

THE LIFE AND WORK OF JOSEPH ROTH AND THE CRISIS OF TRIPARTITE IDENTITY

Dominika Rank

(Ukrainian Catholic University, Lviv)

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Abstract: The author attempts to analyze the life and creative work of Joseph Roth within the functioning and crisis of tripartite identity and to construct an oriental ghetto image in his works as a reaction to the social stigmatization of the writer's Jewish identity.

Tripartite identity, the phenomenon which was investigated by Marsha Rozenblit, was spread among Austrian Jews and designated identity in which the Jews of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy were Austrian by political loyalty, German or Czech or Polish by cultural affiliation and Jewish in an ethnic sense. This means that Joseph Roth, like many other representatives of the middle city class of Jewish population of the empire, felt comfortable as an Austrian, Jew and German at the same time.

Functioning of tripartite identity was possible only in the context of the liberal supranational Austrian-Hungarian Empire. The city of Brody, where the future writer was born, owing to the domination of the Jewish people and their integration in German culture and the Austrian political system, was the last favorable environment in Galicia for the formation of tripartite identity. The growth of nationalism, downfall of the empire, and development of anti-Semitism and Nazism resulted in the fact that Joseph Roth and the other Jews, who identified their civil belonging to the Habsburg monarchy and were representatives of the German culture, felt a crisis of identity. This was characterized by the feeling of connection to a non-existent state – the Austrian empire – as well as the new political system's denial of the right of a Jew to represent the German culture and, above all, social stigmatization of Jewish religious identity. Religious and ethnic Jewish identity, which had to belong to the private sphere according to the principles of liberalism, was perceived as a central negative characteristic of a person – a stigma.

The nostalgia for the lost world, struggle with Nazism and anti-Semitism and reaction to the Jewish identity as a stigma created the special fictitious oriental world of Joseph Roth's Volhynian and Galician shtetl. Its main features were isolation, being beyond space and time, the principal "difference" of its residents and their spiritual and intellectual superiority over what were in the terms of everyday conditions more civilized western adherents.

Joseph Roth, son of an Austrian officer, was born in the small town of Schwabendorf in 1894.¹ In 1916 he enlisted as a volunteer for the *Landwehr*,² where he rose to the rank of lieutenant. Roth received a Silver Cross of Merit – the Military Merit Cross of Charles I, for his loyal service on the Eastern Front in 1917-1918.³ He spent six months in Russian captivity, and afterwards two months as a soldier of the Russian Army.⁴

This is only one of the numerous versions of the autobiography of the future author of the one of the manifest works on the destiny of the Eastern European Jews, the very Galician Jew, Joseph Roth. In the course of his life, the writer passed himself off as the son of an Austrian officer or Viennese official, and even an Austrian count.⁵ He did not parade his Jewish origins and his birth in what was at that time the provincial town of Brody in Eastern Galicia, and for a long time the Jewish topic itself did not feature in his works. Roth's Jewish identity belonged to the private, and not public sphere according to the liberal principles of the society of the empire of that time. However, an Austrian political identity had a public expression and was central in the writer's personal representation. Roth's creative work itself belongs to the treasures of the German classics, and therefore his belonging to German culture needs no proof. Marsha Rozenblit called the combination of German, Austrian and Jewish identities a tripartite identity. This term defines the type of identity in which the Jews of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy were Austrian by political loyalty, German, Czech or Polish by cultural affiliation and Jewish in an ethnic and religious sense.⁶ This means that Joseph Roth, like many other urban middle-class representatives of the empire's Jewish population, felt comfortable as an Austrian, Jew and German at the same time.

The tripartite identity could function only in the terms of the liberal supranational Austrian-Hungarian Empire. All Jewish citizens of the Austrian monarchy could simultaneously practice Judaism, speak Czech, Polish or German and consider themselves patriots of the Habsburg Empire. The development of a nationalist ideology, with its demand of loyalty only to one nation, in political and cultural dimensions, became the first challenge to the liberal tripartite identity. The downfall of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire and the constant growth of anti-Semitism and Nazism led to the final crisis and disappearance of this phenomenon. At the same time, the society began to object to the right of Jews to represent German culture; an Austrian political imperial identity became impossible due to the disappearance of the empire itself, and a Jewish religious and political identity was interpreted as a social stigma. Roth's creative work is a certain reaction to the crisis of tripartite identity and social stigmatization of Jews in 1930s. The formation of a specific image of a Galician Jew as a representative of an oriental ghetto,

¹ Wilhelm von Sternburg, one of Joseph Roth's biographers, gives other quotations from Roth in which he describes a different father – an Austrian official (see Sternburg 2009: 27). Joseph Roth's real father, Nachum Roth, was a grain merchant, who left his wife Maria Roth (Grübel) before their son was born: Lunzer 2009: 27.

² *Die kaiserlich-königliche Landwehr* (the Austrian Imperial-Royal Army) – a type of armed forces of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, which operated from 1868 till 1918.

³ *Karl-Truppenkreuz* – a military award established for military merits on 13 December 1916 by Emperor Charles I.

⁴ Roth 1970: 240.

⁵ Cziffra 2006: 11.

⁶ Rozenblit 2001: 4.

as an “other,” is in his works both an expression of nostalgia for the lost world of the liberal monarchy and a construction of the Jewish ghetto as Utopia, as a counterbalance to the stronger hostility of interwar Europe.

This article is an attempt to analyze the life and creative work of Joseph Roth within the functioning and crisis of tripartite identity and the construction of an oriental ghetto image in his works as a reaction to the social stigmatization of the writer’s Jewish identity.

