his literary depictions, most famously in *The Radetzky March* (1932), always portray the darker, less pleasant aspects of imperial rule. Contrary to the uncritical nostalgia of others, Roth, fuelled by a need to understand his present, focused on those elements, such as corruption, sentimentality and vanity, which caused the Empire's downfall. He even held the Austrian government responsible for the emergence of modern Zionism.²⁷

In the light of this critical stance towards the past it is highly unlikely that Roth donned his Austrian outfit sans irony. His life as a Galician Jew under the rule of Emperor Franz Joseph was a circumstance that fuelled as well as created possibilities for duality and ambivalence. It meant a double identification of Austrian and Jew that did not necessarily require a denial of the latter. This is where the Austrian case differs from Germany, where assimilation to German culture meant a public shedding of all Jewish markers. This does

²⁴ Marsha L. Rozenblit, 'The Jews of Germany and Austria: A Comparative Perspective,' in Robert S. Wistrich (ed.), *Austrians and Jews in the Twentieth Century: From Franz Joseph to Waldheim*. London: Macmillan, 1992, pp. 1-18.

²⁵ The term "Jewish children" in relation to the Jews of the Habsburg Empire is from Gershon Shaked, 'After the Fall: Nostalgia and the Treatment of Authority in the Works of Kafka and Agnon, Two Habsburgian Writers,' *Partial Answers*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2004), pp. 81-111. The best-known example of an uncritical nostalgic representation of the lost world of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy is Stefan Zweig's memoir *The World of Yesterday* (New York: Viking Press, 1943).

²⁶ Marsha L. Rozenblit, 'Jewish Ethnicity in a New Nation-State. The Crisis of Identity in the Austrian Republic,' in Michael Brenner and Derek J. Penslar (eds.), *In Search of Jewish Community: Jewish Identities in Germany and Austria, 1918-1933*. Bloomington, In.: Indiana University Press, 1998, pp. 134-153, p. 143.

²⁷ By not being able to resist the nationalist claims of its non-Jewish population, the Austrian government indirectly encouraged Jewish nationalism, i.e. Zionism. Kati Tonkin, *Joseph Roth's March into History*, p. 44, footnote 76.

not mean that assimilation was an uncomplicated process in Austria, and its virulent antisemitism is well known. But since Austrian identity itself was a diffuse matter, based on a sense of imperial universalist Catholicism instead of a narrowly defined national definition, there was no pressing need to choose one or the other; elements of various national backgrounds existed side by side and sometimes fused. While nationalist sentiments harboured by Czechs, Poles and Ukrainians soared after 1918, Galician Jews had no such claim to national independence, and this deepened the sense of reliance on the imperial model. There had also been a great emphasis on the performative aspects and rhetorics of politics in Austria, giving the impression that identity and performativity could easily be intertwined.²⁸ Roth, who was convinced that “all assimilation is a flight,” himself too experienced the limitations of a purely Austrian identification.²⁹ A tragic sense of inauthenticity clung to his self-presentation, and there was a “false ring” to his accent.³⁰ The ultimate unsustainability of the image of Austrian officer, impossible as it was to escape the fact of his Jewish birth, not only because society was always there to remind him but also because of his own conflicted ties to it, was a source of tragedy as well as an incentive to keep on reinventing.

In the early 1930s Roth’s inner estrangement reached a peak. His drinking spiralled out of control despite claims from the drinker himself that the toxics kept his mind sharp and prevented his immediate death.³¹ In response to the schizophrenia of his wife, Roth, in utter desolation, actively identified with the role of the suffering Jew (discussed in chapter

²⁸ For myth-making and role-playing as an Austrian tradition, see William O. McCagg, ‘Jewish Assimilation in Austria: Karl Kraus, Franz Werfel and Joseph Roth on the Catastrophe of 1914-19’, in Robert S. Wistrich (ed.), *Austrians and Jews in the Twentieth Century. From Franz Joseph to Waldheim*. Houndmills/New York: The Macmillan Press/St. Martin’s Press, 1992, pp. 58-81, p. 75. So far I have found only scattered references to the performative nature of Austrian politics, a subject that deserves further research.

²⁹ Joseph Roth, *The Wandering Jews*. London: Granta Books, 2001.

³⁰ “That Roth was engaged in play-acting, often of a conscious nature, is attested to by the fact that while he passed for a Viennese in Berlin, the native Viennese detected a false ring to his accent. [...] Roth, who carried on a prolonged struggle to identify himself with imperial Austria, with the Habsburgs, with Catholicism, with the image he wanted to project of himself, never discovered himself. His attempt to recreate himself in the same way merely turned him into a character in an Austrian play which Hofmannsthal might have written [...] and which finally made it necessary for him to extinguish himself.” David Bronsen, ‘Austrian vs. Jew: The Torn Identity of Joseph Roth’, lecture delivered at the Joseph Roth Symposium, 29 December 1970, in Robert Weltsch (ed.), *Yearbook 18 of the Leo Baeck Institute*, London: Secker & Warburg, 1973, pp. 220-226, p. 224-5.

³¹ “Machen Sie sich bitte um mein Trinken gar keine Sorgen,” Roth wrote Stefan Zweig in 1935. “Es konserviert mich viel eher, als dass es mich ruiniert. Ich will damit sagen, dass der Alkohol zwar das Leben verkürzt, aber den unmittelbaren Tod verhindert. Und es handelt sich für mich darum: Nicht das Leben zu verlängern, sondern den unmittelbaren Tod zu verhindern. Ich kann nicht auf Jahre hinaus rechnen. Ich versetze gewissermassen die letzten 20 Jahre meines Lebens beim Alkohol, weil ich noch 7 oder 14 Tage Leben mir gewinnen muss. Freilich kommt dann, um beim Bilde zu bleiben, plötzlich ein Punkt, wo der Wucherer vor der Zeit über einer herfällt. So ungefähr ist die Situation.” Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 12 November 1935, *Briefe*, p. 436.

4). In 1933, what had always been a nomadic life was catapulted into permanent exile by Hitler's appointment of Chancellor of the Reich on 30 January. Roth left Berlin immediately. His hatred for German politics, based on the many danger signals in the Weimar Republic visible to the unsentimental observer, made that he held no illusions about the way things were heading.³² While used to dispossession and wandering, however, 1933's political exile created an extra dimension to Roth's perpetual self-invention. One response to the vulnerability of exile was the creation of masks. Irmgard Keun, German novelist and Roth's companion between 1936 and 1938, said: "He was so vulnerable, that he felt he needed to wear a mask also in my company."³³ The few occasions Roth could do without pretence was when he was writing, which, in the 1930s, often meant he was "battling evil."³⁴ In the context of his exile, self-invention became a strategy of survival, and the nostalgia that sometimes accompanied it a "romance with one's own fantasy."³⁵

What I would like to highlight in the context of Roth's exile is his intensified focus on wandering as a human fate, an idea rooted in his personal experience of Jewish non-belonging. Already long before his political exile Roth lived an uprooted life; he was, in his own words, a "hotel patriot." Now, this was of course the kind of cosmopolitan existence that required ample money; it was a privileged position reserved for very successful journalists and writers. Roth's was a cosmopolitanism based on a lack; indeed, on the impossibility of return. Since anchoring himself firmly in the Jewish tradition of Brody or family life, Roth, in the light of the interwar instability but also out of necessity, turned to wandering as an idealised fate. Already in 1927 he lamented the fact that Western Jews had forgotten "how to wander, how to suffer, and how to pray."³⁶ Whereas wandering had also been the lot of his non-Jewish literary characters of the postwar generation in novels such as *The Spider's Web* (1923), *Hotel Savoy* (1924) and *Rebellion* (1924), it became a specifically Jewish theme in the essay *The Wandering Jews* (1927). This loving account of the complexities of East European Jewish culture in the interwar years was written with the hope "to persuade the Jews and non-Jews of Western Europe to grasp the tragedy of the Eastern Jews." Roth felt a deep sympathy for the refugees and displaced persons, Jews and others, who in the aftermath of the First World War, the Russian Revolution, and the redrawing of national frontiers following the Versailles Treaty of 1919, flooded the capital

³² See chapter 6 of this thesis.

³³ "Er war so verletzlich, daß er sich auch mit gegenüber einer Maske bedienen mußte." Irmgard Keun, quoted from Bronsen, *Joseph Roth. Eine Biographie*, p. 476.

³⁴ Marcel Reich-Ranicki, *Joseph Roth. Vortrag zur Eröffnung der Ausstellung "Joseph Roth 1894-1939" in der Deutschen Bibliothek 29. März 1979*. Frankfurt am Main: Buchhändler-Vereinigung GmbH, 1979, p. 31.

³⁵ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2001, p. xiii.

³⁶ Joseph Roth, *The Wandering Jews*, p. 123.

cities of Western Europe. As briefly discussed in the previous chapter, during these years the idea of a Jewish nation had become a priority on the Zionist agenda, an idea Roth rejected. He believed that the Jews, “having outlived their period of national homeland two thousand years ago,” rejected their own universalism by aping the nationalism of others. Zionism and nationhood were by their very nature Western ideals, and the Jews were the willing victims of this Western concept of national belonging. This, he believed, was one of the great tragedies of European Jewry.

