JOSEPH ROTH'S FEUILLETONS AS HISTORIOGRAPHICAL PARADIGM

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ABSTRACT

Theodore Rippey and Beth Griech-Polelle, Advisors

After reflection on specialized academic focus in the current scholarly tradition, this investigation sought to find an intellectual basis for interdisciplinary scholarship. Close readings in context of select feuilletons by Joseph Roth provided the stylistic and ideological basis for this new paradigm, which builds on both the classical education of Roth’s *Geistesgeschichte* intellectual cultural tradition and the historiographical trends of the last sixty years (from New Criticism through Hayden White to New Historicism and internal realism). Reading of text in context, application of varied types of writing, and acceptance of non-absolute objectivity in historiography are all requirements for this new historiographical paradigm. This interdisciplinary orientation is a call across the scholarly community to come together in cooperative exchange, which will once again open wide the intellectual cultural tradition.
If we ask why none of the modern masters of realist fiction wrote history, a subject which obviously interested them deeply, the answer is, I think, that history deals only with the plausible, never the impossible. History leaves us with a sense that things could not have happened otherwise, because in fact they did not happen otherwise. History is wisdom after the fact, knowledge of what we have become, but not of what we might have become, or of what we might yet become. On the other hand, literature that deals only with the impossible - romanticism and modernism in their most extreme forms - does not leave us with a sense that its fictions are plausible.

- Roger Anchor, *Realism and Ideology*

Es ist gleich tödlich für den Geist, ein System zu haben, und keins. Er wird sich also wohl entschliessen müissen, beides zu verbinden.

- Friedrich Schlegel, *Fragmente*

It is possible that sometime in the future, I, too, …will put a low value on our political rags, our party broils, and all that goes with them….Yes, it is highly possible that my own share in the fight will often be painful, wearying, and not at all what one would call a rewarding occupation; but all that does not restrain me from dedicating my life to the struggle of the age to which I belong; for, in spite of everything, this fight is the highest and noblest that one finds today; …not every century is fitted to make the men who live in it distinguished and happy.

- Gustav Freytag, *The Journalists*

Im Feuilleton ist es sehr schwer etwas zu verändern.

- Joseph Roth, *Letter to Bernard von Brentano*
To my father, whose own classical education, love of well-crafted language, and highest standards have shaped my dedication to the all-consuming lifestyle of teaching and learning.
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I wish to acknowledge my family for their support via phone, email and the infrequent face-to-face conversation. They hold me to my own standards even when I might not feel like carrying on.

Last, I acknowledge the inspiring love and support of my closest ally. She reminds me why I care so much about the intellectual cultural tradition and its value to today and tomorrow, and gives new meaning to the term *ebenfalls*. 
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I. Introduction

To label Joseph Roth’s identity as one of “co-existent contradictions”, as the 1989 anniversary symposium on his life and works did, is to limit what can be gained through examination. The apparently conflicting ideas and ideals which Roth espoused during his development as writer, intellectual and individual have been thus far studied as primarily asynchronous and antagonistic. The majority of Roth scholars have struggled with the existence within the same individual of a journalist and a novelist, a Jew and a Catholic, a monarchist and a republican, and a proud Austrian-German and a convinced believer in pan-Europeanism. This struggle should rather be viewed as the result of Roth’s daily attempt at harmonizing the cacophony of early twentieth 20th century society. The blend of optimism based in eternity and pessimism of the moment inherent in Roth’s works arose from his ability both to analytically report the events of the day and to contextualize those events in the broader course of historical progress; he was, like Heine, a Gegenwartshistoriker. For these reasons, to read Roth is to find a trove of possible meanings. The most powerful message in this reading is the possible paradigm for the construction of historiography, a paradigm which enjoyed limited scholarly approval in Roth’s time, but fell into disfavor as intellectuals and their fields of study began to further specialize after World War II. The crisis of intellectual capitulation under fascist regimes was compounded by division within the intelligentsia and an increasingly absurd quest for scientific objectivity in the humanities. Just as integral to adapting Roth’s contributions to modern historiography are an appreciation of his belief in Geistesgeschichte and an adoption of authorial responsibility in society. In the appropriately amorphous narrative form of the feuilleton, Roth brought together the powerful intellectual cultural tradition of Geistesgeschichte and authorial responsibility, setting a standard for resetting historiography. In response to the

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initial stumbling block for Roth’s scholarly style, the idealistic focus which spawned this analysis began with the tragic, yet nonetheless optimistic task Roth left for us: “es wird Aufgabe der Zukunft sein, die Gründe dieser schändlichen Kapitulation genau zu erforschen.”²

The historiographical conundrum that follows should be expected. How can one contextualize the work of a person who, like his writing, is himself difficult to contain in established categories? Many students of the New Criticism would argue, after the linguistic turn and its focus on text taken as much as possible out of context, that Roth’s context itself is not as vital to understanding his writing as are close critical readings. One could focus on Roth’s belief in the might of Geistesgeschichte in application, but would find interference from the fall from favor of Geistesgeschichte and the negative view of “snobbish” intellectual history. The focus could be instead on the journalistic nature of Roth’s contributions, but one runs up against Hayden White’s assertions that all text is a narrative construct, and therefore never a relation of fact. This difficulty is further compounded by the amorphous nature of Roth’s chosen genre, as the feuilleton is often defined more by its personal narrative style and subjectivity than any particular content concerns, and its grip on journalistic legitimacy has been repeatedly challenged. The historicism of Martin Heidegger provides a foil to Roth’s belief in the power of the literate to effect change, but Roth does not completely fit into Popper’s contending school of thought either, differing particularly on the issue of objectivity/subjectivity. Perhaps the tradition of culture studies, the recent interdisciplinary push to bring to bear all available disciplines in the search for understanding the seemingly incomprehensible, with standards voiced in the New German Critique (Spring/Summer 1995), fits Roth best and, by extension, should serve as a discourse in which any topic previously relegated to specialized scholarship will be jointly

investigated. It would certainly seem appropriate based on the interdisciplinary nature of the
degree sought in the crafting of this argument.

In addition to a burden, Roth tacitly left us a methodology. Limiting scholarly study to
the close-reading tradition of New Criticism, ascribing the work of one man to one school of
thought and damning unorthodox writing to the scholarly periphery all hold back progress
towards ultimately unattainable understanding. Roth had no reservations about floating through
disciplines to communicate that which was so important to him. He witnessed and documented
the rise of closed-minded power as the open channels of intellectual discourse became choked
with nationalistic and ideological fragmentation. The postwar consequence of this irrational,
emotional minefield was the removal of humanity from scholarship and the antagonistic
development of various theories which sought to remove meaning from human events. The
pendulum seems to have now swung as far as possible in that direction, and, luckily, one can find
intellectuals and academics working both to bring the scholarly community back into
conversation across disciplines and to return the human value to the study of humanity. As
Robert Anchor so amusingly described the situation among scholars, those within the fortress of
tradition must stop viewing those with conflicting ideas as barbarians at the gates.3 To this end,
this paper has three objectives. The primary one will reach a previously realized but not yet fully
appreciated paradigm for historiography through close readings in context of selected feuilletons
from early and late in Roth’s production. This search will reveal both key Gegenwartshistoriker
documentation from Roth and a model for the construction of historical writing. Situating this
paradigm firmly outside of any singular theoretical framework from the intermediary period (yet
not illegitimating individual theories in the process) will be the necessary corollary to the
primary intent; however, transcending disciplines and theories must be undertaken cautiously, so

that one is left with adequate scholarly footing. The final purpose of this paper will be simply to issue a challenge to the not yet fully aware scholarly community as Roth so often did: continue the conversation, openly embrace and engage in conversation as Roth would have done, in order to come together across the artificial borders of nationality, discipline and theory rather than further specialize and divide.

II. Focus of Methodology and Survey of Previous Scholarship

In a paper which seeks to cover the expanse of two distinct disciplinary fields, one must cautiously limit the focus and the orientation. This project began with a reading of Roth’s “Autodafé des Geistes” and “Das Unsagbare” in a graduate course in German culture and civilization in the autumn of 2006. The beauty of Roth’s writing was immediately apparent, as was its ability to speak directly to its audience about issues they still did not fully comprehend. This import of reading Roth for both scholars of German language and culture and historians was compounded by the comparative ignorance of its context among other students in the course. Although it was for Roth and his contemporaries the gold standard of the humanities and education in general, classical education had fallen out of favor in the postwar, then postmodern periods. This lack of awareness and understanding of Roth’s historical context (and even more painfully his references to Old Testament Judaism, Christian thought of the last two millennia, and the wisdom of Classical Antiquity) led to the question: when did this approach to understanding written works in broad context fall out of favor, and, more importantly, why? The trends of text-based literary analysis of the New Criticism were the immediate response, but further inquest led to a fuller, more complicated chain of removing humanity from the
humanities. Following the literary analytic contributions of Hayden White, scholars began inappropriately labeling the term ‘narrative’ something almost dirty and base, to be avoided at all costs for its scholarly and intellectual inadequacy. The theory of human construction of history, from its structures to its objectivity to its “facts,” led to condemning to demolition organizational structures deemed artificial. The ‘Doktorvatermord’ committed by the literary critics and postmodernists had torn down the centuries of intellectual development which they determined to be run-down ghettos which needed escaping. Responding to the trends developed by their intellectual predecessors, this next generation of scholars sought to correct the structural and subjective errors they perceived in the scholarship to that point. In swinging the pendulum away from the cross-disciplinary prewar intellectual discourse up through the Weimar period, focusing on an attempt to apply science in a field that was never scientific, and invalidating as artificial the structures which gave a framework to understanding the past, postwar scholars declared the field of history, as well as the humanities in general, nearly devoid of the meaning they had so long carried. The discovery of other complications in the development of scholarship from Roth’s time to now expanded the chronological and theoretical scope of my intended investigation, but urged the undertaking all the more.

By virtue of this multifaceted concentration, the examination of the extant literature on the multiple fields involved in this argument must be all the more carefully undertaken. This is neither purely an investigation of the person of Joseph Roth, nor an outright definition of the feuilleton and its applications, nor the historiography of ideas and cultural studies over the last hundred years. It is a balanced blend of each and all of these. As a scholarly pursuit, the search for a historiographical paradigm in the feuilletons of Joseph Roth therefore builds on the work of those who have investigated and developed each of these topics before.
Hermann Kesten arguably initiated Roth scholarship and edited the initial *Werke in drei Bänden* (1956), which enabled the rediscovery of the bulk of the Roth’s lost writings. Reissue in a four volume edition expanded the selection in 1975, and further expansion into six volumes was made by Klaus Westermann and Fritz Hackert (1991). A more recent significant improvement in accessibility to Roth has been through the work of Michael Hofmann, whose translations of two collections of journalism and several novels into English has exponentially increased possible readership. David Bronsen’s biography of Roth (1975) remains the standard for the person behind the writings. Though the facts and places in the biography communicate the massive shift in Roth’s life after the beginning of his exile, this work will contest the early trend in literary scholarship of Roth. The original standard was to embrace two periods in Roth’s life and writing, the early and the late, generally crossing from one to the other around 1930. The shift was mostly focused on study of Roth’s fiction, and the focus in this investigation on his feuilletons demonstrates themes that connect the periods that many scholars would divide; any division in this work is chronological and should help demonstrate the constancy of Roth’s belief in Geistesgeschichte and the responsibility of the writer.

Roth’s identity as an Austrian or an Eastern European Jew has been well researched, but each of those topics limits the full picture of Roth. In this trend, the collected writings of the 1989 symposium *Co-Existent Contradictions: Roth in Retrospect* reinforced the divisions in Roth’s writing and person. He receives mention in various investigations of the feuilleton⁴, but is usually reconnected with his novels even in these explicitly labeled studies of his journalism. Helen Chambers, the editor of the 1989 symposium papers, released her own study of Roth’s feuilletons entitled “Signs of the Times: The Weimar Journalism of Joseph Roth” but this work

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is compiled in a collection entitled *German Novelists of the Weimar Republic*. Chambers applies a close reading of selected feuilletons in a literary investigation of Roth’s contributions to style and genre, and her foundational scholarship was invaluable to my work. The most recent available work dealing with Roth is Jon Hughes’s investigation of Roth’s 1920s writings and their relation to modernity, and though it provides assistance in surveying Roth scholarship, Hughes still believes somewhat in the differences in the artificially established phases of Roth’s writing.

Ever since Heinrich Heine developed the feuilleton as one of his primary writing styles, the feuilleton has been intrinsically linked with that author. Generally, the feuilleton is composed as a journalistic first-person narrative, offering the reader the author’s subjective views on topics ranging from politics to the arts. As the feuilleton remains somewhat amorphous, an investigation into a more developed definition of the genre follows later in this paper. This search for a definition most notably involved Karl Kraus, who, in his 1910 attack on Heine’s misuse of language, defined the feuilleton as an aberration in which language is inappropriately ornamental and thereby violates the ideal matching of *Form* and *Inhalt*. A previous master’s candidate at Bowling Green State made the German feuilleton the subject of her inquiry in 1989; Mareike Herrmann traced the roots and definition of the feuilleton in order to understand its place in the media of (then) divided Germany. Other studies of import to this investigation include the co-authored volume *Städtebilder zwischen Literatur und Journalismus: Wien, Berlin, und das Feuilleton der Weimarer Republik* (1999), which synthesized hundreds of primary feuilleton sources with dozens of literary, historical and philosophical works of secondary literature to provide a fairly exhaustive study of the subject. As to the general concept of feuilleton, further recent scholarship (2003) from Katia Dianina explores the feuilleton and its
role as everyday guide to public culture, with additional particular focus on Imperial Russia.

Again, one finds transcendence of cultural divisions in the existence of the international sense of feuilleton.

The fields of cultural history and cultural studies, the primary framework for the historiographical concerns of this paper, found in-depth scholarly attention in *New German Critique* in 1995. Entries in that edition addressed the problems of methodology, intellectual history, identity, memory and aesthetics, and sought a defining structure for cultural history. The process of building this definition embraces and questions various historiographical and theoretical bases, finding some degree of value in much of the historiography since the end of World War II. This paper will seek to juxtapose Roth to the movements of historicism, the New Criticism immediately following the war, Hayden White’s narrativism and linguistic turn, and (to some degree) post-modern discourse. Primary writings on and in each field will be examined, beginning with Heidegger’s *Rektoratsrede* from 1933 and subsequent scholarly reaction to his thought process. The immediate reaction of Karl Popper in his war-era *Poverty of Historicism* swings analysis to the other end of the spectrum, perhaps with special aggression towards Heidegger’s support of the Third Reich from which Popper escaped. The realm of literary criticism overwhelmed even history after the fall of Nazism, and the New Criticism sought to separate text from context, removing the history from the literary art. Written language was to be studied as literary text, not historical artifact, thus divorcing form from content. The pendular swing of this idea into Hayden White’s *Metahistory* and *Tropics of Discourse* saw the rise of narrativism, asserting the innate literary narrative qualities of history and historiography. White turned an adapted form of New Critical analysis on historiography itself, establishing the historical text as literary artifact. In White’s system, the four available tropes of metaphor,
metonymy, synecdoche and irony predetermined the interpretation of author’s intent and message. The corollary to this narrativism was White’s assertion that the fictive nature of text removed the possibility of finding the much-maligned ‘truth’ in history. This system inspired responses which called for debunking of history as a field of study.