The formation and functioning of tripartite identity in Brody

At the end of the 19th century, Eastern Galicia was under Polish influence, but Joseph Roth’s home town Brody – against the background of the total Polonization of the region – was a fortress of German culture and Austria’s central political position. A variety of factors made the city exceptional in comparison with Galicia as a whole. In Brody, according to existing statistical data, the Jewish population of the city in the 1778-1921 period was between 7,191 and 17,627 people, whereas the Christian population in the same period numbered from 2,020 to 5,867.⁷ This means that the Jewish population was over three times the size of the Christian one. Yet it was not the population structure that made Brody an islet of German culture in Galicia, but the lasting traditions of the Haskalah, which was active in the town until the end of the 19th century. The last maskil, Joshua Herschel Schorr, died in 1895.⁸

Brody was one of the centers of Haskalah in Galicia until the middle of the 19th century; many outstanding Jewish enlighteners who were economically supported by the Jewish leadership lived in the city.⁹ Representatives of urban Jewish intellectual circles merited acknowledgment in the whole empire as talented writers, journalists and scientists.¹⁰ The representative from Brody, Mayer Kallir, was the last one in the Galician Sejm to remain loyal to the Austrian liberal centrist circles and not take the side of the Polish national party.¹¹ For a long time, the city struggled with the School Council of Galicia for the right to conduct teaching in educational establishments of the city in the German language, which with the exception of the city’s gymnasium was not implemented.¹² It was therefore a peculiar fortress of liberal enlightened tradition, and Joseph Roth was its direct heir.

Joseph Roth grew up in the house of his grandfather Yehiel Grübel, an adherent of the Jewish Enlightenment and an educated Jew who spoke German to his family and

⁷ Kuzmany 2011: 345.

⁸ Feiner 2004: 215.

⁹ Israel from Zamostia, who lived in Brody for a time (1752-1772), was a teacher of none other than the official founder of the Haskalah movement, Moses Mendelssohn. At the beginning of the 19th century, such famous maskils as Mendel Lapin, Satanover, Isaak Baer Levinsohn, Jacob Samuel Byk, Joseph Perl, Isaak Erter and Nachman Krochmal were acting in the city, cf. Mahler 1985: 32.

¹⁰ Writers, journalists, literary critics: Joseph Erlich, Leo Herzberg-Fränkell, Hermann Menkes, folklorist and philologist Dr. Alfred Landau and others.

¹¹ Shanes 2012: 287.

¹² Andlauer 2001: 100.

inclined them towards German culture. It is important to point out that in spite of the close relations of Jewish intellectuals of the city with the German culture, there was no German community in the city. Austrian officials were mainly sent from the Czech lands. The peculiarity of the tripartite identity functioning in Brody was that the cultural identity was not formed in contact with the local community (Polish people were secondary to Jews in terms of number in Brody), but had an exclusively remote character.

The prosperity of the ideology of liberalism in the 1870s created the most favorable conditions for the formation of tripartite identity. Jewish religious and ethnic identity became part of the exclusively private sphere of life, whereas cultural and political identities became more public. The example of the functioning of tripartite identity, which demonstrates the aforesaid tendency, was the resolution of Lviv's "Shomer Israel" Jewish Liberal Society in 1873. An example of the absolutization of liberalism is one of the discussions in the society about the name of the election committee for the election company to the Galician Sejm. The members' views differed concerning the word *Jewish* in the name of the committee:

At the present time in our camp there are louder voices sounding and claiming that by adding the word "Jewish" to the name, we will declare the confessional character of the election committee, which contradicts the principle of liberalism in the opinion of some of our members. We reply to this: in contrast to the epithet "Catholic," which expresses only religious belonging, the term "Jewish" has a different meaning. Though, unfortunately, it cannot be accepted in Polish and Catholic minds that the term "Jewish community" means the same as a Catholic one, only with confession nuances; a politically separate, socially lower caste is represented instead, members of which besides being negligible, also belong to a different belief.¹³

Jewry and Catholicism only differed in confessional nuances for the members of this society; such a concept gave the feeling of a wide cultural space, not restricted by cultural, ethnic or religious limits. Liberalism did not require a clear determination of one's cultural, religious or ethno-confessional belonging, but left it exclusively within the private sphere. And Joseph Roth believed that his origins were unimportant for his further life and successful career.

In the gymnasium named after Crown Prince Rudolph, the cradle of the city's maskils, Roth was a successful pupil, especially in learning German language and literature. His German teacher was Max Landau, a recognized Germanist and literary critic.¹⁴ Landau encouraged Roth to use German-language literature, and read the first literary works of the young writer. However, we must stress that Joseph Roth's gymnasium graduation class in 1912 was the last one to take the maturity examination in German; the following year, the gymnasium – the last stronghold of German culture – changed to the Polish language completely.

¹³ Der Israelit 1873.

¹⁴ Max Landau was born in 1837 in Brody; after finishing school he travelled around Italy, France, Germany, sending his correspondence to a range of well-known newspapers and magazines: *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Wiener Zeitung*, *Deutsche Presse*. His works in the field of Italian literary studies included *Die Quellen der Dekameron* (1869) and *Die Italienische Literatur am österreichischen Hofe* (1879). He received the degree of Philosophiae Doctor. Landau returned to Brody at the end of 1880s and taught in a local gymnasium. He died in 1918 in Vienna, cf. Blumesberger et al. 2002: 777. Memoirs about Landau were also left by his nephew, the historian Artur Goldman, cf. Rathkolb 2013: 124.