This call for nationhood, from Jews and others, can be understood in the context of the idea of national self-determination, the battle cry that spread across Europe after 1918 when empires crumbled and minorities everywhere began to claim their independence. Many of these efforts were fuelled by a particularly Western interpretation of nationalism, namely the idea that a nation, or nationhood, has the capacity to bring happiness to its people. Jews constituted a national minority in many countries, and Roth sadly observed that they compensated for the lack of land to call their own in Europe by aspiring to create a home in Palestine. “They had always lived in exile anyway. Now they became a nation in exile.” He was aware of the fact that nations and fatherlands were too tied up with violence to ever deliver the promise of human happiness:

Fatherlands and nations want much more, or much less: They have vested interests that insist on sacrifices. They set up a series of ‘fronts’ in order to secure the ‘hinterland’ that is their real objective. Given all the millennial grief of the Jews, they still had one consolation: the fact that they *didn’t* have such a fatherland. If there can ever be such a thing as a just history, surely the Jews will be given great credit for holding on to their common sense in not having had a fatherland at a time when the whole world launched itself into patriotic madness.³⁷

A Jewish homeland, then, would be a historical regression; a development against the tides of time, back into a phase that Jews outlived centuries ago. Instead, the “Vaterlandslosigkeit” or national homelessness of the Jews was a sign of historical progress. While the Jews’ rootlessness or cosmopolitanism had previously been a main reason for their exclusion, it now, Roth believed, put them in a primary position in sync with their historical times, i.e. with modernity. Zionists considered this idea nihilist and counterproductive because it was based on the idea that the historical mission of the Jews was to remain a wandering people; a mission that antisemites would say had ended with the coming of Christ. But Roth strongly believed it was not the Jews but the nationalists who

³⁷ Joseph Roth, *The Wandering Jews*, pp. 19-20.

were in utter disharmony with their historical times. While Roth shared with the Zionists a glorification of the Ostjude, “the image of the East European Jew as the embodiment of Jewish authenticity, exemplar of the unfragmented self,” he opposed Zionism and instead defended Diaspora life, which Zionists, on their part, considered a deracinated and morally corrupt existence.³⁸ Roth felt that the nationalistic desire to divide the continent into narrowly defined borders ran against the natural course of history and as such formed a threat to the sanity and safety of Europe.

The positive connotations attached to wandering in Roth’s writing can be traced back to the status of the itinerant, traveller, salesman or wanderer under Habsburg rule.³⁹ The monarchy allowed the Jews to wander, and through their wandering they were a kind of glue that provided the often unstable and multi-ethnic empire with a sense of coherence. However, there were other reasons for their wandering, too. Despite many idealised recollections of Jewish life under Habsburg rule, pogroms and persecutions were not at all infrequent. Wandering was a kind of Jewish law of life; one reason, also, why the idea of a Jewish homeland did not necessarily resonate with Eastern Jews. After 1918, Jewish wandering or a “free escape” within the lands of the empire was no longer possible. With the crown lands lost, the expansive Jewish middle class “melted” or disintegrated into national components.⁴⁰ Unlike other East European Jews, Roth, who came from Galicia, could not call upon an own soil land in the same way the Poles, Czechs or Hungarians could.⁴¹ As such, the loss of the monarchy primarily meant a loss of freedom through the imposition of borders; not only physical freedom, but intellectual freedom too, which meant the choice to remain ideologically or linguistically “unfixed.” This imposition of national borders reawakened in Roth the desire for wandering. As Kati Tonkin observed, freedom to Roth equalled a non-confessional attitude to one’s character or “colours.” It was better “to be condemned to perpetual migration but free than to belong to a nation and have a fatherland, thereby losing the freedom that is the essence of being human. [...] When he then insists on the freedom that not belonging to a nation entails, the freedom of

³⁸ Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers. The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800-1923*. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982, p. 84.

³⁹ In the short story *The Bust of the Emperor* (1935) the narrator exclaims: “The unnatural excess of world history has also ruined my personal pleasure in what I called home. Now, everywhere around me they speak of their new fatherland. And they think of me as *déraciné*. I have always been. Oh, there once was a fatherland, a real one, which is to say one for orphaned nationals, the only possible fatherland! And that was the old monarchy. Now I am a homeless man who has lost the true home of the eternal wanderer.” Joseph Roth, ‘The Bust of the Emperor’, in *The Collected Stories of Joseph Roth*, p. 235.

⁴⁰ William O. McCagg, ‘Jewish Assimilation in Austria: Karl Kraus, Franz Werfel and Joseph Roth on the Catastrophe of 1914-19’, in Robert S. Wistrich (ed.), *Austrians and Jews in the Twentieth Century. From Franz Joseph to Waldheim*. Houndmills/New York: The Macmillan Press/St. Martin’s Press, 1992, pp. 58-81.

⁴¹ Andreas Herzog, “Der Segen des ewigen Juden.”

being a human being that is negated by being locked in the cell of the nation, Roth is echoing a long-standing suspicion of the nation in the German tradition...⁴² This was the idea that politics and humanity were incompatible for the Germans; a combination that, if ever tried, would result in catastrophe.⁴³ Thus, freedom and the nation were incompatible to Roth because he saw violence was implicated in its construction from the very beginning.

Seven years after *The Wandering Jews*, in 1934, in a situation of financial insecurity due to the loss of his German readership, Roth returned to the subject of wandering, but this time in a much more vitriolic voice. In *The Antichrist*, (discussed in chapter 6), Roth speaks from an experience of dispossession and projects it onto a shared community of mankind of which he himself feels part.⁴⁴ God plays an even greater part in these ramifications, as a symbol of law and order to which mankind is subjected. God has ordained the dispersion of the Jews for a reason, and man, by urging a nationalist creed, is acting against this divine law. One of the mistakes of modern man is he believes he is at home in the world whereas wandering is still his fate. In this text, Roth articulates a moral justification for wandering. It is not only an existential predicament; it is a moral imperative, and the goal of incessant wandering lies in the spreading of love and charity. It springs from a Jewish source but should be applied to entire mankind:

Where it is good, there is my fatherland. [...] Where evil is practiced is not our home. That is why God has given us feet, so that we can leave a home where evil is perpetrated. Whoever stays in a home where the people sin against God doesn't deserve to have feet. He doesn't deserve to call God his home. God is our only home. In His sublime presence there can be no evil but only love and justice.⁴⁵

In other words, God has given man feet so he can flee from persecution, and this, according to Roth, is the rationale behind the divine advocacy of an itinerant life.

Through their itinerancy, Jews have the potential to be “a kind of supranation, perhaps the anticipation of some future form of nation.”⁴⁶ This idea is based on a secular

⁴² Kati Tonkin, *Joseph Roth's March into History*, p. 36.

⁴³ Goethe expressed this in the following lines: “Zur Nation euch zu bilden, ihr hoffet es, Deutsche, vergebens; Bildet, ihr könnt es, dafür freier zu Menschen euch aus!” Kati Tonkin, *Joseph Roth's March into History*, p. 36.

⁴⁴ Joseph Roth, *The Antichrist*. Translated by Richard Panichyk. London: Peter Owen Ltd., 2010. Many thanks to Emily Gioielli for reading drafts of my paper on the subject of *The Antichrist*, “Prophecies of Unrest. Dispossession as a Catalyst for Belonging in Joseph Roth's *The Antichrist* (1934),” in Stéphane Pesnel (ed.), *Joseph Roth en exil à Paris 1933-1919*. Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 2010 (forthcoming, in French).

⁴⁵ Joseph Roth, *The Antichrist*, p. 163-4.

⁴⁶ The Jews are a “zukünftige Form der Nation.” Joseph Roth, ‘Wailing Wall’, in *What I Saw*, p. 48.

understanding of the messianic function of the Jewish prophets and their role as harbingers of the redemptive word.⁴⁷ The core value of Judaism, Roth believed, was its universality, and Zionism formed a threat to it because it profusely disturbed the idea of a community of Jews and Christians living together peacefully through a mutual attachment to the universal values of love and peace. The idea of a Jewish homeland violated the Jews' divine mission to spread love and peace on earth. The Russian intellectual and historian S.M. Dubnov articulated a similar response to Zionism, claiming that the Jewish nation, in lacking a territory of its own, represented "the highest form in the evolution of nationalities" because it was dependent not on politics, but entirely on cultural-historical and spiritual factors. In the words of Jonathan Frankel, "the idea of a Jewish "mission" to mankind [...] thus implicitly reemerged here, with the role of the Jewish people now being to demonstrate that a nation could exist in total separation from statehood and so serve as a force for peace rather than war."⁴⁸ Roth used arguments from the Old Testament to show that the historical mission of consignment of the Jews was based on the word of God.⁴⁹ The *raison d'être* of Judaism, he believed, lay not in a homecoming to Zion, but in its dispersion; an idea that corresponds to the fact that there are no national homecomings for his literary characters. In other words, the mission of the Jewish community lay in the diaspora.

