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Title

Cultural Translation and the Problem of Language: Yiddish in Joseph Roth's *Juden auf Wanderschaft*

Permalink

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Journal

TRANSIT, 1(1)

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Publication Date

2004-09-16

DOI

10.5070/T711009692

Peer reviewed

In 2000, W.W. Norton and Company released a new English-language edition of Joseph Roth's 1927 compilation of essays entitled, *Juden auf Wanderschaft*. The edition's dustcover proclaims in large, bold typeface: "A masterpiece of Jewish identity emerges in English 70 years after it was first written." While it can't be denied that Roth's tale documenting the mass movement of eastern Jews (*Ostjuden*)¹ westward across the European continent in the early twentieth century has captured both public and scholarly interest in German-² and English-speaking lands, the quotation still begs the question: Why are we reading Roth again now? Even the most tentative answer to this question should include the fact that Roth's concerns in *Juden auf Wanderschaft*, including the forcible displacement of a people and their subsequent dispersal throughout the world, and Roth's suggestion of an inherent tyranny in Western culture, find remarkable resonance in our contemporary reality. Global migrations and Westernization inform current research, not just on identity politics, but also on topics that seek to move beyond or reinvigorate discussions of identity—topics such as mobility, diaspora, and migration.³ Written by one who was both an assimilated Viennese and a Galician Jew born in the eastern-most reaches of the Hapsburg Empire, Roth's work offers an extraordinarily complex and informative perspective on issues that remain topical today. Nevertheless, Roth's *Juden auf Wanderschaft* is rarely analyzed in a manner reflecting this complexity. Most reviewers, in celebratory response to the work's themes, see it as a poignant declaration of love for the vanishing eastern Jewish culture with which Roth came of age.⁴ Upon closer examination, however, an important part of eastern European Jewish culture does not fall within Roth's romanticization: the language of eastern European Jewry, Yiddish. Roth's (mis)treatment of Yiddish, read today, in an age of scholarship increasingly interested in the intersection of multiculturalism and multilingualism,⁵ makes *Juden auf Wanderschaft* a cautionary tale that speaks not only to the themes of contemporary criticism, but also to the very methodologies seeking to shape this criticism.

Building off of articulations of "minor-", "minority-", "ethnic-", and "migration-writing" that have been under constant critical revision for decades, scholars continue to investigate relationships between cultures in what may best be called the literature of migration.⁶ These

¹ For a discussion of the meaning of the terms "Eastern Jews" and "*Ostjuden*" see Steven Aschheim's seminal work on eastern European Jewry, *Brothers and Strangers: The Eastern European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800-1923* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982).

² In the past ten years alone, more than a dozen book-length, German-language monographs have been published on Joseph Roth and his works.

³ Stephen Greenblatt's recent work on "mobility studies" at Berlin's *Wissenschaftskolleg* reflects this burgeoning trend in scholarship.

⁴ One partial exception is Katharina Ochse's treatment of *Juden auf Wanderschaft* in her book *Joseph Roths Auseinandersetzung mit dem Antisemitismus* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1999), 115-133. Ochse details how Roth's situation differs from his western Jewish contemporaries—Arnold Zweig, for example—but she, like the other Roth critics I will mention here, reads the story as a wholehearted defense of eastern Jews against Western influence. In Ochse's case, Roth defends Jews against Western anti-Semitism. "Immer wieder versucht er [Roth S.B.] in *Juden auf Wanderschaft*, im Vertrauen auf die Überzeugungskraft der Vernunft antisemitische Vorwürfe zu entkräften" (119).

⁵ See, for example, Claire Kramsch, "The Multilingual Experience: Insights from Language Memoirs" (paper presented at Goodbye, Germany? Migration, Culture, and the Nation State Conference, Berkeley, Calif., October 2004), and Kramsch, "The Multilingual Subject" in *Plurilingualität und Identität: zur Selbst- und Fremdwahrnehmung mehrsprachiger Menschen*, eds. Inez De Florio-Hansen and Adelheid Hu (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2003), 107-124.

