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“America Was God’s Country, New York the City of Miracles”

Urbanization and Redemption in Joseph Roth’s *Job: The Story of a Simple Man* (1930)

Ariel Yehudith Pridan

Abstract This article offers a close reading of *Job: The Story of a Simple Man* (1930) by Joseph Roth, delving into the novel’s intricate engagement with political and spatial concerns intertwined with the diverse possibilities for “modern redemption” confronted by Jews in the early twentieth century. Through the narrative of the Singer family’s migration from an Eastern European shtetl to New York City, Roth critiques the process of urban modernization and dismisses the spatial transformation into the Western metropolis as a viable answer to the “Jewish question” (*Die Judenfrage*). Employing biblical allusions, Roth redirects the potential for modern “Promethean redemption” toward theological and eschatological dimensions. In doing so, Roth also contributes to the perpetuation of the Habsburg Myth by exploring the political potential to transcend the constraints of segregation and binarism inherent in the modern nation-state.

Keywords Joseph Roth; the Jewish Question; Jewish urbanization; modern messianism; the Habsburg Myth

URBAN SPACE AND THE JEWISH QUESTION

The early twentieth century witnessed transformative processes in Jewish existence, marked by mass migration from small towns to major cities and urban centers.¹ Jewish urbanization, mostly motivated by economic hardships and influenced by persecution and antisemitism, played a pivotal role in shaping the dispersion of Jewish communities in Europe and had a transformative impact on the social fabric of the United States.² The transformative role of space in modern Jewish life was a prevalent theme among Jewish thinkers, politicians, scholars, and ideologues who addressed the Jewish question (*Die Judenfrage*).³ The Jewish question scrutinized the capacity of Jews to shed distinct particularistic attributes and embrace the universal codes of citizenship in modern nation-states.⁴ For agents of Jewish modernization, modern urban spaces served as a vital platform to exhibit civic competence while privately preserving ancestral traditions.⁵ Becoming city-dwellers was perceived as a crucial step in normalizing and modernizing Jewish subjects within a purportedly neutral sphere of equality and progress.⁶ Joseph Roth's novel *Job: The Story of a Simple Man* complicates the notion of urbanization as a presumed progressive and acculturating trajectory. Roth's exploration of Jewish urban modernization aims to challenge the notion of the "American Dream" and portray it as a radical manifestation of the crisis of modernity. Instead of presenting it as a linear, teleological process, the novel explores the American urbanity as a manifestation of radical modernity, characterized by alienation, hypercivilization, and deceptive promises of liberal and capitalist salvation. In so doing, the novel refrains from anchoring Jewish urbanization in the teleological and redemptive narratives typically associated with the modern urban landscapes, such as modernization, progress, and refinement.⁷

Roth scrutinizes the grand narrative of Jewish migration from Eastern Europe to the safe havens of Western nations, as well as the "widely held belief that Jewish migration to America represents a uniquely decisive and secular act of redemption."⁸ As Scott Ury explains, "cultural and literary figures recant and reinforce a common historical narrative regarding Jewish migration (or flight) from Eastern Europe to America."⁹ In contrast to this trend, Roth's novel offers a critical perspective that challenges the myth of Jewish migration as a successful secular redemption narrative, which purportedly culminates in Jewish emancipation and the adoption of "ostensibly liberal versions of modernity."¹⁰

In *Job*, Roth presents modernity and Jewish modernization as inseparable from realms of theology, mysticism, and spirituality. In his pursuit to sacralize the Jewish narrative of migration and urbanization, Roth aspires to establish a version of modernity (and Jewish modernity in particular) anchored in a theological horizon.¹¹ Roth demonstrates that the possibility of urbanization or migration to America to

offer salvation to Jewish subjects is feasible only under the condition of a renewed connection to theological, metaphysical, and spiritual spheres within the context of modern history. By bringing sensibilities of theological redemption to the American urban space, Roth demonstrates the possibility that the modern devastating sense of alienation may be rectified.¹² Although this redemption challenges Jewish eschatological perspectives by facilitating a “recovery of lost harmony” within history itself,¹³ it also serves as “a counterbalance to the excessive reliance on human reason in defining the role of the individual in the modern world.”¹⁴

In addition, Roth’s critique of urbanization in the American metropolis as a necessary transformative force in the attempt to modernize Jewish life aligns with the cultural imagination of a former subject of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its multicultural ethos. The novel’s depiction of New York as a radical version of urban modernization reflects Roth’s broader analysis of the outcomes of radical modernization in a world dominated by nation-states and its impact on the spiritual and universal qualities he recognized in Judaism. Roth’s assessment of urban Jewish life in the New World is thus intertwined with his exploration of Europe’s major cities in the aftermath of World War I and the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, reflecting his intellectual inquiry into urban spaces as potential platforms for multicultural collectivity and universal citizenship.¹⁵

Born in Brody at the Austro-Hungarian Empire’s eastern edge, Roth hailed from a Jewish family deeply connected to German culture.¹⁶ Brody’s multiculturalism and the Austro-Hungarian Empire’s inclusive policies left an enduring mark on Roth, influencing his political perspective regarding the potential for harmonious coexistence within a multiethnic and supranational society.¹⁷ In this multinational and multilingual empire, Jews aligned with various cultural identities, and Emperor Franz Joseph’s tolerant policies garnered their admiration.¹⁸ The significance of space in Roth’s texts thus pertains to the Jewish question and his perception of the Jewish people as a nation whose existence is rooted in a nonterritorial, diasporic, and nomadic identity.¹⁹ For Roth, the Jews of the Austro-Hungarian Empire embodied a distinct form of supranational identity. Unlike other minorities who sought to establish homogeneous nation-states based on tribal origin myths, which combined religion (national church) and ethnicity, the Jews of the Austro-Hungarian Empire abstained from making territorial claims, making them stabilizing pillars of the empire and its cosmopolitan character.²⁰

In his nonfictional texts, Roth depicted the identity crisis which arose from the shift from imperial to national identity.²¹ This shift left Roth with a sense of homelessness, prompting him to contemplate in literature the preservation of the political and cultural legacy of the Habsburg Empire, even in its absence. Roth viewed the Austro-Hungarian Empire as a space allowing for a unique combination of both

patriotism and cosmopolitanism.²² This phenomenon of “Habsburg patriotism” was rooted in a political ethos that permitted the empire’s peoples to identify with various national cultures, without viewing this identification as obstructing their allegiance to the imperial state. This distinctive form of patriotism was grounded in the perception that national and ethnic diversity served as conclusive evidence of the empire’s “unique ability to create a productive unity” and to integrate the manifold national identities of its peoples within its established political framework.²³

In Roth’s life and intellectual pursuits, Austro-Hungarian cities played a paramount role as hubs of regional patriotism (*Landespatritismus*) that could transcend specific national identities and embrace cultural diversity.²⁴ While nationalists perceived cities such as Vienna, Prague, and Budapest as challenges to homogeneous communities, Roth regarded them as potential revitalizers of the defunct Austro-Hungarian Empire and as platforms for alternative models of cultural belonging.²⁵

Roth’s vision of urban spaces, wherein individuals could embrace both patriotism and cosmopolitanism, freeing themselves from exclusive allegiance to the nation-state, should be understood as an integral aspect of the Habsburg Myth. The Habsburg Myth, depicting the Austro-Hungarian Empire as a harmonious multinational entity, blends historical and ahistorical elements to reinvent and celebrate the spirit of the empire even after its demise.²⁶ Before the empire’s collapse, the myth fortified loyalty and legitimized political and cultural authority. Post-collapse, it took on a sentimental role, evoking nostalgia for lost imperial commonality and providing a framework to scrutinize collective affiliations and national identities in postimperial Europe.

While Roth’s exploration of the political, cultural, and spiritual realm of the Habsburg monarchy oscillates between critical and occasionally idealistic dialogue with the imagined entity of the Empire, his writing contributes to the creation of the supranational harmonious image of the Empire, including its Galician territories.²⁷ As Claudio Magris argues, Roth, like many other authors from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, contributed to the mythologization of the Habsburg monarchy and nurtured “the image of the empire as a multinational unit [that] has been continuously re-invented and re-narrated, including when the empires as political realities were long gone.”²⁸ Jagoda Wierzejska further emphasizes that the Jewish variant of the Habsburg Myth was deeply connected with the emergence of a regional Jewish-Galician identity, which enabled the Galician Jews to identify both with the diverse religious and ethnic tapestry of the province and with the Habsburg empire as a whole.²⁹ At the same time, historical evidence reveals pervasive antisemitism, anti-German, anti-Serbian, and anti-Hungarian sentiments, alongside various forms of persecution directed against Jews, throughout the Habsburg Empire.³⁰ These contributed to the Empire’s spiritual and cultural decline even before the fatal blows

dealt by the Treaty of Saint-Germain and the Treaty of Versailles. The image of the Austro-Hungarian Empire nurtured through the Habsburg Myth is thus complicit in what Ernest Renan terms “the forgetting of history and its misguided understanding” — essential components in constructing a nation and its mythical production of historical memory.³¹

THE (UN)PROMISED METROPOLIS

At the heart of *Job* stands Mendel Singer, an impoverished Russian Jewish teacher living in Zuchnow with his wife Deborah and four children. The family’s adversity deepens when the fourth son, Menuchim, is born with deformities and epilepsy. Seeking a miraculous healing, Deborah consults a Hasidic rabbi who predicts Menuchim’s cure and warns them not to abandon him. The family’s hardships escalate when the older sons, Shemariah and Jonas, are drafted into the Russian army. Deborah helps Shemariah escape to America, where he finds success and prosperity. Living in America under the name “Sam,” Shemariah invites his family to join him and relocate to New York City. Mendel, faced with the prospect of leaving his ancestral home and accustomed way of life, nevertheless realizes that his daughter Miriam is romantically involved with a Cossack named Ivan. Consequently, Deborah and Mendel decide to accept Shemariah’s invitation. Despite Mendel informing the porter that he intends to travel to America “to earn money” (82),³² Mendel and Deborah assume that “in Russia she [Miriam] can do that, in America there are no Cossacks. Russia is a sad country, America is a free country, a joyful country. Mendel will no longer be a teacher; he’ll be the father of a rich son” (74–75). Mendel further explains that “If we don’t go to America, a misfortune will occur with Miriam” (91). Finally, Mendel and Deborah entrust Menuchim to a local family and immigrate to America.

In New York’s Lower East Side, the Singer family adjusts to urban life differently: Mendel keeps longing for Eastern Europe, while his children thrive in the new setting. The *Job*-like curse endures as Miriam loses her sanity, leading to her institutionalization; the family loses contact with Menuchim; and both older sons perish in World War I. Upon learning about the death of Shemariah, Deborah collapses and dies. Yet, unexpectedly, America facilitates a reunion with Menuchim, who reveals his successful life as Alexei Kossak, a gifted musician. On Passover eve, Menuchim discloses his identity to his father, validating the rabbi’s prophecy. The novel concludes with Menuchim promising to care for Miriam and the hope of their eventual return to Europe.