The concept of love, the spreading of which is a main reason behind Jewish dispersion according to Roth, is centred on the notion of spreading love and the word of God through the application of charity, a notion that springs from the Old Testament and has its roots in Judaism, and not in Christianity as is often believed. Here the etymology of the term *diaspora* seems appropriate, as it derives from the Greek *dia-speirein*, the scattering of seed; in Roth's case, seeds of love. But this was divine love. Human love, especially the kind between a man and a woman, was considered to be of a different, much lesser category. The home in exile that Roth created for himself was a home without romantic love. Love was displaced, like him; onto the dispersion of the Jews, male friendships and the recreation of male lineages respectively.⁵⁰ Love was a universal, not a personal, mission.

⁴⁷ Andreas Herzog, "Der Segen des ewigen Juden," p. 116.

⁴⁸ Jonathan Frankel, 'S. M. Dubnov. Historian and Ideologist', in *Crisis, Revolution, and Russian Jews*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 239-275, p. 262.

⁴⁹ Mark H. Gelber has pointed out that Roth's attitude to Zionism was not "wholly negative." In the late 1930s he considered it a "moral necessity" and a "partial answer" to the predicament of the Jews. Mark H. Gelber, 'Zur deutsch-zionistischen Rezeptionsgeschichte: Joseph Roth und die Jüdische Rundschau,' in *Von Franzos zu Canetti: Jüdische Autoren aus Österreich. Neue Studien*, Mark H. Gelber (ed.), Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1996, pp. 201-209.

⁵⁰ Roth once wrote to Stefan Zweig that he was willing to sacrifice himself for a friend "tausendmal lieber, als für eine Frau." Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 11 May 1936, *Briefe*, p. 471.

It appears that Roth transferred the loss of love and home onto a proclamation of the itinerant fate and the Jewish mission of “scattering” divine love.⁵¹

To conclude, post-1933 we see an intensification of Roth’s connection to his Jewishness. During exile, the self-cultivated image of the perpetual itinerant that existed before was taken out of its non-political sphere and instead actively connected to the fact of his Jewish birth. While many assimilated Jews claimed in retrospect that the enforced expulsion of 1933 was the first real reminder of or confrontation with their Jewishness, this was not the case for Roth. What it did, however, was to intensify his focus. This role of the cosmopolitan hotel patriot, coffee-house intellectual and travelling newspaper man was perhaps his least conspicuous, but it was also his most pervasive. In this context, it is important to remember the antisemitic connotations clinging to the idea and the image of the wandering Jew, as well as the degree to which Roth identified with it. Persecution, the main rationale behind Roth’s defence of itinerancy, had been a red thread in Jewish existence for thousands of years. It is this state of persecution and flight, as well as the experience of non-belonging rooted in the fact of his Jewish birth, that allowed Roth to create a worldview aimed at universal application. It also allowed for his multiple and shifting loyalties, such as his later royalist and “Catholic” positions; positions which, despite their opposed and seemingly nostalgic natures, all originated from a deep worry about the present.

“Words Endowed with Magic”: the Question of Linguistic Belonging

One persistent image of Roth, based on a rare photograph, is that of the suffering, cynical and bright writer in exile, black cape draped around his drooping shoulders and a newspaper folded tightly under his arm. The image of the “coated exile” also appears in George Grosz’s self-portrait *Remembering* from 1937, a painting which resulted from a period of extended self-reflexion sparked by reminders of his German refugee past within American art circles. In this painting, Grosz depicts himself in the “tragic guise of the

⁵¹ There exists an old connection between the wandering Jew and love. One of the ways in which the myth of the wandering Jew was secularised was to add the charge of Jewish lovelessness to the medieval Christian idea of Jewish guilt. Jewish “self-love” was now called egoism which centred on a devotion to money. “Ahasverus was swiftly interpreted as the personification of this egoism: his lack of love for others, his essential failing of “lovelessness,” were taken to symbolize the generally alienated condition or *Zerrissenheit* of European – and especially German – man, a personal alienation reflected in an unhealthy “inorganic” political society.” Thus, “no longer was Ahasverus’s sin the rejection of Christ; in keeping with a new vision of humanity, his sin was the rejection of love itself.” Paul Rose, ‘Ahasverus and the Destruction of Judaism’, in *Revolutionary Antisemitism in Germany. From Kant to Wagner*. Princeton: Princeton University Press: 1990, pp. 23-43, pp. 27-28.

refugee.”⁵² Overcoat thrown about his hunched shoulders in anxiety and fear, he sits amidst the rubble of his German past, brick walls collapsing and a bombed-out house burning behind him. The burning house as a metaphor for Nazi Germany is also vividly present in Roth’s writing, and the comparison between the two artists does not end here. Grosz’s painting *Eclipse of the Sun*, for instance, is used as cover for Roth’s *Hotel Savoy*, and Ritchie Robertson, identifying a deep sympathy for the poor and downtrodden as a main theme, called Roth’s early journalism “a verbal counterpart to a Grosz caricature.”⁵³ This section, then, deals with cloaked figures, both literary and real, and argues that Roth’s constant urge to reinvent himself can best be understood as a reaction to and against his historical present. In analysing this relationship, I will focus closely on the relationship between self-invention and language. Also, Roth’s mythomania places him in an intricate relationship with the cacophony of his own creation: the image of the author as conductor, who controls his literary puppets and lingers over them like death lingers over their fates, suits Roth. A pervasive polyphony characterises his oeuvre, and it can be argued that this multiplicity of voices constitutes a kind of counter-history, a symphony of voices against the great.

To Roth, the loss of clearly defined semantic pillars with which to understand or describe the present resulted in an amplification of the importance of language. Despite the modernist erosion of linguistic certainty, based on the idea that a direct explanatory relationship between language and reality is illusory, language nevertheless became a kind of existential anchor, resulting in an employment of the wondrous and the miraculous as possible ways to transform the present. Roth kept his belief in the redemptive power of language despite the political and ideological abuses it suffered. By emphasizing his use of satire, irony and subtle humour, I hope to argue against the dominant interpretation of Roth as an author who, especially in his later years, fled into language and thus away from reality. According to this view, Roth increasingly withdrew into the phantasmagorical world of his novels as a response to the unwinding catastrophe of Nazi Germany and his disillusionment about the moral disintegration of Western Europe. His increased use of mythical literary genres and his alcoholism are used to support this argument. As a result, Roth has been accused of “literary escapism”; of fleeing the scene when political engagement was most needed. It is true that many of his later narratives are structured between the opposing poles of reality and ideal, and some contain imaginary realities as

⁵² For the expression “the tragic guise of the refugee,” see Barbara McCloskey, ‘Cartographies of Exile’, in Stephan Alexander (ed.), *Exile and Otherness*, p. 142.

⁵³ Ritchie Robertson, ‘1918’, p. 356.

ways to avert the catastrophe, but I disagree with the interpretation that this meant that Roth was averting his eyes from the political and human disasters unfolding in the 1930s. Quite the contrary. Roth's employment of the miraculous was a direct result of his concern for the present. For even if his humour was black and satire always points to a painful truth laying buried beneath the joke, it demonstrates that there was a certain elasticity and vigour to his responses to catastrophe. This side of Roth's intellectual legacy should be highlighted, as it is proof of his resilience in the face of tragedy and underlines his desire to transform, improve and criticise his historical present.

Some scholars have argued that the ongoing interest in Roth is the result of his particular use of narrative devices; of what is called *erlebte rede* and his conscious position as an "unreliable narrator," leaving it up to the reader to interpret the tale.⁵⁴ In the absence of an all-explaining narrator, the use of *erlebte rede* makes it impossible to determine whether an opinion or thought belongs to a character or to the narrator. Furthermore, many of Roth's literary characters appear in different guises in different novels, partially or wholly stripped of their former selves. In this way, the internal plurality of his literary universe mirrors the multiple interpretations of his work. The author himself hides from his own narratives, shelters behind a multiplicity of voices that all belong to him yet elude him all the same. Roth uses irony as a means to achieve a distance to his cacophonous literary world. Through irony, he portrays the world as he sees it: multiple, unclear, contradictory, mutable and convertible. Indeed irony, the play with meaning, is a typical feature of twentieth century literature. It involves the use of repetition as a means to question the validity of a statement or action; a repetition that ultimately turns into the comic.

The comic in early twentieth century literature too is of a special kind. It is a particular form of humour that has lost the directness of a more antiquated form of comedy, which was aimed at the rectification of morally unacceptable or questionable behaviour.⁵⁵ In modern literature, the obviousness of the comic moment is surpassed, and instead a mild tragi-comedy arises naturally out of context and situation. The modern novel is "softly witty" but never elicits "an actual laugh." It is never outwardly funny because the assumption that we can truly know a character or situation no longer holds true. This subtle humour and understated irony in the portrayal of literary characters is also what

⁵⁴ "Im Grunde bringt er dadurch den Leser dazu, den Denkprozess, welcher der Text zugrunde liegt, selbst zu vollziehen. Darin liegt wohl Roths Größe: ein Dichter des Offenen und dadurch des Differenzierten zu sein." Sarah Fraiman, "Joseph Roth: Dichter des Offenen," *Bulletin of the Leo Baeck Institute* 76 (1987), pp. 35-50, p. 47.