Roth was born at the time when Austrian liberalism, centralism and the general cultural and political influence of Vienna began losing its influence in Eastern Galicia, yielding to the Polish cultural, political and nationalist influence. German culture and Austrian liberal centralism in Brody existed in a closed environment, and were gradually superseded by a more active and emotional national movement – Polish and Jewish. Roth felt these changes in the gymnasium; the national circles of the gymnasium youth lived with new dreams which were strange to a young Jew deeply assimilated in German culture. Roth repeatedly emphasized his loneliness in the letters to his cousin.¹⁵

After finishing the gymnasium in 1913, Roth spent one semester studying at the University in Lviv, and in September of that year he entered the department of Germanic philology at Vienna University. In Brody, Lviv and Vienna, Roth attempted to remain neutral, distancing himself from the increasing struggle of different national groups. In Vienna, university conflicts between German nationalists and Jewish students were everyday occurrences. Roth's friend, the writer Soma Morgenstern, recollects that when he and a group of Jewish students were preparing for the usual conflict or, to be more exact, usual beating, he saw Roth dressed as a count, with a walking stick and monocle, watching the events. One more acquaintance of Roth's was in that group – Leon Roth (by coincidence they had the same surnames) – and Joseph tried to dissuade the pale and thin Leon from taking part in the fight by saying, "Leon, you are also neutral! The Roths have never been fighters!" He heard the answer, "I am not neutral at all! Yes, I am armless and I know I am a bad fighter, but Jews are being beaten here, so I will be with my coreligionists!" Joseph laughed and said, "We Roths are weak by nature and should stay out of the fight. I am going to the library."¹⁶

Roth wanted to be as far as possible not only from the fight, but also from his own origin; the tragic situation, shame and coquetry are mixed in his recollections of that part of his life.

Roth's friend Geza von Chiffra describes a conversation they had in 1925 in his memoirs:

One day Roth told me:

– My father was an Austrian official. A thoughtless villain who abandoned my pregnant mother. She was Jewish. But let this remain between us.

– You mean the story about your father?

– No, about my Jewish mother...¹⁷

Roth himself made an effort to emphasize his belonging to Austrian old-fashioned aristocracy rather than Galician Jews with his manners, style of behavior. The biggest compliment for him was if a waiter or porter mistook him for a count. For example, a porter from Hotel Habsburg in Berlin thought that Roth was a representative of a dynasty.¹⁸ At the same time, his middle name, Moses, in fact disappeared, Roth did not use it, though in his university documents the full form remains – Joseph Moses Roth.¹⁹

¹⁵ An Resia und Paula Crübel: Roth 1970: 25.

¹⁶ Morgenstern 2008: 9.

¹⁷ Cziffra 2006: 11.

¹⁸ Ibid.: 10.

¹⁹ Fuchs 1999: 81.

The decay of the tripartite identity

The development of nationalism in the Habsburg monarchy was the first factor to endanger tripartite identity. Unlike liberalism, nationalism demands total loyalty only to one national culture, state and language. Cultural identity for nationalism, as well as state and national identity, shall exist within one nation – Polish, Czech, Ukrainian or German. After formation of the autonomy in Galicia in 1867, with the expansion of Polish influences at the political and cultural or educational levels, Jews were given the opportunity to choose between tripartite identity (Austrian as a citizen, Jew and Polish or German in cultural affiliations) and double identity (Jewish religiously and Polish culturally, politically and nationally). Zionism also required homogeneous identity – a single national language, religion, authority. Israel Bartal convincingly demonstrates that Zionism put an end to the Jewish tradition of bilingualism when Jews had a sacral and a spoken language, having changed these two languages for a single one, both religious and spoken.²⁰

World War I became the highest and last manifestation of tripartite identity. The Jews who volunteered for the Austrian army deemed it their public duty. Even among Jewish Zionists Austrian political identity was more important than national.²¹ Therefore, Zionists as well as liberal Jews volunteered for the Austrian army. Joseph Roth also volunteered in 1916. He spent most of the war in Vienna and only a few months as a correspondent of a martial newspaper on the Eastern front. His first newspaper paragraphs remained from those times:

I knew both of them – the hunter and his dog. I used to meet them in the woods quite often. They always stayed devotedly together. They were inseparable friends. And there I was walking on the Polish battlefield. Walking past thousands of corpses. And I recognized the hunter. He was lying dead.
His dog is hunting in the woods. It knows nothing about the Motherland and the death of the Hero. It is looking for its master...²²

The downfall of the monarchy was a bigger trauma for Roth than the war itself. The death of Franz Joseph I, the downfall of the empire and the constantly growing levels of anti-Semitism only accentuated the feeling of belonging to a super-national empire.²³ After 1918, liberal Jews' identity on the territory of the former Austrian-Hungarian monarchy marked the connection with the non-existing state. And construction of a new political identification became complicated by anti-Semitism in other national groups –

²⁰ Bartal 1993: 141.

²¹ For more about the participation of Zionists in WWI, cf. Rozenblit 2001, 61. In Brody the leader of the local Zionists, historian Nathan Michael Gelber, published his very patriotic speech with the appeal to protect the motherland and dynasty, cf. *Die Beschreibung der Feierlichkeiten des 1916 in Namenstages des Kaisers in Brody am 4.10.1916 durch die Juden*, n.d.

²² Roth 1989: 24.

²³ Till the end of his life Roth attempted not only to save the Austrian Empire in his works, but also to regenerate it in the real world of great political events at the end of 1930s. Facing the threat of the Anschluss of Austria, Roth travelled from Paris to Vienna with the more than elusive aim to call for a change in the governing regime and endow Otto Habsburg with the power to restore the monarchy. The writer considerably overestimated his influence; he was only admitted to the secretary of the Viennese police commissariat, who advised him to leave Vienna immediately for his own safety. Cf. Lunzer 2009: 261.