⁶ Cf. Leslie Adelson, "Hello, Germany! Towards a New Critical Grammar of Migration" (paper presented at Goodbye, Germany? Migration, Culture, and the Nation State Conference, Berkeley, Calif., October 2004).

scholars have focused particular attention on the interaction between multiple languages in the cultural production of figures like travelers, migrants, and exiles.⁷ As Claire Kramsch has shown, multilingual authors often highlight their own processes of language learning in their works, a phenomenon that has made critics increasingly aware of language choice and the representation of language in texts.⁸ Azade Seyhan goes so far as to refer to the multilingual writers she investigates as translators—suggesting a notion of translation, seemingly inspired by German Romantic concepts,⁹ that extends the purely linguistic process of translation to the transmission of cultural and linguistic memory and practice.¹⁰ Seyhan argues that such a process is most productively investigated with a keen sensitivity to each author’s particular historical, political, and social situation; the essay that follows can be seen as taking up her argument for specificity. Like Seyhan and Kramsch, I argue that the literature of migration is necessarily engaged in the linguistic and cultural processes described above—processes to which I will refer as “cultural translation.” However, the questions this essay addresses are even more fundamental but are often ignored or taken up only tangentially by researchers: What is the role of language itself in our current understanding of cultural translation? How can a theory of cultural translation focused on the role of language shed new, critical light on the constitutive texts of the literature of migration?

Literary scholars and translation theorists alike have long been engaged in a struggle to define and critique cultural translation. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak isolates a violence inherent in all cultural translation when it manifests itself as what she calls “transcoding.” For Spivak, transcoding is a practice through which any given people’s loss of culturally specific semiotic systems is perpetuated without an accompanying loss of knowledge of the mother tongue.¹¹ While Spivak’s work acknowledges—but swiftly side steps—the role of language in cultural translation, other scholars focus on the role of languages in multilingual texts as representative of that which purposefully refuses cultural translation. Doris Sommer’s scholarship is particularly useful in this regard, as she takes up what she terms “the busy borders between languages.” She claims such “borders” as spaces where “displaced and culturally overloaded artists” function, perform, and produce. Leaving the problematic vocabulary of “between-ness” to Leslie Adelson’s convincing critique,¹² Sommer’s argument calls for a reading of texts by multilingual authors as being purposefully disruptive and even combative toward their reader.¹³ In other words, Sommer makes the impossibility of comprehensive cultural translation an essential

⁷ One paradigmatic example of this kind of scholarship would be Gilles Deleuze’s and Felix Guattari’s *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). A list of scholars engaged in this work would also have to include Leslie Adelson, Claire Kramsch, Mary Louise Pratt, Azade Seyhan, Werner Sollors, Doris Sommer, and Gayatri Spivak.

⁸ Claire Kramsch, “The Multilingual Experience” (see footnote 5).

⁹ Friedrich Schleiermacher was among the first to conceptualize translation as both a linguistic and cultural phenomenon. See his: “On the Different Methods of Translating” (1813). Seyhan is most likely aware of this similarity; one of her books bears the title: *Representation and Its Discontents: The Critical Legacy of German Romanticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

¹⁰ Azade Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 156.

¹¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Translation as Culture,” *Parallax* 6, no. 1 (2000): 13-24.

¹² Seyhan’s argument for the recognition of an interstitial description of migration literature functions in much the same way as Leslie Adelson’s well-known critique of the use of the preposition “between” in describing the position, identity, or writing of the migrant-writer. Cf. Leslie Adelson, “Against Between: a Manifesto” in *Unpacking Europe: Towards a Critical Reading*, eds. Salah and Iftikhar Dadi (Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen: NAI Publishers, 2001).

¹³ Doris Sommer, *Bilingual Games* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) and Sommer’s earlier work, *Proceed with Caution, When Engaged by Minority Writing in the Americas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

quality of what she calls “minority writing.” I suggest that a language-focused view of cultural translation does not necessarily lead to Spivak’s linguistically fluent but culturally empty documents, nor, as Sommer implies, to works rich in an untranslatable bilingual aesthetics, nor even to texts that preserve a personal or collective cultural “memory,” as Seyhan would argue. In fact, somewhat paradoxically, a literary text’s staging of an encounter between both cultures and languages can actually reflect a larger project of apparent colonial—the term’s imprecision here must be emphasized—, willed, cultural and linguistic silencing. This paper presents such a case.