⁵⁵ James Wood, *The Irresponsible Self. On Laughter and the Novel*. London: Picador, 2005. See the chapter 'Joseph Roth's empire of signs,' pp. 125-141.

defines Roth's literary voice. It is very likely that this poetic style came about as a result of having perfected the craft of the *feuilleton*. Due to a lack of space, every sentence in the *feuilleton* had to convey character as well as atmosphere; specifics as well as broader reflection. It was about "polishing the ordinary until it becomes extraordinary"; a certain verbal carefulness that prompted Joseph Brodsky to say that "there is a poem on every page of Roth."⁵⁶ Indeed, there are no long stretches of description or reflection in Roth. His images are conveyed in sharp similes and metaphors, as if every new sentence was the first.

The unreliable narrator, the use of irony, as well as the short, poetic sentences all reflect and are a result of the historical contexts in which Roth wrote his novels. A defining red thread in his thought is the idea that history is a series of repetitions; that fragmentation and multiplicity characterise the modern world. Thus, both irony and a fragmented narrative were a means to accurately reflect the present. In Kati Tonkin's words, Roth "experiments with different forms as a means of understanding historical processes, specifically the problems created by the historical fact of the collapse of the Habsburg Empire in Central Europe."⁵⁷ The shortness of the *feuilleton*, for instance, the genre in which Roth excelled, was a response to the "jumpy pace of the age."⁵⁸ What emerges here is the notion of history as cyclic: the idea that history is imitation, repetition and a comedy of grave errors. This is reflected in the fate of Roth's literary characters, as they very often are the victims of historical events or their own repeated mistakes. In this way, Roth's narratives aim to expose the repetitive errors of history, as well as the dangers of man's desire to perpetually recreate and improve the world. The failed repetition of these miserable literary lives calls to mind Albert Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*, the idea of a life lived in perpetual limbo, where repetition comes to the fore as an underlying pattern of the modern world which realises itself by "continually invalidating any kind of reality."⁵⁹ Also,

⁵⁶ Alfred Polgar was the German master of the *feuilleton* at the time Roth began his career as a journalist. In 1935, in honour of Polgar's sixtieth birthday, Roth wrote that he considered himself Polgar's pupil: "He polishes the ordinary until it becomes extraordinary [...] I have learned this *verbal carefulness* from him." James Wood, *The Irresponsible Self*, p. 126.

⁵⁷ Kati Tonkin, *Joseph Roth's March into History*, p. 4. About Roth's early novels Tonkin writes: "The fragmentary impression created by these novels is almost certainly to some extent intended: in a review of Hans Natonek's *Geld regiert die Welt* Roth expressed approval of what he called the "gesprengte oder gebrochene Form des Romans," arguing that it was the only form that could represent the times adequately: "O tempora, o homines! Fragmente sind alle: die Gestalten und ihre Darstellungen, die Zeit und ihre Zeitbilder. ... Die fragmentarische Form des Berichts entspricht vollkommen der fragmentarischen Gestalt." (Joseph Roth, 'Die gesprengte Romanform', *Die Literarische Welt*, 12 December 1930, *Werke* 3:268-69, quoted from Tonkin, p. 4)

⁵⁸ Jeffrey Eugenides, 'Joseph Roth's Movable Café – Review of *What I Saw: Reports From Berlin 1920-1933*', *New York Times Book Review*, Sunday, February 2, 2003.

⁵⁹ Wolfgang Iser, 'German Jewish Writers during the Decline of the Hapsburg Monarchy', p. 266. Camus's philosophical essay was published in 1942 as *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*.

inherent in the concept of cyclic history is a rejection of the possibility of salvation, or the idea that instead of ultimate redemption or the coming of the Messiah, the world is perpetually locked in an unfortunate repetition of errors. This particular mockery of salvation is part of the apocalyptic consciousness as it revealed itself in interwar German literature. Here, the traditional eschatological pattern of an end and a beginning is negated; the end is crossed out, and time is put on its head.⁶⁰ It is redemption cut short. Mockery and irony, then, as a means to convey the larger vision of the cyclic nature of history and the unreliability of language, were Roth's entry points into the wondrous and the miraculous. This aesthetic attitude, a worldview that incorporates the mythic and the imaginative into its core, was a reaction to the historical predicament of both exile and catastrophe.

That language was a precarious and slippery concept in which to put your trust was a common notion among writers in the 1920s. Psychoanalysis, the modern theory of the self, also affected its means of communication, the abovementioned erosion of language that came with modernity, and while many took on this modernist challenge in short, brisk sentences, others felt a kind of "consciousness of crisis" in relation to language.⁶¹ Yet, while being acutely aware of the powers of language and the dangers when, in a political context, it was manipulated and distorted, many felt they had no other way to engage in battle but by means of the word.⁶² The power and powerlessness of language, its ability to falsify, distort and lie, is what Roth called "die Ohnmacht zur Wahrheit": the impotence to convey truth. He was concerned with what he called the "linguistic inflation" of the German language: the political banalities it expressed and its lack of authenticity. This places doubt on the oft-heard argument in Roth scholarship that his only home was the German language. By necessity, of course, it was the medium of his art, but his desire for linguistic belonging was directed more towards the French language; the tongue, he believed, of

⁶⁰ David Roberts, 'The Sense of an Ending: Apocalyptic Perspectives in the 20th-Century German Novel,' *Orbis Litterarum* 32, 1977, pp. 140-58, p. 140. Milan Kundera believes this ironic vision towards history to be the result of the history of Central Europe specifically: "Central Europe as a family of small nations has its own vision of the world, a vision based on a deep distrust of history. History, that goddess of Hegel and Marx, that incarnation of reason that judges us and arbitrates our fate – that is the history of conquerors. The people of Central Europe are not conquerors. They cannot be separated from European history; they cannot exist outside it; but they represent the wrong side of this history; they are its victims and outsiders. It's this disabused view of history that is the source of their culture, of their wisdom, of the "non-serious spirit" that mocks grandeur and glory." Milan Kundera, 'The Tragedy of Central Europe', p. 36.

⁶¹ Johannes F. Evelein, 'Traveling Exiles, Exilic Travel – Conceptual Encounters', in Johannes F. Evelein (ed.), *Exiles Traveling. Exploring Displacement, Crossing Boundaries in German Exile Arts and Writings 1933-1945*. Amsterdamer Beiträge zur Neueren Germanistik 68. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2009, pp. 11-31.

⁶² Joachim Beug, "'Sprachkrise' und 'Sprachgläubigkeit,'" in Bronsen (ed.), *Joseph Roth und die Tradition*, pp. 345-363.

Europeans. His love for France not only prompted doubts about Germany as a homeland, but also about himself as a writer locked within the confines of its language, “a dead language.” But not only was it dead: Roth questioned whether it was even possible to write about people, or humanity, in a language that had only brought forth “geniuses and murderers, the outcomes of a barbaric people.”⁶³ Roth’s inflated use of quotation marks was a result of this skepticism; this, indeed, was how much he mistrusted words.⁶⁴ In September 1933, he claimed that “the word has died.”⁶⁵ However, these outcries of linguistic despair did not put a strain on his creative output. On the contrary, it seemed that the impending prospect of another war only fuelled his creativity.

Trying to build up a strategy of resistance out of the quotation marks and ruins of language was also Walter Benjamin’s main project, which he aimed to give shape in his *Arcades Project*, a composition of fragments arranged in accordance with the idea of the Parisian iron and glass covered arcades; a project which, unfortunately, remained unfinished.⁶⁶ He argued that true historical reflection should be based on history’s rubbles and ruin, and, like Roth, considered the desperate state of language a chance to let the marginalised voices emerge from the destruction.

In determining who is an important writer – one who not only depicts and shapes and articulates, but who has a vision, and can change things – conscience is the crucial factor. An author’s conscience lends magic to his words, and only words endowed with magic have the ability to change or to renew the world. Conscience without faith is an impossibility. The conscience of a European writer is based on religion. Conscience lends magic to his words, faith makes them holy.⁶⁷

At the time Roth penned this quiet manifesto, he was living in Paris, helping refugees from Nazi Germany find shelter and documents. It was during this time that his faith in language intensified; a stubborn politics of exhuming as many words as possible as a means to combat the political disaster of Nazi Germany. Keen on his writer’s duty, Roth refused to

⁶³ Joseph Roth, *Briefe 1911-1939*, in a letter to Bernard von Brentano written from Marseille dated August 1925, pp. 55-56.

⁶⁴ “Ich muß jedes zweite Wort in Anführungszeichen setzen, so mißbraucht empfinde ich die Worte.” Joseph Roth, in a letter to Félix Bertaux dated 27 February 1929, *Briefe*, p. 146. Joachim Beug writes that it expresses “seinen Zweifel an der unkritischen Verwendbarkeit der betreffenden Worte und Wendungen” and underlines “den zitathaften Charakter der Sprache” and “die Verbraucherscheinungen der Worte.” Joachim Beug, “Sprachkrise” und “Sprachgläubigkeit,” p. 356.

⁶⁵ In 1933, in response to bad press, Roth writes: “Das Wort is gestorben, die Menschen bellen, wie Hunde. Das Wort hat gar keine Bedeutung mehr, d.h. keine aktuelle.” Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 9 October 1933, *Briefe*, p. 283.

⁶⁶ Walter Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project* or *Das Passagen Werk* was only published in the 1980s. Harvard University Press calls it a “monumental ruin.”