Polish, German, and Ukrainian. The coexistence of tripartite identity was possible only in the system of dominance of liberalism. The decline of liberalism and development of nationalism with its demand for monoculture – political, religious and linguistic – made the functioning of tripartite identity impossible. Norbert Elias describes the identity crisis as a loss of relations between “I” and belonging to “we,” the feeling of connection with a certain group.²⁴ In this case, the large “us” group, the citizens of the Austrian Empire, disappeared; this was Roth’s reference group of identification. Correspondingly, realization of a political identity as a citizen of the Austrian Empire was physically impossible. The second component of tripartite identity, German cultural identity, was becoming more problematic for its carriers from year to year. Aggressive nationalism considered Jews as a separate strange group who did not have the right to represent German culture on its own.

The last component of tripartite identity, Jewish religious identity, also underwent substantial changes. *Nolens volens*, it developed from the private sphere to the public one.

Joseph Roth’s further creative work develops from this crisis. In contrast to his companions, writers of the same Jewish origin – József Wittlin, Soma Morgenstern, and Stefan Zweig – Roth managed to become neither Polish nor German. His attempt to acquire Austrian citizenship was also problematic because Roth had to be a citizen of Poland owing to his place of birth. He insistently and consistently continued to live as a citizen of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy. What did not really exist he created in his works – *Radetzky March*, *The Bust of the Emperor* and his other works are an attempt to implement his identity and realize the feeling of belonging to a world which had disappeared:

What is the Motherland on the whole? Isn’t it a certain uniform of a gendarme or customs officer who we used to see in childhood? Not the same Motherland as a pine and fir-tree, quagmire and glade, cloud and spring? ... Wasn’t this place – the count was thinking – my Motherland just because it belonged to my master as numerous priceless places did? Of course! The unnatural whims of world history ruined the private admiration for the Motherland. Anyone who will take the trouble now gossips about the new Motherland. In their eyes I am motherless. I have always been. Oh! There used to be a Motherland, a real one, just for motherless ones. It was the old monarchy. And here I am, motherless, who lost his real Motherland of primordial travelers.²⁵

Roth’s identity crisis can be perceived within the framework of the theory on social stigma, which was introduced by Erving Goffman in the work *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*.²⁶ The sociologist understands stigma as a quality which shows a certain negative, disgraceful quality, where the character of this quality is determined not by its characteristics, but only by the attitude of the society to it. The discrepancy between one’s true (factual, own) identity and the one which constructs society about a person leads to formation of a social stigma. The stigma spreads to individual shortcomings – physical or psychic defects and also group ones – religions, nationalities and professions. Despite the kind, the stigma has the same qualities – an individual,

²⁴ Elias 2001.

²⁵ Roth 1979: 225.

²⁶ Goffman 2009.

who could easily take part in everyday social interaction, has a certain peculiarity which obtrusively draws attention and alienates people from them, preventing them from perceiving their other qualities. A certain ideology arises over a stigmatized person which proves their inferiority and explains the hostility of people to that person.²⁷

The reason that a stigma arises in Joseph Roth is the discrepancy between the concept of one's own identity (tripartite identity) and the one which was obtruded by the society – Jewish identity. Anti-Semitism considers a person in the light of his belonging to the people of Israel in the first place, and this belonging became the central and at the same time negative feature of a person. Such a vision was destructive for a liberal conception of tripartite identity, according to which Jewish ethnic and religious identity belonged to the private sphere and did not influence the social, cultural and professional realization of an individual. The Jewish identity became a stigma not only for Roth, but also for many Jews. The stigma of Jewish origin was no more than an imaginary social construct, the consequences of which, unfortunately, passed the sphere of abstraction and incarnated in a real catastrophe.

Goffman divides the history of understanding the stigma into phases. The first phase is when an individual examines the state of a normal person, assumes it and, therefore, assumes the concept of identity typical of the society; he is unaware himself of being a stigma carrier. In the next phase, this person learns that he has a stigma with all the consequences of estrangement, isolation and marginality.²⁸ Roth grew up in liberal Brody, where the majority of residents were Jews. They considered themselves part of the Austrian Empire, German culture and their own religious tradition. Destruction of this world, the downfall of the empire, growth of anti-Semitism, and demand for establishing his own national and state belonging on the one hand deprived Roth of two of his identities, and on the other established an image of a Jew as a dangerous and injurious member of society.

In the 1930s, the Jewish topic in Joseph Roth's creative work becomes one of the central ones; the same pertains to publicism.²⁹ At the same time, when Roth addresses the issue of his own Jewish identity in the context of the growth of anti-Semitism and, correspondingly, the threat for all European Jews, even then he attempts to emphasize his distance from Jewry, "For me, as for an adherent Catholic, Jewry is probably the same as for a rabbi (*Wunderrabbi*): a metaphysical quality, endlessly high and distant from everything which happens with Jews on this earth."³⁰ This quote, in my opinion, is not a manifestation of the lack of faith in Judaism, but an attempt to reserve only the private sphere of life for a Jewish religious identity. At the same time, the growth of hostility to Jewish people made Roth publicly defend the rights of Jews to implement their religious and cultural rights.

²⁷ Ibid.: 32.

²⁸ Goffman 2009: 32.

²⁹ Such as *Die Juden und die Nibelungen*, *Der Segen des Ewigen Juden*, *Jedermann ohne Pass*, and others. Cf. Roth 1989.

³⁰ Letter to Max von Hohenlohe-Langenburg Roth 1970: 275.