Particularly rich and surprisingly contemporary material for an investigation of projects of cultural translation can be found in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German-language texts by authors of Jewish descent. The early translations of the Yiddish-language works of Rabbi Nachman von Bratislav by Martin Buber are often seen as representative not only of an increasing interest in the field of translation (an interest shared by Buber’s fellow German-speaking, Jewish contemporaries Franz Rosenzweig¹⁴ and Walter Benjamin¹⁵), but also of a nostalgia for traditional, “primitive” Jewish culture among the highly assimilated ranks of early twentieth-century German-speaking Jewry.¹⁶

It is through such a nostalgia-colored lens that Joseph Roth’s *Juden auf Wanderschaft* is often viewed. Roth’s apparent participation in a large-scale romanticization of his Eastern subject, and his critics’ continued dependence upon that romanticization, make postcolonial theory a particularly appealing avenue for a new interpretation of this complex work. However, an investigation that includes Roth’s biographical specificity and his portrayal of the role of language—taking a lesson from the multilingual investigations of Kramsch and Seyhan—reaps evidence suggesting what postcolonial translation theory seems currently unable to sustain, namely that Roth’s work actually seeks to suppress both the language of his eastern European subject, the Yiddish language, as well as his own intimate connection with eastern European culture. A critique of *Juden auf Wanderschaft* which brings Roth’s theoretically challenging situation to bear reveals the text as resonant with early twentieth-century Jewish questions of cultural translation, leading scholarship toward a more critical stance concerning existing theories of cultural translation while, at the same time necessitating a reconsideration of Roth’s problematic stance toward Yiddish, the mother tongue of his magical interpreters.

Joseph Roth’s work seems to invite critics to take up an investigation of the basis of translation; the concept of cultural translation comes into play almost immediately in Roth’s narrative. In an early essay in the collection, Roth contends that many exiled or homeless migrating Jews become “interpreters”:

Interpreter is a Jewish career. It has nothing to do with translating into French from English, into French from Russian, or into German from French. It has to do with translating the foreigner—even when he has not spoken. He does not even need to open his mouth. Christian interpreters translate, perhaps. Jewish ones can just guess.¹⁷

¹⁴ Buber and Rosenzweig translated the Hebrew Bible together. See, *Die Schrift*. 15 vols. (Berlin: Schneider, 1926-1934).

¹⁵ Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator” in *The Translation Studies Reader* trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Lawrence Venuti (New York: Routledge, 2001), 15-25.

¹⁶ Martin Buber, *Die Geschichten des Rabbi Nachman* (Frankfurt: Rütten & Loening, 1906).

¹⁷ Joseph Roth, *Juden auf Wanderschaft* in *Joseph Roth: Werke*, ed. Hermann Kesten (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1975), 342. All translations are my own [SB].

Roth first rejects translation as a singularly linguistic practice—it is not simply the language, but rather the “foreigner” as a whole that is to be interpreted. Next, he obviates language’s role in the act of such cultural translation; the foreigner, after all, need not even speak in order to be translated.

On the one hand, by ascribing special talents (bordering on magical interpretive powers) to the Ostjude, Roth participates in a widespread phenomenon in German-language literature in the early part of the twentieth century—the western European Jew’s romanticization of eastern European Jewry. On the other hand, Roth’s statement devalues language’s role as a crucial component of culture—a devaluation that is not consistent with the writings of many of Roth’s contemporary romanticizers, especially when applied to the language of the Ostjude.

Anuradha Dingwaney, co-editor with Carol Maier of a volume on postcolonial translation theory entitled *Between Languages and Culture: Translation and Cross-Cultural Texts*,¹⁸ takes her definition of cultural translation to Roth’s own extreme in her willingness to excise the linguistic variable from cultural translation: “[T]ranslation is [...] the vehicle through which ‘Third World’ cultures (are made to) travel [...] to audiences in the West. Thus, even texts [...] written in one of the metropolitan languages, but originating in or about non-Western cultures, can be considered under the rubric of translation.”¹⁹ If eastern European Jewish culture could be classified as “Third World” or even as “non-Western,” such a culturally grounded definition of translation would certainly apply to Roth’s German-language work. Of course, such classifications are inappropriate descriptors for a culture and language so intimately connected to both eastern and western Europe.²⁰ Ironically, in recognizing the shortcomings of mapping contemporary translation theory onto Roth’s translation of Yiddish language and culture, I critically redouble Dingwaney and Maier’s imperative to productively return to the place of “loss” in translation.²¹ Investigating this loss brings my argument closer to the Yiddish language by helping to identify the specifically Jewish context of Roth’s cultural translation.