As the forest of theoretical interpretation grew fuller and fuller, scholars in the 1990s began a thinning process through various sorts of debunking in postmodernism. This, of course, simply added to the pile of theory, and led to the synthesis of varied theories across disciplines in cultural history and cultural studies. The *New German Critique* dedicated an entire issue to fomenting the solidification of these fields in harmony, calling on scholars across the academic spectrum to contribute to the developmental process. Most significant for this investigation, proponents of these fields understand the ebb and flow of theoretical discourse and seek value in the majority of the ideologies; this give and take is examined in Helmut Lethen’s “Kracauer’s Pendulum.” The important issue in this perceived “pick-and-choose” scholarship is a firm foundation in one discipline to address the others. In the broadened community of cultural history/culture studies, historians wishing to converse with literature must maintain their sense of historiographical orientation, while literary critics must not lose sight of their selected brand of critical analysis. In his essay “Method? What Method? Confessions of a Failed Structuralist,” Peter Jelavich explores the need for scholarly orientation, tempered with disappointment in exclusive commitment to any one theory or paradigm. This new sense of interdisciplinarity does not mean the disappearance of disciplines, but rather the embrace of others to strengthen one’s own.

Much of this analysis stems from the trends of the 1990s, including New Historicism, internal realism and cultural history and cultural studies, to question the limits in each of the
earlier schools of thought. This is, by no means, a complete documentation of historiographical progress, but the somewhat ideologically and chronologically diverse sampling further serves the purpose of asserting the transcendence of category (biographical, genre and theoretical) inherent in Joseph Roth, the feuilleton, and cultural history and culture studies.

III. Roth’s Writing in “Biographical” Context

The details of Joseph Roth’s life remained, until recently, only those which he wished known. Born in the part of present-day Ukraine that was then called Galicia, he was raised in Brody on the eastern border of the Habsburg Austro-Hungarian Empire. His formal advanced education began at Lemberg (Lviv) and ended in Vienna; he enlisted in Franz Josef’s army in 1916 to serve in World War I, but little verifiable information on his service is known. The fall of the Habsburg monarchy and collapse of the empire after the war left Roth without a sense of home. His journalistic career took him from Vienna to Berlin, where he became a rather successful feuilletonist primarily in the employ of the Frankfurter Zeitung. The first half of the 1920s saw Roth’s writings expose the slow rise of nationalism in the Weimar Republic. His travels as correspondent took him notably to France and Russia during the second half of the 1920s. After achieving fame as both a journalist and novelist, Roth found his career virtually eliminated with the Nazi rise to power. He continued to battle against the Third Reich while in exile in Paris from 1933 on, slowly succumbing to stress, poverty and alcoholism until his death in 1939.

As mentioned earlier, Roth’s identity has long confused scholars, who seem unable to reconcile the many possible orientations provided in analysis of his writings. His political
leanings, which have been analyzed for their shift from far-left to monarchist, serve as an example of the range of subjectivity in Roth’s work. To compartmentalize or simplify Roth, one would most likely need to omit some of the subjective positions from which he composed his feuilletons. While I will not claim expert status in Roth’s biography, limiting Roth to a simplified picture is not appropriate. The subjective, amorphous medium in which Roth produced the works under investigation cannot be simplified nor compartmentalized, and seems therefore all the more appropriate for Roth. Generally speaking, my entire argument seeks to reverse the trend of removing context from the equation in order to analyze the subject; the varied range of subjectivity with which Roth viewed his world is a key to understanding his writing and a template for contemporary historiography.

IV. The Feuilleton, Briefly

Feuilleton comes into scholarly usage as the French diminutive of *feuille*, maintaining the sense of sheets and leaves often associated with the German term *Blätter*. In the hands of masters of the “kleine Form” these particular little leaves are not simply crude sheets of paper with harsh shapes stamped in black ink that fades with the passage of time, but delicate sheets of gold leaf, emblazoning and highlighting the structure which they adorn, attracting attention to details that would otherwise go unnoticed, showing the truth lying underneath. Pretty as this description may be, the substantial question remains: What is the feuilleton? It has been characterized, critiqued, criticized, analyzed, praised, vilified, and left to rot. It doesn’t accurately translate to English, nor exist in American journalism; studies of feuilleton in American scholarship are therefore understandably sparse. Rather than as a concrete concept,
the feuilleton has generally been accepted in scholarly circles as a tradition; this tradition finds its German roots in Heinrich Heine, addressed most famously in Karl Kraus’s *Heine und die Folgen*.

The style critic Karl Kraus, whom Roth cites as “ein Meister der deutschen Literatur, ein Fanatiker der Reinheit der Sprache, ein fast unangreifbarer Apostel des Stils,” charged, judged and sentenced Heinrich Heine as the father of the German feuilleton – “Ohne Heine kein Feuilleton.” Infamous for his precision and demanding reading, Kraus mercilessly assailed Heine in his 1910 polemic; through this ironically feuilletonistic assault, Kraus developed a “spachliches Dekadenzmodell” which diagnosed Heine’s introduction of a “Franzosenkrankheit” into the German language. Kraus cited the feuilleton as the origin of “übersichtlichen Nebeneinander von Form und Inhalt, worin es keinen Zwist gibt und keine Einheit” which over the course of its development became “zwischen Kunst und Leben ein gefährlicher Vermittler, Parasit an beiden ... Fluch der literarischen Utilität, Geist der Utiliteratur.” Kraus primarily decried the perceived mismatch of form and content on the grounds that language is turned into an ornamental device, rather than it being unified with the content and message it delivers. He vehemently believed that language (specifically the German language) was an art (*Kunst*), and should never be artificially (*künstlich*) used simply to deliver a message. As with any degree of taste-based style criticism, Kraus could be taken as only one extreme interpretation of the inherent lack of value in the Heine feuilleton, but the respect accorded him by Roth and his acceptance as paradigmatic by scholars of German language and literature make his demands on the language important considerations in the discussion. His

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5 Roth, „Autodafé des Geistes“
7 Kraus, Karl. *Heine und die Folgen*, 17.
influence on Roth’s resulting contemporary attempt at unifying form and content will be clear in
the selected readings.

In her research into the German feuilleton and its societal implications, Mareike Herrmann formulated a fairly comprehensive survey of the feuilleton from its French origins to its realization in (then) divided Germany. She asserts, and rightly so, that a definition of feuilleton cannot fit into the customary single sentence which one would expect. “Feuilleton hat, wie jedes andere journalistische Genre, die Aufgabe, den Leser zu informieren, ihn zu belehren, und ihm somit bei seiner Meinungsbildung zur Seite zu stehen. Einerseits verbindet dieser erzieherische Zweck das Feuilleton mit dem Journalismus, andererseits hebt es sich aber, durch seine charakteristische Schreibart, von ‘konventionellen’ Formen des Journalismus ab.”

German language periodicals often dedicated most of the front page to reportage through mainstream journalism, and separated this “legitimate” journalism from other entries on the bottom fourth of the front page with a thick line. Although works inserted “unter dem Strich” were often labeled feuilletons, the primary (though not always as vindictive as Kraus’s categorization) criterion for declaring a work a feuilleton is its style. Basing her analysis more on examination of the form and style of the feuilleton, Herrmann demonstrates her use of the then standard close reading. Herrmann builds her genre characterization on Heine’s style using his “personalisierte Erzählweise, die immer in Ich-Form geschrieben, ausdrücklich subjektiv…war” to explain his accessibility and resultant readership down to today. The ability to both entertain and educate a large audience distinguishes the feuilleton from “above the line” journalism, in which objectivity remained the alleged norm. Objectivity in the feuilleton was neither expected, nor usually displayed. This relegated the feuilleton to a sense of

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8 Herrmann, Mareike. Das deutsche Feuilleton, 1.
9 Herrmann 1.
10 Herrmann 21
ornamental opinion piece, as explained by brothers Heinrich and Julius Hart in 1879: “Ein Feuilleton darf nicht fehlen, es ist eine pikante Beigabe, das Dessert für einen Zeitungsgourmand.” Roth himself would validate the feuilleton in what seemed a direct reply, “Ich bin nicht eine Zugabe, nicht eine Mehlspeise, sondern eine Hauptmahlzeit.” This witty co-option of another’s phrasing would be one of Roth’s significant tactics of engagement; through the response we also gain important insight into Roth’s evaluation of his contributions.

The most important historical development presented in Herrmann’s thesis is her assertion that the Heine tradition of feuilleton died out under the Third Reich; as Roth’s publication continued in exile, one can only presume she means that this authentic form of feuilleton died out within the borders of the Reich.

More recently, Katia Dianina established the feuilleton as “an everyday guide to public culture.” Although situated primarily in the study of Imperial Russia, her assessments trace back through the development of feuilleton across borders, labeling the French feuilleton “light” and the German “heavy”. (Herrmann’s search for a definition similarly led her to French and Russian sources in order to establish her concept of a German feuilleton.) Echoing Herrmann, Dianina defines the characteristic structure of the feuilleton as “something in-between an article of practical character, which recounts facts, and what one conveniently would call a work of imaginative literature…a particular method (means) of processing facts.” The scholarly value of the genre as historical text, memory document and cultural marker originates in the feuilleton’s position “situated between fact and fiction …a borderline genre that bridges the

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11 Quoted in Herrmann, 45.
14 Dianina 193
categories of the material and the literary; it translates everyday culture into language.”

Dianina reinforces the subjectivity-by-choice nature of the feuilleton; “…the feuilleton did not aspire to objectivity in the presentation of its material. On the contrary, the language of the feuilleton was typically ‘colored’ by puns, witticisms, and quasi-literary metaphors of all sorts.” Kraus reduced these humorous conventions to destructive elements which separated Form from Inhalt, but as this investigation will demonstrate, Roth would adopt his contemporary’s concerns and bear carefully in mind the appropriate use of convention to bring together Form and Inhalt.

In her insightful analysis of Roth’s Weimar journalism in context, Helen Chambers further refines the concept of feuilleton, often citing Roth himself on the subject. The particulars of Roth’s feuilletonistic writing begin with his approach:

“In order to feel its greatness and weigh up its effect, I have to reduce each world-history-quality occurrence to a personal dimension. To let it run, as it were, through the filtration plant ‘ego’ and purge it of the dross of monumentality. My aim is to translate it from a political idiom into a human one. From the areas above the line, to the regions below it.”

The amorphous nature of the feuilleton makes it a difficult object for both literary analysis and historiography. As historians have specialized ad absurdum and the field of history has turned its back on the narrative roots from which it still draws life, historiography has suffered. In analyzing these “half-page truths,” one reaches an important realization: not only does the feuilleton present the “Städtebilder zwischen Literatur und Journalismus”18, but it also

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15 Dianina 194
16 Dianina 194
17 Roth translated by Chambers, 102.
18 Jäger, Städtebilder zwischen Literatur und Journalismus
points the way back to the interdisciplinary writing demonstrated by the classically educated scholars of the prewar tradition. The possibility of entertainment and education within the one text of a feuilleton, advanced by Herrmann, sets a standard for advancing accessible scholarship to those otherwise not invested. The feuilleton embraces the subjectivity, imperfection and creativity – the humanity – inherent in human pursuits. The intrinsically interdisciplinary nature of the feuilleton depends on a broad well-informed scholarship. The groundwork laid in this writing, shaped by classical education, allows for the modern trend towards cultural history and cultural studies. This trend depends on cross-disciplinary scholarship, which follows as a possible modern realization of classical education in application.

V. Selected Feuilletons Analyzed

Introduction

Joseph Roth began his all-consuming writing career as both a journalist and a novelist, and retained that duality throughout his life. His investment in any sort of supranational identity began with his identity as a subject of the Habsburg Austro-Hungarian Empire. These two aspects of his identity would figure prominently throughout his journalistic productivity. From Berlin of the Weimar Republic, Roth traced the rise of militaristic nationalism and, with it, the decline of the writer and the supranational intellectual cosmopolitan society to and for whom writers were responsible.
Feuilletons of the 1920s

Wahlkampf in Berlin

The earliest example of Roth’s feuilletonistic writing to be examined in sets the tone for his early period, as well as for two themes that continue throughout his career. In analyzing the period leading up to elections in Berlin of early 1924, Roth has already realized and clarified two important and destructive trends in German society. The rational written word has been replaced by inflammatory proselytization in print, and the swastika has spread its hateful influence from the pages of campaign propaganda to the youth of Berlin. Until his death, Roth would develop in his feuilletons the theme of the slow loss of true writers’ social influence through the loss of level-headed writing. The increasingly sweeping influence of the political activities of the nascent NSDAP is, in hindsight, already well established.

In his examination of the regression of print media to propaganda, Roth assails not only the message, but the physical medium that carries it as well. The propaganda (Roth minces no words in labeling this genre) of the many, many parties argues within itself, seeking to establish the “un-Germaness” of every party other than its own. The cheap, pulpy paper on which these messages are printed does not add to their allure, nor does the choice of Fraktur as the typeset. The unfortunate consequence of this abundance of pulp is the refocusing of what would otherwise be legitimate journalistic writing on the “election fever” gripping the city. The value of the written word, in turn, suffers. Berliners of all social classes and demographic groups
ignore most of what the writing has to say, as it has become the white noise in the background of their daily lives.

The first of Roth’s beautiful, revealing metaphors that I will consider occurs just before the end of this feuilleton. Roth asserts that “ein deutsches Blätterwäldchen” has been planted in Potsdamer Platz; this pulp forest metaphor is developed through analogies between the realities of urban Potsdamer Platz and the components of the figurative wood.


The publications become the trunks of the trees (with increasingly ubiquitous swastikas carved therein), the lines become branches, and the leaves are represented by “schwarz-weiß-rote Phrasen”. Wanderers in this thicket fruitlessly search for the daylight of reason, find no refreshing breeze of wit and stumble over the climbing underbrush of “ungrammatikalische, antigrammatikalische” writing.