In the early twentieth century, Mendel Singer’s family sees the American metropolis as a beacon of hope. In the years from 1870 to 1920, a significant wave of immigration from Eastern Europe, mostly driven by economic hardships, brought

over 2.8 million Jews to New York City.³³ Most settled in Manhattan's Lower East Side, maintaining their connection to traditional Jewish heritage and customs amidst American modernization.³⁴ Surprisingly, Roth had never set foot in New York.³⁵ Even though America could have served as an escape route from Nazi Germany, he preferred to remain in Europe.³⁶ Yet in his journalistic and essayistic texts, Roth frequently employs the term "Americanization" to symbolize troubling aspects of urbanism and relentless modernization that leads to historical amnesia.³⁷

New York is represented in *Job* as the antithesis of the Eastern European space from which the Singer family emigrated. While a comparative discussion of these spatial typologies is not the central focus of this article, it remains crucial for understanding Roth's perception of New York City.³⁸ The depiction of urban space in the novel contributes to establishing a profound contrast between New York and the Habsburg "old country." In depicting the Singer family's transition from the small Russian shtetl to the bustling city of New York, Roth opts not to contrast two types of cities (Austro-Hungarian urbanity versus American urbanity), but rather establishes a profound and radical distinction through the juxtaposition of New York's enclosed and confined urban landscape with the open, expansive, and rural spaces of Eastern Europe. As in many of Roth's Eastern European works, the representation of the Russian shtetl in the novel can be interpreted as a metonymic encoding of the neighboring Austro-Hungarian Galician space.³⁹

The Galician fringes of the Austro-Hungarian Empire played a crucial role in shaping Roth's existential, philosophical, and cultural stance as an imperial subject. Roth's admiration for Eastern European Jewry, shaped by his upbringing in Galicia, arose from viewing it as an existential alternative to the pervasive influence of national sentiment and the rigid demarcation of Europe by the territorial borders of nation-states.⁴⁰ According to Roth, the existence of Jews in Galicia exemplified a traditional humanism that persevered amidst the challenges of nationalist modernity and deserved preservation beyond the confines of the Eastern European shtetl. According to Roth, the presence of Jews in Galicia exemplified a traditional humanism that endured despite the challenges of nationalist modernity and warranted preservation beyond the confines of the Eastern European shtetl.⁴¹ This idea of Galicia, in Larry Wolf's words, functioned as a "transcendent political conception, encouraging the possibility of transnational convergence."⁴² This idealization of "Galicia" is deeply related to the mythologization of the Habsburg Empire, presenting the Galician territories as geographically dynamic and expansive areas that defy easy demarcation through cultural, ethnic, and national categories.⁴³

Roth's decision to present the American urban space in opposition to the Eastern European rural space thus reflects the political imagination of a former imperial subject, creating literary spaces that correlate symbolically with two disparate political

possibilities: the supranational Habsburg Empire and hypermodern nation-state. This contrast, based on Roth's continental perspective, serves as a symbolic and conceptual encoding of spatial and historical identities in his poetic and intellectual thought.⁴⁴

From the moment he arrives in New York, Mendel experiences the city as a purgatorial realm of inscrutable chaos:

The heavy wagon clattered through the streets. . . . The leather seat burned under Mendel's body like a hot stove. . . . the heat blazed like gray melting lead through the old cap of black silk rep on Mendel's head, penetrated into his brain and soldered it up, with damp, sticky, painful intensity. . . . his heavy boots and his feet were burning as in an open fire. Tightly clamped between his knees he had his umbrella, the wooden handle of which was hot and couldn't be touched, as if it were made in red iron. Before Mendel's eyes wafted a densely woven veil of soot, dust and heat. . . . The wind was no wind, it consisted of din and noise, it was a wafting din. It was made up of the shrill ringing of a hundred invisible bells, of the dangerous, metallic roar of the trains, of the blaring calls of countless trumpets, of the beseeching screech of the tracks at the curves of the streets, of the bellowing of Mac, who explained America to his passengers through an overpowering megaphone. . . . The muscles of his face were paralyzed. He would rather have wept like a small child. He smelled the sharp tar from the melting asphalt, the dry and desiccated dust in the air, the rancid and greasy stink from sewers and cheese shops, the acrid smell of onions, the sickly-sweet gasoline smoke of the cars, the putrid swamp smell from fish halls, the lilies of the valley and the carbolic acid from the cheek of his son. All the smells mingled in a hot vapor that struck him along with the noise that filled his ears and wanted to burst his skull. Soon he no longer knew what was to be heard, to be seen, to be smelled. . . . America besieged him, America broke him, America shattered him. After a few minutes he fainted. . . . And as his lips smiled and his head nodded, his heart began slowly to freeze, it pounded like a metal drumstick against cold glass. (111–14)

The Singers' journey to Manhattan is depicted as an inferno rather than a liberation. The urban environment's sensory bombardment obscures Mendel's perception, and he gazes upon the city through a dense haze of smoke, dust, and heat. This blurred physical vision serves as a metaphor for Mendel's struggle to comprehend and decipher the novel urban reality, as he grapples with the overwhelming stimuli it presents.

The city's portrayal creates a chaotic tapestry of stimuli, resulting in a synesthetic experience where senses blend, making it challenging to establish clear categorical boundaries between human and nonhuman, natural and synthetic, internal and

external. This overwhelming sensory encounter leads to Mendel's loss of recognition, echoing the ineffectiveness of his cognitive receptivity and the dissolution of his systems of signification. The internal turmoil in Mendel's psyche signifies the challenge of transforming stimuli into coherent speech to articulate his inner experiences. Unlike Simmel's depiction of city dwellers constructing intricate internal lives in response to metropolitan stimuli,⁴⁵ Mendel's struggle for sensory control results in self-abandonment and the dissolution of his sense of individuation and resilience as a subject.

During the ride, Mendel peers at the city through a sealed "motorized box." The window, meant for protection, fails to shield Mendel from the city's unreserved impact, which permeates the wagon. Observation through the window plays a crucial role in depicting the urban landscape in the novel. New York is often described through the narrator's account, intricately woven with Mendel's perspective as he gazes at the city from the window of his Lower East Side apartment. Roth emphasizes Mendel's detachment and alienation from his urban surroundings through consistent use of the window motif, symbolizing the physical and mental barrier between Mendel and the bustling city. While serving as an intermediary object offering access to external reality, the window becomes a symbol of Mendel's sense of distance and alienation from the city. Although it provides some insight into the outside world, it restricts his observations to a confined and limited perspective.

The alignment of the third-person narrator with Mendel's perspective contributes to the partial and impaired portrayal of the urban landscape. By confining the omniscient narrator's "eye" to Mendel's limited viewpoint, the novel avoids creating an illusion of spatial transparency. Homi Bhabha critiques spatial visibility as an ideological mechanism for the spatialization of historical time. He emphasizes that, "The recurring metaphor of landscape as the inscape of national identity underscores the play of light, the question of social visibility, and the ability of the eye to naturalize the rhetoric of national affiliation and its various collective expressions."⁴⁶ Bhabha asserts that the gazing eye, as an ideological mechanism, bestows legitimacy upon the historical reality embedded in space and its political order. In line with Bhabha's critique, Roth, through Mendel's constrained viewpoint, portrays American urbanity as disruptive and ultimately delegitimizes the political and societal order represented by the city in the novel.

Mendel's apartment window aids in coping with the sensory overload of the metropolis; however, it also emphasizes the limitations of his perspective:

The windows faced a *dark light-well* in which cats, rats and children scuffled, at three in the afternoon, even in spring, the *petroleum lamp* had to be lit, *there wasn't*

even electric light, they didn't yet have their own gramophone either. (120; emphases are mine)

This portrayal emphasizes the confined view through the apartment window, as it does not overlook the street but opens onto an inner courtyard, delineating Mendel's existence within a Jewish "ghetto" nestled in the Lower East Side. The positioning of the apartment's windows suggests its limited potential—both physically and symbolically—to broaden Mendel's comprehension of the external environment and intensifies his sense of detachment from the broader urban milieu.

The spatial layout of the apartment building affords Mendel a restricted view, allowing him to peer only into the windows of neighboring Jewish families: "Mendel stood, as was his habit, at the window, his back turned to the room. He fixed his gaze on the Lemmels' shattered window, covered with brown cardboard, on the second floor across the street." (140). The presence of the broken window and the futile attempt to substitute it with cardboard underscore its dual purpose—not solely as an instrument for external observation, but also as a metaphorical representation of vulnerability and neglect.⁴⁷

Through his apartment window "in all the windows across the street, he [Mendel] saw the yellowish-red glow of lamps." (140). The window functions akin to a mirror, engendering reflections that conjure an atmosphere of claustrophobic density. The generalized statement "in all the windows" serves as a metonymic representation that highlights the pervasive uniformity and homogeneity defining the lives of Jewish residents within the urban apartment block. As a result, the windows acquire metaphorical significance, symbolizing not just the segregated Jewish urban community but also the sense of isolation that Mendel confronts within the vast metropolis.

Mendel's constrained observation, hindered by the fear of New York's unfamiliar aspects, keeps him confined within his Jewish enclave, epitomized by "the tightly shuttered windows of Mendel's room." Here, the window functions as a boundary separating the Jewish domestic sphere from the external urban space, indicating Mendel's assimilation fears. His choice to immigrate to America as a refuge from assimilation reveals that, contrary to expectations, the American metropolis exacerbates his need for barriers and self-imposed confinement.

The optimism of a promising life in the modern city transforms into fear and isolation for the Jewish subject. New York, in contrast to the bucolic expanses of Eastern Europe, confines Mendel to what he can see from his apartment window. The Lower East Side, allegedly a haven for Jewish immigrants seeking refuge, transforms into an informal ghetto, highlighting that the transition to the new (urban) world only

exacerbates their marginalization. As Deborah astutely observes, “this America was no new world. There were more Jews here than in Kluczyńsk, it was actually a larger Kluczyńsk.”

Toward the novel’s end, Mendel and Menuchim arrive at “Forty-fourth and Broadway, the Astor Hotel” (197):

He [Mendel] went immediately to the window. There he saw for the first time the American night from up close. . . . He heard the noisy song of America, the honking, the tooting, the roaring, the ringing, the screeching, the creaking, the whistling and the howling. Opposite the window on which Mendel was leaning appeared every five seconds the broad laughing face of a girl, composed entirely of sprayed sparks and points, the blinding teeth in the open mouth made of a piece of melted silver. . . . It was an advertisement for a new soda. Mendel admired it as the most perfect representation of the night’s happiness and of golden health. He smiled, watched the picture come and disappear a few times and turned back to the room. (198–99)

In contrast to the limited view from his apartment, Mendel gains an encompassing elevated perspective from the hotel window, offering him an observation of “the American night from up close.” Positioned on a high floor, he assumes an elevated vantage point, echoing Michel de Certeau’s concept of an elevated gaze in his essay “Walking in the City.” This panoramic view enhances Mendel’s capacity to comprehend and interpret the city, allowing him to “be a solar Eye, looking down like a god.”⁴⁸ New York, once disorienting, now becomes an object of pleasure, meaning, and satisfaction with distinct contours and defining features.

While the encompassing elevated view imparts ontological security and transforms the city into a readable text, de Certeau emphasizes its deceptive nature: “The panorama-city is a ‘theoretical’ (that is, visual) simulacrum, in short, a picture, whose condition of possibility is an oblivion and a misunderstanding of practices.”⁴⁹ Focused on an illuminated soda advertisement, Mendel’s observation exemplifies the captivating power of American mainstream culture. The advertisement, symbolic of American life, becomes a socializing agent constructing a distorted sense of belonging. Ironically, the urban “reality” that Mendel experiences when leaving the Jewish “ghetto” is ultimately based on the marketing rhetoric of an illuminated advertising sign that is part of a capitalist semiotic system.