Roth’s message of translation in *Juden auf Wanderschaft* is not only apparent on the narrative level; cultural translation can, in fact, be seen as motivating the entire work. In his preface, Roth makes the claim that his work “will seek to describe the [eastern European Jewish] people” for those

Western Europeans who are not proud of their clean mattresses, who feel that they would have much to gain from the East, and who perhaps know that great men and great ideas come out of Galicia, Russia, Lithuania, and Romania: and also (in their own way) useful ones, which help to support and expand the secure structure of Western civilization.²²

¹⁸ Eds. Anuradha Dingwaney and Carol Maier (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995).

¹⁹ Anuradha Dingwaney, “Introduction: Translating ‘Third World’ Cultures” in *Between Languages and Culture* (see footnote 18), 4. Dingwaney’s definition of cultural translation is useful for my purposes in this paper; for a thorough critique of translation as a colonialist exercise, see Tejaswini Niranjana’s *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

²⁰ For a comprehensive guide (albeit a disagreeably fatalistic one) to the geography and history of Yiddish, see Benjamin Harshav’s *The Meaning of Yiddish* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). Florian Krobb has attempted, with mixed results, to apply postcolonial theory to nineteenth-century German-Jewish texts in his book, *Selbstdarstellungen: Untersuchungen zur deutsch-jüdischen Erzählliteratur im neunzehnten Jahrhundert* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2000).

²¹ Carol Maier, “Toward a Theoretical Practice for Cross-Cultural Translation” in *Between Languages and Culture* (see footnote 18). Maier proposes that this return can be facilitated through an investigation of the agency of the translator.

²² Roth, *Juden auf Wanderschaft*, 293.

I will examine Roth's employment of the eastern European Jewish population and its ideas as a kind of raw material for use in the expansion of Western civilization in a moment. For now, it is important to note that Roth classifies his project as one which seeks to describe the culture of eastern European Jewry for western European Jews, a project which Dingwaney and Maier would define as a cultural translation project.

It is obvious today that the Ostjude and his language are largely culturally European and yet, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, European Jews, both eastern and western, struggled with the label "Oriental." Nineteenth century, non-Jewish, German-language authors²³ employed Orientalizing rhetoric specifically toward Jews as an often anti-Semitic reminder of their "non-European" origins.²⁴ This facet of Jewish Orientalization conforms to Edward Said's genealogy of Orientalist discourse, in which the "Orient," although not essentially a Western creation, was the West's source for an image of the Other.²⁵ Interestingly enough, however, in nineteenth- and twentieth-century German-language texts, Jews themselves experimented with "Oriental" as a label for the Jewish Self, as well as for the Jewish Other—a phenomenon that complicates Said's analysis. As John Efron has suggested, Orientalism must be more subtly investigated when it is propagated by a minority group with a long history of Orientalization of its own.²⁶ Walter Rathenau, in his 1897 work, "Höre, Israel!" calls on his fellow western European Jews to "Look in the mirror!" lamenting the fact that *Westjuden* have "south-eastern" [*südöstlich bestimmt*] features which hinder their full assimilation into western European society.²⁷ Other authors, like Karl Emil Franzos in his work *Aus Halb Asien* (1876), push the supposed location of the lamentable Oriental away from western European Jewry, but not, as in Said's examples, out of Europe proper; the Other of the East for Franzos could be found in the East of Europe—in the "non-rational" Judaism of Chasidism.²⁸

In the early twentieth century, western European Jewish perceptions of the Ostjude, although persisting in the creation of an eastern European Other, began to take on a romantic hue. This twentieth-century romanticization is overdetermined: it is due, in part, to the shrinking geographical distance between West- and Ostjuden. Waves of pogroms in late nineteenth-century Russia pushed eastern European Jewry westward, while the battles of the First World War brought western European Jewish soldiers into actual eastern European Jewish communities for

²³ See the nineteenth-century historian Heinrich von Treitschke's brochure entitled, *Ein Wort über unser Judentum* (1879-1880), Karl W.F. Grattenauer's *Wider die Juden* (Berlin: Johann Wilhelm Schmidt, 1803).