In a direct and sarcastically witty swipe at the Nazi sentiment in the city, Roth draws the reader’s attention to the absurdity of the movement’s skewed association with appreciation of nature.

“Nur an Sonntagen sieht man politische Wandervögel mit Sandalen, Knüppeln, Messern. ...Es ist eine seltsame, eine unverständliche Jugend. Sie leugnet Gott und betet zu Götzen. Sie übernimmt vom Heldentum den Blutrausch, aber nicht
seine scheue Natur- und Herzensfrömmigkeit. Man kann sie auf den Bahnhöfen
sehn, die blühenden, weizenblonden, jungen Mädchen, die zu Müttern bestimmt
sind und zu politischen Furien entwickeln. Sie tragen entstellende Windjacken,
breite Schöße und kurzgeschnittenes Haar. Sie schreiten mit unnatürlich breiten
Marschschritten, gebärden sich lächerlich männisch, aber die Natur rächt sich,
sobald sie Heil! und Pfui! schreien, und verlieht ihren Stimmen die abschreckende
Grellheit der Hysterie.“

After transmogrifying Potsdamer Platz into a propaganda-laden forest, he places the proto Nazi
“politische Wandervogel” in the heart of this forest. The juxtaposition of the urban/cosmopolitan
and the pseudo-nature enthusiast becomes even more bizarre when the youths, dressed for
outdoor adventure, are found not in the hills, but train stations. The heathen nature of this new,
“unverständliche Jugend” reveals itself in denial of God and worship of idols; their further self-
removal from society comes from their selective absorption of heroism. The youths retain the
bloodthirstiness of the heroes of old, but avoid adopting the humble piety toward nature.

Through his carefully crafted “Blätterwäldchen” metaphor, Roth takes a manifold stand
against the trend toward cultural and intellectual deterioration in Berlin. He cites the
nationalistic propaganda as the early source and inspiration for this deterioration, but brilliantly
co-opts the symbolism and values of Nazi pulp into his own retort. Appropriating the nature
symbolism of the still-fledgling Nazi movement and demonstrating the absurdity of its selective
adoption, Roth undercuts one of the more constant value sets in the fluctuating Nazi ideology.
While the Nazi movement would never be able to commit fully to any one set of values, Roth
calls out the hypocrisy demonstrated by the youth of the movement. He forces the antimodern
hand, not only pointing out the incompleteness of Nazi investment in pre-Christian ideology, but
also completing adoption of *Urwald* values for the “Wandervogel”; the appreciation of nature must accompany the “Blutrausch” of the heroes of old. In his most scathing one-liner, Roth labels the young females of the movement, whose androgynous appearances belie their feminine destinies, “die zu Müttern bestimmt sind und sich zu politischen Furien entwickelt.” Roth subtly asserts in essence that these youths and the movement which they represent must admit the aspects of pre-Christian thought that do not fit into their ideology just as readily as they are willing to demonstrate that which they view as positive and “urdeutsch”.

The lowbrow name-calling espoused by the Nazis in the name of nationalism worries Roth enough to be concerned about not just the movement, but the deteriorating effects on society in general. The rise of populist “ungrammatikalische, antigrammatikalische” propaganda, coupled with the decline of readership of legitimate journalism, will plague Roth through the rest of his feuilletonistic writing. Writers and artists are, in his view, responsible to society, but are in turn dependent on readers and audiences; without reception, the message Roth tries to deliver will have little effect, to the detriment of all.

**Besuch im Rathenau-Museum**  
*Frankfurter Zeitung* 24.6.1924

Published on the second anniversary of Walter Rathenau’s assassination, this feuilleton takes Roth down a more serene, memorial road. The focus here is not on the negatives of the assassins, but on the positives of the victim. The inimitable wit is not a weapon here, but the beautiful prose eulogizes a fallen comrade in Roth’s struggle against the onslaught of closed-minded nationalism. In close harmony with the reverberant theme of intellectual tradition through the written word, Roth emphasizes another aspect of his personal life which found
resonance in the life of Rathenau: the careful, purposeful melding of Judaism and Christianity into a Judeo-Christian identity. The bridges built between these two increasingly separated traditions provide a key to understanding Roth’s deep belief in a European identity based in literate cosmopolitanism.

Roth opens the memorial by lamenting the inaccessibility of the Rathenau Museum; access to the assassinated Foreign Minister’s home is granted only through the Reichskunstwart. Although Roth praises this office as an oasis of humanity in the desert of bureaucracy, he holds the hope that the slowly developing Rathenau-Gesellschaft will eventually clear the way to experiencing how Rathenau lived. This way of living, Roth reveals, was drawn from the rhythm of natural order and is still demonstrated by all within the house.

The focus of this chronicle of the well-lived life is, not coincidentally, the centrality of intellectual literacy in Rathenau’s identity. The collected works of Tieck, Ariosto, Kant, Chesterfield, Plutarch and Goethe serve Roth as symbols of Rathenau’s life. “Fast gibt es keinen Namen der Geistesgeschichte, der großen, unendlichen Geistesgeschichte, der hier nicht vertreten wäre. ...So lebendig und unermüdlich war sein Kontakt mit den arbeitenden, schöpferischen und schaffenden Gehirnen der Gegenwart, daß zu ihm der reiche Strom gesitiger Fruchtbarkeit ins Haus floß wie nach einem geheimnisvollen Naturgestez.“ Rathenau’s connection to the contemporary intellectual movement builds another link in the intellectual tradition.

The completeness of Rathenau’s collection of Geistesgeschichte is superseded (if not further focused) only by the primacy of the Bible. Roth finds within Rathenau’s living quarters multiple versions, copies and transcriptions of “das Buch der Bücher.” The cohabitation of Greek and Lutheran Bibles with the Schulchan Aruch highlights for Roth the centrality of Judeo-
Christian thought in Rathenau’s life and works. An idea integral in Roth’s weltanschauung, the coordination of Judaic, Christian and European traditions is reported as the keystone of Rathenau’s intellectual efforts as well. “Sein Leben kennzeichnet der Versuch, Antike, Judentum und Urchristentum in Harmonie zu bringen...Es war der Versuch, in die Gemeinschaft eines Orchesters die verschiedenen Instrumente der Kulturwelten zu bringen.“

Roth closes the feuilleton with documentation of the practical application of his and Rathenau’s ideals. In treating his servant humanely, based in the ideals of human progress and improvement, Rathenau rescued this simple man from the dullness and limitation so often dictated for people by their poverty and low social standing. (The emphasis on this man’s East Prussian roots is not incidental; Roth’s increasing suspicion of the Prussians and their dismissal of intellectual cosmopolitanism will only increase with the passage of time.) On the day of the visit, Roth found this former servant his guide not only to Rathenau’s home, but to his life as well. When asked if he ever read any of the works collected by Rathenau, the servant replied in the affirmative and admitted that he did not always understand everything he read. The belief in intellectual literacy for all can be found in the end of his response: “Aber ich denke mir: Auch wenn man nicht alles versteht – dümmer wird der Mensch auf keinen Fall davon.” The feuilletonist’s lament in his own conclusion is therefore appropriate, for with Rathenau’s death the proponents of pan-European intellectual identity lost a powerful ally. “Es ist nicht wahr, daß jeder Mord ein Mord ist. Dieser hier war ein tausendfacher, nicht zu vergessender, nicht zu rächender.“

The rising tide of intolerance, spurred on by nationalism, had already swallowed leading lights of the cosmopolitan intellectual tradition by the time Roth produced this feuilleton. In memorializing Walter Rathenau, he combines eulogy and warning. Missing from the writing is
the biting wit present in “Wahlkampf,” but despite the change in tone, the reader senses the immediacy of Roth’s appeal to his audience. The focus on Rathenau’s collection of texts from various thinkers, times and places is centrally significant. Whether or not Roth’s assessment that the collection nearly covers *Geistesgeschichte* is accurate (and it would go beyond present purposes to establish this), it does show that Roth is invested in historiography.

This feuilleton provides incontrovertible evidence of Roth’s appreciation of the greater trend of intellectual history; his clarification of *Geistesgeschichte* as “der großen, unendlichen Geistesgeschichte” ties his appreciation of Rathenau’s ideals to the longer tradition realized in classical education. *Geistesgeschichte*, its intellectual cultural tradition and its historical grounding as a field of study, worldview and way of life fixated Roth’s life and writings. The respect with which he viewed authors, thinkers and artists flowed straight out of his belief in their responsibility to society, and the need to view their contributions in both universal, relative and specific, original context reinforced the need for intellectual grounding across disciplines. The spread of this respect, demonstrated in practice by Rathenau’s former servant, would provide the bulwark against the rise of closed-minded, violence-prone nationalism. The project of coordinating so many apparently disparate intellectual traditions into one European identity, undertaken yet unrealized by Rathenau, would remain the key to Roth’s argument for intellectual literacy. The practical difficulties of broadening this somewhat elite language-based tradition in the face of rising nationalistic propaganda and mass culture would eventually prove too much, as the last generation of typically classically educated scholars slowly lost its hold on cultural space.
The satirical wit of Roth’s early writings returns as his anti-Nazi weapon in this sarcastically conceived travel-themed feuilleton. In documenting this “Propagandafahrt,” Roth exposes the anti-republican sentiment shared by Rügen and Bavaria. Organized by the Ostseebäderverein to keep up Rügen’s positive appearance among representatives of various periodicals, the trip spoiled the visitors with meals, accommodation and entertainment. Unbeknownst to the organizers, one of the newspaper representatives actually believed in the republican ideals of his periodical. The disappointment in his fellow journalists shines through Roth’s mock-praise of the event and lends contemporary and future readers a perspective on the hypocrisy in other print media. Perhaps most interestingly in retrospect, Roth continues to believe in the possibility of his ideas reaching the mainstream and keeping nationalistic sentiment corralled in the outliers of Bavaria and Rügen.

Roth opens this report by geographically situating Rügen off the coast of northern Germany, cordoned off by “die prophylaktische Ostsee.” He explores the division represented by the body of water, introducing the reader to Rügen’s apparent insulation from actual events on the mainland. The invitations to the island were apparently distributed across “Blätter aller Parteien” in order to build up the reputation of Rügen among all Germans, including Jews and the proletariat as well as those who believed in the republic. The irony of this sentiment strikes Roth as especially amusing upon arrival on the island, whereupon the travelers are greeted with “schwarz-weiß-roten Fahnen.” This decorating scheme is juxtaposed to that used by Sweden
during a similar journalistic jaunt a year earlier, in which the “schwarz-rot-goldenen Fahnen” of the republic were featured. Roth believes that this not only proves that Sweden is better informed than the Deutsche Ostseebäderverband, but also reveals that the island is culturally further removed from the republic than Sweden is geographically.

The atmosphere on the island does not change much beyond the initial landing. Pictures of the Kaiser hang in dining rooms, swastikas adorn hotel balconies and gables, receptions are enlivened with military marches, and the swastika is further found on lapels and available for purchase from the local paperboy. Local residents reveal with both pride and sadness that the government has banned signs forbidding entry to Jews, but Roth finds them on houses anyway. The personal interactions and sights on the island are all outstripped, however, by the “einzigen geistigen Produkt der Insel: der ‘Rügenschen Zeitung’”.

Roth relates, word for word, the lead story in the periodical. This not only provides access for only readers of the day, but also falls under Roth’s role as Gegenwartshistoriker. With his carefully crafted ironic objectivity, Roth calls attention to the subjectivity at play in the allegedly objective reports of his journalistic peers. The opening of the story (“Kommt da die letzten Tage ein Negerpärchen nach Stralsund.”) might be enough to indicate racism on the island, but the events of the story, which see the couple hounded by local children, stoned while they try to nap on the beach and mocked by the writer for reacting, make things even clearer.

“Der Redakteur dieses Blattes track auf unser Wohl. Der Herausgeber rühmte in seiner Rede die “Rügensche Zeitung’ als die ‘geistige Zentrale von Putbus.’ Die Vertreter der Presse ließen dieses Rügen, die Zeitung, die Wirte hochleben. Sie sangen in Sellin ,Deutschland über alles,’ gefüllte Weingläser in der Hand, wie
man es in der Wilhelma-Diele in Berlin gewohnt ist. Es war ein Fest des
entfesselten Journalismus.“

Roth makes sure to explain that the editor drank to the health of the visitors, that the publisher
names his periodical the “geistiges Zentrale” of the island and that “Deutschland über alles” is
sung with wineglasses full. His report includes all that other, less responsible reports might have
left out, putting special emphasis on the whole happening as “ein Fest des entfesselten
Journalismus”.

To close his travelogue, Roth announces that he feels obliged to publish his report, as he
is sure someone will seek the truth in the republican press.

“Ich fühle mich verpflichtet, diese Schilderung irgendwo drucken zu lassen. Man
wird die Wahrheit in dem größten Teil der republikanischen Presse vergeblich
suchen. Jüdische und republikanische Leser greaten in die Gefahr, nach Rügen zu
reisen. Ich warne sie davor. Es könnte ihnen so gehen wie dem ‚Negerpärchen‘
oder noch schlimmer. Rügen kann völkischen Besuchern empfohlen werden. Ich
tue es hiermit.“

He documents the risk that Jewish or republican travelers take in visiting Rügen, as he fears that
things will go at least as badly for them as for the “Negerpärchen.” For “völkische Besucher” he
makes a firm recommendation, simultaneously ironizing the dangerous ideological leanings of
the island and tacitly encouraging nationalists to leave the republic.

Roth’s dry delivery is never broken, and rather than simply being read, the words speak
to their audience.

“Dieser Umstand hat den Ostseebäderverein nicht davon abgehalten, die Vertreter
der deutschen Presse zu einer Propagandafahrt durch Rügen einzuladen. Es

The ironic matter-of-fact delivery provides the foundation on which Roth builds his deeply disappointed and concerned case. Whether offhandedly remarking that he, unfortunately, was also on the trip (“Unglücklicherweise war ich auch dabei.”) or demonstrating the prosaic, narrow-minded writing and worldview of his counterparts on Rügen, Roth dryly cuts again and again into the body of thought of those willing to settle or turn a blind eye to the deterioration of intellectual and journalistic integrity. Rather than pedantically bemoaning the disastrous trends developing on Rügen, Roth presents his report with tongue in cheek and depends on his readers to follow the thinly veiled exposé. By avoiding impassioned pleas for change and emotional tirades against the spirit of the weekend (every sentence, no matter its content, ends with a declarative period), Roth keeps clear of the irrationality of the nationalists. He depends on the obvious irony of his statements and the anathema of activities on Rügen to demonstrate the danger brewing across the prophylactic barrier of the Baltic. It this way, Roth builds all of his efforts to communicate the facts of the matter into scaffolding for his main argument.