Although Mendel’s sensation of floating in heaven during his hotel elevator ascent creates a metaphysical atmosphere (198), the ironic undertone of the episode illustrates that in the city, Mendel can only perceive a “spiritual” revelation through the illuminated signs of the illusory capitalist mechanism. In fact, this urban

experience remains detached from any immediate sensory encounters discussed in Benjamin's treatment of the flâneur or de Certeau's spontaneous city strolling.⁵⁰ Mendel's transition to city life relies on a remote elevated perspective and is mediated by a consumerist mechanism that enticingly promotes an image of an ostensibly accessible world. In this expression of Roth's anti-American sentiment, cultural segregation persists despite the advanced urban landscape, highlighting the enduring distinction between the Jewish individual and the modern world beyond.

AGAINST URBAN MATERIALITY: THE FICTIONAL STATUS OF NEW YORK

Despite never visiting New York, Roth considers the American metropolis a powerful symbol, emphasizing its textual and linguistic aspects as much as its physical attributes. Beyond vivid depictions of the urban environment, Roth highlights the narratological essence of New York—a construct shaped by a distinct semiotic and discursive framework. The second part of the novel, which delves into the lives of the Singer family in New York, commences with the declaration that—

A few hundred years earlier an ancestor of Mendel Singer had probably come from Spain to Volhynia. He had a more fortunate, more ordinary, in any case less noticed fate than did his descendant, and as a result we don't know whether it took him many or few years to settle into the strange land. But of Mendel Singer we know that he was at home in New York after a few months. (117)

In a departure from the narratological features established in the first part of the novel, the narrator introduces the plural form, creating an impression of an anonymous collective delivering the narrative. Despite the narrator's omniscient perspective, the use of expressions implying uncertainty ("we don't know") introduces ambivalence into the otherwise authoritative stance. This opening contrasts with later depictions of Mendel's estrangement in New York, emphasizing the unreliable nature of the narrator's understanding.

The novel's first part begins with the declaration, "Many years ago there lived in Zuchnow a man named Mendel Singer" (9), while the second part starts with the assertion, "A few hundred years earlier, an ancestor of Mendel Singer had likely journeyed from Spain to Volhynia" (117). Both openings, employing formulaic expressions, evoke the realm of "once upon a time" legends and folktales. By emphasizing parallels between Mendel's chronicles and those of his forebears, these passages challenge historical linearity, highlighting its recursive and nonlinear foundations.

The concise portrayal of extensive familial history at the outset of the novel's "American" part highlights the contrast between the prolonged duration of the events being represented and the brief period of their representation. This accentuates the narratological and mediated characteristics of the recounted events, creating the impression that the Singer family's New York experiences are interwoven within a continuum of stories spanning generations and epochs. In contrast to Benedict Anderson's view of the novel contributing to the creation of an imagined national community,⁵¹ Roth's narrative integrates elements of folklore and storytelling, fostering a sense of an intimate, tribal, and therefore nonimagined Jewish community.⁵²

Symbolically resonating with New York's elusive presence in Roth's life, the city makes its debut in the novel through a secondhand account, unfolding as a narrative relayed to Mendel by a fellow Jewish traveler:

The fourteenth evening of the voyage was illuminated by the great fiery balls shot by the lightship. "Now," said a Jew, who has already made this journey twice, to Mendel Singer, "the Statue of Liberty appears. It's a hundred and fifty feet tall, hollow inside, you can climb it. Around her head she's wearing a crown of light. In her right hand she's holding a torch. And the best part is that this torch burns at night and yet can never burn out. Because it's only lit electrically. That's the sort of trick they do in America." (108)

The Statue of Liberty holds a significant place in narratives of Jewish immigration to America. However, its mediated presence moderates its profound impact as a symbol of American freedom and equality. This foreshadows the contrasting themes that permeate the second part of the novel, where the American ideals intersect with the somber reality of Mendel's life in the bustling metropolis.

Portraying the statue as "hollow" and explaining its electrical "burning torch" mechanism diminishes its symbolic significance, emphasizing its industrial nature.⁵³ The reference to the torch, akin to the biblical burning bush "that is not consumed" (Exodus 3:2), contrasts the intangible nature of the Hebrew deity with the simulated illumination of the American statue.⁵⁴ Described as a "trick" of modern technology, this effect downplays the utopian loftiness associated with the Statue of Liberty as a gateway to the "Promised Land."

BIBLICAL JOB AS A LITERARY CHARACTER

The novel's title and plot allude to the biblical Job—a pious man undergoing divine trials. Unlike the affluent Job, Mendel Singer is an "every-day Jew" from rural imperial

Russia. Still, he mirrors Job's devoutness: "Each morning, Mendel thanked God. . . . His conscience remained clear. His soul was untainted. Regret was absent, and coveting held no place" (10). Similarly to Job, Mendel faces a series of afflictions, prompting a dialogue with his Creator to understand the origin of his misfortunes. Viewing these misfortunes as a hidden divine decree, Mendel, as a modern individual, seeks control over his destiny. His solution mirrors the choices of many Eastern European Jews in the early twentieth century: emigration to New York, aiming for financial well-being and escape from persecution in Czarist Russia.

Mendel Singer envisions a solution rooted in a spatial transformation akin to the messianic redemption in Jewish tradition. Parallel to the messianic return to the Promised Land, he believes that "America was God's country, New York the city of miracles, and English the most beautiful language" (131). However, adversity persists for the Singer family in New York, revealing it as another challenging chapter in Mendel's saga of tribulations.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, amid rising fascist and antisemitic threats in Europe, Jewish writers, notably in the German-speaking cultural sphere, turned to biblical themes such as the narrative of Job to grapple with contemporary suffering.⁵⁵ This literary trend, shared by Roth, emerged as the optimism regarding Jewish assimilation waned against the backdrop of political violence.⁵⁶ The tension in Job's narrative, oscillating between cataclysmic upheaval and potential redemption, mirrored the deep vulnerability felt by Jews in a time marked by a looming "apocalyptic fury soon to be unleashed."⁵⁷

The novel is often seen as embodying the tragic plight of the Jewish subject in the face of modern history.⁵⁸ Critics, moving beyond theological and biblical considerations, identify mythical elements in the biblical allusions, particularly in the miraculous ending, interpreting them as indicative of the author's departure from a realistic mode and a loss of faith in reality. In their interpretations, those critics frequently subordinated the novel's metaphysical and eschatological dimensions to discussions centered on the "tragic anti-hero" — Mendel Singer. The Job-like plot is thus seen as portraying a man's accusation against an enigmatic deity and a manifestation of the modern recognition of the "Death of God" — a challenge to justify God's existence amidst agonizing reality.

I propose an alternative perspective: the novel's Job-like narrative does not seek to employ a biblical allusion for contemporary conceptual purposes and transform the mythical into the historical; instead, it mythicizes the historical. Roth's novel offers an underlying mythical foundation rooted in absolute theological truth. This foundation not only provides an intellectual framework to address modern concerns but also translates historical realities into a theological-ahistorical structure intertwined with metaphysical and sacred elements. The emphasis on the eschatological

dimension of the novel and its defiance of historical rationalization can be understood as Roth's critique of the great narratives of modernity and as an integral component of the mechanism responsible for producing the mythical totality and the utopian horizon inseparable from the Habsburg Myth.

BARUCH KURZWEIL'S "JOB AND THE POSSIBILITY OF BIBLICAL TRAGEDY"

Roth's approach to the biblical story of Job, I argue, is not "tragical" but "theological." To elucidate this argument, I have chosen to examine the biblical and literary character of Job through the lens of another descendant of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Baruch Kurzweil.⁵⁹ In his essay titled "Job and the Possibilities of Biblical Tragedy,"⁶⁰ Kurzweil scrutinized the modern interpretation of biblical myths outside the traditional context of Jewish faith. He contends that the story of Job cannot be viewed as a tragic drama, an artistic mode characterized by a struggle between equal and opposing dialectical entities that form the basis of the tragic conflict.⁶¹ Greek tragedy "does not know of one and single truth."⁶² It embodies a conflict between contrasting truths that resist resolution in favor of one over the other, maintaining their inherent relativity. Judaism's value system, however, "does not align well with the spiritual aspects of tragedy,"⁶³ as it allows for only a singular absolute to prevail—the divine truth. The biblical narrative of Job is incompatible with the tragic genre within this theological framework. The Bible establishes the existence of a singular and absolute value represented by divine commandment, eliminating the possibility of coexisting opposing value systems in dialectical tension.

Interpretations examining the intertextual connection between Roth's novel and the Book of Job often regard the latter as crucial in shaping a modern tragedy with universal attributes.⁶⁴ Kurzweil suggests that modern literary adaptations perceive the Book of Job as a tragedy due to a purposeful "abandonment of the artistic-sacral foundation on which the biblical narrative is based."⁶⁵ The transformation of the biblical character into a modern tragic hero stems from rejecting the absolute truth embedded in the biblical narrative, leading to the "de-sacralization as the foundational premise for a tragic interpretation."⁶⁶ Unlike literary adaptations that turn the biblical story into "artistic fiction,"⁶⁷ Roth employs it to subordinate literary fiction to the absolute truth inherent in the sacred reality of the scriptural narrative.

In his life, Roth did not feel committed to the theology implied by his novel, but his text does manifest a similar "degree of seriousness" that Kurzweil attributes to modern writers whose works strive "to reencounter the truth of the Biblical myth."⁶⁸ The novel's theological and metaphysical aspects are not secondary to its modern

plot; rather, the modern plot is mythicized and becomes an integral part of the theological and metaphysical totality. Roth firmly embraces the belief that redemption emerges solely through divine grace, connecting historical and modern characters to the biblical world and subjecting them to its inherent logic. Roth and Kurzweil both resist the revolutionary tenets of modernity, emphasizing the enduring importance of Jewish metaphysical and theological foundations. While Kurzweil, rooted in Orthodox Judaism, considers these foundations paramount, Roth, influenced by the Habsburg Myth, integrates them into a broader narrative expressing a worldview that harmoniously blends diverse elements into a mythic unity.

In Roth's case, this "mythic unity" binds together the theological and the political, echoing the myth of European unity as a sociopolitical model capable of fostering a pan-European vision. This unity, as Luiza Bialasiewicz describes, represents "the final expression of a multinational cosmos before the upheaval of the two world wars."⁶⁹ It is rooted in the ideal of Austria-Hungary as a cosmopolitan and transnational political entity capable of uniting diverse national, ethnic, and religious groups.⁷⁰

In Roth's exploration, the pursuit of mythic unity, akin to the imperial synthetic state model, extends into metaphysical and spiritual realms. As discussed in subsequent sections, the idea of redemption Roth presents in *Job* embodies the principle of mythic unity based on the "synthesis of individual and collective as well as particular and universal identities."⁷¹ In other words, this concept of redemption revolves around the pursuit of unity and harmony across both collective and individual dimensions.⁷² Through the reconciliation of contradictions and differences under the authority of a divine meta-signifier, Roth's concept of redemption serves as a celestial reflection of the political model of a multinational, multiethnic, and multireligious state governed by a strong imperial authority.

THE BIBLICAL ALLUSIONS: HISTORICITY AND TRANSHISTORICITY

The novel transforms Mendel's account into a *Job*-like narrative, where divine influence shapes experiences more than human aspirations. Despite urbanization being a well-documented historical avenue of early twentieth-century Jewish modernization, the novel's theological depth frames events as intrinsic elements guided by divine providence in the enduring foundations of the Jewish nation.