⁶⁷ Joseph Roth, ‘The Poet Paul Claudel’ (*Der deutsche Weg* (Oldenzaal), February 6, 1938), in *Report from a Parisian Paradise*, pp. 230-232, p. 230.

hand in the word. The magic of language, its ability to resurrect the lost and ruined, is intricately tied up with a writer's conscience; a conscience aimed at changing or renewing the world. Thus, in February 1938, in the midst of historical upheaval, the prospect of Austria's *Anschluss*, heavy drinking and the creation of magical tales, it was nevertheless the transformation of the present that was on Roth's mind. In other words, despite an awareness of crisis concerning the possibility of an honest language, Roth delivered himself to it as the only means to understand, describe, criticise and ultimately change the present. He was suspicious of archaic formulations and linguistic stagnation in a time so utterly determined by change, and instead he chose to concentrate on other forms of linguistic expression. In what many consider an idiosyncratic or even retrogressive move, Roth found his critical medium in the linguistic universe of the mythical; in prose infused with the wondrous.

Whereas in literature, the dangers of self-invention are already quite substantial, killing off characters and foreclosing happy endings, it is evident that there is an element of despair and self-destruction in an aesthetic attitude taken to such extremes in real life. For some exiled writers, estrangement, as an artistic device, became a way of life. This "exilic self-fashioning," or "arts of survival" as it has been called, certainly resonates with Roth's constant self-invention.⁶⁸ But, was it an attempt at self-maintenance, at preservation, or instead the opposite, a degenerative and self-destructive path out of the void? This takes us back to the precarious position of Jews in modern German society. Hannah Arendt has argued that Jews in nineteenth-century Germany and Austria had only two options: either to embrace their status as outsiders and align with others similarly marginalised, or to enter the worlds of nature and art, worlds that were regarded impervious to social and political intervention.⁶⁹ In this context, the world of art brought with itself the risk of a flight into aesthetics, into worship of fame, society and appearance for the sake of surrender. If modern society was indeed "death dressed up in a Sunday suit," as Marcel Proust has written, stressing its deracinated, temporary and ultimately fatal character, could it not be argued, then, that personal masquerade was indeed a most adequate response to modernity? Were not modernism and exile two historical contexts that, for Jews but not exclusively, allowed, if not encouraged, the creation of mythical personae as a reaction to as well as strategy of survival in the face of the catastrophe of Nazi Germany?

⁶⁸ Svetlana Boym, 'Estrangement as a Lifestyle: Shklovsky and Brodsky', in Susan Rubin Suleiman (ed.), *Exile and Creativity*, p. 243.

⁶⁹ Hannah Arendt, 'The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition', *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (April 1944), pp. 99-122. See also Steven Beller, *Vienna and The Jews*, p. 212.

What we see in Roth, albeit with considerable irony, is the conscious cultivation of exilic eccentricity. Exile and perpetual non-belonging in the traditional sense became an aesthetic as well as a critical posture, expressed in the singularity of character and a dogma-free individual disposition. However, this self-invention could not possibly remain innocent or care-free; I doubt whether it ever was. Whether or not Roth was aware of it, he was acting within a diffuse system of stereotypes about Eastern Jews. In the period of the great influx of Eastern Jewish immigrants into Germany and Austria, beginning around 1880, Eastern Jews were often considered masters of role-play. According to one writer at the time, there was a fundamental lack of correspondence between the Jew's external appearance and his inner being: he operated with a conscious dualism that was the result of his ghetto experience. Why, this writer asked, did the Eastern Jew indulge in such pretences? Steven E. Aschheim summarised the argument as follows:

This was less a matter of intentional hypocrisy than a deeply rooted element of their historical being. The disharmony between inner and outer, body and spirit, was at the basis of their existence and was a direct outcome of ghetto life. The Polish Jews of the ghetto were filled with contempt for everything outside their narrow world. Their servile, craven exterior simply masked their real sense of Talmudic superiority. Beneath the helpless aspect lay a cynical, arrogant view of the non-Jew; Jews had shut themselves off and created states within states. The ghetto, originally born of compulsion, had become a second nature, an inner necessity.⁷⁰

It anticipated the resurgence of antisemitism in the years leading up to the First World War, a hatred not only directed against the Eastern Jew, but also against the assimilated Western Jew. It was exactly the latter's ability to conspicuously look like everybody else, her ability to merge and camouflage, while remaining essentially different, which concerned the Germans. The assimilated Jew embodied "the ruthless drive for constant change" and became a metaphor for decomposition. Assimilation was considered a "duplicious exercise in camouflage."

One literary character that beautifully illustrates the possible subversions as well as the traps and limits of self-invention, is the Jewish clown from Radziwillow, a small town at the old Russian-Austrian border, who has "a Jewish heart" and is a clown "by conviction rather than by birth."⁷¹ Roth encounters him in Paris; the city, indeed, where his "universal Jewishness" could exist freely and unburdened. In response to the question of why he does

⁷⁰ Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers*, pp. 23, 67, 79.

⁷¹ Joseph Roth, 'Paris', excerpt from *The Wandering Jews* (1927), in *Report from a Parisian Paradise*, pp. 145-151, pp. 149-151. See also Kati Tonkin's discussion of the Jewish clown in *Joseph Roth's March into History*, pp. 34-53.

not have a more honourable profession, the clown replies: “What business has a Jew got to be making serious music for the public? I’ve always been a clown in this world.” Instead of singing the music of Beethoven, he decides to join a travelling circus. “And from my very first appearance in the circus, I’ve been utterly convinced that I haven’t broken with the tradition of my forefathers at all, but that what I am is what they should have been.” Which is, a clown, but free nevertheless. “In Paris, Jews live at liberty. I’m a patriot; I have a Jewish heart.” The Jewish clown from Radziwillow is not afraid of ridicule, and possesses the freedom to wander and determine his own identity. As such he is one impersonation of Roth’s intellectual and political quest for freedom, a character not just by coincidence a Jew.⁷² The Jewish clown is one of Roth’s many tragi-comic figures whose subtle irony and courage in the face of persisting stereotypes makes them into flagpoles of a ramshackle marching band on the way to freedom and out of the void.

Out of the Void? The Legend of the Holy Drinker (1940)

Roth engaged in self-invention for the greatest part of his life. He was a deracinated Eastern Jew who filled this void with myths and who took on various roles in order to transcend it. However, this perpetual self-invention also contributed to his decline; his degeneration and eventual self-annihilation via alcohol. This decline, however, was accompanied by great miracles. Alcoholism, decline and the wondrous come together beautifully in the novella *The Legend of the Holy Drinker*, published posthumously in 1940.⁷³ It deals with physical decay and death, as well as its miraculous opposite, holy salvation or bliss. It expands on the idea of exile as bliss, which perhaps can only be envisioned “by those who have plumbed the depths of despair.”⁷⁴

This short novella, which Roth wrote in the spring of 1939, relates the miraculous last days in the life of clochard Andreas Kartak, a criminal in a past life now living under the bridges of Paris. Roth, who overheard the tale of a Parisian clochard in Le Tournon and was inspired to use it, was proud of what turned out to be his last work; he once called

⁷² As Otto W. Johnston observed about Roth’s literary technique: “Firstly, remarkably distinct examples illustrate general truths about the human condition. These unique instances, many of which were gleaned from specifically Jewish experiences, evolve toward universality across antithetical structures.” Otto W. Johnston, ‘Jewish Exile from Berlin to Paris. The Geographical Dialectics of Joseph Roth’, *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, 31 (1986), pp. 441-454.

⁷³ Joseph Roth, ‘The Legend of the Holy Drinker’, translated by Michael Hofmann, in Joseph Roth, *Three Novellas*, Woodstock & New York: The Overlook Press, 2003, pp. 71-109.

⁷⁴ Borton W. Browning, ‘Joseph Roth’s *Die Legende vom heiligen Trinker*’, p. 93.

it his “testament.”⁷⁵ His antihero Andreas Kartak, who experiences a series of miracles in the form of substantial financial gifts from strangers, is on a mission to repay his debts. It is to the holy St. Thérèse of Lisieux he wishes to return the 200 francs he received from a handsome gentleman under the bridge, but every time he is about to enter the church, someone he knows appears, out of the blue, and he ends up drinking in the café instead, spending the money he owes the saint. Andreas’s conception of money is one of extreme naïveté, yet in the process of receiving, spending and losing it he rediscovers himself. Money, in this miraculous tale, is a catalyst for emotional rebirth. As Andreas finds and loses his money he remembers his name and his birthday, and he suddenly becomes aware of his haggard appearance. In this way, despite the fact that the story takes place in a literary context drenched in “unreal” or at least unlikely events, Andreas’s itinerary leads him not away from, but back into reality.⁷⁶ The consequences of his drinking, for instance, now taken out of their previous toxic-infused haze, suddenly become apparent. This clairvoyance, however, does not last. In the final scene, Andreas, in a drunken stupor, mistakes a blue-eyed girl in a café for St. Thérèse, and, as he falls to the floor and collapses, reaches into his pocket for the money he owes her. Witnessing the death of his creation, the narrator exclaims: “May God grant us all, all of us drinkers, such a good and easy death!”