His true target with this salvo is the banal, hypocritical journalism increasingly prevalent around him. If his contemporaries are willing to experience all that occurred on Rügen without concern or remark, Roth is willing to let them … to a point. This feuilleton, without naming many names, is an exposé of German journalism of the time. Roth continues to demonstrate in
this text that he holds those who write to a higher standard. Communicating with the written word is a burden of the highest order for Roth. The fact that journalists would turn a blind eye, or at least blank paper, to the cultural atrocities on Rügen inspires a mean streak in Roth that is not to be found in any of the other works analyzed here. Working ironically within the corrupt system to expose its inconsistencies further demonstrates Roth’s mastery of the form.

Emile Zola (Schriftsteller ohne Schreibtisch)  

Die Neue Bücherschau  1927

Conceived (according to Roth’s own words) hastily in response to Gerhard Pohl, this feuilleton speaks directly to the role and responsibility of the writer in modern society. As is so often the case in his feuilletons, Roth communicates with the reader on multiple levels and uses his primary focus to serve as the foundation for his overarching message. The natural advantage provided by writing about the archetypal writer cum social activist does not escape Roth; his application of Zola to the contemporary events demonstrates his understanding of the historical precedent set by his forerunner. The regret with which Roth speaks of the void left by Zola actually serves a more self-reflexive purpose than a reflective. Once again, the feuilletonist sounds the call to action among his peers.

The direct historical context of this text becomes immediately apparent in Roth’s opening lines. In apologizing for his delayed response, he mentions that this survey reached him in the same moment in which he learned of the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti. He understands that the connection between this case and the “größten Diener der Gerechtigkeit in Frankreich” may not seem as clear to readers as it does to him. In clarifying that connection, Roth reveals the deep respect, if not awe, with which he views Zola and his work:
“Es gibt keinen Zola mehr in der Welt!...Ich weiß nicht, ob er heute (nach dem Krieg) und in Amerika (dem Land der unb grenzten Unmensch lichkeiten) den Mord verhindert hätte. Aber daß kein einziger Schriftsteller 'von Weltruhm’ sich gerührt hat, ist für uns, Genossen dieser Zeit, mehr als beschämend: Es könnte fast unsere Hoffnung vernichten.”

He does not necessarily believe that even Zola himself could have altered the outcome of the Sacco and Vanzetti trial, but nonetheless rues the fact that not a single writer of note came to the aid of the accused. This is, for Roth, nearly enough to kill hope. The contemporary (already in 1927!) belief that justice is already dead in America and Europe stills his heart, but Roth asserts that Zola would have the courage to rail against even the most hopeless situation. The optimistic belief that the future avenges the sins of the present kept Zola fighting, and, in turn, should inspire Roth’s contemporaries.

Analysis of Zola continues in a vein close to Roth’s heart:


Any writer who does not feel called to duty by reading a newspaper report about desecration of humanity no longer has the right to write about the lives and actions of men. The stories that need reporting are those that Zola would cover. He was, as Roth asserts, the first European
writer who did not seek inspiration from a desk; Zola was the first novelist with a notebook, the first poet aboard a train. In direct response to Pohl’s question, Roth believes that this aspect of Zola can be an applicable example to his contemporary Germany. He issues direct challenges to his peers, urging them to use the fame they earned from their desks to address the issues of the age. Despite the ubiquitous quality of Roth’s writing yet again present in this offering, he closes asking excuse for the hurried lines.

In his challenge to his peers, Roth asks no excuse, nor will he accept any. “Wer von den deutschen berühmten Schriftstellern hat sich um schwarze Reichswehr, massakrierte Arbeiter, bayrische Justiz, Pommern und die Herren von Kähne gekümmert? Wie viele Dreyfus-Affären hatten wir seit 1918? Wer von den berühmten Männern hat schon einen Lokomotivführer angeschaut?” In his most direct attack on the sad status quo discussed thus far, Roth takes the entire community of German writers to task and blankets America and Europe with a collective involvement in the death of justice. The specificity of his examples leaves little question as to Roth’s concerns, and the examples align with his worry for the continued expansion of nationalism and the closing of the German mind. The historical value of this piece comes not only from Roth’s contextualization and contemporary applicability of Zola, but also from the inclusion of these particular examples. Citing Zola as the father of a journalistic movement for societal responsibility allows Roth to trace his own pedigree and to accost his less idealistic fellow writers. Much like the contemporaneous citation of events on Rügen, the incorporation of developments in the Reichswehr and Bavaria’s decidedly lenient judicial interaction with Hitler demonstrate both Roth’s desire to rise above the journalism that was for his contemporaries acceptable and his ability to contextualize without the benefit of hindsight.
A theme evident in each of these early feuilletons, the responsibility of the writer to society is clear in this ultimatum. Roth will obviously hold himself to the standards which he sets out to his contemporaries, and adds an emphasis on Zola’s “starken Glauben an die Kraft der Wirklichkeit.” The meticulous observation of this reality should, in turn, lead him and his fellow observers to the truth. By citing the gold standard established in Zola’s life and work, Roth has enlisted yet another titan in his quest to bring pan-European intellectual might to bear on the deterioration of society into nationalism and injustice. Unfortunately, he once again has not found a contemporary, but rather another source of inspiration gone before him.

**Between the Early Feuilletons and the Late**

In his early feuilletons, Joseph Roth established the primacy in his mind of the importance of Geistesgeschichte, his belief in writers’ responsibility to and for society and the need for European society to invest in the intellectually cosmopolitan culture of the written word. Urging pan-European unity across religious, cultural and especially national lines, Roth sought to elucidate the rising threat of the closed-minded, hateful nationalism represented most detrimentally by the still fledgling Nazi party and its supporters, overt and tacit alike. In the decade of the 1920s, despite the advances made by right-wing nationalism, Roth retains a certain optimism; his focus on the few losses suffered (Rathenau and the audience of the German public in particular) serves only as warning. With his travels abroad and certain historical developments well known to modern scholars, however, the trend takes a decided turn for the negative. The same themes from the 1920s remain: the pan-European cultural intellectual tradition maintains its place as Roth’s greatest hope for society, and he still believes that writers
need to project this shield across the masses. The beauty of his writing and its message remain, but become ever more entangled with tragedy. Beginning with his years in exile, Roth’s writing becomes more and more mired in despair. The regret he expressed at the loss of Rathenau expands with the ascension of Hitler to Reichskanzler and all entailed therein, and the limited audience he found so long ago in Berlin of 1924 shrinks even further with censorship and exile.

**Feuilletons of the 1930s**

Das Autodafé des Geistes

_Cahiers Juifs (Paris) 9/11.1933_

In response to the establishment of the Third Reich and the early purgings of the German literary tradition soon thereafter, Roth released this scathing condemnation of Nazis and their sympathizers of every shade. The capitulation of the intellect in Germany, about which he has been concerned since the early 1920s, has been realized through the condemnation and burning of books on Bebelplatz. Roth realizes that few observers anywhere in the world fully understand the meaning behind the actions of the Third Reich, and clarifies the grim forecast for all. He embraces the division between Germans and those who hold to Judaism and Christianity; this selective, artificial distinction installed by the Nazis, whose explanation goes well beyond the scope of this project, provides Roth the opportunity to concretely establish the heritage of the book-burning and the ideological space in which this mindset developed. The tone is strident and the accusations broad. The conclusion is defeated, but this is a martyrdom, not a surrender.

“Wenige Beobachter in aller Welt scheinen sich darüber Rechenschaft abzulegen, was die Bücherverbrennung, die Vertreibung der jüdischen Schriftsteller und all
The primary enemy of intellectual literacy in this feuilleton is the modern barbarism gaining power specifically in Nazi Germany. Empowered by the “Leuna-Werke” and “I.G. Farbenwerke,” the “Wandalen des Dritten Reiches” have set themselves against European civilization. The strange, frightening concepts of “die heidnische Zivilisation der Giftgase, … der mit Ammoniak bewaffnete germanische Kriegsgott“ bring together anti-civilization forces of old with the immense potential of technological modernity. “Was die Industriellen betrifft – sie beschäftigen sich mit Stahl und Eisen, mit Kanonen und ‘Dicken Bertas’, sie schmiedeten die modernen ‘Siegfriedsschwerte’.” These specific German concerns reveal the dual-edged progress of modernity and, in turn, the decline of the intellectual tradition espoused by Roth. The last bastions of this tradition have only words at their command, and relative to both modern industrial progress and the mass culture proffered by Goebbels, these weapons are inadequate.

Roth continues his pan-European intellectual emphasis on writers in general, but focuses more specifically in this feuilleton on writers of Jewish heritage. Blame is assigned for the “geistige Kapitulierung”, and the reasons are laid out as “Schwäche, Trägheit, Gleichgültigkeit, Gedankenlosigkeit”. The book burning, censorship and exile vindicate Jewish authors, Roth
explains; authors of Jewish heritage have been eliminated because of their unwillingness to capitulate. Any degree of “victory” is nonetheless Pyrrhic, as the resistance does not prevent their defeat. This division marks Roth and his peers as the “einzige Repräsentanten Europas, die nicht mehr nach Deutschland zurückkehren können.” They can never betray their cause and legitimize the Nazi government, for the Third Reich would never accept them. This leads to important points of emphasis in the remainder of the feuilleton, the place and role of writers in a society like that of Nazi Germany and the responsibility of Jews to carry on the pan-European intellectual tradition through transcendence of the nationalism that threatens them.

Roth clarifies that the now-banned Jewish authors are the last remaining representatives of true German culture. Since Bismarck and the Second Reich began to emphasize physical, military might over the “geistige Leben,” Germany has forgotten her roots. The chain of support behind the chain of command extends back from the front line, including the engineer who supplies weapons, the chemist who develops both poison gas and migraine medicine and the most dangerous enemy of European civilization, the professor who is mistaken by humor journalists as a harmless dreamer and seeks scholarly legitimation for Prussian superiority. This “Unteroffizier der Universität” has betrayed the literate intellectuals, whom Roth trusted with resisting what he saw as the development of Nazism out of the tradition of Prussian authoritarianism. The other betrayal cited by Roth falls within the Jewish community. After 1900, Roth argues, Jews who accepted classification as “Sonntagsjuden” and in some cases labeled themselves “deutsche Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens” erred in thinking that their adaptation to mainstream German customs and identification with German nationalism would secure them unconditional Germanness. Members of these groups further forfeited their right to
protest the course of German history with their back-to-back two-term election of Hindenburg, who repeatedly made clear “daß er in seinem Leben niemals ein Buch gelesen hat.”

The anti-literate actions of the Third Reich should not surprise anyone, for Roth can trace German enmity to books from Bismarck through the Hohenzollerns and Hindenburg to Hitler’s book burning. Invoking the “true” Judeo-Christian tradition, Roth accuses Protestant Germany of committing this auto-da-fé against all books, and by extension, the Bible and Christianity itself. He juxtaposes the maintenance of culture undertaken by Jews in Germany against these base actions of the Third Reich and its supporters, specifically extolling the achievements of his peers of “‘semitischer Herkunft’, um in der Sprache des Dritten Reiches zu reden.” As the first to fall to the aggression of the Third Reich, Jewish authors should be proud; they are the last to espouse “das wahre Deutschland.”

The showdown between civilization and barbarism is evident to Roth, and he seeks to make it clear to his readers. The earlier concerns with language’s growing weakness in opposition to irrationality and closed-mindedness are realized, and the intellectual roots of civilization are pulled up as authors are banned and driven into exile. The loss for modern scholars in this shift is well-known: voices of dissent from the Nazi period have for a long time been difficult to find. Roth’s persistence in writing provides both gegenwartshistorische documentation of this watershed moment and an argument for continuing both the writing process and the intellectual tradition it represents. The silencing from above of dissent and investment in this type of modern society from below have begun their strangulation of the intellectual, cultural, civilized middle.

Roth’s composition of this feuilleton combines a number of powerful metaphoric and ironic devices. The choice of the title makes obvious reference to the Inquisition, and the
parallel drawn to irrational institutional assault continues from there. The undercurrent of longstanding anti-Semitism in the Prussian tradition is examined in its unofficial societal practice. Roth exposes the unwritten, unpublicized criterion of an author’s heritage used in deciding if a bookstore will carry his work. The tradition of bias has also been slightly more concretely realized through the Nazi process of labeling German citizens based on their degree of Jewish descent, already in practice if not codified before the Nuremberg laws. Roth embraces the listing of authors according to their racial categories in order to use it against those who demanded the categorization; what would in Nazi writing read as a list of accusations reads in this feuilleton as a who’s who of German language literature. These authors have been marked for censorship by both their “jüdische Blut” and “europäischen Geist”, both of which are badges of honor for Roth. The absurdity of Third Reich policies and ideals is further exposed by continually referring to Hitler as “Korporal”, a rank which no self-respecting military culture should have considered fit to lead.

The issue of betrayal figures prominently in this feuilleton as well, and Roth’s sense of personal injury, as well as his realization of the dire straits into which this treachery placed his cause, appear in his tone and reductive characterizations of his betayers. His condemnation of the hypocritical Wilhelmine and Nazi academy is expressed through both disapproval of those within and praise of those without. Heidegger’s appointment to the Rektorat at Freiburg and his embrace of National Socialism soon thereafter struck a blow against intellectual solidarity against the nationalist movement. The movement, loathe to tolerate dissenting intellectual input, gained legitimacy with each member of the intelligentsia who tolerated the Nazis, or even worse, accommodated himself to them. Roth labels this accommodating figure the greatest enemy of European civilization and, given Heidegger’s Rektoratsrede, is well within reason labeling the
university the barracks of militarism. Roth feels perhaps even further betrayed by Jews willing to settle for “Staatsbürgerschaft”; this no man’s land of identity sold out the traditions of Judaism in the false hope of achieving full acceptance as Germans. In one of the choice passages from this feuilleton, Roth blames these assimilationists for the weakened stance of Jews in general: “Weil sie nicht den Mut besaßen, selbst zu konvertieren, zogen sie es vor, die gesamte jüdische Religion zu taufen.” The lack of monolithic solidarity within two of Roth’s primary sources of identity and support weakened his argument. Realizing this, he chose to expose the betrayers and clarify the consequences of their hypocrisy. As an intellectual in exile, Roth is, according to this explanation, safe from association with this hypocrisy; the sincerity of his commitment to “europäische Geist” is demonstrated by his censorship in his latest homeland.