The historical immanence and realism in the migration narrative coexist with the transcendent and metaphysical. Departing from linear chronology, the novel adopts a temporal structure reminiscent of biblical narratives, infusing temporal descriptions with mythical and legendary qualities. Roth employs a theological and

typological approach to calendar-based temporal units, such as the Singer family's migration to America, spanning three days: "They journeyed for three days and changed trains twice" (105). This typological use of the numerical "three" transcends quantitative time, emphasizing symbolic essence drawn from the biblical text.⁷³

The oceanic journey of the Singer family to America carries apocalyptic undertones, infusing the narrative with messianic tension and a longing for redemption. Roth's portrayal of this journey invokes the image of the mythical creature Leviathan, also referenced in the biblical Book of Job:

He cast a fleeting glance at the sea and drank consolation from the endless of the choppy water. It was eternal. Mendel was aware that God himself had created it. . . . Deep down on its bottom coiled Leviathan, the holy fish, whom the pious and righteous will eat on the Day of Judgment. "Neptune" was the name of the ship on which Mendel stood. It was a large ship. But compared with the Leviathan and with the sea, with the sky and with the wisdom of the Eternal, it was a tiny ship. . . . He turned in a semicircle and scattered the individual words of the blessing over the green waves: "Praised are you, Eternal One, our Lord, who created the seas and with them divides the continents!" (107–8)

For Mendel, the mythical and divine are inseparable facets of his existence. Human creation, symbolized by the ship, and mythical beings like Leviathan form integral components of a singular totality under divine control and the ship's name—Neptune—underscores the diminishment of mythological and human gods in the face of a monotheistic divinity.

The biblical portrayal of Leviathan, a colossal sea creature, attests to God's might. In the Book of Job, Leviathan is described as an immense sea creature unconquerable by conventional weapons, except for the sword of God. This scriptural reference cautions against humanity attempting to seize divine authority and confront entities mightier than itself.⁷⁴

In Roth's poetic imagination, the character of Leviathan often serves as a powerful metaphor for the conditions of redemption in modernity. A significant reference to this can be found in Roth's novella "Der Leviathan" (1940), which centers around the life of Nissen Piczenik, a Jewish coral merchant from a Russian shtetl.⁷⁵ According to the novella's narrator, the corals lie deep in the ocean, under the dominion of Leviathan—a dual and fearsome creature embodying both fertility and destruction, entrusted by God to safeguard the corals. Piczenik, consumed by his passionate obsession for corals, turns the ocean and Leviathan into the focal point of his life. The introduction of the fake corals from New York City into the Russian trade circulation by the Hungarian businessman Lakatos—a representative of a hypermodern

capitalist civilization that celebrates mass-produced and counterfeit representations—undermines Piczenik’s socioeconomic status. Similar to Mendel Singer, Piczenik loses his place within the existing framework of his life, struggling to find his footing in a new, modern context, and like Mendel, he decides to board a migrant ship in an attempt to redeem himself from his situation and find a place in the modern world beyond the ocean. The ship’s name, Phoenix, ironically foreshadows Piczenik’s tragic fate: it sinks on its way to Canada, and he meets his death in the depths of the ocean. In his demise, in what appears to be an ambiguous act—either drowning or suicide—Piczenik reunites with the Leviathan kingdom. This event mirrors a Gnostic model of redemption, where Piczenik liberates himself from the constraints of the material world and returns to a primordial, anthropic oceanic state.⁷⁶ In contrast to the idea of historical redemption, Leviathan suggests the possibility of an eschatological, anticosmic, and anti-immanent redemption that culminates in the annihilation of the subject and the end of history.

Roth’s recurring use of the figure of Leviathan suggests that in the modern condition epitomized by Western capitalist civilization, redemption and liberation cannot manifest solely within historical events. The theological framework surrounding the Singer family’s migration journey implies a predetermined narrative of anticipated failure: Despite Mendel completing his journey to America and ultimately finding personal salvation, the theological and eschatological dimensions surrounding these events reflect Roth’s skepticism about resolving the impasses generated by modernization.

Job’s fusing of narratology and theology reflects Roth’s critique of attempts to secularize theological eschatology through narratives of modern progress that suggest noneschatological, historical redemption.⁷⁷ Deborah’s presentation of her ailing son Menuchim to the rabbi echoes the Binding of Isaac, imbuing him with the qualities of a sacrificial figure: “... she presented her son on both arms, as one offers a sacrifice” (20). Aligned with Mendel Singer’s *Job*-like narrative, Menuchim becomes part of a series of sacrificial figures, entwined with the transhistorical concept of divine trials and Jewish suffering. Additionally, in the Singers’ apartment in New York City, an unusually large number of pests invade and multiply: “The vermin . . . multiplied unstoppably. . . . The bedbugs crawled in long orderly rows down the walls, along the ceiling, waited in bloodthirsty malice for nightfall and fell onto the beds of the sleeping. The fleas jumped out of the black gaps between the floorboards into the clothes, onto the pillows, onto the blankets” (132). The term “*Das Ungeziefer*” (vermin) in the original German text is akin to its use in the Luther Bible’s German translation of the Old Testament, specifically in the description of the plagues of Egypt in the Book of Exodus. This biblical reference suggests that the pests in Mendel’s home are a divinely intended “plague.” Before the Singer family’s decision to depart for

New York, the narrator notes that “one day smallpox broke out in the town” (13). As plagues and collective maladies are often perceived in biblical and halakhic literature as divine retribution, they introduce a religious and metaphysical dimension to the novel’s realistic events.⁷⁸ In response to the outbreak, Mendel “fled no divine punishment” (13). The narrative’s deliberate avoidance of ironic or critical tones in presenting Mendel’s interpretation of the events, along with the absence of an alternative explanation, strengthens the novel’s theological undertone.

In depicting New York, the narrative highlights its surreal and ominous nature. The wind striking Mendel’s face in the city’s streets is described as “the fiery breath of hell” (112), and the dust and gusts evoke memories of “the desert through which his ancestors had wandered for forty years” (112). This direct allusion to the Israelites’ desert journey after leaving Egypt draws a parallel between the Jewish quest for the Promised Land and Mendel’s family’s aspiration to reach another promised land—America. However, New York is portrayed as a desert, and America is depicted not as the Promised Land, but rather as a malevolent entity sacrificing its citizens on its own altar. After Shemariah’s death in World War I and Deborah’s subsequent passing, Mendel declares, “America has killed us. America is a deadly fatherland. What was day at home is here night. What was life at home is here death. . . . In America, you are buried, Deborah, I too, Mendel Singer, will be buried in America” (146). Migrating to America not only fails to redeem Mendel but also adds to his chain of atrocities, encapsulating Jewish suffering as a consequence of historical circumstances and the eternal covenant with the divine.

TRANSCENDENTAL MESSIANISM AND PROMETHEAN MESSIANISM

In a manner typical of Roth’s later literary works, the novel delves into themes such as messianism, redemption, and utopianism, which were absent from his earlier texts.⁷⁹ Mendel, a devout Jew, relinquishes hope in the Messiah’s imminent arrival after enduring numerous catastrophes. He acknowledges the Messiah’s failure to arrive, prompting him to take active control of his fate: “He will not come. Let others wait for him. Mendel wasn’t waiting” (172). Rather than passively awaiting redemption, Mendel actively pursues it, reflecting the experiences of many impoverished Eastern European Jews who sought solace and renewal in an advanced, modern society found in the Western metropolis across the ocean.

In traditional Jewish messianic thought, redemption is seen as solely dependent on the divine authority of God, unfolding independently of human will or action. David Ohana distinguishes this as “transcendental messianism.”⁸⁰ In contrast, “Promethean messianism” envisions a universal messianism without religious content,

where the future is shaped by terrestrial forces.⁸¹ Unlike eschatological messianism, Promethean messianism operates within history, driven by human agency. Through the modern currents of Enlightenment, nationalism, and political revolutions, Promethean messianism rationalizes messianic aspirations and utopianism, departing from passive eschatology to empower humanity in actively shaping its destiny.

The Singer family's urbanization and westward journey embody a tangible realization of contemporary redemption narratives.⁸² Traditional Jewish eschatology envisions redemption involving a divinely initiated geographical shift: the gathering of the People of Israel in the Holy Land.⁸³ Roth's novel portrays a Promethean messianic narrative, reflecting spatial movement not to the Holy Land but to a distant metropolis, offering potential emancipation from the hardships faced in the Russian Empire. The New World's bustling metropolis, particularly New York, symbolizes a utopian promise of progress, freedom, and prosperity.

In contrast to this historical narrative of "Promethean messianism," Roth's novel reintroduces eschatological significance, questioning the complete relocation of concepts from eschatology to history. Roth questions the pursuit of progress rooted solely in historical immanence, advocating for an acknowledgment of transcendence and tradition. In doing so, he transforms Promethean human rationality into an enigmatic divine logic, attributing historical events to divine power. The novel's optimistic conclusion hinges not on Mendel's adjustment to urban space, but on an unforeseen "miraculous" event—the recovery of his son. This providential redemption challenges the notion of historical redemption through human agency, critiquing attempts to grapple with history by negating theological dimensions.

In fact, Mendel's choice of Promethean redemption is depicted as a defiance of the divine plan. In Mendel's decision to immigrate to America, he is portrayed as acting in opposition to the rabbi's warning—and indirectly against God's will⁸⁴—not to forsake his son (21). Mendel's inability to comprehend the divine reasoning underlying his family's misfortunes propels him to actions perceived as a deviation from God's intentions. The rabbi's early prophecy, promising Menuchim's well-being, is fulfilled in the novel's conclusion, creating narrative circularity. The prophecy-fulfillment pattern imparts a deterministic quality to the plot. The realization of the prophecy underscores the family's despondency in reshaping destiny through immigration.

Mendel's choice to migrate to America represents a shift from eschatological to Promethean redemption. However, this transition proves unsuccessful, as the Singer family, despite achieving material gains, faces continued misfortunes in New York. The tragic fate of Mendel's children results from their adoption of twentieth-century "redeeming" narratives such as nationalism, urban modernization, and assimilation. Mendel recognizes that his choice to move to America goes against divine laws and the divine plan. The Promethean messianic solutions, particularly in the context of

American liberal society, reveal themselves as tragic illusions, demanding sacrifice on the national altar during times of war. The family's immigration to the American metropolis intensifies the children's detachment from traditional norms, exacerbating Mendel's concerns about assimilation. This leads to Mendel's isolation and desolation until the miraculous emergence of his son. It becomes clear that evading fate is implausible, as Shemariah, who fled Russia to avoid conscription, enlists in the American army and perishes. Miriam, despite Mendel's efforts, persists in relationships with non-Jewish men. The family's situation not only fails to improve but worsens.