Andreas Kartak is a pariah; a human type developed by Jewish writers which Hannah Arendt has argued is a literary type that looms especially large in the imagination and thought of assimilated Jews.⁷⁷ The pariah, or schlemihl, is a character that is excluded from society and who has no desire to be embraced by it; a type that embodies various responses and strategies to come to terms with Jewish exclusion. Even if, at first sight, it is Andreas’s “Christian” faith that inspires his rebirth, I would argue that Roth, in this last tale, created his own version of the schlemihl based on and embedded in a whole array of varieties of this literary type that sprang up from the Jewish imagination. Kafka’s pariah in *The Castle*, for instance, is an average small-time Jew who really wants no more than his basic rights as a human being: home, work, family and citizenship. He wants universals, i.e. things that are common to all of mankind. He is “the typical man of good-will.” As Arendt writes: “Indeed, his whole genius, his whole expression of the modern spirit, lay precisely

⁷⁵ David Bronsen believed that, since *The Legend of the Holy Drinker* was to be his final work, published only posthumously, Roth ended his oeuvre with a “literarischen Bitte um Erlösung.” David Bronsen, *Joseph Roth. Eine Biographie*, pp. 582-586.

⁷⁶ See Lothar Pikulik, ‘Joseph Roths Traum von Wiedergeburt und Tod: über die Legende vom heiligen Trinker,’ *Euphorion*, Vol. 83, (1989), pp. 214-225, p. 216.

⁷⁷ Hannah Arendt, ‘The Jew as Pariah’, pp. 102-103.

in the fact that what he sought was to be a human being, a normal member of human society. It was not his fault that this society had ceased to be human, and that, trapped within its meshes, those of its members who were really men of goodwill were forced to function within it as something exceptional and abnormal—saints or madmen.”⁷⁸ In Roth’s novella, too, truth is on the side of the rejected, and instead it is society that appears twisted and unreal in the somewhat outlandish perspective of Andreas. With money, his desire for basic human rights returns, and homeless as he is, “of no fixed address,” he starts longing for a house and a family. Andreas may not have been conceived as a Jew, and he may not show particularly “Jewish” traits, but he is involved in situations and perplexities distinctive of Jewish life; he emerged, in other words, of Roth’s vision of Jewish exclusion.

For instance, Andreas experiences what Hannah Arendt has called “the traditional Jewish fear of the ‘cop’ - that seeming incarnation of a hostile world.”⁷⁹ While in the process of rediscovering his mental and physical self, Andreas realises that his papers are invalid and that he has no right to be in France. On his way to the café he experiences the “ultimate terror” of a man without papers, namely, the feeling of a policeman’s hand on his shoulder. Instead of being arrested, however, the policeman returns to him a wallet he thinks belongs to Andreas. This is not the case, but the wallet contains a lot of money, and Andreas, thanking the police officer, is once again regenerated. Furthermore, the Jewish consciousness of the tale can be found in the fact that the narrative is conceived from a particular perspective that views exclusion, or exile from society, not as an exceptional situation, but as one specific and highly important form of the human condition. The story lacks a historical or temporal contextualisation, but what is important is the reversal of the usual exilic itinerary. Instead of a corrosion of the exile’s identity, Andreas experiences a reintegration of his person, thus regaining himself in a situation of loss.⁸⁰

Andreas’s death, which is experienced as a moment of bliss, thinking he has just repaid his debts to St. Thérèse, is directly related to his alcoholism. Alcohol, apart from being the main fuel of Roth’s life, is also a recurring theme in his work. Michael Hofmann has pointed out that the rare state of joy Roth felt during his travels through the south of France in 1925, i.e. the experience of not being *fremd* (a stranger), was a state his literary

⁷⁸ Hannah Arendt, ‘The Jew as Pariah’, pp. 120-121.

⁷⁹ Hannah Arendt, ‘The Jew as Pariah’, p. 111.

⁸⁰ What matters is “not so much the evocation of a specific localized atmosphere and milieu as the sense of Andreas’ essential homelessness. Roth achieves here almost an abstraction of the rootlessness experienced by so many exiles. In this case, however, Roth avoids the customary exile situation involving the dissolution of all the details constituting one’s daily identity. Instead we experience in Andreas the reintegration of a personality in a fashion that might properly deserve the designation ‘legendary.’” Borton W. Browning, ‘Joseph Roth’s Die Legende vom heiligen Trinker: Essence and Elixir’, p. 86.

characters could only reach through alcohol.⁸¹ This levelling and calming of experience of his literary characters by alcohol was later doubled by Roth himself. In the long letter to Gustav Kiepenheuer on the occasion of the latter's 50th birthday, Roth describes how their diabolically opposed characters found friendship and sympathy after a night of drinking bad schnapps, "... wir wurden beide krank davon."⁸² The literary pinnacle was *The Legend of the Holy Drinker*, while the actual climax came in the form of Roth's own death in May 1939, from causes directly related to alcoholism. Roth, like his clochard Kartak, collapsed in a café and was taken to a hospital for the poor where he died, in a state of miserable neglect, four days later.

What is clear from his letters is that Roth lived in a perpetual fear of dying "like cattle"; poor, and in a state of physical and mental decay. While complaining about his physical disintegration, he nevertheless maintained that alcohol kept him sane.⁸³ Roth himself, as well as his many friends testified to his incredible mental and observational lucidity when intoxicated. However, Roth's lifelong abuse of alcohol is closely tied up with questions of redemption, liberation, and suicide. Even in recent scholarship, his death is often mistaken for suicide.⁸⁴ In many ways, of course, it was the slow suicide of the alcoholic. Roth uncannily embodied both meanings of the German adjective "geistig," meaning both "intellectual" and "alcoholic." In his excessive drinking, Roth acted, although perhaps not consciously, against a stereotype of the Jew. Around the turn of the last century, medical ethical discourse designated the Jewish body as the carrier of illness and irrationalism, and the perceived overuse of tobacco amongst Jews was thought to be a result of a religious prohibition against the use of alcohol. This view was based on the common medical and popular belief that Jews consumed less alcohol than others, based on religious

⁸¹ Lieutenant Trotta, in *The Radetzky March*, needs a drink in order to achieve this state of joy: "Once he'd had a drink, Lieutenant Trotta saw in all his comrades, superiors, and juniors good old friends. He felt so much at home in the little town, it was as though he's been born and grown up there." Michael Hofmann, 'Introduction', in *Report from a Parisian Paradise*, p. 17.

⁸² Joseph Roth, An Gustav Kiepenheuer zum 50. Geburtstag, *Briefe*, p. 168.

⁸³ "Machen Sie sich bitte um mein Trinken gar keine Sorgen," he wrote to Stefan Zweig in 1935. "Es konserviert mich viel eher, als dass es mich ruiniert. Ich will damit sagen, dass der Alkohol zwar das Leben verkürzt, aber den unmittelbaren Tod verhindert. Und es handelt sich für mich darum: Nicht das Leben zu verlängern, sondern den unmittelbaren Tod zu verhindern. Ich kann nicht auf Jahre hinaus rechnen. Ich versetze gewissermassen die letzten 20 Jahre meines Lebens beim Alkohol, weil ich noch 7 oder 14 Tage Leben mir gewinnen muss. Freilich kommt dann, um beim Bilde zu bleiben, plötzlich ein Punkt, wo der Wucherer vor der Zeit über einer herfällt. So ungefähr ist die Situation." Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 12 November 1935, *Briefe*, p. 436.

⁸⁴ Hubert Roland, 'German and Austrian Exile Literature in Belgium (1933-1945). Topography and Perspectives', in Johannes F. Evelein (ed.), *Exiles Traveling*, pp. 73-98, p. 90. Roland discusses the group of German-Austrian exiles in Ostend, of which Roth, together with Stefan Zweig, Irmgard Keun, and Ergon Kisch, formed an important member. Elaborating on their feeling of inner homelessness, Roland writes: "This feeling may also explain why the many suicides among them (Carl Einstein, Ernst Toller, Joseph Roth, Stefan Zweig, etc.)."

prohibition.⁸⁵ Roth was a heavy smoker, and some friends say he smoked as many as sixty cigarettes a day.

It is true that the reinvention of one's life does not necessarily exclude its ending. Death, indeed, may even be the object of creative potential.⁸⁶ When asked why his drinker was holy, Roth replied: "Aus demselben Grunde wie ich. Weil der liebe Gott ihm dieselbe Gnade zuteil werden liess wie mir."⁸⁷ The grace of the gift of the written word, then, was what constituted in his eyes his divine blessing. It also fuelled his perception of the Jews as a messianic people fated to save all of mankind. Yet Andreas's blissful literary redemption was not granted to his creator, whose own delirious death was far from good and easy. Roth's complex and extremely subjective attitudes towards the past, language and self-creation reminds us of Nietzsche – although of the direct intellectual influence nothing is known – who believed that art was another means through which life itself ensures that its creatures go on living despite their fears and miseries.⁸⁸ In other words, art is a vital illusion that spreads itself out over the world in order to make it bearable, with the full awareness, however, that it is illusionary. It is this awareness of the illusionary character of art that translates into irony. If we follow this trail of thought, then we can say that any identity based on the artful invention of myth is bound to collapse, since all art is illusory and, therefore, unsustainable. It may prolong life in the short run, just like drinking does, but it ultimately cuts life short because the void on which it is based remains unfilled. Andreas's life without papers, no matter how much the myths and miracles sustained him temporarily and even hinted at his redemption, could not prevent his premature death. It is this corporeal reality that, in the end, speaks for itself when we try to make sense of a past life; not, indeed, as a material fact in the fatalist sense of the term, but as a result of a life lived

⁸⁵ Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Frontiers*, p. 105.