Europa ist nur ohne das Dritte Reich möglich

Die Wahrheit (Prag) 20.12.1934

In his most direct and practical attempt to clarify the threat presented by Hitler and the surest way to stop him, Roth becomes very practical in his tone and structure in this feuilleton. His appeal has moved from only Germans to Europeans and citizens of the world in general. In order to establish the Third Reich as the enemy of Europe, Roth distances Nazi Germany from the old Germany of which it projected itself to be the heir. The argument here is built once again around pan-European cultural cosmopolitanism, which focuses on the pre-nationalist spirit that unified Europe through intellectual tradition. Realizing that any audience might pay more heed to a diagnosis that includes a prescription for cure, Roth provides a concrete plan for changing policy and eliminating the Nazi threat before it expands further.
Roth opens with the claim that there still exists a homesickness, “ein Heimweh nach einer europäischen Solidarität, nach einer Solidarität der europäischen Kultur.” The hurdle to this solidarity is the nationalism that is currently swelling to violent proportions. In order to demonstrate the danger of Nationalstolz, Roth draws the metaphorical comparison between the blindness of patriotism and the blindness of love; in both cases, the reasoning is somewhat reflexive: if patriots weren’t blind, they wouldn’t be patriots, just as lovers would not be so in love if they were not blind. Contrary to this nationalist sentiment Roth advances “das europäische Universalgefühl”, based in cultural connections among Ancient Greece, Rome, Israel, Christianity and the Renaissance, the French Revolution and German 18th century, and Austrian supranational music and Slavic poetry.

On a practical note, Roth realizes that he may be taken for a “weltfremden Utopisten” and preemptively counters that claim with a tripartite plan for simultaneously eliminating the Third Reich and unifying Europe. First, every form of Nationalstolz must be accepted by all as absurdity (Unsinn). Second, the League of Nations must decree all people of all races to be equal and forbid entry into the League to any nation whose stand differs. Last, Germany, in its inception as the Third Reich, must be isolated from the European community.

Roth quickly clarifies that he does not hate Germany; he simply suggests contempt for its current self-concept. Despite the case made in “Autodafé”, Roth contends that there exists little, if any, connection between the Third Reich and Germany before 1870. He finds it childish and laughable to assert a bright future for this Germany based on the great past that old Germany established. Maintaining the graves of Lessing and Schiller does not make the maintainers their heirs, and a people who would make Goebbels their new Lessing has less relation to old Germany than current Greece does to Agamemnon. “Es ist ein gewaltiger und gefährlicher
Irrtum, dieser deutschen Nation von heute trotz ihren Barbareien den Kredit zu gewähren, zu
dem sie ihre Vergangenheit angeblich zu berechtigen scheint.” Barbarism surfaces once again as
both primary identifier of Nazi Germany and target of concern for Roth, highlighted by the
contrast between the intellectual literacy of nineteenth century Germany and the current mass
culture. A solidly unified Europe needs to realize this and isolate Germany-as-Third Reich to
realize the true power of solidarity.

Roth continues his attack on anti-literate Nazi Germany in this feuilleton, tying his
tradition to Lessing and Schiller and thereby distancing the Third Reich from pre-1870 German
tradition. The specific labeling of Goebbels, Göring and Hitler as un-German leaves little
question that Roth knows and does not fear the enemy. The cultural Geistesgeschichte tradition
has no room for current Germany, while Roth clearly invites the rest of Europe to celebrate its
common heritage.

The specificity of Roth’s practical scheme for eliminating the Third Reich shifts from his
normally stylized use of irony and metaphor to a more straightforward action plan. This shift
demonstrates the connection between Form and Inhalt, between text and context usually present
in study of feuilleton. The metaphors and wit remain, but these stylistic aspects of the feuilleton
must share space with pragmatic recommendations. The standard of accessible, if not
specifically in this case entertaining, writing to communicate that which is vital remains.
Optimism still exists in this feuilleton, as Roth believes that the League of Nations can provide
the institutional foundation for European solidarity. Unfortunately, the Schwäche, Trägheit and
Gleichgültigkeit which ushered in the Autodafé des Geistes will continue on a supranational
level.
Disenchantment with the effectiveness of the writing process mixes with harsh realities of an author’s life in exile in this deeply personal feuilleton. With the passage of time comes Roth’s realization of the futility of fighting an increasingly losing battle to expose the realities in Germany; he relates the difficult life of an individual in exile more explicitly, and this serves as the concretization of the consequences of Third Reich policy. Through this documentation Roth continues his role as private and public Gegenwartshistoriker. The lackadaisical attitude of democratic leaders receives special ire, as does the destructive misuse of language by demagogic leaders through time. The lack of an audience, or at least one that might receive and understand the message, is clear to Roth, but this isolation will not stop him from writing; sending out a message in a bottle is the only option left.

The feuilleton opens with the simple reality of paying bills and sinking into debt. Upon receipt from his publisher of advance copies of his newest book, Roth recounts the lack of commercial success of his novels: “Von den früheren 17 sind 15 vergessen.” Living off of advances proves difficult, if not impossible, especially when the novels for which the advances are given do not sell. They are banned in Nazi Germany and difficult to obtain in bookstores beyond the borders of the Reich. Roth expresses his regret for his publishers, for they continue to publish works written in a language less widespread than Esperanto and Latin.

Franzosen und Engländer halten heute schon das Deutsch Hitlers für deutsch, 
insbesondere deshalb, weil auch die Opfer Hitlers so selten Deutsch können. ...
Daß dich und mich, guter deutscher Schriftsteller, der Deutsche nicht mehr 
versteht: Damit hatten wir uns schon abgefunden.“

The true German language, in which Roth and a few of his peers still write, has been supplanted 
by the German of Hitler, Ribbentrop and Goebbels. Hitler, Roth claims, speaks German as well 
as Stalin speaks Russian; no dictator since Julius Caesar has actually had command of the 
language in which he ruled. But Hitler has a response prepared: “durch Taten, nicht durch 
Worte,” and Napoleon “hat seine Herrschaft durch Schlachten begründet und nicht durch eine 
literarische Publikation.”

The masochistic pleasure of reading is just as disappointing as writing for Roth. In the 
world’s newspapers he finds more and more evidence of apathy and appeasement. He draws the 
distinction between the statesmen in democracies, who seem to have the time to rest on both the 
sixth and seventh days and to focus on their golf game, and tyrants, who “haben kein Weekend 
… Merkwürdig ist, daß Diktatoren nicht Golf spielen.” Citing his experience on the Russian 
Front in World War I, Roth recounts the Christmas attack which his force did not expect, 
followed by the attempted revenge attack two weeks later, for which the Russians were naturally 
prepared. “Die Diktatoren verschieben ihr Weihnachten immer um zwei Wochen. Die 
Demokraten aber feiern immer Präventiv-Weihnachten, Präventiv-Sonntage... ”

Another newspaper-related story further connects Roth’s situation to that within the Third 
Reich. He relates the story, told to him in confidence, of a German exile who resigned his post at 
a newly-founded newspaper upon his discovery that Jews worked there as well. Roth wonders 
why this individual, who follows the spirit of the Nuremberg Laws, chooses to live in Zurich
rather than Nuremberg. He is further confounded by the number of anti-Semitic Germans who choose to emigrate and take the few positions available to those actually driven into exile.

The hardship of the week’s entries wraps up with a return to Roth’s financial situation. In comparing the bill compiling his debt at the hotel and the financial statement from his publisher, he is prompted to tear out the journal entries and submit them as an article. Due to basic survival concerns, he declares himself no longer able to conceive a topic for an article and submits his personal writings “wie eine Flaschenpost…” There is an aspect of self-preservation in this entry, as writing in some way proves that a human somehow lived through these inconceivable times.

Broken into journal entries by day, the structure of this feuilleton increases the intimacy Roth affords the reader. Even if purposely written to duplicate the sense of diary entries rather than being the explicitly labeled authentic journaling Roth claims these passages to be, the personal connection to the reader through the written word is reinforced; one is granted access not to some newspaper article, but the document that the author theoretically holds dearest and most private. If no one reads this or any other writing outside the approved publications and butchered language of the Third Reich, where is an author to find motivation to write? Defense of the true German language and by extension true German culture remains a focus for Roth.

The issue raised by the concept of “true German”, as represented by the written word, deserves special attention. The language in which Roth seeks solace, defense and refuge is, by his own reckoning, dying out. The rise to power of Nazi propaganda, especially in the words of Goebbels, has pushed aside the viability of Roth’s primary weapon and means of survival. The German language cannot, apparently, represent both the ideals of Roth’s intellectual cultural tradition and the modern barbarity of the Nazis. Writing in German is writing in the language of
those he seeks to stop, a language whose reading public now receives closely monitored texts and, perhaps more detrimentally, radio broadcasts and film newsreels.

On the level of conception, the disjointedness of these unconnected yet interrelated short passages serves as its own metaphor. If language, in the hands of one who can truly connect Inhalt and Form, can remain this lucid and purposeful despite apparent dissimilarity in topic, why would one listen to the language of a tyrant, language forced into a task and bent to serve a purpose? What Roth feared in “Wahlkampf in Berlin” is closer to full realization; the written language of Roth and his peers has been further unseated by the speeches of the Nazis. The anger of “Autodafé des Geistes” remains, but seems more listless. The selection of the “Flaschenpost” metaphor is brilliant. Whether intended for the few of his contemporaries who might still be reading, for future generations of readers or to help Roth himself, writing, especially in German, has itself become as effective as a message in a bottle. He sends it out to whomever might find it as proof of literate human existence in the coming darkness.

Das Unsagbare 

Manuskript von 1938

Apparently unpublished and discovered among Roth’s papers at the Leo Baeck Institute in New York, this feuilleton presents an interesting shift in Roth’s writing. Reports of anti-Semitic cruelties in Germany and Austria provide the historical context for this entry, while Roth’s by now complete disbelief in the power of the written word to improve anything about the situation forms the organizing sentiment. The tone is again of despair, but this time with fully apocalyptic resignation to the developments in Europe. The apathy and ignorance that has empowered the Nazis makes Roth’s reporting of the facts futile, but he looses this slingshot so
that possible future generations may be aware of the *Gleichgültigkeit* and *Sinnlosigkeit* that ruled the day.

Hypocrisy in the press does not begin to cover Roth’s concerns at the opening of this feuilleton. The mainstream press has sullied true journalists through its lies and omissions, and Roth finds it harder moment by moment to record and report the unspeakable. In addition to the futility of writing against the mainstream press, Roth has begun to contend with the ineffectiveness of written language period. The “unspeakable” of the title refers to more than just the connotative meaning of the word. The horrors of Nazi rule can not be adequately put into words; language therefore no longer suffices as a means of communication. He feels nonetheless obliged to apologize for having to write and write on. The apocalyptic finality of the piece leads Roth to resign himself to the possibility that, if nothing else, his writing will demonstrate to future generations the humanity that existed up to the rise of modern barbarism under Nazi Germany: “Man muß schreiben, gerade dann, wenn man nicht mehr glaubt, durch das gedruckte Wort etwas bessern zu können.”

According to Roth, optimists might find it easy to write, pessimists to say nothing; the desperate find it difficult to write and this makes their writings all the more important. He regrets the daily radio and newspaper reports of monstrosities, but even more so the silence of these media on the bulk of the atrocities. He finds it a further atrocity that, though he is able to report these events safe from the threats, readers laugh off his reports as unbelievable “Märchen”. The realities actually reported would seem like fairy tales compared to those left out by the press. Those who continue to write and attempt to report should not be ignored; Roth asserts that the classic aphorism “Inter arma silent musae” (In war the arts are silent) no longer
applies, and the world must accept that “Inter arma clamant musae de profundis” (In war the arts cry out from the depths).

In four separate events reported by Roth, anti-Semitic violence and legislation are revealed to be far more ubiquitous in Germany and Austria than the media will admit. He commits himself to continuing reports of the true events, afraid of what it will take to make the world listen. This world, according to Roth, has become apathetic and deaf (“stumpf und taub”), suspicious of those who tell the truth and trusting of the speakers of lies. The events he reports, and many others like them, come to him nearly every day. He is aware that the duty to pass along the reports falls to him, despite the repeated pressure to compromise, to choose between the truth and lies. He knows the “Augen und Ohren der Welt” of the Wochenschau comprise nearly insurmountable competition, for they blind the living eyes and deafen the listening ears of the world. “Welch eine Welt, in der die kühnsten Phantasien Balzacs erblassen, die großartigsten Shakespeares erbleichen und in der man sich gezwungen fühlt zu erkennen, daß dieses Jahrzehnt, was seine Intenistät an höllischer Schlichtigkeit betrifft, Jahrhunderte schänden konnte...“

Roth closes this entry with yet another sad admission of reality. In one of the cases reported earlier in the feuilleton, a 72 year old Jewish citizen of Vienna was forced to climb a fire ladder carrying a hose. The SA members who abused him claimed it was a fire drill for his building. The maintenance man of the building confronted the Stormtroopers and reported himself ready to take the place of the old man, but was threatened with arrest. Roth knows there was no foreign correspondent in witness, and even worse, that even if one had been, he would not have reported it; worst of all, if it had been reported, it would have been forgotten. This brings him to his strongest point: the indifference of the world makes the cruelties of the world
seem insignificant. He worries that the only story left to tell the great-grandchildren will be of
the apathy of the time and the disasters it allowed.

In response to this very modern realization of barbarism, Roth counters with the earliest
sources available; classical and biblical references abound in this text. Seeking support from the
progenitors of his intellectual tradition, Roth focuses on the Jews of the Exodus, the abhorrence
of evil in Christianity and the wisdom of the Romans. He couples these appeals to what he
considered universal with an attack on what he sees as the universal modern situation, even
sprinkling in reference to Kant’s Enlightenment assault on Unmündigkeit. The whole work is
connected by Roth’s continued dedication to writing and the power he still accords it. The
importance of the written word remains, but its power has been diminished and corrupted.

Given his repeated reference to the ignorance of actual events in Germany and Austria, it
is fairly obvious that Roth realizes his possible audience is now at its most limited. Even worse
than the situation that produced the message in a bottle in the previous feuilleton, this series of
events leaves Roth an inheritor of the Exodus tradition. “Ich weiß, daß ich in der Wüste schreibe
– und daß wir alle in die Wüste rufen!” The reference to both the Jewish enslavement in Egypt
and John the Baptist communicates the biblical proportion of Roth’s despair. It also further
identifies him with the exiled/banned group in which he gladly counted himself in “Autodafé des
Geistes.” Even the arts call out from the depths, as Roth’s rewriting of “Inter arma silent musae”
into “Inter arma clamant musae de profundis” implies. The authorial assault on Gleichgültigkeit
in the “stumpfe, bequeme, taube Welt” recalls Kant’s “Es ist so bequem, unmündig zu sein.”
Perhaps most universal is his appeal to Christianity. The power of the word in this appeal
originates from John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the
Word was God”. The burden of the writer is intensified when he is established as the protector
of this particular “Word”. This burden connects Roth’s concern with the hypocritical media (and their willingness to lie or omit) and the knowledge of future generations. While he may not see much hope for the current situation in the near future, he fears even more for his generation’s great-grandchildren: “…als wollte sie sich lächerlicherweise darauf berufen, daß sie nicht etwa durch das Wort Gottes entstanden sei, sondern durch einen Druckfehler Satans.“ The possibility that this antithetical viewpoint could be legitimate for future generations demonstrates how much the world actually has deteriorated.