The reaction to the stigmatizing of the Jewish identity by Joseph Roth

It is natural that such a creative personality as Roth, with a great talent for self-reflection, expressed his feelings and his crisis on the pages of his own works. It is also natural that the central topics are the struggle with Nazism and nostalgia for the lost world of the Habsburg monarchy. But the focus of this article is the image of an Eastern European Jew and his home as an expression of the author's identity crisis. The creation of an imaginary world, in which the old order of the former liberal empire dominates, a world without division by the nationality, or even racial indication, a world of free people of the borderland, endowed with fairytale qualities, a world with the sensation of home, the motherland – this became the attempt to compensate the stigma allotted to the writer by society. The residents of an Eastern European shtetl described by Roth do not have tripartite identity, and vice versa, Jewish identity is their determinant quality, but it has a positive character. Thus, the author denies Jewishness as a stigma. Eastern Jews live in a certain isolated space, isolated in the first place from the Western civilization, and have many exclusive, even fairy-tale qualities. The formation of a poor but spiritually rich Jew from the ghetto has a long tradition in ghetto literature, and Roth is an heir to this tradition. Endowing the characters with some bright features, which make them distinctively “different” from their western adherents, and the constant opposition of the East to the West, form an oriental image of the writer's Jewish characters.

Ghetto literature and Joseph Roth

In the field of fictional literature, it is most convenient to operate with the definition suggested by Anne Fuchs and Florian Krobb, who consider the ghetto as any location of traditional Jewish life. The ghetto can be both a real and imaginary place where the confrontation of German and Jewish cultures takes place in opposition between openness and closeness, modernity and conservatism, assimilation and orthodoxy.³¹ This interpretation means that the term can be used to define one city block and the whole Eastern European shtetl.

In the 20th century, the genre of ghetto literature genre did not disappear, although the ghetto itself did.³² However, the topic of portraying Jews as traditional values carriers – patriarchy, family, wisdom, deep spirituality – became more urgent.³³ Evaluation of the ghetto changed – instead of Jewish authors enlightening critics of ignorance and backwardness of Eastern Jews, the ghetto was portrayed as a center of deep spiritual life. And this image was becoming more and more romanticized. The perception and evaluation of ghetto changed – from the negative one from the 19th century to a positive one – at the beginning of the 20th century. The topic itself, however – the description of life of Jews in a certain isolated space, isolated not geographically, but mentally – remained

³¹ Fuchs and Krobb 1999: 5.

³² Until the period when a different ghetto appeared on the map of Europe in its worst image – the Nazi ghetto.

³³ Among other European German-speaking authors who examined the topic of the Eastern Jewry, we can mention Jakob Wasserman, Arnold Zweig, Max Brod, Walter Rathenau and others.

unchangeable. And from this perspective, the creative works of Joseph Roth are a subject to determination as the genre of ghetto literature.³⁴

Eva Raffel believes that the topic of Eastern Jewry is a reaction to the events of World War I and was again or even just revealed to Viennese intellectuals. Agreeing with the fact that the war actually provoked the increase in the interest in traditional Jewry, we should also emphasize the prolongation of this topic within ghetto literature.

Roth's first text dedicated to the Jewish ghetto is very demonstrative, and its topic would determine the whole corpus of Roth's Jewish texts. This is the article in the leftliberal newspaper *Der Neue Tag*, "Die Juden von Deutsch-Kreutz." The journalist describes Jews, the residents of one Jewish society in Vienna, in one of the city blocks of Leopoldstadt named Deutsch-Kreutz:

The Jews who live in Deutsch-Kreutz do only dignitive and fair trade and the whole Christian society respects and appreciates them. They keep very isolated and in any case mix with Christians. They do not know what dancing is, they do not celebrate feasts nor play games. Only prayers, piety and fasting abstinence. These Jews practice abstinence twice a week and pray half of a day.³⁵

The readers see an almost saintly image of the Jewish community – pious, peaceful and very necessary for the city itself. It is obvious that the author was attempting to excite sympathy for the Jewish community. This was an attempt to create a positive image of Jews, and that was the first ghetto of Joseph Roth.

Roth created and popularized the ghetto. In the book *The Wandering Jews*, he names Leopoldstadt, a poor Jewish district of Vienna, a voluntary ghetto, and this ghetto has a positive image. This is evident, in the first place, from the attitude of the author himself, who depicts the dirty, poor, overcrowded streets of Leopoldstadt with kind feelings.

The Eastern Jews who came to Vienna settle down in Leopoldstadt, in the second of twenty districts... All of them arrive at the Northern station; the scent of the Motherland is diffusing in its halls, and this is open doors to return home. Leopoldstadt – is a voluntary ghetto. Many districts are connected to it with bridges. Merchants, leasers and other unproductive elements of the arriving Eastern Jewry cross these bridges every day. But in the morning hours descendants of these unproductive elements, sons and daughters of these merchants who work at factories, in banks, bureaus, editorial offices and workshops... Among these young people there are lawyers, medical men, bankers, journalists, actors.³⁶

³⁴ It is worth pointing out that among modern researchers the attempt to consider Jewish authors of the 20th century in the light of ghetto literature has hardly been practiced. Among the few examples, Anne Fuchs's article about the German writer Edgar Hilsenrath can be mentioned (Fuchs 1999b). More relevant within this research is Ritchie Robertson's article about Joseph Roth's "Job" [Hiob] in the context of ghetto-literature (Robertson 1989). Fuchs also examines the image of the shtetl in Roth's works in the context of ghetto literature and believes that the author is a representative of its last wave (Fuchs 1999a). Certainly, the topic of Eastern Jewry in Roth's works repeatedly attracted the attention of the researchers of his creative work. For example, Eva Raffel, who portrays Eastern Jewry in the works of Joseph Roth and Arnold Zweig (Raffel 2002). In the opinion of this author, the topic of Eastern Jewry was a reaction to the events of World War I and was again or even just revealed to Viennese intellectuals. Upon agreeing with the fact that the war actually provoked the increase of the interest in traditional Jewry, it is well worth emphasizing the prolongation of this topic within ghetto literature.

³⁵ Roth 1989: 208.