⁸⁶ The possibility of liberation from the perpetual insecurity of interwar Jewish exile has been questioned. According to Henrike Walter: "It might just as well be the case that, if it exists at all, their liberation lies in an undisguised confrontation with their fate. They must either accept their situation and live as wanderers until the end of their lives, or evade it entirely by vanishing into the emptiness." And here arises the question of suicide: "The self-determined ending of a life [...] is part of human existence, and may as well become the object of creative potential. Shaping and inventing one's life does not exclude its ending." Henrike Walter, 'Fern-Weh. Wolfgang Hildesheimer's Novels Tynset and Masante as Topographical Reflections of Exile Experience', in Johannes F. Evelein (ed.), *Exiles Traveling*, p. 112.

⁸⁷ The entire quote is: "Aus demselben Grunde wie ich. Weil der liebe Gott ihm dieselbe Gnade zuteil werden liess wie mir. Er lieh meinem Trinker, einem Clochard, einmal zweihundert Francs, die er an die heilige Therese von Lisieux zurückzahlen sollte, per Adresse des Priesters der Kapelle Ste. Marie des Batignolles. Der Clochard vertrank natürlich die Gabe, aber der liebe Gott liess ihm auf Umwegen immer wieder Geld zukommen – genau so, wie er meine dichterische Begabung immer wieder aufflammen liess, wenn die innere Flamme auszulöschen drohte. Géza von Cziffra, *Der Heilige Trinker*, p. 15.

⁸⁸ Ward H. Powell, 'Joseph Roth, Ironic Primitivist', *Monatshefte*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (March 1961), pp. 115-122, p. 119. Powell refers to Nietzsche's *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik*, or *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*.

in perpetual mythmaking which was the result of a particular historical birth, in conjunction with a personal predilection for the invented, the narrated, and the mythical.

Conclusion

“It is impossible to pin me down. I don’t have a stable literary “character.” But I am generally speaking not stable,” Roth wrote in 1929.⁸⁹ Where does this leave the literary historian aiming to understand a past intellectual “on his own terms”? What I have tried to show in Joseph Roth’s specific example, and without meaning to diminish the actual sufferings of exile and persecution, is how a condition of uprootedness resulting from the fact of Jewish birth influenced, ignited and fuelled a predilection for mythmaking and masquerade. Roth’s personal predilection for self-invention stemmed from a history of repeated losses. But it was also the result of his predicament as an Eastern Jew in interwar Europe, and as such a response to his present. His trajectory of assimilation, estrangement, and exile is mirrored in his three main identifications or roles of Austrian officer, suffering Jew and cosmopolitan itinerant. They were emotional responses to the catastrophes of his historical present, resulting in his exaggerated visibility as an assimilated Jew.

In confronting the fact of Roth’s incessant self-invention and role-play, we must also face the difficult question of what it was he was fleeing *to*. Now it is clear that sometimes Roth played or acted dangerously close on the border of antisemitic stereotypes, most importantly that of the wandering and suffering Jew, as well as the dualist, role-playing Jew (the East European Jew as a “master of role-play”). Was Roth filling the void with exaggerated stereotypes? Roth’s Jewishness, therefore, is a key to understanding Roth’s identity. It was an “empty” conception of Jewishness that constituted the void, yet one that nevertheless played a decisive role in Roth’s life. What I mean is that Roth did not conduct his life according to, or fill it with, a substantial, traditional or spiritual notion of Judaism. He was not a religious orthodox Jew, nor did he find comfort in the Jewish communities in the diaspora. In many ways, then, it was an empty heritage. Yet the fact of his Jewish birth set in motion a personal itinerary of fleeing, persecution and wandering that was intricately tied to it. Despite the fact that Roth’s life was filled with lamentations, there are none at all about his itinerant fate, this persistent form of wandering that began

⁸⁹ “Mich zu fixieren ist unmöglich. Ich habe keinen stabilen literarischen “Charakter.” Aber ich bin auch sonst nicht stabil.” Joseph Roth, in a letter to Stefan Zweig dated 27 February 1929, *Briefe*, p. 145.

early on in life, pushed ahead by assimilationist desires and the wish to escape the stigma of the Eastern European Jew.

To conclude, I hope to have shown that Roth's was a voice speaking from a Jewish void, rooted in multiplicity and defined by a clear lack of existential anchorage which he later transformed into a moral-religious worldview of wandering; a void that, ultimately, contributed to his self-annihilation. While his various narratives or self-presentations in the short run preserved his sense of self, the ultimate unattainability of the various roles also caused a kind of annihilation of identity, expressed most poignantly in the idea of alcoholism as slow suicide. Roth wandered down many routes that never came together, not even, as we have seen, in death. Was it indeed, then, "part of his Jewish fate to want to be something he could not"?⁹⁰ It seems that speaking from a void involves the risk of being called a "phony," as well as the creation of an identity that exists mainly in language, or in the process of writing, as Roth himself once formulated. The risks, then, were many and grave; but the results, perhaps, outweigh them.

⁹⁰ "Mok detected a certain aspect of Jewish fate in Roth: an essentially Jewish man despite his Catholicism – and Roth knew this. [...] Roth did not put on an act – did not have vanity; it was part of his Jewish fate to want to be something he could not be. [...] Roth was a complicated man who had undergone many influences. He was an East European with a strong Jewish element, the atmosphere of Chagall; the Jewish component in him was very strong – and as in Chagall, also the merging of Russian and Jewish." David Bronsen's notes from his interview Maurits Mok (November 7, 1960, Dst, JR/DB 18.1/10), published in Heinz Lunzer, *Joseph Roth im Exil in Paris 1933 bis 1939*. In Zusammenarbeit mit Victoria Lunzer-Talos. Vienna: Zirkular, 2009, pp. 188-193.

Conclusion

One of the main conclusions after having travelled interwar Europe with Roth for four years is at the same time a poignant one. Roth's strongest identification with his Jewish heritage came in times of the greatest suffering. As I have argued in my analysis of *Job*, a novel born out of the tragedy of his wife's mental illness, Roth turned to this quintessential sufferer when his personal despair reached a peak. He reacquainted himself with full force with the Old Testament not just as a blueprint for a literary tale, but as a source of redemption in a world sliding increasingly off the scale. Now, this in itself is not so shocking. Nor was it sudden. Roth's dreams of assimilation had not been able to diffuse or deny the long tradition of a discourse of suffering in Judaism, and after his realisation during the early years of Weimar that "all assimilation is a flight" his desire to explore his roots became more pronounced. Now, Roth had always portrayed his Jewish characters in a favourable, albeit somewhat stereotypical, light, but I would argue that this active turn to Jewish sources was not so much a change in literary awareness or direction, but instead a profound ideological and existential reorientation. It was a reaction to the facts of life as they were presented to him, and it catapulted Roth into an exploration of his own account of Jewishness and Jewish heritage.

Multiplicity, complexity, and even duplicity had been a part of his mental orientation from his earliest years, visible in an individualist rejection of all political and ideological communities; a predilection that developed into full mythmaking after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Out the three main "roles" that Roth skilfully germinated during his life, two were clearly connected to his Jewish heritage: the suffering Jew and the cosmopolitan itinerant. The third, the Austrian army officer, was based on the ideological recognition of a multinational society in which Jews enjoyed more freedom and opportunities than in exclusive nation states. As such, this latter one, too, springs from his existential position as a Jew. What adds to the complex nature of these identifications with his Jewish heritage is the fact that they are dangerously close to antisemitic stereotypes of Jews; those classical sufferers, who, punished for denying Jesus Christ, were sent on an eternal and rootless wandering. Since Roth's portrayal of Eastern Jewry in *The Wandering Jews* borders on the opposite, i.e. an uncritical admiration for the unspoiled communities of the East, it is difficult to find the middle ground in his assessment of the Jews, his own person included. One of the reasons why Roth refused to go to Palestine, apart from his

general aversion to the national idea, was because, as he said, “there were too many Jews there.” Now, it would be fruitless to accept this remark as proof of Roth’s so-called self-hatred as a Jew or internalised antisemitism, because, as I hope to have shown in this thesis, an internalised negative image does not equal self-hatred. As Paul Mendes-Flohr has argued, the category of self-hatred, “at least as usually employed, is of limited analytical value when seeking to understand the ambivalent tensions afflicting the Jewish intellectual. To be sure, there are Jewish anti-Semites, but they are relatively few. The fact that many Jewish intellectuals are beholden to the negative images of Judaism and Jews has generally produced more complex responses than endorsement of out-and-out anti-Semitism.”¹ It is these complex responses that I have explored in this thesis, and I would argue that Roth’s engagement with Jewish roles and characters was, apart from a genuine personal identification, also a means of exploring – with humour – the possible transgressions and de-essentializing potential of Jewish stereotypes.² His antisemitic comments were uttered with full consciousness about the rights and wrongs of assimilated Jewish life in Western Europe, and in the light of Roth’s personal, literary and intellectual cynicism, I believe they were part of his greater scheme to upset, deconstruct, and modify petrified assumptions about mankind, society and modernity. Indeed, role-playing can be considered a means to avoid social constraints, and the celebration of solitude that followed in its wake was a confession to the difficulties of assimilation.³

These intellectual changes took place long before the political imposition of Jewish identity which was a result of January 1933. However, it is true that the expulsion and exile from Germany amplified this change in Jewish self-awareness and led many Jewish writers to reconsider their literary themes and political alliances. With Roth, this led to an intensification of the idea of exile and wandering as a moral imperative; as mental cannon against the furious nationalisms that had been raging on the European scene since the end of the First World War. His personal and literary masquerade was a strategy of resistance developed in the face of the National-Socialist danger, and this concept of Jewish masquerade remains to this day a rather unexplored territory in Jewish Studies. It is a

¹ Paul R. Mendes-Flohr, *Divided Passions: Jewish intellectuals and the experience of modernity*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991, p. 14-15.