The End of the Writer and the Writing

By the point in his writing at which this last entry appeared, Joseph Roth seemed to have abandoned any hope of positive resolution in his quest against the Third Reich and all it represented. His overall tone switches to one of guilt born of ineffectiveness, apology to his peers and future generations, and condemnation of both the leaders of the National Socialists and the narrow-minded, apathetic zeitgeist which left an indifferent world powerless to stop their rise. The purpose of writing after this turn in his thinking seems to be just as much memorialization and commemoration (which are themselves their own branch of historiography) as it is accusatory. Perhaps he wanted there to be some record of writers who understood and accepted the responsibility which was innately theirs. Perhaps he wanted there to be a bridge from the intellectual cultural solidarity in which he believed and for which he fought, and the society that would develop after the Third Reich. Whatever his purpose, the connective issues between the selected writings from both his early and late production remain; that sense of constancy fits with his belief in the traditions he held dear.
VI. Themes from Selected Roth Feuilletons, or Roth the Feuilletonist

Taken together as one issue, Roth’s faith in the rational written word and the writer’s responsibility to demonstrate rationality with respect for the medium figure in all eight of the selected pieces. The origin of this power of the written word stems from the intellectual cultural tradition which Roth traces from Antiquity to his present. The process the writer should follow to execute his office can be ascertained from two chief objectives of these writings: Roth uses wit, irony and metaphor to entertain and inform, and he serves as a Gegenwartshistoriker. In addition to giving current and future scholars and writers a reference for one perspective silenced by the Third Reich and its aftereffects, his texts can be useful points of reference in rethinking scholarly priorities.

Obligation to a reading public may have served as Roth’s primary financial motivator in his writing process, but something more drove him. After the significant decline in readership (documented early by Roth in “Wahlkampf in Berlin” and corroborated by the banning of works and authors within the Third Reich and his lack of sales in “Aus dem Tagebuch eines Schriftstellers”), what kept Roth writing? His dedication to his craft, in this case particularly the feuilleton, remained, and will therefore be considered as the new primary motivator. The writer and the word were bound together for Roth. He began this relationship not so much as a writer, but as purchaser and reader of journalism in “Wahlkampf.” Absorption of the gradually debased language of the Potsdamer Platz Blätterwäldchen raised his aesthetic hackles. His care for the written word and concern for its demise inspired the verbal dismantling of propaganda tracts in 1924. Between the white noise of propaganda print media and the increasingly loud messages
from the mouths of nationalists, Roth already saw the might of the pen waning; this increased the importance of high standards in the community of authors. The vilification of his hypocritical peers in “Das Hakenkreuz auf Rügen” therefore follows as no surprise. Roth could not logically call for appreciation of language and its merits and allow his fellow journalists to pervert it through lies and omission. The responsibility of writers, especially journalists, to aspire to better than the base morals of the nationalists in Bavaria and on Rügen was, for Roth, coupled with their obligation to report violations of the republican ideals of Weimar Germany. The aspiration to the level of Émile Zola was therefore a development to be expected from the still idealistic Roth in 1928. Roth viewed Zola as the last author who used his two weapons, fame and the written word, to campaign for right and justice. Perhaps intended only to spur his peers on (citing a French author served this purpose well), Roth’s condemnation of the upright journalistic void in Weimar Germany is nonetheless vicious. He still believed that Zola could teach his peers something about fighting with the pen; unfortunately, this plan never came to fruition.

Roth’s dedication to journalistic standards and the written word did not slacken with his exile, but his optimism for their immediate effect began to fade. “Autodafé des Geistes” praised his Jewish writer peers for their dedication to both German and European culture through the written word. The list of the major authors “semitischer Herkunft”, by Roth’s admission not exhaustive, extolled the contributions in specifically text-based methods. These authors wore Roth’s metaphorical red badge of courage before other victims of the Third Reich because of their dedication to writing and pan-European culture. Roth hoped that the martyrdom of Jewish (and “true German”) writing would awaken the sensibilities of likeminded individuals in Europe and beyond, but this did not come to realization; hence Roth’s increasing despair for the plight of both writers and the written word in his last contributions in this investigation. The futility of
writing to solve immediate problems overwhelmed Roth’s contributions in both “Tagebuch” and “Unsagbare”. The power of rhetorical oratory, even in its perverted hateful use of the German language, overwhelmed the virtue of the written word as Roth feared it would. The rise of corrupt German, traced by Roth from 1924 to 1937, removed reason from the power of language and made writing an offense to be excused. It was at this point that Roth’s dedication to the position of writer and its obligations switched from hope for the present to an attempt at cautioning the future. Due to lack of solidarity among practitioners of the craft, the written word of reason and open-mindedness lost its power; with the ban on publication in the Third Reich, the Nazi government excused the writer’s responsibility to society as envisioned by Roth. This loss of audience also severed the author-created link between the intellectual culture tradition of the past and the German (and eventually European) society of the 1930s.

Tracing his self-concept and the traditions from which it developed as far back as Old Testament Israel and Classical Antiquity, Roth imbued his writings with the spirit of the intellectual literacy tradition. The claim to this tradition was furthered not only by emphasizing the positive connection between the tradition and his peers, but also in Roth’s exposure of the schism between Germany up to the nineteenth century and post-Bismarck developments. The earliest evidence of Roth’s belief in and espousal of this intercultural intellectual heritage in these writings came across in “Besuch im Rathenau Museum”. That which distinguished Rathenau from those who ended his life was his understanding of the place of the Weimar Republic in the development of culture and ideas. The harmonious co-existence of Judaism, Christianity and Enlightenment ideals within the person and policies of Rathenau allowed, if not obligated, the statesman to situate Weimar Germany in a pan-European position. The practical application of edification based in this tradition legitimated Rathenau and Roth’s beliefs;
Hermann Merkel’s belief in his own betterment simply through reading the books in the house provided at least one concrete example of societal improvement through appreciation and embrace of the tradition. The greater good represented by cultural cooperation across national borders figured even more prominently in Roth’s exile writing, as he sought in the intellectual tradition a community powerful enough to check the Nazi machine.

“Autodafé des Geistes” therefore demonstrated not only the continuity of the “europäischer Geist” tradition within the community of Jewish writers, but more importantly displayed the violation of this inheritance by the Nazis and their modern barbarism. Roth traced the inheritance of Germany’s new rulers not back through Goethe to the intellectual past, but through Hindenburg to Bismarck’s establishment of Prussian military power. (Given the quotation from Heine now engraved at the site of the book burning: “Dort, wo man Bücher verbrennt, verbrennt man am Ende auch Menschen,” Roth’s tacit reference to this passage in his writing: “Ist ein Volk, das als Staatsoberhaupt ein Standbild wählt, das niemals ein Buch gelesen hat, so weit davon entfernt, selbst die Bücher zu verbrennen?” seems eerily noteworthy.) The suspicion of Protestant tendencies and their break with the Catholic link in the cultural chain led Roth to establish Luther and the Reformation as the original spikes driven between Germany’s place in the European tradition and the Prussian.19 This break is further exploited in “Europa ist nur ohne das Dritte Reich möglich”, in which Roth specifically addressed the shared tradition which connected all European cultures other than the Prussian-influenced Third Reich. In both turning their backs on membership in the noblest of traditions and refusing to accept its practice by citizens within their borders (if not society), the Third Reich deserved exclusion from the European community. This community continued the tradition that Roth traced from Israel, Greece and Rome to the present. He carefully included both Kant’s contributions to the

Enlightenment and nineteenth century German society in his chain to further emphasize the outlier represented by Hitler’s society. The chain of Geistesgeschichte underpinned even Roth’s most pessimistic offering in this collection. The Judeo-Christian position in the development of scholarship afforded Roth the latitude to expect understanding from whatever audience may have absorbed “Das Unsagbare,” and Latin aphorisms connected Ancient Rome to those who still subscribed to the tradition espoused by Roth.

In fitting these works under the loose conception of feuilleton, the style demonstrated repeatedly by Roth provides the best evidence. If a feuilletonist is a Gegenwartshistoriker, as Herrmann and Brummack claim, then Roth fits the bill. Modern historians might consider themselves committed to objectivity in their search for facts, but must depend on archives of the past; historians of the present document that which strikes them as important. Roth’s productivity, coupled with his apparent ability to pan for informational gold in his observations of his society, mark him as a divining rod for that which would be considered “important” in hindsight. Of the eight feuilletons analyzed above, seven display explicit documentation, analysis and contextualization of historical events of Roth’s present. The limited possibility of objectivity indicated by our definition of the feuilleton notwithstanding, the very title of “Wahlkampf in Berlin” clarifies the reportage of political and societal developments in the Weimar Republic. Roth’s take on the events marks the evolution of fascism out of nationalism and Weimar society’s failure to mount an effective response. “Besuch” commemorates Rathenau’s assassination, itself a major turning point in the political development of Germany. Roth’s lament indicates his understanding of the consequences of not only the loss of Rathenau, but also the tacit acceptance of the assassination by German society. “Hakenkreuz” provides reference not only to developments on Rügen (and Bavaria, according to Roth), but also a level
of self-referentiality within German language journalism. The state of affairs reporting lends a
clearer, truer (according to Roth) documentation of the disintegration of republican ideals and the
rise of National Socialism in the Weimar Republic. The specific references to the Sacco-
Vanzetti trial and Hitler’s release from prison and the lifting of his speaking ban, among others,
might seem reducible down to critique, but they critique in a contemporary context without the
benefit of hindsight. “Émile Zola” sets those events in a development of ideology context as
well, questioning societal reaction to the events implicitly documented by Roth.

The very fact that the last four of the feuilletons were written in exile serves as its own
documentation of Roth’s history of the present. In addition to this advantage afforded modern
historians, each contribution records specific developments of the time. “Autodafé” remarks on
the Bebelplatz book burning, the appointing of Heidegger to the University of Freiburg and the
many authors banned by the Third Reich. Each of these facets of the report is compounded by
Roth’s contextualization of the events in the chronological progress and ideological regress of
German history. Roth’s belief in the efficacy of the League of Nations in “Europa ohne das
dritte Reich” demonstrated contemporary perception or hope in the organization that modern
historians know would fail. Roth passes along both firsthand and overheard accounts in both
“Tagebuch” and “Unsagbare”, documenting possible sources of investigation ignored by his
contemporary media and censored by the Third Reich. The four incidents of aggressive Nazi
policy reported in “Unsagbare” may by now be difficult to corroborate, but that does not
automatically reduce their veracity. These last two feuilletons under analysis fall under the
recently popularized categories of subaltern voices and memory studies; the extension of
Gegenwartshistoriker of the 1920s and 1930s to include cultural historian will be discussed later.
The primary distinguishing characteristic of the genre, the style of the feuilleton was inspired by Heine, followed by many and attacked by Kraus, and had already been developed by the time Joseph Roth wrote for various periodicals. This style invariably was expected to include wit, irony and metaphor, and Roth fulfills these demands as well. His ridiculing the “furious” young women in “Wahlkampf” developed out of his extended Blätterwäldchen metaphor, itself a witty spin on the urdeutsch symbolism of the early National Socialists. Roth forced honesty on the selective cultural memory of the nationalists, urging their embrace of the culture (including the good and innocent) from which they pirated and scavenged that which was convenient to their message. His tongue-in-cheek report from Rügen demonstrates his deep dissatisfaction with both his journalistic peers and the already (still?) nationalistic citizens of the island. His selection of the adjective prophylactic to describe the Baltic Sea as a barrier between Rügen and the mainland indicates that this barrier prevents republican ideals and knowledge of constitutional rule from crossing to the island.

Roth continues to demonstrate the incompleteness and hypocrisy of Nazi ideology, labeling the Nazis as the incomplete inheritors of a more varied tradition than they realized in his exile feuilletons, often taking the message of his enemy and using it against them. The conversion of German universities into barracks in “Autodafé” calls out the militaristic tradition, which itself is mocked in Roth’s repeated referral to Hitler as the low-ranking “Korporal.” Mussolini is reminded of the treachery of the last Cimbri and Teutons trusted by Romans; if the Nazis want to embrace pre-Christian Germanic tradition, then Roth will help complete the picture. As discussed above, Roth’s list of Jewish authors co-opts Nazi labeling into a positive bent. The authors named on Roth’s list of praise would be the same authors the Nazis banned, and for the exact same reasons in each case. Drawing a parallel between Goebbels and Schiller
in “Europa ohne das dritte Reich” exposes the inadequacies of the Propagandaminister, and the comparison between Hitler, Goebbels, and Göring in the modern and Hagen in the ancient reminds the reader how different the two “German” societies are. Just as important as his appropriate use of wit is Roth’s awareness of its inappropriateness in other writings. The memorial pieces “Besuch” and “Zola” deal seriously with their subjects, as do “Tagebuch” and “Unsagbare”. Metaphor still pervades these pieces (most of the religious references in “Unsagbare” relate the fate of Roth and his contemporaries to their Biblical predecessors), but without the sharp irony or wit of the less reserved pieces. The contrast between the two types of writing within one artist’s work in the genre provides more concrete evidence for his marriage of content and form.

This examination of these four themes leads to a synthesis of Roth’s concept into a paradigm for scholarly endeavors. Roth’s commitment to his craft and high expectations from those who shared the field led him to police himself and his peers. He sought not to divide the community of writers and scholars, but to bring them together across borders in cross-disciplinary critical conversation. Simultaneously, he would make sure to challenge apathy, omission and laziness among those who aspired to write, a standard still espoused in the crafting of historiography today. In his use of narrative to relate key events and analysis of the day, especially through the stylistic tendencies of the feuilleton, he sought to create a discourse which would continue the intellectual cultural tradition by bringing more people into the discussion, not by scaring them off. Appropriate application of irony, wit and metaphor amused the audience and challenged the actors or actions under investigation, while limitation of humorous structure drew attention to the gravity of other situations. Sensitivity to the balance between form and content provides a stylistic benchmark for today’s authors, especially in light of the possibility of
today’s works being read as our Gegenwartshistorie by future scholars. Joseph Roth worked within the style of the feuilleton, but the loose structure of this genre allowed him to write across the Grenzen he disliked so much. These borders, which were to him primarily artificial, were not just national, but also cultural, linguistic and disciplinary. The scholarly intellectual cultural tradition, based in classical education in application, left to scholars of today by Joseph Roth will be further examined, especially in light of the possibility of application, on the other side of the historiographical forest between his work and that of today.