In Jewish eschatology, messianic redemption is viewed as an event surpassing the confines of the historical present. Roth's novel portrays a redemption that, while not wholly embracing an eschatological essence, is grounded in utopian solace and salvation manifesting within history and operates within the individual's sphere and finds expression through harmonized relationship with the world.⁸⁵

During Roth's rekindled fascination of Eastern European Jewish culture, coinciding with the writing of *Job*, he discovered an alternative perspective to what he perceived as an excessively rational, materialistic, and mechanistic modern civilization. Roth was particularly drawn to the lives of Hasidic Jews, where divine law permeated every aspect of daily existence, serving as a conduit for individual redemption in the present moment. The novel's private and individual redemptive moment, embodied in Menuchim's miraculous return and the renewed harmonious relationship between Mendel and his surroundings, aligns with Hasidic interpretation of Messianism, emphasizing the potential for a mystical and individualized redemption.⁸⁶

DEUS EX MACHINA

Modern authors, deviating from the optimistic resolution in the biblical Job narrative, often challenge its prevailing notions of hope and comfort.⁸⁷ In contrast, the revelation of Menuchim's presence in New York during Passover, symbolizing liberation from enslavement, solidifies his messianic role and contributes to the novel's optimistic conclusion. References to the imminent arrival of Elijah and the utopian hope expressed in the Passover Haggadah ("Next year in Jerusalem!") frames the unveiling of Menuchim's identity as part of a sequence of extraordinary events guided by divine providence.⁸⁸ As he knocks at the door, "Everyone paused. . . the yellow unfamiliar light and the old melody had brought the adults and the children so close to the anticipation of a miracle that they stopped breathing for a moment and looked at one another, helpless and pale, as if they wanted to ask whether the prophet

wasn't really demanding admittance" (185–86). The messianic tension reaches its peak as Menuchim emerges, evoking echoes of Lazarus or a resurrected Jesus. The children weep, candles flicker, and Menkes, Mendel's friend, exclaims, "'Great are the miracles that the Eternal One performs, still today, as several thousand years ago'" (196).

Menuchim's arrival brings forth an air of optimism, starkly contrasting with the preceding hardships and somber atmosphere.⁸⁹ The unexpected twist toward the novel's conclusion transforms the narrative from immediate realism into an unforeseen semi-utopian and almost fantastical dimension. Literary scholars thus criticized this twist, perceiving it as an unconvincing plot element steeped in sentimentality, indicative of Roth's departure from realism to a phantasmagorical writing style reflecting his disillusionment with the present.⁹⁰ In the early 1930s, critics perceived Roth's embrace of miraculous escapism as disconnected from the prevailing skepticism regarding the potential of a miraculous occurrence to rescue European Jews from dire circumstances.⁹¹

Critics' disapproval of the novel's ending stems from a realistic expectation that overlooks the effect embedded in its abrupt conclusion.⁹² The sudden emergence of Menuchim aligns with the Jewish messianic idea, emphasizing that redemption can materialize at any unforeseen moment. Despite earlier hints of redemption through the rabbi's prophecy, the actualization of the redemptive moment is portrayed as unforeseen and beyond human manipulation. The theological framework underscores that Menuchim's revelation is a result of divine intervention, guided by a mysterious logic beyond human comprehension. Menuchim's appearance therefore resembles a *Deus ex machina*;⁹³ lacking a firm causal connection to preceding events, it underscores the human subject's dependence on divine assistance.⁹⁴

The biblical Book of Job suggests that mere piety and strict adherence to divine commandments do not guarantee a life free from suffering. Roth extends this idea, emphasizing the inscrutable nature of divine sovereignty beyond human rationalization. In an era dominated by nationalist movements, progress doctrine, and urban modernization as paths for human redemption, Roth bestows upon the novel's protagonist a semi-eschatological redemption rooted solely in divine authority. The fact that Mendel experiences a miraculous and redemptive revelation of his son indicates that Roth does not negate divine existence but rather questions the attempt to secularize eschatological salvation via narratives of progress, modernization, and enlightenment. The transformation within the trajectory of the Singer family does not arise from their decision to immigrate to New York or Mendel's attempt to align their fate with that of the American nation. Instead, the miracle is apprehended within the parameters of a divine schema defined by deterministic attributes, impervious to human praxis.

The novel's conclusion portrays Mendel's "redemption" as a whimsical result of divine will, occurring without a direct causal link to his contemplations. Unlike the biblical Job, Mendel Singer becomes consumed by thoughts of blasphemy and rebellion. On Yom Kippur, he contemplates the possibility of buying pork from the Italian quarter, yet, eventually, he refrains from acting on these blasphemous thoughts. Instead, he decides to burn his prayer kit:

He went into the kitchen, gathered up newspaper and pine chips and made a fire in the open stove. When the fire reached a considerable height and width, Mendel walked with strong strides to the wardrobe and took from it the little red velvet sack that contained his phylacteries, his prayer shawl and his prayer books. He imagined how these objects would burn. The flames will seize the yellow-toned shawl of pure sheep's wool and destroy it with pointed bluish greedy tongues. . . . Thus Mendel stood before the open fire and shouted and stamped with his feet. (153–54)

While biblical Job's reward from God stems from his unwavering faithfulness, Mendel's salvation is intertwined with heretical intentions, thereby challenging the traditional cause-and-effect relationship between righteous acts and redemption. Mendel's apostasy does not diminish the theological enchantment of the fictional world; instead, it culminates in a personal redemption infused with Gnostic sensibilities. Apostasy is inherent to Gnosticism, enabling transcendence from the flawed and evil material world governed by a malevolent divinity, toward reunion with the absolute and transcendent God.⁹⁵ Mendel's redemption, while not a complete Gnostic nullification of the immanent world leading to withdrawal from history, ultimately results in theological and spiritual reconciliation with a divine presence.⁹⁶

Unlike the Gnostic pursuit of transcendental redemption through negation of materiality, Roth emphasizes achieving redemption in this world through spiritual reconnection with a benevolent divine presence. Mendel's Gnostic rebellion manifests in his defiance of religious norms and practices that prescribe an exclusive path to a distant god, perpetuating a state of alienation. Roth's exploration of overcoming the immanent deity in favor of a transcendent one taps into a universal horizon beyond the particularistic exclusivity of religion.⁹⁷ This resonates with Roth's understanding of the Jewish mission of universality (*jüdischer Weltauftrag*).⁹⁸ Inspired by the Dual Monarchy's humanistic legacy, Roth believed Jewish diasporism, nomadism, supranationalism, and cosmopolitanism aligned with a vision of a humanistic Europe that could transcend national boundaries to embrace cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity.⁹⁹

Mendel's rebellion and subsequent redemption result in the formulation of a theological and spiritual relationship between man, the world, and the divine. If Mendel's life in New York is characterized by tangible and symbolic barriers separating himself from his environment, then after his redemption, Mendel perceives his surroundings in a reconciled and unmediated manner. In the closing pages of the novel, after Menuchim's miraculous revelation on the eve of Passover, Mendel and Menuchim travel to an unspecified location at the outskirts of the city—

They drove for a long time through noisy streets. . . . And they reached a world where the soft sand was yellow, the wide sea blue and all the houses white. On the terrace in front of one of those houses, at a small white table, sat Mendel Singer. He slurped a golden-brown tea. On his stooped back shone the first warm sun of the year. The blackbirds hopped up close to him. . . . The waves of the sea lapped the shore with a gentle regular beat. In the pale blue sky were a few little white clouds. Under the sky Mendel was willing to believe that Jonas would one day turn up again and Miriam come home. . . . The sparse, curly little hairs on his bald head were moved by a spring wind, as if they were strange delicate plants. Thus Mendel Singer greeted the world. And a gull flew, like a silver bullet of the sky, under the canopy of the terrace. Mendel watched its precipitous flight and the shadowy white trail that it left behind in the blue air. (201–2)

This episode serves as a contrasting depiction of Mendel Singer's arrival in New York City, where he experiences an alienated and mediated relationship with urban space. The tumultuous nature of urban civilization and the disorientation of space are replaced on the seashore by a vision of harmony between humanity and nature. Here, the entire space, mirroring the tranquil and rhythmic undulations of the sea, is depicted through comforting and anticipatory cadences of the natural world. Human beings, animals, the sea, houses, and sand—all elements of the environment—merge into a harmonious unity that blurs the conventional distinctions between humanity and nature: the wind gently stirs “the sparse, curly little hairs” on Mendel's head, “as if they were strange delicate plants”; Mendel's tea is “golden-brown” akin to the “soft yellow” sand; the houses are white, reminiscent of the clouds. This portrayal of space captures the human presence through the lens of the nonhuman natural world, fostering a nondualistic interaction between these realms and emphasizing the direct and unmediated closeness among humans and nature, as well as between various spatial elements. The harmonious state depicted in this episode is achievable not within the heart of urban life, but rather in the liminal space of the seaside, far removed from the bustling center of city life. This further underscores Roth's critique of the limited salvation offered to the Jewish subject by the modern urban world.

THE MESSIANIC MOMENT AND THE “HABSBURG MYTH”

Unlike literary trends depicting Job-like characters trapped in unalleviated suffering, Roth's narrative aligns with a positive and redemptive essence reminiscent of the Biblical framework. However, this alignment does not stem from his particularistic exploration of Jewish suffering but unveils a broader radical political potential, resonating with the political perspective of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

As the novel culminates in the Passover *seder*, Menuchim, now appearing as the musician Alexei Kossak, reveals his true identity. Notably, the phonetic similarity between Menuchim's adopted family name (Kossak) and the term “Cossack” becomes significant. Within Jewish historical consciousness, “Cossack” carries negative connotations, often associated with gentiles harboring animosity toward Jews.¹⁰⁰ Throughout the novel, the figure of the Cossack symbolizes Mendel's apprehension toward assimilation, emphasizing his need for a distinct separation between the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds. Mendel refers to the non-Jewish soldiers engaging with his daughter Miriam as “Cossacks,” fearing their potential influence on her (95). Upon discovering that Miriam's American suitor, Mac, is not Jewish, Mendel's thoughts immediately turn to the Cossacks from Eastern Europe, pondering, “He knows, Mendel Singer, that Mac isn't a Jew, and the Cossacks aren't Jews either” (68). Similar to Miriam, Jonas finds the Cossacks alluring, deciding to enlist in the Russian army to emulate them and “ride like the best Cossack” (128). The fear of infiltration, whether in intimate relationships or adopting a foreign militant culture, plays a role in Mendel's decision to immigrate, driven by the belief that “in America there are no Cossacks” (74). Later, Mendel attributes their departure to his daughter's association with Cossacks, stating, “For other reasons, because of my daughter, who had begun to run around with Cossacks—with Cossacks!—we had to leave” (158). Despite migration to America, Mendel's apprehension lingers, evident when he labels the men in uniform welcoming them as “the Cossacks of America” (109).