²⁴ Paul Mendes-Flohr documents the chronology of this term as it applies to European Jews in Chapter 4 of his *Divided Passions: Jewish Intellectuals and the Experience of Modernity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), entitled "Fin de Siècle Orientalism, the *Ostjuden* and the Aesthetics of Jewish Self-Affirmation." His chapter greatly contributes to my paragraph here.

²⁵ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 2-3.

²⁶ John Efron, "From *Mitteleuropa* to the Middle East: Orientalism through a Jewish Lens" (Lecture, University of California, Berkeley), 25. Here, Efron claims that for many Jewish Orientalists in the mid- and late-nineteenth century, "their own pariah status within Europe was a constant reminder that no matter how strong their own identification with Germany [or] Hungary [etc.] might have been...[t]hey could not be the intellectual vanguard of powers that denied them their rights as human beings."

²⁷ Walter Rathenau, "Höre Israel!" in *Deutschtum und Judentum: Ein Disput unter Juden aus Deutschland* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1993), 34.

²⁸ Karl Emil Franzos, *Aus Halb-Asien* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humboldt, 1976). Mary L. Martin also documents the negative reaction of eastern European Jewish writers to Franzos' works in her 1968 Ph.D. dissertation for the University of Wisconsin.

the first time.²⁹ Arnold Zweig, for example, wrote *Das ostjüdische Antlitz* in 1920, describing a German-Jewish soldier in Lithuania and the Ostjude's intrinsic resilience in the face of animosity from both sides of the Great War's battlefields.³⁰ Another factor contributing to the romanticization of the eastern European Jew was the rise of a "Völkisch" trend in German and Austrian literature that called to German-speaking youth to discard their bourgeois, urban lifestyles and seek out more "authentic" ways of life in the countryside and its villages. This neoromantic movement was very attractive to a new generation of western European Jewish authors, chief among them the Viennese-born Martin Buber, whose works offer striking parallels to contemporary non-Jewish, German-language texts that mark the literary revival of German Volk mystics.³¹

Regardless of how much Roth's *Juden auf Wanderschaft* owes to these historical events and literary trends, Roth himself remains slightly on the outside of such movements for the simple reason that he was born an Ostjude, spending his first seventeen years in Brody, Galicia, on the outermost corner of the Austro-Hungarian border. However, in spite of his *ostjüdisch* experience, Roth takes up a form of Orientalizing rhetoric in *Juden auf Wanderschaft* when he claims that eastern European Jewish men and ideas can and indeed should be put to use in "securing" and "expanding" Western civilization. In his essay, "Das Moskauer jüdische akademische Theater," Roth even calls the Judaism of eastern European Jews a "more oriental" [*orientalerisches*] one, and the Jews who practice it "more Jewish" than western European Jews.³² Roth's *Juden auf Wanderschaft*, in a similarly Orientalizing fashion, describes a civilization robust with "authentic" Judaism—one which Roth saw as assimilating much too quickly to the "sad living conditions" of Western culture.³³ Literary critics, then, are not entirely in error when they classify *Juden auf Wanderschaft* as a "declaration of love for the eastern European Jew."³⁴ Marcel Reich-Ranicki goes so far as to claim that these essays show that Roth, although a "spectacular observer of reality," was "basically an un-political person."³⁵ But Roth's cultural translation—one which involves constituting an "Other" like the eastern European Jew—is more problematic than these descriptors imply. Roth's rhetoric in *Juden auf Wanderschaft* works to suppress the linguistic system used by the culture he observes. This move demands historical specificity in order to be adequately interpreted, and, at the same time, calls the celebratory rhetoric of his most recent English-language publishers and German-language reviewers into question. In disavowing Yiddish, Roth distances himself from other members of the early twentieth century's neo-romantic movement who offered the Yiddish language pride of place when celebrating the eastern European Jew. Authors like Heinrich Loewe and Fritz

²⁹ Cf. Delphin Bechtel, "Cultural Transfers between 'Ostjuden' and 'Westjuden': German-Jewish Intellectuals and Yiddish Culture, 1897-1930," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* XXII (1997): 67-83.