VII. Historians’ Reactions? or, Roth Across Contexts

Roth’s Contemporaries

Given the work and publication ban established by the Third Reich, symbolized most vividly by the Bebelplatz book burning, and the relatively lock-step nature of Nazi “scholars,” finding evidence of contemporary intellectual reaction to Nazi seizure of power proves somewhat difficult. To place Roth in context of his contemporaries, one should turn to two contending schools of thought from his time and place. As perhaps the most (in)famous intellectual of the time, Martin Heidegger has been justifiably vilified for selling out both himself and the scholarly community to the Nazis, the very opposite of the resistance for which Roth so passionately argued. On the opposite end of the spectrum, one finds Karl Popper and his disbelief in Heidegger’s historicism. Comparison among these three thinkers confirms the existence of more than one way to disagree with Heidegger.
The values discussed above in analysis of Roth’s writings confirm his belief in the responsibility of intellectuals to carefully wield the power of the rational word, to realize their place in the continuity of the intellectual cultural tradition. Diametrically opposed to Roth’s particular take on these values stands Martin Heidegger, whose *Rektoratsrede* (1933) began his intellectual support of the Third Reich. Heidegger’s paradigm of a spiritual essence and “will to will” established a fatalist destiny for cultures, by extension eliminating the agency of individuals in the progress of history and the effectiveness of reason. The option left to individuals was to do the essential, to embrace the moment or not, and Heidegger saw the assumption of the rectorate as essential. The reduction of the university to a training ground for the expansionist German war machine comes across in the *Rektoratsrede*.

“Out of the resoluteness of the German students to stand their ground while German destiny is in its most extreme distress comes a will to the essence of the university. This will is a true will, provided that German students, through the new Student Law, place themselves under the law of their essence and thereby first define this essence. … The second bond binds to the honor and the destiny of the nation in the midst of all the other peoples. It demands the readiness, secured by knowledge and skill and tightened by discipline, to give the utmost in action. In future, this bond will encompass and penetrate the entire existence of the student as Military Service. … This battle community of teachers and students, however, will only recreate the German university into a place of spiritual legislation and establish in it the center of the most disciplined preparation for the highest service to the people in its state if teachers and students arrange their existence more simply, more unsparingly, and more frugally than all the other
members of their people. … For what is decisive in leading is not just walking ahead of others but the strength to be able to walk alone, not from obstinacy or a craving for power, but empowered by the deepest purpose and the broadest obligation. Such strength binds to what is essential, selects the best, and awakens the genuine following of those who have new courage. But we do not need to first awaken this following. German students are on the march. And whom they are seeking are those leaders through whom they want to elevate their own purpose…”20

Heidegger asserts that faculty and students can only assume power in the process if they embrace this process; students must become members of one of the three pillars of this new German society: the Labor Service, the Military Service and the Knowledge Service. Developments thus far dictate developments to follow for Heidegger.

Some Heidegger scholars have attempted to refute the thinker’s support of Nazism, but Jürgen Habermas clarifies a shift in Heidegger’s previous thought. There are similarities between Heidegger before 1933 and after, “but he adds something: the nationalistic privileging of the German fate, the conflation of the collectivistically interpreted category of ‘Dasein’ with the Dasein of the German people, and those mediating figures, the ‘guides and guardians of the German destiny,’ who can shape necessity and create the new, if only their followers keep themselves in hand.”21 Heidegger’s own words again confirm his investment in the inevitability of National Socialism. In a letter released by Habermas in his 1989 essay on the Heidegger controversy, Heidegger apparently began recruiting to his cause soon after assuming the

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rectorate: “It becomes ever more urgent to gather together the spiritual forces that can bring about what is to come. For today I close with friendly greetings. Heil Hitler. Yours, Heidegger.”

Tracing the Nazi rise as the natural, essential progression of German history sets Heidegger firmly in opposition to Roth. Ownership of the German tradition meant for Roth the tradition of Goethe, while Heidegger specifically dismissed Goethe and German Idealism. The continuation of the intellectual cultural tradition had been suggested by previous events, but was far from inevitable, hence Roth’s impassioned arguments for its continuation. Roth’s attempt at scholarly solidarity on the basis of National Socialism’s inherent devaluing of Geistesgeschichte and intercultural intellectualism suffered a major blow from Heidegger’s new position. Heidegger’s intellectual gravitas gave the Nazis a necessary scholarly legitimacy, and Heidegger’s full investment in their cause (“But we do will that our people fulfill its historical mission.”) lent further credibility to the Nazi path for German society.

Karl Popper also found Heidegger’s stance abhorrent, but for different reasons. Primarily a philosopher of science, Popper extended his discoveries in the natural sciences to the social sciences. He defined historicism as “a methodology of the social sciences that emphasises their historical character and aims at historical prediction.” Popper denied the possibility of predicting the future through study of the past, and attacked the scientific validity of social sciences. (He may not have been too far off, but more malicious than necessary; history does not need to be a pure science anymore than it needs to be purely literary.) He remained true to the rational thought process, but believed that the social sciences had lost sight of that standard;

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22 Heidegger in Habermas, 443.
23 Habermas, 440.
24 Heidegger in Neske, 11.
25 Popper, Karl. “Poverty of Historicism I” 86.
historicists’ belief in inevitability struck him as disempowering: “Another link between the historicist and the Utopianist is that both believe that their aims or ends are not a matter of choice, or of a moral decision…” 26 Popper held this belief in inevitability in the same disregard as historicism’s acceptance of subjective discoveries.

“We have, so far, assumed that the social scientist really strives to find the truth, and nothing but the truth; but the situation we have described makes plain, the historicist will point out, the difficulties of our assumption. For where interests and tendencies have such influence on the content of scientific theories and predictions, it must become most doubtful whether the extent of bias can be determined; and we need not be surprised to find that there is very little in the social sciences which resembles the objective and ideal quest for truth which we meet in physics” 27.

If a social scientific text which strove for objectivity could not meet Karl Popper’s scholarly standards, there can be little hope for Joseph Roth’s feuilletons. The “half-page truths” would no doubt have fallen far short of Popper’s goal of “the objective and ideal quest for truth,” as the feuilleton has been determined to be, if nothing else, subjective. As a counterpoint to Popper’s quest, however, one could raise Roth’s desire to move events out of the geopolitical realm and into that of human concerns. In consciously passing events through the “filtration plant” necessary to make them more generally accessible, Roth set a standard for the imparting of information, all the while maintaining the authorial and intellectual demands of his traditional foundation.

26 Popper, Karl. “Poverty of Historicism II” 126.
27 Popper “Poverty I” 90.
Born in the same empire as Roth, Popper composed most of his related scholarship while in flight from the Anschluss. His beloved scientific objectivity gave way to his own biases, especially his life experience. His fear, informed by contemporary events in World War II Europe, was that social sciences “can equally well serve, in the hands of conservative interests, to retard impending social revolutions.”

Heidegger’s complicity in Nazi power to some degree confirmed this fear, but so did the participation of leading natural scientists in, among others, the field of eugenics and racial hygiene.

In order to legitimate social sciences, Popper believed that they must be held to the same rigors as the natural sciences. The issue of subjectivity was one obstacle, as was the historicist obsession with context. “All social groups have their own traditions, their own institutions, their own ritual. Historicism claims that we must study the history of the group, its traditions and institutions, if we wish to understand and explain it as it is now, and if we wish to understand, and perhaps to foresee, its future developments.”

To accept the progress of history simply by virtue of its progress (as Popper read Heidegger’s actions in 1933) recalled the ‘Bequemlichkeit of Unmündigkeit’ addressed by Kant, and was certainly not the task of true intellectuals. Popper wished that social scientists would, to the extent possible, remove history from their study; by extension, context was not for him a necessary aspect of studying social concerns. The close readers of the New Criticism would have been proud of this claim, but not every postwar scholar was convinced of the validity of Popper’s assertion. As a 1955 book review of his *The Open Society and its Enemies* put it, “To reject these [historical considerations] and to go further and say that history has no meaning, is effectively to help those very forces of irrationalism which Dr. Popper so deplores. The denial of order and significance in human affairs is an increasingly

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28 Popper “Poverty I” 91.
29 Popper “Poverty I” 91.
fashionable attitude in reactionary circles today. If history is just a tale told to an idiot, sound and fury find their justification.”

Joseph Roth might have disagreed with Heidegger’s assertion that Nazi power represented the inevitably essential progress of German history just as Popper did, but he also appreciated the context of the events he reported. Roth’s gift of both recognizing the place of everyday and extraordinary occurrences in the progress of the intellectual cultural tradition and contextualizing those events for his audience sets him apart from Popper’s objectivity-focused, scientific agenda. Removing the context of human events leaves analysis of human events devoid of their full meaning, in a similar way to an attempt to examine Roth’s writings without some understanding of his motivations devaluing the examination.

**Beyond**

The postwar division between the focus on context and the focus on text continued to ebb and flow for decades. Three major shifts in this period will be discussed, and each, as is the case with historiography or critical theory, grew somewhat from and in response to its predecessor. The first of these came in the form of blessing and curse to the reading of Roth’s feuilletons. Hayden White set his own paradigm for reading history, asserting that historical writing’s basis in narrative (“the historical work … is: a verbal structure on the form of a narrative prose discourse”31) eliminated the possibility of reading it as fact. The effectiveness of an historian’s scholarship was no longer, according to White, based on archival research, but rather on the establishment of the appropriate emplotment paradigm to connect the material with the audience.

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30 Bernal, J.D. “Has History a Meaning?” Review of Popper’s Open Society, 169.
To make matters worse, postmodernists saw White’s challenge of historical writing and raised a challenge to history itself. In analyzing the variance across disciplines of meanings and importance, postmodernism (for our purposes) established limits on language’s applicability across disciplines. Words, as labels, did not universally ‘mean’ what they labeled. If all history was constructed, then history could never be recovered nor could it be ‘known.’ The call went up for both the deconstruction, and in more radical camps, the destruction of history. This, in turn, invoked a response from scholars who had either never accepted postmodernism or had altered their practices with some postmodern criticism in mind. The school of New Historicism refused to accept the shift to postmodernity, and instead revised the New Criticism. This revision took the text out of the vacuum of original close readings and focused on how the text shaped and was shaped by the time, place and culture in which it appeared. A new acceptance of the limits of objectivity allowed a new perspective on historiography, and post-postmodernists have finally let go of Rankean examination of *wie es eigentlich gewesen war*. The realization that knowledge is fallible offers the scholarly community a more palatable option than the self-destructive nonexistence of knowledge proffered by postmodernism.

Metahistory: *The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* broke significant ground upon its release in 1973. This work focused on White’s systematization of major philosophers of history, placing each into categories determined by his mode of communication and intended message. The analysis of history and its writing developed further with White’s *Tropics of Discourse* five years later. White reduced history to literature rather than severing the bond between history and literature, as had been done to some degree in Popper’s call for objectivity and to large extent in the ‘text-in-vacuum’ close readings of the New Criticism. By extending tropes from linguistic and literary analysis into historical criticism, he asserted that
historical texts were, in fact, narratives composed with a style appropriate to their intent. He developed a system of interrelation among four major tropes (metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony) and their complements within aesthetic, epistemological and ethical elements, or modes of emplotment, argument and ideological implication. In White’s model, analysis of the written text reveals more about the history than the reported events. The confounding aspect (in this instance) of White’s argument, for those opposed to literary criticism in historiography, is that certain sections of it make perfect sense despite the density of the writing (he is no feuilletonist), and much of his dedication to the study of historiography is praiseworthy.

For White, “understanding is a process of rendering the unfamiliar… familiar; of removing it from the domain of things felt to be ‘exotic’ and unclassified into one or another domain of experience encoded adequately enough to be felt to be humanly useful, nonthreatening, or simply known by association.”32 Roth certainly would agree with this concept, as he moved issues from above the line to the spaces below it. Feuilletonistic writing by definition increased accessibility, which promoted an understanding not achievable above the line. This important contribution to general understanding, in turn, legitimizes Roth’s work as the Hauptmahlzeit which he labeled it. In appealing to his audience, “the historian must draw upon a fund of culturally provided mythoi in order to constitute the facts as figuring in a story of a particular kind, just as he must appeal to that same fund of mythoi in the minds of his readers to endow his account of the past with the odor of meaning or significance”33 The underpinnings of both the Judeo-Christian belief and cultural system and pre-Christian Germanic self-concept find their way into Roth’s writing, often founding some of his most convincing arguments. The huge breadth of the scholarship covered by White nearly guarantees the applicability of his analysis to

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33 White Tropics, 60.
any historical, fact-asserting text, including journalism. The benefit of examining Roth’s feuilletons is their distinct occupation of a space between journalism and literature. Roth’s embrace of both genres, when coupled with his role as Gegenwartshistoriker, anticipates in practice what White will later theorize. Further discussion of this relationship will follow in the conclusion to this argument, but three more paradigm shifts must first be discussed.

Hayden White predicted (without subscribing to any degree of historicism) to some extent the course of thought following the linguistic turn, its focus on word-labels and their inadequacy in communicating concepts. The conclusion of Tropics of Discourse announces the possibility of his analysis leading to further development in what he calls the Absurdist school. If the Absurdist reduce language to arbitrary signals, the somewhat logical progression would lead to the question, “Why should reading matter?” Coupled with White’s assertion that historical meaning in contingent on the language in which it is written, this would lead to assertions such as those of Keith Jenkins.

The rise of the many guises of postmodern theory challenged, among so many other things, the inherent value of history. Postmodernism, as it will be viewed in this examination, tears down the illusory structures which have no basis in verifiable knowledge. According to this form of inquest, if history is only a construction, it must therefore be artificial. In application, Hayden White’s narrativism is turned on the discipline of history, exposing it as ‘fictive’. Keith Jenkins, especially in his Why History? Ethics and Postmodernity (1999), attacks the history he sees in practice as self-empowering and therefore devoid of import. History according to Jenkins has no “privileged access to the past, because the past exists only as history constructs it as such.” He favors the “cross-discursive” nature of postmodernists, and

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34 White Tropics, 282.
35 Jenkins quoted in Anchor, “How to Kick…”, 104.
rails against the establishment for its unwillingness to accept new challenges to their, well, establishment.