² For an exploration of Jewish stereotypes as a means of subversion, see Mary Gluck, “The Budapest Flâneur: Urban Modernity, Popular Culture, and the “Jewish Question” in Fin-de-Siècle Hungary”, *Jewish Social Studies*, New Series, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Spring-Summer 2004), pp. 1-22.

³ For an analysis of the processes of role-playing and isolation in the life and work of Hungarian writer Dezső Szomory, see Tamás Ungvári, “The Tragedy of the Pariah-Parvenu: The Case of Szomory”, in *The “Jewish Question” in Europe: the case of Hungary*. Translated by Tamás Ungvári, Nóra Aratá and Judit Zinner. Boulder, Colorado: Social Science Monographs, 2000, pp. 147-165.

concept closely related to the question of Jewish visibility and invisibility in the Diaspora, and, because it inherently transgresses and subverts these borders, the concept is potentially sensitive. The concept of role-playing is also related to the internal cacophony of Roth's literary works, which was a result of his immersion in the diversity of Galician life as well as a dignified response to modernity. Multiple voices characterise his novels as well as his mental disposition, and I believe this intellectual cacophony, as a kind of counter history, is one of the most important elements of Roth's legacy.

Roth did not suffer solely because he was a Jew, but his personal despair led to a close identification with his Jewish heritage. This exploration lasted until his death, and resulted in various responses. One of them was the transference of guilt onto, and into, the bodies of women, resulting in the creation of what I have called "narratives of guilt." Roth was certainly not modern – the opposite! – in his attitude towards women, and, despite his relationships, he remained essentially alone. This leads me to a second response, namely, the creation of an imaginary community of what Roth called "gifted men," or intellectuals, from Galicia. In the novel that was meant to describe his childhood but which remained unfinished, *Strawberries*, Roth traced the lineage of his uprooted narrator back to an imagined community of displaced Galician men who now, in their dispersion, formed a community of European intellectuals. This idea of a European intelligentsia was indeed an aspiration of many writers on the Left in interwar Europe, even if such a community remained fully ephemeral and unattainable. In the end, at least to Roth, it was a community of individuals, and the "communal" aspects of it took place solely in the mind of its author.

It is telling that Roth traced the origins of his community of uprooted and gifted men back to pre-war Galicia. One of the main characteristics of modernity is a sense of historical discontinuity, of a conscious break with the past and tradition. Roth's thought is ambivalent in this respect. On the one hand, he postulates a gap between the pre-war and postwar generations, between fathers and sons; a main theme in his early novels. The old world vanished with the fathers, and the two worlds do not meet again. On the other hand, though, Roth passionately pleaded for a use of the past in order to understand as well as improve the present, and he set out to analyse the elements of continuity that connected his contemporary world and the past; a vision of history as cyclic. Roth's youthful belief in progress and *Bildung* was replaced by the recognition of human error at the core of historical change. Even if a structural tension between the desire for order, on the one hand, and the need to confront the messiness, injustices and disorderliness of human life

on the other, runs persistently through his writing, the solution never lay in dogmatic surrender. As such, Roth's expressions of "conservatism," in the form of monarchism or nostalgia, were continuously exposed and undermined by his interest in human life and the train of events of contemporary politics.

In the light of this, what constituted Roth's vision of and for the Jews? His position was clearly Diasporic, based on a positive assessment of uprootedness, and later, exile, as an existential starting point. Roth knew the blessings but also the hardships of such a predicament, yet he remained faithful to it. From this secular position, he advocated the Jews' mission to remain uprooted, a post-national nation among the nations, and spread love and charity. While he also believed there was no redemption for mankind, stuck as it was in its own perpetual errors, the idea of a Jewish mission clearly resonates with the Messianic tradition in Judaism. Redemption, however, would not come in form of the Messiah, but, according to Roth, in the betterment of man's morals and ethics. This was clearly a concern embedded in, and directed towards, the present as it appeared to Roth: a world gone awry in irrational bids for power and a centrifugal movement away from harmony. His thought on the fate of European Jewry, however, does not go beyond the idea of their diasporic mission. Even if, later, when faced with the vicious antisemitism of the 1930s, he admitted that there was a certain rationale to Palestine, it was not Zion that could redeem Jewry. While Zionism was a reaction and/or a solution to the threat of extinction that faced the Jewish people, Roth's reaction to this threat was to stay in the present, fight with words, help refugees coming in from the East, and remain in the center of the battlefield which was Europe. His suffering was rooted in the external consequences of the fact of his Jewish birth, and he bore it in isolation, refusing to take refuge in the Jewish communities surrounding him. Perhaps this was, then, what he envisioned for all Jews: individual suffering transformed into an engagement with the world, through words, meant to bring out the moral betterment of mankind.

I am sure Roth would have chuckled at the posthumous interest that befell him; he would have made a cynical remark about the passage of time or the futility of posterity, and ordered another brandy. But even so, in recent years, Joseph Roth has come into his own as a twentieth-century author and his voice has emerged, crystal clear, out of the void. My work forms a contribution to the intellectual assessment and legacy of this man who was born and went under in a world solely made up of paradoxes; a difficult but wondrous predicament he himself held on to until the end.

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The Leo Baeck Institute in New York owns the largest collection of Joseph Roth material, *The Papers of Joseph Roth*, spanning the years 1906-1995, quantity 4 feet, 3 microfilm reels (identification AR 1764) The larger part of this collection consists of handwritten and typewritten manuscripts of his novels, novellas, stories and essays, including such novels as *Hundert Tage*, *Trotsky. Roman eines jungen Revolutionäers*, and notes on *Radetzky-Marsch*. It also contains correspondence with family and publishers, clippings about Roth and reviews of his work, family photographs. The collection is arranged in 10 series, containing the following materials:

Series I. Manuscripts, Novels No. 1, 2, 3, 1894 - 1940s

Box 1 Folder 1: Manuscript: *Hundert Tage* (own handwriting, several chapters 220 p.)

Box 1 Folder 2: Manuscript: *Hundert Tage* (typewritten with corrections 88 p.)

Box 1 Folder 3: Manuscript: *Trotsky, Roman eines jungen Revolutionäers*

Series II. Manuscripts: Novels, Novellas, and various individual chapters A - Z, 1894 - 1940s

Box 2 Folder 1: "Die Bueste Kaisers Franz Josef" - handwritten (original + copy), typewritten (2 copies, with handwritten corrections); essay "Joseph Roth's 'Bueste des Kaisers' - the quest for an authentic text" by Otto W. Johnston (1973)

Box 2 Folder 2: 2 Filmentwurf (draft for a film project), handwritten

Box 2 Folder 3: Handwritten part of the "Stummer Prophet", i.e. "Trotsky" novel; two omitted chapters of "Flucht ohne Ende", typewritten

Box 2 Folder 4: "Der Hilfsredakteur" own handwriting

Box 2 Folder 5: "Juden auf der Wanderschaft", original, own handwriting (partly copied), newspaper clipping

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Box 2 Folder 8: Varia, early works and fragments, mostly handwritten and original 50 p

Box 2 Folder 9: Manuscripts & separate chapters

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Box 3 Folder 1: Albania & other voyage feuilletons

Box 3 Folder 2: "April", galley proofs

Box 3 Folder 3: "Berufe"

Box 3 Folder 4: Essays A - Z:

Box 3 Folder 5: Feuilletons of various content, A-Z

Box 3 Folder 6: "Die Kapuzinergruft"

Box 3 Folder 7: Novels A - Z

Box 3 Folder 8: Political and time-critical essays and lectures

Box 3 Folder 9: Varia - polish translation, letters of Cezanne for a planned work

Box 3 Folder 10: Lectures

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Box 3 Folder 13: Die Oesterreichische Post
Box 3 Folder 14: Varia

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Box 4 Folder 4: Obituaries (1939)
Box 4 Folder 5: Varia: clippings, personal documents, letters (1916-1939, 1987-1989)

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Box 5 Folder 2: Mainly correspondence of and with publishers; arranged alphabetically. A - Z. Incl. 4 signed letters of Joseph Roth (filed under “R”) and signed contract (1933 – 1934)
Box 5 Folder 3: Business correspondence and contracts (1936 – 1939)
Box 5 Folder 4: Foreign Manuscripts
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