³⁰ For a detailed analysis of Zweig's work in this historical context see Chapter 2, "The Imagined Community" in Noah Isenberg's *Between Redemption and Doom* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999).

³¹ Cf. Steven Aschheim's *Brothers and Strangers* (see footnote 1), p. 101. See also "The Influence of the Volkish idea on German Jewry" in George L. Mosse's *Germans & Jews* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1970).

³² Cited in Mark H. Gelber's "'Juden auf Wanderschaft' und die Rhetoriker der Ost-West Debatte im Werk Joseph Roths," in *Joseph Roth: Interpretation—Kritik—Rezeption*, eds. Michael Kessler and Fritz Hackert (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1990), 127-135.

³³ Roth, *Juden auf Wanderschaft*, 299, 295.

³⁴ "Eure Sprache ist auch meine": *Eine deutsch-jüdische Literaturgeschichte*, ed. Hans J. Schütz (München: Pendo, 2000), 338. David Bronsen expresses similar sentiments in his essay, "Austrian versus Jew—The Torn Identity of Joseph Roth," *Yearbook of the Leo Baeck Institute* XVIII (1973): 223.

³⁵ Marcel Reich-Ranicki, "Joseph Roth, der Romancier" in *Joseph Roth: Interpretation—Kritik—Rezeption* (see footnote 32), 264.

Mordechai Kaufmann defend Yiddish as a beautiful language. Similarly, the German *Jüdischer Verlags Almanach* published an article by Israel “Isidor” Eliashev (also known by his Yiddish pseudonym, *Bal Makhshoves*) in which he wrote that Yiddish is “the most appropriate tool to evoke in the Jewish intelligentsia [an] understanding for the people and its suffering soul.”³⁶ This is not to say that the Yiddish language goes entirely unrepresented in Roth’s work. Evidence of Roth’s views toward Yiddish can be found in his analysis of Berlin’s Yiddish stage. Roth transliterates the following poem by Chaim Nachman Bialik as recited at a Yiddish cabaret in Berlin:

Ynter die griene Beimelach
Sizzen die Mojschelach, Schlojmelach,
Eugen wie gliehede Keulalach...[Roth glosses the last line for his German readers:]
(Augen wie glühende Kohlen)...³⁷

In a skillful juxtaposition, this recited verse serves to reiterate the atmosphere of the cabaret, which just moments before Roth had described as “dead-silent, and the little merchants had big eyes and rested their chins on their fists, and you could hear the rustling of the Linden trees.”³⁸ Just as the boys in the Yiddish poem sit with enraptured eyes under the trees, the cabaret audience is so enthralled that they too have big eyes—one can even hear the rustling of trees outside. Roth’s application of motifs from the Yiddish stage to his description of eastern European Jewish reality takes a critical turn, however, when one considers one of his earlier statements concerning Yiddish theater. In this statement, Roth claims that

[t]he Yiddish theater has become so famous in the West in the past few years that an assessment here is superfluous. It is almost more of an institution of the western ghetto than of the eastern one.³⁹

Within the context of Roth’s essay collection, Western institutions are to be castigated as corrosive to Jewish authenticity; if the Yiddish theater has become fully assimilated to western Jewish life, it too is deserving of reprimand. *Juden auf Wanderschaft*, by relegating its most direct representation of the Yiddish language to the cabaret stage, and that stage to the “western ghetto,” completely removes the Yiddish language not only from the reality, but also the sought-after authenticity of the eastern European Jew.

Although the Yiddish theater scene is the only section in the collection that presents Yiddish-language speech in transliteration, Yiddish plays an indirect role in a number of passages with the same negative result. Roth, for instance, propagates the “stigma” of the Jewish or Yiddish-accent,⁴⁰ noting that in Parisian eastern European immigrant communities,

³⁶ Cited in Jack Wertheimer’s *Unwelcome Strangers: East European Jews in Imperial Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 152.