³⁶ Roth 2010: 86.

This passage contains the principle characteristic of the ghetto – its isolation. It is symbolically overcome by the bridges, but the bridges only emphasize the border between the ghetto and the other world. Transition to the city is a symbolic transition from one world to another.

Ritchie Robertson, who examined the work *Job* in the light of ghetto literature, drew attention to other parallels. In particular Roth has all the characters who were central for this genre: rabbi, schoolmaster (melamed Mendel Singer), an ordinary Jew who wants to become a soldier (Mendel's son Ion), and beautiful Jewesses (Mendel's daughter Miriam). In Robertson's opinion, Roth raised the standard of ghetto literature to the level of modernism when the accent of social or topographic topics was transferred to the reproduction of the ghetto atmosphere.³⁷

Orientalism and Joseph Roth

Defining exotic features in the description of the Eastern Jewish ghetto, Joseph Roth's creative work can be considered as part of the orientalism movement in the Western literature of the 19th and 20th centuries. There are several grounds for defining Roth's creative work as construction of the Orient in the works dedicated to the Jewry of Eastern Europe.

The term "orientalism" itself, introduced by Edward Said, originally anticipated the vision of the British and French empires of the Muslim world, and was a display of the domination of the West over the East, and also the inevitable diametrical opposition of the two worlds, two experiences, two realities.³⁸ This notion has outgrown its geographic and temporal framework set by this author and cardinally extended its meaning. In particular, Kerstin S. Jobst enumerates and describes such forms of orientalism as orientalism of borderlands, neocolonial orientalism, microcolonialism, and – of special importance within the framework of this article – positive colonialism, when a colonialist approaches the topic of his research in a positive manner.³⁹ The ghetto literature genre itself can according to Anne Fuchs and Florian Krobb be defined within orientalism as a mental cartography.⁴⁰ Ghetto literature described the life of Jews from the West-East perspective. The location of the ghetto did not play any role in the case of orientalism. A competent historian, Paul Mendes-Flohr, examines within orientalism Gustav Meyrink's work *The Golem* about Prague's ghetto.⁴¹ In other words the specifics of the ghetto literature genre anticipated the representation of Galicia as a place of residence of the traditional Jewry as the Orient. Roth, in my opinion a representative and follower of ghetto literature tradition, could perfectly well be a representative of the orientalist vision of Eastern Europe on the whole and Galician Jews in particular.

The presentation of the Orient and mental cartography of the East and its residents itself, Jews in particular, was presented in a specific way by eastern Jewish authors with

³⁷ Robertson 1989: 198.

³⁸ Said 2006.

³⁹ Jobst 2012.

⁴⁰ Fuchs 1999a: 5.

⁴¹ Mendes-Flohr 1991: 79.

a cultural German identity. The researcher Donna Heizer analyzes three authors of this type, who described Jews from the East, especially Turkey. Her main thesis lies in the fact that in describing exotic, “different” Jews, German Jews were attempting to understand their own Jewish identity and its connection with German culture.⁴² It is important to remember that the creative work of all the European authors of Central Europe in the 1920-1940s was in either case correlated with the problem of anti-Semitism and aggressive Nazism. This conforms to the thesis about the identity crisis and the search for ways to compensate for it by creation of an imaginary world.

The idea of Galicia as the Orient exceeded the limits of some authors’ creative work, but reflected a general notion among the establishment and intellectuals of the Austrian Empire about Eastern Galicia. Larry Wolff believes that such a specific image was formed in the Josephine epoch and reflected an enlightening vision of the whole of Eastern Europe. This idea of mental cartography was created in the form of semi-orientalism, which anticipated the projection of the features of “difference” typical of orientalism on categorically European territories.⁴³

Orientalization of Jews

The idea of Galicia as the Orient spread to its residents – Galician Jews. However, they were only one of the parts of the “Eastern” “oriental” European Jewry. In particular, John Efron considers German-Jewish orientalism as a separate tendency, for which the West-East opposition is imposed upon Germany and Eastern Europe respectively.⁴⁴ The researchers Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek Jonathan Penslar think that, owing to the historical connection of Jews with the East – Israel – the orientalization of Jews was natural and inevitable for Western society, notwithstanding the fact that European Jews had lived apart from their historical motherland for centuries.⁴⁵ Indeed, Joseph Roth mentions the Jewish people’s biblical history, and occasionally calls Jews the Israel people⁴⁶ or recollects the departure from Egypt: “Wasn’t Egypt the Motherland for Jews four thousand years ago? Didn’t they call Egypt their motherland in the days of wandering about the desert?”⁴⁷

The Orientalist vision of European Jews seems neither natural nor normal, as the aforementioned authors state, but is more the product of anti-Semitism and the desire of German nationalists to construct the image of a Jew as a “stranger,” using the old story about the Eastern origin of Jews.⁴⁸ Although “Eastern origin” was not necessarily associated with biblical history and geography, Poland and Polish Jews were marked with the Orient. Karl Emil Franzos was responsible for the formation of this kind of

⁴² Heizer 1996: 3.

⁴³ Wolff 2012: 48.

⁴⁴ Efron 2005: xiii.

⁴⁵ Davidson and Penslar 2005: 82.

⁴⁶ Roth 1989: 898.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*: 863.

⁴⁸ The orientalization of Jews as a reflection of anti-Semitism and Nazism growth proves, in particular, Paul R. Mendes-Flohr (1991: 81).

vision of Eastern European Jews with his work *From Half-Asia*.⁴⁹ Mendes-Flohr even speaks of a Jewish stigma of oriental origin, where belonging to – or rather the suspicion of belonging to – the East and Eastern tradition, meant the loss of the right to belong to Western civilization and Western society and correspondingly caused a big personal trauma of identity.⁵⁰ One of the ways to overcome this trauma is creative work; from this point of view, Roth's literary heritage also reflects the orientalization of Jews as a response to the crisis.