In Mendel's worldview, “Cossack” encompasses any non-Jew, symbolizing an ominous presence. Yet the messianic revelation involving Menuchim/Alexei hints at a potential transgressive fluidity between the “Jew” and the “Cossack,” symbolizing the coexistence of opposing identities—the “Jew” and “non-Jew” (Cossack).¹⁰¹ This aligns with Hasidic approaches to Messianism, where the messianic juncture entails a cognitive and spiritual transformation erasing distinctions between “self” and “other” and dissolving pre-existing categorical differentiations.¹⁰² According to Elliot Wolfson, this cosmic messianic occurrence envisions a “unified reality,” uniting nations under a shared divinity.¹⁰³ In light of this interpretation, the deconstruction of the dyadic clash between the “Jew” and the “Cossack” compels an ethical imperative, negating hierarchical norms in favor of egalitarian diversity,

distinctiveness, and differentiation.¹⁰⁴ Despite the common interpretation of Job's narrative as a testament to ongoing Jewish suffering and the covenant between the people of Israel and their God,¹⁰⁵ Menuchim's messianic revelation signifies Roth's avoidance of anchoring Mendel's suffering within an identity politics that grants Jewish particularity moral and existential precedence.¹⁰⁶

Menuchim's messianic revelation complicates interpretations focusing on implicit critiques of assimilation within the narrative.¹⁰⁷ However, it is insufficient to assert that the novel solely cautions against the perils of assimilation and advocates for preserving an exclusive connection to Jewish tradition. Roth's response to Jewish assimilation apprehensions does not reinforce the partition between "Jewish" and "non-Jewish" entities. Instead, it exploits the radical potential inherent in blurring rigid identity boundaries in the sphere of redemption and thus triumphs over distinctions, exclusivity, and theological particularity. Against the backdrop of rising nationalist movements and escalating antisemitism in 1920s Europe, Roth's redemptive discourse underscores the universal dimension of messianism, envisioning an ideal unity across humanity.¹⁰⁸

The novel's messianic moment presents a harmonious world where divergences coexist within a unifying framework, aligning with the utopian geopolitical imagination perpetuated in the Habsburg Myth. The Habsburg Myth embodies supranational coherence and reconciles incongruous elements, challenging the nation-state's divisive logic. Roth therefore envisions redemption as a utopian resurgence of imperial experience, transcending exclusionary nation-state logic. In an era of rising antisemitism and chauvinism, Roth proposes redemption through a radical reevaluation of the "self" and the "other" beyond the Schmittian dichotomy of "friend" and "foe."¹⁰⁹

THE KEY TO REDEMPTION—A PAST EMBEDDED IN THE PRESENT

At the novel's conclusion, Mendel reunites with his healed son, who pledges to assist in Miriam's rehabilitation and to return with Mendel to Europe. This marks a departure from the biblical story of Job, where his lost family members remain lost forever. Ultimately, God rewards Job's righteousness and faithfulness by giving him seven sons and three daughters. In contrast, Mendel's redemption is intricately linked to the processes of healing and restoration within his surviving family. This distinction from the biblical narrative is crucial for understanding Roth's perspective on redemption, the past, and the potential for future rectification.

In the context of modernization and progress, the prevalent relegation of symbols of tradition embodies the endeavor to transcend historical constraints toward a more

enlightened future. In the oscillation of debates concerning modern Jewish life between strands of evolution versus revolution, Roth unequivocally aligns himself with the former. *Job* thus articulates Roth's resolution: the reappearance of Menuchim, a prerequisite for the potential rectification and redemption of Mendel, embodies the ethical and moral dynamics envisioned by Roth between the past and present, as well as between tradition and modernity.

Initially, Menuchim is excluded from the prospect of historical redemption within modern American urban life. In their quest to secure a better future for their family, Mendel and Deborah Singer leave Menuchim in the Eastern European shtetl. Menuchim's physical limitations prevent him from joining the journey to the Western metropolis, thereby positioning him as modernity's outcast—a disabled figure unable to experience *Bildung* and change. He is not conscripted into the army, thus not sacrificed on the altar of nationalism; he does not migrate to the bustling city, “benefiting” from what technological progress could offer.

At the novel's conclusion, Menuchim emerges as a messianic figure, contributing to the redemption of Mendel Singer from his desolate state. The one left behind in the pursuit of progress and a brighter future is the very person who carries the message of redemption and the possibility of future rectification. Through Menuchim's character, Roth underscores the problem of suppressing both past and tradition in the process of historical modernization and progress.

Job's redemptive moment seems to embody a distinctly restorative quality, drawing sustenance from the past while aspiring to rejuvenate its essence in the present.¹¹⁰ This form of redemption avoids grounding itself in rigid dichotomies—whether spatial or temporal—that would delineate a stark contrast between a history marked by suffering and an idealized, harmonious future.¹¹¹ Against the backdrop of prevailing currents of progress, modernization, and the pursuit of material advancement, Roth's narrative constructs an alternative existential ground that bridges the realms of the past and the present, as well as the earthly and the metaphysical.¹¹²

NOTES

1. Wirth-Nesher, *City Codes*, 140.

2. Facchini, “The City, the Ghetto and Two Books,” 11–44.

3. Despite modern cities often being celebrated as places of opportunity in the Jewish migratory experience, they occupied a complex position in the Jewish cultural and historical imagination due to various restrictions imposed by authorities (such as the pale of settlement in Russia), ghettoization, the harsh realities of industrialization, bureaucratic complexities, and pervasive antisemitism. These urban challenges were critiqued in early

twentieth-century Jewish literature. For example, the plight of impoverished Jewish immigrants in New York was starkly depicted in serialized novels by authors like Sholem Asch and Michael Gold, who portrayed urban Jewish communities as perpetually marginalized and isolated. In Eastern Europe, the migration of Jews to large cities was met with numerous local restrictions. Sholem Aleichem's literature, particularly his "Menahem-Mendl" stories (1909–1913), satirically portrayed Jewish life in Kyiv (referred to as "Yehupets"), highlighting the city's hostility toward Jewish integration despite their aspirations of belonging. Yiddish poets such as Anna Margolin, Rokhl Oyerbakh, Dvoyre Fogel, Kadya Molodowsky, Ida Hempen, and Rokhl Korn also addressed urban issues faced by Jewish women in European and American metropolises, including poverty, harsh labor conditions, and sexual harassment. For further elaboration, see (in the order of the presented information): Wallach, "America Abandoned," 202; Estrakh, *In Harness*; Lyubas, "Gender, Language and Territory," 163–84.

4. Case, *The Age of Questions*, xiv.

5. In the nineteenth century, the maskilim, influenced by the European Enlightenment, embraced Judah Leib Gordon's statement in "*Hakitzah Ami!*" [Awake my people!] (1866), encouraging Jews to be "a man on the street and a Jew at home." They aimed to obscure Jewish differences in the private sphere, viewing immigration to the major cities of Western and central Europe as an opportunity to embrace new languages, attend theaters, adopt European attire, and pursue secular education, seeking to make their Jewishness less conspicuous. See Stanislawski, "Yehudah Leib Gordon."

6. The allure of the modern city for Jews seeking integration, education, and equal rights in European society became, in early twentieth-century Jewish national thought, a symbol of the futility of diasporic life. Many Zionist thinkers and activists regarded cities as an inferior, bourgeois form of living, conflicting with the communal and progressive character of pioneering nonurban settlements in the Land of Israel. David Ben-Gurion opposed building cities in Mandatory Palestine, comparing the fate of Carthage, a city-state, to Rome, a country-state, highlighting the triumph of rural over urban in historical struggles. Max Nordau expressed concerns about the modern urban lifestyle, characterizing the great European city as "a sanatorium housing all the world's deranged" and an "evolutionary regression" for humanity. As cited in Klein-Halevi, *Revisionism, Architecture, and Urbanism in Tel Aviv*, 111 (translation is mine).

7. Interestingly, in contrast to Roth, who perceived New York as the quintessential American metropolis and a stark departure from the classical imperial city of the Habsburg monarchy, the Jewish historian of Galician origin, Salo Baron (1895–1989), who also immigrated to the United States from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, viewed the United States as a pluralistic imperial entity akin to the Habsburg monarchy. In his seminal work *Social and Religious History of the Jews* (1937), published a decade after his migration to the United States, Baron explores the historical connection between Jews and the major empires and multinational states where Jewish foreignness was not seen as exceptional and problematic. According to

Baron, the ubiquity of Jewish wanderings and settlements throughout the empire served as a fundamental basis for unifying diverse groups around the imperial state. Baron saw the United States, much like the Austro-Hungarian Empire of his birth, as a multicultural imperial republic capable of safeguarding its various components and minority groups, including the Jewish community. Baron, *Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 39. On Baron's Habsburg provenance, see Engel, "Crisis and Lachrymosity," 243–64.

8. Ury, "Migration as Redemption," 4.

9. Ury, "Migration as Redemption," 4.

10. Ury, "Migration as Redemption," 6.

11. This endeavor, explains Christoph Schmidt, finds its clear expression in Kant's famous formulation, which defined modern Enlightenment as an act of humanity's liberation from religious bondage, specifically from the dominion of God, thus transforming humanity into a rational being with autonomous ethical and political authority. In this way, modernity embeds within it the principle of redemption and future salvation but strips it of its eschatological content. See Schmidt, "Canon, Gnosis, and Modernity," 463.

12. Like other members of his generation in the interwar period, Roth's embrace of Jewish spirituality enabled him to address issues not only concerning Jewish identity but also the broader modern condition. Many Jewish intellectuals and thinkers of Roth's era, living within German culture in the early decades of the twentieth century, experienced disillusionment with the Jewish assimilation project of the nineteenth century. Consequently, they turned to Jewish mysticism, exploring the potential for redemption and the restoration of lost harmony within modern Jewish life. See Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia*, 2.

13. Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia*, 2.

14. PiloIU, *The Quest for Redemption*, 2.

15. See, for instance: Roth, *Report from a Parisian Paradise*; Roth, *What I Saw*; Bronsen, *Joseph Roth*, 152–53; Perloff, *Edge of Irony*, 3–11, 51.

16. Roth scholars have conceptualized his identity in diverse ways. Marsha Rozenblit sees it as a "tripartite identity," harmonizing Austrian, Jewish, and German elements. David Bronsen, Roth's biographer, argues that his sense of belonging is rooted in a "double consciousness" of being both Jewish and Austrian. For further reading, see Rozenblit, *Reconstructing a National Identity*; Bronsen, "The Jew in Search of a Fatherland," 54–61.

17. Hughes, *Facing Modernity*; Tonkin, *Joseph Roth's March into History*.

18. Perloff, *Edge of Irony*, 3.

19. Roth's admiration for these Jewish "qualities" reached its zenith in the late 1920s, when he published a collection of essays in his book *Juden auf Wanderschaft* portraying the way of life of Eastern European Jews (*Ostjuden*).

20. Lazaroms, "The Double Bind of Self-Narration," 698.

21. Rank, "The Life and Work of Joseph Roth and the Crisis of Tripartite Identity," 69–86, esp. 70.

22. Lazaroms, "Hotel Patriots or Permanent Strangers?," 814–27.

23. Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*, 9.

24. Pappalardo, *Modernism in Trieste*, 32.

25. Yet, Roth himself was aware that even in cities of the Austro-Hungarian Empire such as Vienna, Prague, and Budapest, often considered bastions of multiculturalism, Jewish integration faced significant challenges. In *Wandering Jews* (1927), Joseph Roth depicted Eastern European Jewish immigrants in Vienna's Leopoldstadt as residing in what he described as "a sort of voluntary ghetto" (55), emphasizing their difficult living conditions and dependence on Jewish charity. Roth could not ignore Vienna's political and social complexities, particularly its first antisemitic mayor Karl Lueger, who coined the derogatory term "Judapest" to dismiss the prominent presence of Eastern European Jewish immigrants in Budapest. The rise of antisemitism in Vienna and Budapest due to the influx of Eastern Jewish immigrants (Ostjuden) was also viewed critically by local Jews already assimilated into urban culture, who distanced themselves from the newly arrived Ostjuden. Therefore, in post-World War I Vienna, Roth's perspective turned increasingly pessimistic regarding Jewish integration in an urban environment that had shifted away from its former supranational and multiethnic character. See Roth, *The Wandering Jews*, esp. 55–57; Pinsker, *A Rich Brew*, 129; Lupovitch, *Transleithanian Paradise*.

26. Magris, *Der habsburgische Mythos in der österreichischen Literatur*.

27. In this regard, Kati Tonkin argues that while Roth's literature may initially present life under Habsburg rule as idealistic, he also expresses a disenchanted and critical stance toward the imperial past. See Tonkin, *Joseph Roth's March into History*, 43. Similarly, Johanna Chovanec and Olof Heilo contend that Roth's literature embraces the Habsburg multinational ideal while simultaneously challenging the imperial notion of totality. See Chovanec and Heilo, "Narrating Empires," 3–35.