³⁷ Roth, *Juden auf Wanderschaft*, 337. The translation would read: “Under the green trees / Sit the little Moysheles and little Shloymeles / Eyes like glowing coals....”

³⁸ Roth, *Juden auf Wanderschaft*, 337.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 320.

⁴⁰ Roth, *Juden auf Wanderschaft*, 338. Here, Roth makes the following statement: “Der Ostjude lernt leicht fremde Sprachen verstehen, aber seine Aussprache wird niemals rein. Er wird immer erkannt.” [The Ostjude easily learns to understand foreign languages but his accent will never be perfect. He will always be recognized.] This formulation plays nicely into Sander Gilman’s thesis in *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

[immigrants] can speak Yiddish as much and as loudly as they wish. They can [...] speak French poorly without being suspected of anything. The consequence of getting away with this is that they learn French and that their children no longer speak Yiddish—they just barely understand it.⁴¹

These immigrants may be allowed to speak Yiddish, but they appear to prefer to speak accented French. The description of this phenomenon is accompanied by Roth's seemingly objective statement that the consequence of this choice is the loss of the Yiddish language in a single generation. Roth's argument becomes more subjective when he reveals that he is "delighted" [*belustigt*] to hear children answer Yiddish questions in French, going so far as to claim that God will bring these children success. Roth describes a similar situation for Yiddish in America, where in New York, Yiddish-speaking grandparents can no longer understand their grandchildren.⁴² Roth describes the language of eastern European Jews as precariously sustained by a single generation, yet it is by shedding this language that eastern European Jews find success.

The reduction of the efficacy of Yiddish to one generation living on western European or American soil or to the cabaret stage (or both!) is not included in Roth's litany of the West's shameful degradation of eastern European traditions. The subsequent "loss" of the Yiddish language apparent in Roth's translation of eastern European Jewish culture, viewed through postcolonial theory, can be seen as an act of violence upon the source culture. In Dingwaney and Maier's postcolonial translation theory, Maier explains that such violence occurs when the translator does not approach the translated culture with "[the knowledge that it] does not belong to you, that [it] is in some fundamental way alien to you the critic."⁴³ When we investigate Roth's biography, we see that Roth's silencing of Yiddish cannot be due to his lack of knowledge of the translated culture or its language. Roth most certainly had contact with Yiddish speakers, not only through his extended family, but also during his boyhood in Galicia. Several accounts claim that Roth, a native German speaker, eventually came to speak Yiddish himself.⁴⁴ Irmgard Keun, Roth's companion in the last years of his life, goes so far as to say that Roth spoke Yiddish "in such a way that one could feel his love for humanity."⁴⁵ Roth attended the *k. und k. Kronprinz Gymnasium* in Brody where, he would later claim, there were three social cliques: assimilationist-Polish, secret-Zionist, and socialist-Yiddish. Given Roth's childhood, it is difficult to believe that he would not have had close ties to the culture he came to romanticize for western European audiences. Instead, it is more probable that, in his zeal to more fully Austrianize after leaving Galicia and moving to Vienna in the post-war period, Roth felt the need to distance himself from his place of origin, which had become foreign territory—part of the fledgling Polish republic.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Ibid., 339.

⁴² Ibid., 347.

⁴³ Noel Valis in Carol Maier (see footnote 18), 25.

⁴⁴ Mark H. Gelber (see footnote 32) and Irmgard Keun as cited in Sidney Rosenfeld, *Understanding Joseph Roth* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001).

⁴⁵ Irmgard Keun in Sidney Rosenfeld (see footnote 44), 6. Rosenfeld claims that Roth could converse in it, although his mother did not speak Yiddish at home, stating, "[Roth] at times turned to a Yiddish phrase as if to seek comfort in something familiar..."

⁴⁶ I am indebted to Robert Adler-Peckarar for this formulation.