The problem of German-speaking Jews in nationalist Germany was the factor which led Roth to constantly emphasize the connection of local Western Jews with Germany as their Motherland. He leaves beyond national, beyond time and beyond space reality, on the other hand, to Eastern Jews.

At the beginning of his work *The Wandering Jews*, Roth introduces the East-West opposition. The West is represented as a territory with civilization – the water closet and elevator – but the East, for the lack of Western comfort, supplies the West with great people and great ideas instead.⁵¹ With the first page of the work the reader is prepared to hear the story about the East itself; such an introduction is the first confirmation of Roth's orientalist style in this work. The East for the author is not a geographical world orientation, but a fairytale, exotic and separate territory, inhabited by none the less fairytale characters – Eastern Jews. The fairytale character, however, is very skillfully concealed behind the realism of the plot's representation and the author's reservations:

This book does not need an “indifferent” reader who from the top of the shaky towers of Western civilization with the sour face of acted kindness throws a glance at the neighboring East and its residents, benevolently groans about the imperfection of sewerage and in fear of epidemics closes the poor emigrants in barracks where the social problem will be solved by general pestilence. The book is not worth reading by those who repudiated their parents and grandparents who only by a happy accident did not share the destiny with the prisoners of the barracks. This book is not written for those who could be injured deeply by the fact that the author examines the subject of his description with love and not a “scientific objectivity,” another name of which is boredom.⁵²

Who will criticize what is written or make an attempt to analyze it with “scientific objectivity” after such a reservation? Roth used this method to protect himself and his work from possible critics, and thus from destruction of the world modeled by him; as if he reserved a free space where the boring laws of the objectivity of the Western world have no power, and this world belongs to emotions, atmosphere and exotics, and above all nostalgia.

Describing his native town in the work *Wild Strawberries*, Roth depicts it on the endless plain, vast from the East, and from the West surrounded by the mountains.⁵³ Such a location, beyond mountains, beyond fields, on a vast plain, deprives the city of a real geographical coordinate system. The description of Brody from the work *Wild Strawberries* is in many respects identical to the description of the city visited by Trotta

⁴⁹ Franzos 1876.

⁵⁰ Mendes-Flohr 1991: 82.

⁵¹ Roth 2010: 7.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Roth 2010a: 13.

in *Radetzky March*. The city space in the landscape is conventional and simplified: two main roads cross each other in the city center where a small square forms a market; one road has a station and cemetery at its ends. Similar geography is seen by a reader in *The Wandering Jews*:

The city lies in an open field which is not limited by hills, woods or a river. The field imperceptibly flows into the plain. The city begins and ends with little houses. Then buildings change them. Streets begin. One runs from south to north, the other from east to west. Where they meet, there is a market square. And at the end of the street which runs from south to north there is a station. A passenger train arrives once every twenty-four hours. And leaves once every twenty-four hours ... It takes about 15 minutes to get to the station. If it rains, you won't do without a coachman: the road is poorly covered with breakstone chips and flooded with water.⁵⁴

Progrody was surrounded by marshland. In *Radetzky March* the swamp becomes a separate character, a separate monstrous, unknown power which gives and takes away life:

Their mind [the frontier people's, author's note] is quick and bright in earning money, their hands which could strike cash from hollow rock, as sparkles are struck off from flint, did not manage to get joy for their souls and health for their bodies. Swamps gave birth to them. Since the swamps inauspiciously occupied the whole space of the region on each side of the road, with frogs, malarial parasites and treacherous grass – a horrible attraction of a terrible death to careless travelers, unfamiliar with the place. Many perished here and nobody heard them crying for help. But everybody who was born here knew about the guile of the swamp and had something from that guile in their nature.⁵⁵

It seems that each city is situated nowhere, the designation of the East is sufficient for a reader, the rest of the coordinates are faded.

Joseph Roth endows the ghetto residents with features which make them special, unique beings, incomprehensible to Western Jewry. In such a way he also joins the orientalist way in art, in literature in particular. David Horrocks, analyzing the work *The Wandering Jews*, writes about the distinct discrepancy of Roth's portrayal of Jews. On the one hand, he describes Jews who live in the village as semi-peasants, strong millers, ignorant, illiterate. On the other hand, Roth writes in the same work that when a peasant is only beginning to learn to read and write, a Jew already has the theory of relativity in his mind.⁵⁶ It is possible to understand such a description as a contradiction if only to consider *The Wandering Jews* as ethnographic work. In spite of the fact that the author wanted to create this impression, the book is an attempt to create an imaginary world of Eastern Jewry – idealized and romanticized. From that perspective a peasant Jew can perfectly well be as strong as Heracles and wise as Einstein, even if he is illiterate; he is born with the theory of relativity in his head, even if he is unable to write it down.

Roth depicts the residents of his own town in the autobiographical work *Wild Strawberries* even more exotically. Speaking about the population of the town, the author calls one third of the residents insane, and those who were born in Brody but left the town have magical or some special skills – the surgeon who makes old women young, the

⁵⁴ Roth 2010: 41.

⁵⁵ Roth 2000: 156.