28. Magris, *Der habsburgische Mythos in der österreichischen Literatur*.

29. Wierzejska, "The Pogrom of Jews During and After World War I," 169–84.

30. A stark example is the anti-Jewish pogroms that swept the Habsburg Empire's Galician provinces in the spring and summer of 1898. During these pogroms, thousands of Roman Catholic peasants and townspeople in western Galicia murdered, injured, and plundered their Jewish neighbors, marking the most extensive anti-Jewish attacks in the Habsburg Empire's history. For further details, see Wierzejska, "The Pogrom of Jews During and After World War I"; Unowsky, *The Plunder*.

31. Renan, "What is a Nation?," 8–22. Renan's discussion primarily revolves around the French Republic, which differs significantly in essence and composition from the multinational Austro-Hungarian Empire. Yet the idea that a political entity, even one with a diverse and eclectic makeup, actively shapes its historical self-perception to establish a legitimate position as a political collective, remains applicable to the case of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

32. Joseph Roth, *Job: The Story of a Simple Man*. All page numbers of citations taken from this source are presented in the text's body.

33. Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz, *The Jew in the Modern World*, 883.

34. Rischin, *The Promised City*; Soyer, *Jewish Immigrant Associations and American Identity in New York*.

35. To grasp Roth's perception of New York, one must first understand his view of Berlin. Roth arrived in Berlin on June 1, 1920, and resided there until 1933. During his time in Berlin, he penned numerous feuilletons, many of which depicted the dysfunctional aspects of Berlin's urban culture amidst its pursuit of rational functionality. In his critical discourse, both Berlin and New York serve as synonymous representations of extreme and detrimental urbanism. Moreover, Roth portrays America and Germany as deceitful and perilous "promised lands," symbolizing the looming evils he observed in Europe during his era. See Roth, *The Wandering Jews*, 121; Roth, "Berliner Bilderbuch," 119.

36. When the opportunity arose for him to travel to America on behalf of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in 1926, Roth declined the offer. After his passing in May 1939, a letter dated January 21 from Dorothy Thompson, then chair of the American PEN Club, was discovered among Roth's papers. Thompson, renowned for translating Roth's novel *Job* into English, invited him to be an honored guest at the World Congress of Writers, scheduled to take place from May 8 to May 10, 1939, in New York. Roth never replied to the letter. Roth, *A Life in Letters*, 530–31.

37. As posited by German historian Detlev Peukert, during the 1920s, 'Amerikanismus' became a concept denoting unreserved and uncommitted modernity. The public discourse surrounding American culture, in one way or another, addressed the challenges and experiences of modernity faced by German culture. Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*, 179.

38. A detailed discussion on the production of space in the novel stands at the center of my 2025 article "The Habsburg Myth and the Production of Space in Joseph Roth's Novel *Job: The Story of a Simple Man*." In this article, I argue that Roth critiques the ideological mechanisms that portray Galicia as a pluralistic and cosmopolitan space where Jews can peacefully coexist with their non-Jewish neighbors. Therefore, Roth not only critiques the narrative that presents migration to the New World as a secular form of redemption but also challenges the narrative associated with the Habsburg Myth itself. This narrative portrays Jewish life in nation-states and postimperial political entities as a decline from the harmonious and tolerant existence experienced in the supranational empire.

39. Caplan, "Osterbrot or Matzo?," 147–70.

40. Roth, *The Wandering Jews*, 15.

41. Piloiu, *The Quest for Redemption*, 149.

42. Wolff, *The Idea of Galicia*, 278.

43. Like the Habsburg myth, the myth of Galicia emerges as a product of an ideological process intertwined with a distorted representation of history. For instance, historian Iryna

Vushko illustrates how the Bureaucrats in Galicia during the Habsburg period constantly worked to downplay national distinctions between the locals. See Vushko, *The Politics of Cultural Retreat*. As per Börries Kuzmany's observation, many instances of tolerance in Galicia were, in fact, outcomes of top-down integration policies rather than events arising from cultural openness and a diverse political perspective. Kuzmany, *Brody*, 212.

44. Magris, *Weit von wo*, 153.

45. Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," 23–31.

46. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, 295.

47. The Broken Windows Theory, formulated by James Wilson and George Kelling in 1982, posits that neglecting the repair of a single broken window can lead to general deterioration in a residential area. This theory suggests that addressing minor issues promptly is crucial to prevent the escalation of problems, preserving societal laws and regulations. The theory was implemented as a practical approach in New York City during the 1980s, notably under Mayor Rudy Giuliani, resulting in success in reducing criminality and violence in the urban landscape. See Maskaly and Boggess, "Broken Windows Theory," 1–4.

48. Michel de Certeau asserts that an elevated position, such as from a skyscraper, transforms the city into a readable "text" by compressing spatial dimensions and highlighting visual aspects. See de Certeau, "Walking in the City," 92.

49. de Certeau, "Walking in the City," 93.

50. Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," 313–54; de Certeau, "Walking in the City."

51. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 19.

52. These storytelling qualities and the proximity that Roth creates in the novel between the theological and the narratological align with what Claudio Magris identifies as Roth's dialogue with the Hasidic world and his fascination with the Chasidic tale (Magris, *Weit von wo*, 267). Hasidic storytelling intertwines the earthly and the heavenly in a manner that attests to the embeddedness of miracles in everyday life. Yet, in contrast to Magris, who argues that Roth's adoption of Hasidic storytelling is specifically linked to a Jewish rejection of history and a desire to transcend reality toward metaphysical and miraculous realms, the argument posited in this article is that Roth's notion of redemption insists on infusing history with metaphysical dimensions rather than entirely rejecting history altogether. On Roth's affinity for Jewish mysticism and Hasidism, see Steinmann, "Von der Würde des Unscheinbaren," 1–138.

53. Roth's portrayal of the Statue of Liberty has intriguing parallels with Franz Kafka's *America*. Published in 1927, Kafka's novel narrates Karl Roßmann's nightmarish immigration journey to the US, wherein he misconstrues the Statue of Liberty's torch as a threatening sword. Roth's novel similarly assigns a malevolent role to the Statue of Liberty, symbolizing uncertainty and foreboding for Mendel Singer. Both instances depict the iconic statue's transformation from a symbol of freedom to an enigmatic force that signals the protagonists' experiences in America.

54. According to Erich Auerbach in “Odysseus’ Scar,” the first chapter of *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946), the Hebrew deity is a “concealed God,” with hidden attributes and enigmatic intentions. This characteristic arises from the Jewish prohibition against creating sculptures or images, a fundamental aspect of Judaism and the foundation of Hebrew monotheism, as explained by Freud in *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). For further reading, see Auerbach, *Mimesis*; and Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*.

55. Hoffmann, “Des Herzens Gleichmut,” 109.

56. Stern, “Job as Alter Ego,” 201.

57. Frankel, “The Paradoxical Politics of Marginality,” 132.

58. See, for instance, Hüppauf, “Joseph Roth,” 309–25; Hoffmann, “Des Herzens Gleichmut,” 109–26.

59. Baruch Kurzweil (1907–72), a key figure in modern Hebrew literary scholarship, was born in Písek, Moravia, in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His influential essay, “Our New Literature: Continuation or Revolution?” (1959), challenges established assumptions about the genesis and evolution of modern Hebrew literature and contends that it arose in response to the crisis of secularism and the decline of religious authority. Kurzweil criticizes modern Hebrew literature for lacking continuity, bridging historical values with contemporary circumstances, and contributing to a cultural void. For further reading, see Miron, “Outlines of the Critic Kurzweil,” 10.

60. Kurzweil, “Job and the Possibilities of Biblical Tragedy,” 143–57.

61. Kurzweil, “Job and the Possibilities of Biblical Tragedy,” 153.

62. Kurzweil, “Job and the Possibilities of Biblical Tragedy,” 151.

63. Kurzweil, “Job and the Possibilities of Biblical Tragedy,” 144.

64. An interpretation of Roth’s novel that moves beyond a biblical theological lens to focus on its existential tragic dimension is facilitated by recognizing the universal nature of the biblical Job narrative. The Book of Job portrays a righteous gentile character, emphasizing themes of divine providence and justice that transcend a single culture or religion. Isaiah Leibowitz suggests that the God depicted in Job is universal, distinct from the deity in the Binding of Isaac story, free from exclusive Jewish identity. For a comprehensive exploration of this topic, see Klein, Horowitz, and Sefati, *The World of the Bible – Job*, 13.

65. Kurzweil, “Job and the Possibilities of Biblical Tragedy,” 151. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

66. Kurzweil, “Job and the Possibilities of Biblical Tragedy,” 153.

67. Kurzweil, “Job and the Possibilities of Biblical Tragedy,” 156.

68. Kurzweil, “Job and the Possibilities of Biblical Tragedy,” 156.

69. Bialasiewicz, “Another Europe,” 28.

70. However, this does not mean that Roth himself was unaware that this unity was often achieved through coercive and violent means. For instance, in his renowned novel *Radetzky March* (1932), Roth portrays how the Habsburg Crown, tasked with unifying and harmonizing

the diversity of its peoples, necessarily excluded Orthodox Jews and Protestant peasants to ensure and enforce this “unity.”

71. Piloiu, *The Quest for Redemption*, 2.

72. Piloiu, *The Quest for Redemption*, 3.

73. In Judeo-Christian culture, the number three holds significant symbolic and sacred qualities. Christianity associates it with the Holy Trinity, while in Judaism, it represents the three patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The biblical literature features the number three in various instances, such as the three sons of Noah and the dove sent three times from Noah’s ark. Additionally, the Talmudic tractate *Pirkei Avot* states that “the world stands on three things: on justice, on truth, and on peace” (Chapter 1, Mishna 18).

74. Klein, Horowitz, and Sefati, *The World of the Bible – Job*, 216.

75. Roth, “Der Leviathan.” Parts of the novella were published as early as 1934 under the title “Der Korallenhändler.”

76. The gnostic faith is based on a striking dualism between God and the world: God is the transcendental essence that is the counterpart to the material world and constitutes its absolute opposite. In gnostic terms, the material world is also described as a product of divinity; however, the divinity that created it is essentially evil (the demiurge). The revolt against the evil divinity that created the material world is expressed in an aspiration to be released from the shackles of immanent existence toward the transcendental eternity of the benevolent divinity. For further discussion, see Hotam, *Gnosis moderni vetsiyonut*, 45–46.

77. Regarding the eschatological dimension embedded in modernity, see Styfhals, “Evil in History,” 191–213.

78. Crane, “Cross-Over Diseases and Constructions of Difference,” 131–70; Bennett, *The Diseases of the Bible*.

79. Piloiu, “History and Utopia,” 200.

80. Ohana, *Messianism and Mamlachtiut*, 7.

81. Ohana, *Messianism and Mamlachtiut*, 22–24.

82. Zionism presented a territorial “redemption” solution to the Jewish question, advocating migration to the Land of Israel so that Jewish sovereignty might overcome exile passivity and foreign dominion. Despite its secular identity, Zionism, as noted by David Ohana, paradoxically maintained connections to messianic rhetoric, blending secularism with elements of messianic discourse. Ohana, *Messianism and Mamlachtiut*, 22.

83. In traditional Jewish eschatology, the messianic redemption entails the gathering of the dispersed Jewish population in the Promised Land, restoration of the Davidic monarchy, emphasis on Temple rituals, and the establishment of a just societal structure based on Jewish legal traditions. Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, 330; 364.