Here, Roth's attempt to more fully assimilate into Austrian culture as an eastern European Jew seems to rely on what Homi Bhabha articulates in *The Location of Culture*: that even the colonizing [in this case western European] culture is "always ambivalent" and may also be affected by "hybridity."⁴⁷ By calling upon western European Jews to validate the eastern European Jewish experience, Roth, in a similar fashion, hopes to infuse western Europe not with eastern European Jewish "authenticity" itself—which would then become a Western simulacrum, according to the economy of his work's logic— but instead with knowledge of and respect for the "authentic" eastern European Jew. Roth, as a cultural translator, seems to be acting against the same assumptions as Dingwaney, who writes:

[...] translations of cultures proceed, not surprisingly, in a predictable, even predetermined, direction: alien cultural forms or concepts or indigenous practices are recuperated (translated) via a process of familiarization (assimilation to culturally familiar forms or concepts or practices) whereby they are denuded of their "foreignness," even perhaps of their radical inaccessibility.⁴⁸

Roth's treatment of Yiddish often functions as precisely the kind of assimilationist de-foreignization which postcolonial scholars deride. The supposedly Yiddish-speaking figures in the story speak German instead; Yiddish as a functioning language (a language in need of Roth's German-language glossing) appears only once in the collection, and even then it is on stage— allowing the narrative's stage-spectator a critical distance, and enhancing the critical distance of the western European reader. At the same time, although the "foreign" stature of Yiddish is rejected, it is made foreign to new generations of eastern European Jews, as Yiddish-speakers' children and grandchildren learn more "metropolitan" languages.

An analysis of Yiddish in Roth's work has shown then, that Dingwaney and Maier's theorization concerning cultural translation cannot support the subtleties inherent in Roth's *Juden auf Wanderschaft*, perhaps because they do not recognize the complications of a Jewish Orientalism which applies variously—or, as in Roth's case, even simultaneously—to both Self and Other. Unfortunately, Dingwaney and Maier are not the only scholars to fall short in light of an analysis of Roth's *Juden auf Wanderschaft*; by failing to take into account Roth's silencing and foreignization of the Yiddish language, literary critics have allowed Roth's work to be interpreted as a purely romantic paean to eastern European Jewish culture. I return to one particularly troubling example: Hans Schütz, in his 2000 German-Jewish literary history, summarizes *Juden auf Wanderschaft* with the following:

[Roth's] great essay [...] is a declaration of love for the eastern European Jew, a document of sympathy and of inner distance because he, Roth, had just completed the journey from East to West, from the outer border into the center, from the primitive into civilization.⁴⁹

Here, Schütz only begins to address Roth's extraordinary position as both an insider and an outsider to eastern European Jewish culture through the amorphous notion of "inner distance." In much the same way as Roth's English-language publishers (writing in the same year as Schütz)

⁴⁷ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 107 and 113.

⁴⁸ Dingwaney, "Introduction: Translating 'Third World' Cultures," (see footnote 19), 4-5.

⁴⁹ Hans Schütz, "*Eure Sprache ist auch meine*" (see footnote 34), 338.

could tout Roth's *Juden auf Wanderschaft* as a "masterpiece of Jewish identity", Schütz's comments only begin to hint at the complex layers of Roth's identification with both eastern and western Jewry (an identification which, unlike the journey described by Schütz, should never be considered "complete"). Schütz does not stop to question what exactly may be classified as "primitive" and what as "civilization" in Roth's historical and cultural context, and although his vocabulary is more essentializing than most critics', he is not alone in allowing the resonant content of Roth's narrative of migration and woeful Westernization to distract him from Roth's problematic presentation of this culture in exile. The interpretive challenge involves investigating the devaluation and "loss" of the Yiddish language in *Juden auf Wanderschaft* and in the work's subsequent literary criticism, in accordance with the attention to language-choice that characterizes much of mobility studies, but which has, as yet, not been fully incorporated into scholarly formulations of cultural translation.

In combining an attention to historical specificity and language-choice with a criticism of current definitions of cultural translation, I hope not only to have offered a corrective that could apply to the reception of a single work, but also to have suggested the efficacy of a methodology for investigating the literature of migration. As Roth's *Juden auf Wanderschaft* approaches its eighth decade in circulation, it can serve as a reminder of both the lasting appeal of themes like migration, diaspora, and exile, as well as of the necessity for scholarship to look beyond those themes to critique the mechanisms of their representation. The language of a text, or the presence or structuring absence of multiple languages in a text, are interpretable, constituent factors of the literature of migration and the cultural translation which that literature performs.