It is Jenkins’s reading of Hayden White which pushes postmodern further beyond the tenable. White’s system of charting the emplotment based on tropes could be viewed as analyzing a text for its marriage of Form and Inhalt, and to that extent might apply to reading of the matching evident in Roth’s feuilletons. Extending narrativism to label history as totally invalid was not White’s intent; if nothing else, White saw history as a prime opportunity to examine the practice of literary technique over time. In the closing chapters of *Tropics of Discourse* White traces the development of ideas from Vico to Croce, and his work as a whole can be read just as easily as a historiography of the philosophy of history. Proponents of both New Historicism and internal realism practice a much more careful study of history, and in both cases appreciate the narrative aspects of history without stripping away its historical value.

Stephen Greenblatt’s research into Shakespeare and Renaissance literature led to his inadvertent founding of New Historicism in the early 1980s. In nearly direct response to New Criticism, Greenblatt’s work purposely situated the text within its context. “It was part of a generational, somewhat impatient, interaction dating back to the Seventies and Eighties. This impatience was rather characteristic of the way the wheel turns. People (and I) just wanted to do things in a different way than our elders had done them. I wasn’t looking forward to doing anything, in particular, except trying to figure out how to open the windows—as I felt them to be—and let some air in.”36 Greenblatt’s peers became “opposed to the view that the study of literature should be done independently of social and political contexts. Instead, these historians

believe literature is part of the historical process…” 37 The validation of historical study in literary studies led in turn to literary study in historiography. This was not, however, the reductive conflation of the two espoused by Hayden White. The historiographical linguistic turn of Hayden White, which eventually resulted in some cases in destruction of history, never happened in the world of New Historicism, and proponents of this school have thus not reached the resultant postmodern, post-historical state specific to the evolution of White’s theories. Nor does the New Historicism bear the same burdens of inevitability borne by ‘old’ historicism. “Few historians have ever been pure historicists; few have argued that there are no universal standards of behavior, else how could they have condemned the actions of Adolf Hitler? Most historians, if pressed, would admit to a kind of moderate or middle-of-the-road historicism…that the best explanation for societies each being different was their historical experience.” 38 Their literature-based interdisciplinarity finds support from across the aisle in the historiographical trend of internal realism.

In response to both New Criticism and postmodern deconstruction, internal realists such as Hilary Putnam and Chris Lorenz assert that current scholars of history are no longer obsessed with the Rankean search for ‘wie es eigentlich gewesen war’, that they do not expect definitively accurate descriptions of the past. As Robert Anchor points out in response to Jenkins: “historians no longer operate with this notion [of absolute objectivity], and … postmodernists criticize them for failing to produce what they no longer claim to produce.” 39 Internal realists accept the ‘truth’ put forth in an historical work by studying the cultural and societal norms in which it can be held to be ‘truth’. As a response to postmodernism, Chris Lorenz asserts that

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38 Hoover 358.
39 Anchor „How to Kick...“108.
internal realism challenges its antithetical predecessor: “From the correct insight that no certain knowledge is possible, postmodernism draws the unjustified conclusion that no knowledge at all is possible (instead of the correct conclusion that all knowledge is fallible).”

Hayden White established the period of the founding of ‘fact’-based history as the early nineteenth century; it was objectivity-based history established primarily in opposition to the concept of ‘fancy’.

The unfair burden put on history at this turn was that of fact, as opposed to the lack of a burden on the fictional realm of literature. Having finally moved past this absurd requirement, historians in the internal realism school no longer expect one authoritative version of the facts; “what we have are better and worse versions; and that is objectivity.”

The implications of New Historicism and internal realism for a reading of Roth’s feuilletons, as well as the support lent to each approach by the feuilletons themselves, become even clearer when situated in the realm of cultural history and culture studies. In a seminal call for some sort of definition of this interdisciplinary scholarship, the New German Critique compiled the papers of a 1994 conference on cultural history at Harvard University. The editors of the journal realized the difficulty of legitimating the amorphous and rapidly expanding field.

“One major reason why cultural history is so resistant to standardization is because it is caught in the no-man's-land between interpretation and causal explanation, between the humanities and "science" in the Anglo-American sense.”

Most of the work by the scholars involved looked back to Weimar Germany, Roth’s milieu, as a source for interdisciplinary study. The zeitgeist in interwar Germany had already espoused the ideals of cultural history and its interdisciplinarity,

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41 White Tropics 124.
42 Hilary Putnam, The Many Faces of Realism (LaSalle: Open Court, 1987), 77. cited in Anchor, “How to Kick…”
but this cooperation among scholars had been lost in the disciplinary fragmentation of the postwar period. The journal supported a re-establishment of cooperative balance between scholarly fields, but cautioned those who wished to completely blur disciplinary lines. “In the enthusiasm about crossing disciplinary thresholds, participants frequently forget to fully account for the position from which these crossings began…practices will vary from the archival research of the historian … to the textual or iconological criticism of the literary critic…”

The varied contributions to the symposium and journal investigated the realizations of interdisciplinarity in German cultural history. The long established sense of cultural history in the work of Warburg and Benjamin was captured in Benjamin’s desire to “promote an analysis of the work of art which recognizes it in an integral expression of the religious, metaphysical, political and economic tendencies of an epoch which can in no way be limited in terms of subject areas.” In striking a methodological balance between the broad scope of Norbert Elias and the detail orientation of Peter Duerr, Helmut Lethen invoked the balance of Kracauer’s pendulum, which valued the

“antagonism between the two models of cultural history, those on the one hand, which reduce the complexity of phenomena in order to combine long term diagnoses with a horizon for the possibility of action, and, on the other hand, micro-histories, which attempt to enmesh themselves in the darkness of life. Both are necessary. It would be wonderful if that were made to be possible without the poetization of ‘darkness’ and without the overdetermination of the macro-models.

45 Walter Benjamin cited in Michael Diers “Warburg and the Warburgian Tradition of Cultural History” New German Critique 60.
The medium of writing enables this shifting of perception between construction and the dark, reverse side of the cognitive mirror.”

In a realization of the inadequacy of contemporary theory and methodology to fully grasp such a vast expanse of scholarship, Peter Jelavich spoke in support of cross-disciplinary cooperation. “One could reply that there are appropriate sub-specialties to deal with these issues (e.g. respectively, [psycho-]biography, political history, sociology of culture). My guess is, though, that if the contradictions and paradoxes in those fields are anything like the ones I increasingly see in my own areas of specialization, then we are facing a historical equation that is bursting at the seams.”

Betokening the constant give and take necessary when scholars of various disciplinary and theoretical orientations come together, the emphasis of cultural history and culture studies is a constant balancing act. “The methodological point is not to find a happy medium where the pendulum comes to a standstill, but to sustain the tension between the two approaches by keeping them in a relation of supplementarity.”

Far from homogenous, this interdisciplinary call to arms echoes the emphases of internal realism and New Historicism. Scholars working in cooperation that is not always harmonious and harmony that is not purely cooperative set a standard based on a paradigm asserted long before its modern realization, and a standard that this author fully embraces. Joseph Roth’s feuilletons serve today’s readers as both a paradigm for writing and intellectual interchange, and material to be analyzed under the same cross-disciplinary standard

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46 Lethen “Kracauer’s Pendulum” New German Critique 45.
47 Jelavich 85.
48 Czaplicka 11.
VIII. A New Old Paradigm for Scholarship

Joseph Roth felt himself an observer, aficionado and member of the intellectual cultural tradition. His feuilletons demonstrate his pan-European, interdisciplinary understanding of the world, influenced primarily by his multifaceted origins and career, development in the multiethnic Habsburg Empire, as well as his contemporary connection with the scholars of the Weimar period across national borders. His ability to trace and continue the intellectual tradition from Judaism and Classical Antiquity, through Christianity and the Renaissance, and over the 18th and 19th centuries allowed him to focus on the fatally problematic issues of his day yet maintain the perspective provided by understanding the place of it all in history, filling to some degree both Elias’s broad-scoped translation of the great to the understandable and Duerr’s application of detail-oriented microhistory. His belief in individual and collective agency enabled through open literate discourse flew in the face of the inexorability of historical movements espoused by his less committed peers. Keen observation of his present was the foundational touchstone of his journalistic writing, and it is this resultant chronicle that adds to his value to current and future scholars.

In concluding this argument, the relationship between Roth’s feuilletons and the return to cultural history must be crystallized. This relationship is symbiotic, as the reading of the feuilletons benefits interdisciplinary scholarship and interdisciplinary reading lends greater understanding and import to the feuilletons. The initial focus will be on the lessons Roth imparted on current scholars through the selected feuilletons.

The position of the feuilleton in between literature and journalism frees it from the genre constraints of either type of writing. The stylistic conventions of the in-between required the
author to compose his work in a personal, often *Ich-Erzähler* format. In the eight feuilletons examined in this study, Roth never swerves from this course; whether documenting small journeys within Germany, remarking on permanent travel to Paris or opening his personal journal to the reader, Roth maintains his position of narrator within the documentation. Even in his most practical piece (“Europa ist nur ohne das dritte Reich möglich”), Roth identifies his personal stance alongside and concurrent with his prescription for change. This personal connection to the author continues in Roth’s obvious willingness to forego objectivity, even sometimes conflating or altering verifiable facts. This may not serve as the strongest example for current scholars, but speaks to the acceptance of subjectivity. His entertainment value in translating the events above the line to the readership below it rested on his adoption of wit, irony and metaphor. Without exception in these examples, Roth unleashed acerbic wit when appropriate, fashioned ironic twists on hypocritical policies within the rising Nazi party and Third Reich, and communicated the import of major ideas, event and persons through metaphors humorous when appropriate (exposure of nationalist ignorance) and solemn when necessary (the memorialization of Rathenau). This balance of *Inhalt* and *Form* demonstrates an understanding of both sometimes necessary propriety and the constant artistic value of language. His narration of the events of his time left a record of significant happenings in German, European and world history, and he communicated their immediate and longer term import. The specific value of each of these aspects of Roth’s writing and scholarship to modern scholars can be further clarified.

Roth’s feuilletons provide a ready source of both information and technique for interdisciplinary scholars. In the realm of literary scholarship, he documented the fall of the written word. He demonstrated effective use of language outside of genre convention, but
without losing sight of the necessity of fitting Form to Inhalt and vice versa. As a feuilletonist who balanced literature and journalism, Roth remained free of the captivity into which White banishes the historian who sought to avoid fictive elements (“…historians of the nineteenth century … were captives of the illusion that one could write history without employing any fictional elements whatsoever.”). His use of narrative structure may have been inherent in both the genres of literature and journalism, but Roth’s writing also elevates him to the position of Gegenwartshistoriker. If indeed “…the historian has an obligation … to preserve the memory of the past, and … the historian can find a common meaning in the text of discourse itself that would allow all to judge,” then Roth must be counted among the ranks of historians. His contextualization of events assists any New Historicist, giving that scholar various points of departure for the closer study of both Roth’s writings and the society in which they were recorded. Roth’s writings also serve as a model for New Historicist essays, assessed to appear in “strikingly crafted and scholarly form.” The daily examination of public culture inherent in the feuilleton as described by Dianina makes Roth’s writing valuable; interdisciplinary study as laid out by the New German Critique asserts that “especially common objects of everyday use, the residues of a former present, saved from history in museums and other collections provide a key to the historicity of everyday life, the sphere of culture which has most often been left in the dark by the grand narratives of cultural history.” On a more general level, Roth’s own and the feuilleton’s specific fluidity in structure allows the give and take necessary to realize the patience and acceptance of Kracauer’s pendulum; the balance between the grandiose and the meticulous possible through writing is nearly a given in the balance of the feuilleton. His writing remains

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49 White Tropics 124.
50 Hoover 355.
51 Veeser “Re-Membering a Deformed Past: (New) New Historicism” 5
52 Czaplicka 16.
both a product of history and history itself, and interdisciplinary study of the feuilletons not only seems appropriate due to their existence across genres, but can realize Roth’s writing as a work of history as well as a work of art.53

The schools of New Historicism and internal realism seem most well suited to illuminate Roth and his writings. Interdisciplinary scholarship can appreciate the intersection of genre and discipline, without the precedent bias towards divorcing text from context and eliminating the historical value of narrative. As daily remarks on culture and society, Roth’s feuilletons demand to be taken in context of their era of creation and New Historicism answers that demand. This context necessarily includes the life of the writer, and Greenblatt himself encourages study of the artist as much as the art: “What you should actually think about is why the lives of writers actually matter to people, and to burrow in there and try to capture that sense of what’s going on. That’s what I felt.”54 The inherent subjectivity of the feuilleton would have continued to eliminate it from consideration as history, had internal realism not woken from the Rankean slumber and postmodern nightmare of the quixotic quest for ‘fact’-based objectivity. Greenblatt again speaks as if directly to the case of Roth, “You don’t have to think that there’s a straight logic of absolute truth – between using your imagination on the one hand, and being a historian on the other.”55 The sheer possible scope of the feuilleton requires for its understanding representatives from multiple disciplines in the current state of academic specialization. Culture studies seeks to return to the interactively critical, if not always cordial, intellectual spirit of the Weimar period; while the claim that this spirit alone might better inform reading of Roth might be off-base, the return to cooperative efforts of scholars across disciplines certainly will.

53 Czaplicka 15.
54 Greenblatt Interview Paradigm
55 Greenblatt Interview Paradigm
The impetus for this now nearly complete project was curiosity about how these writings could have been passed over in previous study, as well how fellow graduate students could not connect to the all-encompassing synthesizing appeal of the writing. Upon further investigation of the fate of Roth’s writings after his exile and death, as well as after the war, I discovered that the scholarly community of that period would not have been ready for the genre-bending, interdisciplinary nature of his work. The multifaceted, Geistesgeschichte nature of Roth’s beliefs and writings needed to wait for a group of scholars ready to accept text within context, the melding of contrasting types of writing, and the viability of non-absolute objectivity in history. With the advent of New Historicism, internal realism, and the cultural studies which embrace both, there once again exists that necessary group of scholars. As examined the New German Critique, the necessary paradigm for interdisciplinary studies had existed in the Geistesgeschichte tradition of select Weimar intellectuals and can once again become relevant. Joseph Roth’s feuilletons and all that they entail are hereby offered as inspiration for this reclamation project, proof of the earlier paradigm, and material for closer study within the practice of interdisciplinary study. In the title of her essay on Roth and his journalism, Helen Chambers labels his work “signs of the times.” It is now time to once again learn how to read these signs and gain from the intellectual tradition they offer.
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