84. Roth explored the revered figure of the righteous person, a Hasidic rabbi with a perceived direct link to the divine, as depicted in his book *Wandering Jews*: “Für die Chassidim ist

der Wunderrabi der Mittler zwischen Mensch und Gott” (“For the Hasidim, the miracle Rabbi is the mediator between man and God”; translation is mine). See also Roth, *Werke III*, 308.

85. Gershom Scholem contends that early Hasidism, confronted by the influence of messianic figures like Shabbatai Zvi, sought to temper messianic fervor by adopting an individualistic interpretation. This interpretation, rooted in establishing a personal connection with the divine, eschewed the anticipation of a collective redemptive moment. See Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, 330; 364. According to Elliot Wolfson, within Kabbalah, the messianic concept evolved from its association with a specific figure to a reinterpretation where individual awareness underwent transformation, reshaping the individual’s relationship with the world. See Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 124.

86. While both Hasidism and Jewish Orthodoxy rejected the historical-political aspect of messianism, Hasidism regarded it as an individualistic event and a component of personal spiritual transformation. This perspective transforms the arrival of the Messiah into a matter of personal and faith-based experience rather than an imminent, all-encompassing historical event. Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, 282–83.

87. Stern, “Job as Alter Ego,” 199–210, esp. 204.

88. Chazal assert that the Messiah’s name, tasked with redeeming the People of Israel from the diaspora, will be “Menachem.” This name, signifying strength and consolation, appears in Ecclesiastes (4:1) and is associated with the Messiah in the Book of Isaiah and the Talmud, further reinforcing Menuchim’s implied messianic characterization in Roth’s novel. See Juriansz, *The Hebrew Messiah*.

89. Despite occurring in America, Menuchim and Mendel’s encounter is not rooted in the latter’s immigration to the United States but in circumstances leading to Menuchim’s salvation in Europe. Menuchim recounts to his father that, due to his illness, he found himself in a public medical institution in a major (likely Russian) city, where a kind doctor treated and brought him to his home. Menuchim commenced his career in Europe: first as a band’s conductor in St. Petersburg and later, after the October Revolution, in London, where he became the conductor of an orchestra (190–91). Menuchim’s narrative highlights that the circumstances of his redemption are intertwined with his presence in major European cities and his interactions with non-Jewish culture, which further invoke parallels with biblical salvation stories involving interactions between Israelites and gentiles (such as the stories of Moses and Pharaoh’s daughter, and Joseph and Pharaoh).

90. The flight into myth, or “Flucht aus der Geschichte,” as coined by philologist and researcher of German literature Helmuth Nürnberger (1930–2017), denotes a narrative characteristic that marks many of the works Roth authored during the 1930s. See Nathenson, “Joseph Roth in the Tension of Modernity,” 92–93.

91. Bronsen, *Joseph Roth*, 386.

92. For a review of the novel in this context, see Lazaroms, “The Double Bind of Self-Narration,” 693–710, especially 704.

93. The Latin phrase “*deus ex machina*,” meaning “god from the machine,” refers to a narrative device where an external element is introduced to resolve plot issues and conclude the story. In *Poetics*, Aristotle criticizes the use of this device, arguing that it weakens the role of causality within the represented world.

94. Kurzweil contends that infusing a divine rescue element from the Book of Job into modern literature seems artificial, diminishing the biblical text’s authenticity. Yet, I argue that incorporating this element in Roth’s novel enhances its theological underpinnings, emphasizing the perpetual presence of redemption and salvation in the narrative.

95. Gnostic teaching is based on strict dualism, separating a true, benevolent, transcendent God from a tyrannical, malevolent God (demiurge) who created and governs materiality. The latter is often identified with the God of Judaism and the Hebrew Bible, who is believed to have created the world. For further information, see Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*.

96. “The Leviathan” radicalizes this Gnostic sensibility. Nissen Piczenik’s increasing fascination with the oceanic-theological world of Leviathan causes him to gradually forsake his traditional Jewish way of life; he reduces his visits to the synagogue and mechanically recites his prayers. However, this does not detract from his process of drawing closer to a universal, ancient God, with whom he reunites in his death. The deity Piczenik longs for cannot be found within the synagogue or in specific religious practices, but rather a transcendent deity beyond the routines of Jewish life. Unlike Mendel, Piczenik’s redemption is intertwined with his renunciation and departure from the physical world in favor of union with an oceanic Eden.

97. In this regard, there are several examples from the novel that illustrate the blurring of strict distinctions between Judaism and Christianity: Mendel “imparted to children knowledge of the Bible,” not the Torah; the Passover meal (Seder), is referred to as Easter; matzah is called “Easter bread,” and Menuchim’s “resurrection” echoes the character of Jesus.

98. Gelbin, “Nomadic Cosmopolitanism,” 173.

99. Gelbin, “Nomadic Cosmopolitanism,” 166.

100. Cossacks, primarily Eastern Slavs, inhabited Eastern Europe, prioritizing freedom and avoiding exclusive political alliances. In the seventeenth century, under Bohdan Khmelnytsky, they targeted various communities, including Jews, leading to the infamous “Khmelnytsky Uprising” (1648–49) and severe pogroms against Jews. In Jewish history, “Cossack” carries the derogatory connotation of non-Jewish perpetrators who engaged in brutal acts against Jews in Eastern Europe. For further elaboration, see Bartal, “Cossack and Bedouin.”

101. Throughout the novel, Menuchim’s character blurs distinctions between “Jew” and “non-Jew.” Adopted by a non-Jewish doctor after his family immigration, Menuchim, as Alexei Kossak, gains admiration for composing “Jewish melodies” from both Jewish and non-Jewish communities (Roth, *Job*, 179). In addition, two other plot events serve as prefigurations of the duplicate identity embodied in the character of Menachem/Alexei. Upon the Singer family’s arrival at Ellis Island, the immigration officials who welcome them appear

to Mendel as “half like gendarmes and half like angels” (109). Mendel quickly endeavors to untangle the ambiguity, asserting, “These are the Cossacks of America” (109). Shortly thereafter, when the family finally meets at the train station upon their arrival in New York, they all share a simultaneous astonishment: “All three of them were startled in the same way. They saw simultaneously their little old house again, the old Shemariah and the new Shemariah, known as Sam. They saw Shemariah and Sam at the same time, as if Sam had been superimposed over Shemariah, a transparent Sam. It was indeed Shemariah, but it was Sam.” (109). In these instances, Roth underscores the transgressive potential facilitated by the New York urban setting in contrast to the Eastern European rural environment. Within Mendel’s traditional world in the Jewish village of Russia, his life was ordered by principles of segregation and a clear dichotomy between the “Jewish self” and the “non-Jewish other.” The “other”—whether the Cossack, military authorities, Russian doctors, or local villagers—remained external to his realm, symbolizing distinct entities marked by solid boundaries. However, as events unfold upon the family’s arrival in New York, the shift to the metropolis challenges the established framework of identities that supports the unequivocal division and stability between self and other. Although Mendel’s decision to migrate to America was driven by his intent to distance himself from the “other” and protect his family from the perils of gentile culture, the New York backdrop in the novel is established from the outset as a space that encourages fluidity between identities and contests Mendel’s fixed and dichotomous understanding of identity.

102. Elliot Wolfson suggests that the Hasidic messianic breakthrough leads to the dissolution of distinctions between “self” and “other,” preventing further discernment between “blessed is Mordecai” and “cursed is Haman.” Wolfson adds that Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902–92) considered Purim the quintessential messianic festival. Rooted in Kabbalistic and Rabbinic sources, Schneerson portrayed Purim as a celebration of the transformation and unity of opposites, reflected in the holy day’s tradition of drinking until “not knowing” the difference between “cursed is Haman” and “blessed is Mordecai.” Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 56–57.

103. The Hasidic discourse on the messianic moment and the Jewish role in redemption varied, yet all branches agreed that redemption’s arrival is intricately linked with the trajectory of Jewish destiny. Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 114.

104. Wolfson explains that the state of “not knowing” emphasizes an inherent connection between disparities while still maintaining a differentiation between the “self” and the “other.” Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 88–89.

105. For a critique of the Jewish emphasis on suffering, see Benbassa, *Suffering as Identity*.

106. Although this manifestation of individual redemption is anchored in Hasidic mysticism and reflects Roth’s deep fascination with Eastern European Hasidism, Roth’s renewed affinity for Judaism is not particularistic in nature and it does not stem from a desire to spark a Jewish renaissance. Rather, this redemption resembles the political horizon Roth sought

to achieve in future European contexts. During his stay in France, Roth identified a mode of existence resembling that which he observed in the traditional communities of Galician and Eastern European Jewry. For Roth, Paris symbolized “a European expression of universal Jewishness,” a context where Jewish spiritual life could flourish independently of specific, limiting national identities. In a letter to Benno Reifenberg dated 16 May 1925, Roth articulated this perspective, suggesting that Judaism, as he perceived it, is grounded in a spiritual heritage that possesses a universal essence, though he did not explicitly define the concept of “universal Jewishness” in his writings (Roth, letter to Benno Reifenberg dated May 16, 1925, 45–46).

107. Garloff and Shaked, for instance, interpret the novel as a critique of the implications of Jewish assimilation. See Shaked, *Identity*, 223–24; Garloff, “Femininity and Assimilatory Desire in Joseph Roth,” 354–73.

108. Similarly to Roth, German Jewish philosopher Hermann Cohen (1842–1918) argues that Jewish messianism takes on a universal character. Both Cohen and Roth contend that efforts to reclaim sovereign dominion, as seen in Zionism, contradict the ethical and universal Jewish mission for a messianic mankind. See Cohen, *Religion of Reason*.

109. Hollerich, “Carl Schmitt,” 107–22.

110. The concept of messianism, which evolved within Talmudic Judaism and later found expression in Jewish Kabbalah, is founded upon a dialectical tension between a restorative foundation and a utopian foundation. A notable aspect of messianic interpretation in Judaism, particularly associated with figures like Maimonides, is fueled by a utopian impulse that extends not only toward the future but also resonates with the past: the vision of the messianic era derives its essence, in part, from antiquated, elusive, and primordial elements. This form of messianism is utopian, yet not inherently progressive, as the utopian content represents a variation of ancient and lost content. Ohana, *Messianism and Mamlachtiut*, 5–10.

111. Roth himself did not propose a structured philosophy of history. However, in his works, he addressed historical issues as part of his criticism of the rational logic of modernity, which aimed to provide decisive, immediate, and clear answers to complex existential questions concerning the individual. Roth expressed profound skepticism toward the optimistic ideology of progress in both its American and Bolshevik versions, seeing it as an expression of hubris that reduces life to merely material and national aspects: “die Lokomotive des technischen Fortschritts zermalmte das humanistische Ideal von der ‘edlen Kraft und Güte’” (the locomotive of technical progress crushed the humanistic ideal of “noble strength and goodness”). (*Werke IV*, 516; translation is mine).

112. From this perspective, Roth’s attitude toward the past is closely linked to his political perception. The disappearance of the Austro-Hungarian Empire from the map of Europe also served for him as an example of a problematic and ruthless modernity that arose from the blind progression of world history toward the future. To address this, Roth attempts to compensate through corrective actions that acknowledge the past: “Wenn es möglich wäre,

der Geschichte die Sinnlosigkeit vorzuwerfen, mit der sie die österreichische Monarchie im Jahre 1918 behandelt hat, so würde es genügen, ihr die Stadt Wien zu zeigen” (If it were possible to accuse history of the senselessness with which it treated the Austrian monarchy in 1918, it would suffice to show it the city of Vienna.) (*Werke IV*, 409; translation is mine).

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