⁵⁶ Horrocks 1999: 131.

astronomer who discovered Halley's Comet, the Roman cardinal who determines the politics of the Vatican et cetera.⁵⁷

Roth portrays Eastern Jews with kind feelings, which might seem contradictory to the traditional vision of orientalism as a declaration of superiority of the West over the East and correspondingly arrogance in the attitude towards representatives of the East. But the peculiarity of the oriental style of Jewish authors is romanticization and idealization of the East, namely Jews as its representatives.⁵⁸

The modeling of the Orient from the Austrian borderland added its features – the image of a Jew became more “oriental,” more exotic. In the first place, color contributed to this:

By a special, almost thoughtless will of nature, Voshyvko Pechenyk, a coral merchant, was a red-haired Jew; his copper goatee seemed like some seakale, strikingly assimilating him with a marine deity.⁵⁹

Mendel Singer is also red-haired, but not from *Job*, from *The False Scales*.⁷⁴ The beard is an important attribute of a real, traditional Jew, present in the description of all Roth's Jewish characters that represent Eastern Jewry:

The most abruptly pious Jew will blame the one who has shaved off his beard; a shaven-off beard is the first sign of apostasy. A Jew without a beard loses his stigma of belonging to his people. He attempts without realizing it to become similar to a successful Christian who suffers neither mockeries nor persecutions. Although it does not save [a Jew] from Judophobic attacks.⁶⁰

The rabbi is a very important oriental personage. Hasidism as a mystic spirit fitted the oriental vision of the Jews of Eastern Europe very well. Martin Buber was one of the authors who depicted a mystic, exotic vision of the Orient in his works of Hasidic parables.⁶¹ Joseph Roth also appeals to the rabbi personage in his works *Job* and *The Wandering Jews*. This is a description of a tzadik from the work:

He [the tzadik] blesses – and the blessing will come true. He condemns and damnation will come true, fall upon the whole family. Woe betide him who will mock and deny. Blessed will be the believer who brings him gifts. The rabbi will not take anything for himself. He lives in a way more modest than an absolute pauper. He eats only not to die of hunger. He lives serving God. He feeds on crumbs, drinks by drops. When he is sitting with his faithful ones, he takes only a small bit out of the plate and then sends round the plate. And every guest saturates by rabbi's treatment. Rabbi himself is deprived of carnal desires. Sleeping with his wife is his sacred duty, and he enjoys fulfillment of his duties rather than possession of his woman.⁶²

In this extract Roth does not indicate the perspective he is writing from. Such a method, in my opinion, is used to assure the reader of the neutral objective position of the author who only retells the fact. Roth does not speak ironically and does not blame. While

⁵⁷ Roth 2010a: 13.

⁵⁸ Efron 2005: xviii.

⁵⁹ Roth 1979: 245.

⁶⁰ Roth 2010: 59.

⁶¹ Buber 1991.

⁶² Roth 2010: 54.

uncovering the plot in *Job* when Mendel's wife Debora makes a pilgrimage to the tzadik begging him to cure Menukhym, the miracle-working features of the rabbi are revealed in practice.⁶³

Till the end of his life, Joseph Roth did not manage to overcome the crisis of the lost Motherland, lost culture, lost feeling of protection and home. This influenced the writer's life; alcohol addiction, homelessness, and political persecution became the reasons for his tragic death in Paris in 1939.

Conclusions

Joseph Roth's childhood and youth were the last years of the supranational Austrian-Hungarian Empire's existence and tripartite identity as a manifestation of the state enlightenment of liberal ideology. The city of Brody, where the future writer was born, owing to the domination of Jewish people and their integration in German culture and the Austrian political system, was the last favorable environment in Galicia for the formation of tripartite identity. The growth of nationalism, downfall of the empire, development of anti-Semitism and Nazism resulted in the fact that Joseph Roth and the other Jews who identified their civil belonging to the Habsburg monarchy and were representatives of the German culture felt an identity crisis. This was its characteristic – the feeling of connection to the non-existing state – the Austrian empire, denial of the new political system of a Jew's right to represent the German culture and, above all, social stigmatization of Jewish religious identity. Religious and ethnic Jewish identity, which belonged to the private sphere according to the principles of liberalism, was perceived as a central negative characteristic of a person.

Joseph Roth's identity crisis was reflected in his creative work. The nostalgia for the lost world, struggle with Nazism and anti-Semitism and reaction to the Jewish identity as a stigma created the special fictitious oriental world of the Volhynian and Galician shtetl. Its main features were isolation, being beyond space and time, the principal "difference" of its residents and their spiritual and intellectual superiority over the more civilized – in terms of everyday conditions – Western adherents.

It is natural that such a creative personality as Roth, with a great talent for self-reflection, expressed his feelings and his crisis on the pages of his own works. It is also natural that the central topics are the struggle with Nazism and nostalgia for the lost world of the Habsburg monarchy. But this article focuses on the image of an Eastern European Jew and his home as an expression of the author's identity crisis. Creation of an imaginary world, in which the old order of the former liberal empire dominates, the world without division by the nationality, or even racial indication, the world of free people of the borderland, endowed with fairytale qualities, the world with the sensation of home, the motherland – this became the attempt to compensate the stigma allotted to the writer

⁶³ In the case of the tzadik it is necessary to add one explanation which pertains to the indicated character. Tzadiks' yards were very rich. Every believer making a pilgrimage brought a certain payment. For instance, the Sadagorsky dynasty and, in particular, Rabbi Israel had a palace in Ruzhyn, coaches, novelties of the latest Viennese fashion, while the tzadik and his family visited Austrian cities.

by society. The residents of an Eastern European shtetl described by Roth do not have tripartite identity, and vice versa, Jewish identity is their determinant quality, but it has a positive character. Thus, the author denies Jewishness as a stigma. Eastern Jews live in a certain isolated space, isolated in the first place from the Western civilization, and have many exclusive, even fairytale qualities. The formation of a poor but spiritually rich Jew from the ghetto, has a long tradition in ghetto literature, and Roth is an heir to this tradition. Endowing the characters with some bright features which make them distinctively “different” from their Western adherents and the constant opposition of the East to the West forms an oriental image of the writer’s Jewish character.

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