

## VIOLENCE, MASCULINITY AND SELF: KILLING IN JOSEPH ROTH'S 1920S

## FICTION

Jon Hughes

'Denn es ist Krieg, wir wissen es, wir, die beeideten Sachverständigen für Schlachtfelder, wir haben sofort erkannt, daß wir aus einem kleinen Schlachtfeld in ein großes heimgekehrt sind'.<sup>1</sup> These words, from Joseph Roth's short travel book *Die weißen Städte* (1925), may be understood metaphorically to refer to the lasting psychological damage inflicted by the First World War upon those who fought and survived. For a small number of men, however, armistice in 1918 did not mean an end to violence. For these trained soldiers the killing continued, and Europe, at least for a few more years, remained a huge potential battlefield. In the Russian Revolution and Civil War, in the clashes between Bolsheviks and right-wing volunteers in the eastern part of the *Reich*, in the widespread fighting in 1919, the year of the failed German 'Revolution', in demonstrations, riots, and political assassinations: the War continued. For the best part of a decade, Roth, himself a veteran but with no combat experience, was concerned with little else in his fiction than the effects of the War upon those who survived it. He then turned his attention, in his most famous work *Radetzky* (1932), to the world which preceded it. In this essay I shall focus on a little considered aspect of those earlier novels: Roth's depiction of killing by War veterans ('murder' seems to me too tendentious, though doubtless some would prefer it). I shall consider the conditions under which the act becomes possible, and argue that the texts demonstrate an unsentimental grasp of the continuum of male psychology, and of the displacement of the soldier's ego in military training and combat situations. This continuum incorporates at one end modes of behaviour and thought characteristic of convinced fascists, but not exclusive to them. Thus I will consider the fascistic protagonist of *Das Spinnennetz* (1923) alongside the revolutionaries in *Die Flucht ohne*

*Ende* (1927) and *Rechts und Links* (1929). The fact that these characters are capable of killing does not mean they are to be distinguished absolutely from others in Roth's novels of this period. Rather, the act of killing, as an extreme situation *par excellence*, reveals aspects of character and motivation which otherwise may remain hidden. Many of my comments here may be fruitfully applied to other texts featuring soldiers and veterans. The parallels and differences in the behaviour of the ex-soldiers and War veterans in the three texts on which I focus are explicable without reference to political ideology. As Klaus Theweleit observes in his groundbreaking study of the psychology of the men of the early German fascist movement, his object of study 'soll [...] keineswegs prinzipiell von den übrigen Männern isoliert werden. [Er] bildet vielmehr so etwas wie die Spitze eines Eisbergs von Patriarchalität; was unter der Oberfläche liegt, macht die Gewässer aber insgesamt kalt'.<sup>2</sup> My concern with regard to Roth's texts is not just with that visible tip of the iceberg, then, but with the cold waters beneath it.

In his first, apparently unfinished novel *Das Spinnennetz* (serialised in the Viennese *Arbeiter-Zeitung* in the autumn of 1923), Roth introduces the first of the several War returnees in his texts who find it difficult to adjust to demobilisation and a civilian career.<sup>3</sup> This is of course a well-documented phenomenon after almost any war, and was exacerbated in the first years of the Weimar Republic by high levels of unemployment, political dissent and the calamitous economic situation, culminating in the hyperinflation of 1923.<sup>4</sup> The sudden absence of the state of permanent 'Spannung', in which at any moment one may be required to kill or oneself be killed, to which the frontline soldier had become accustomed was, for many, a disorientating experience.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the disappearance of the camaraderie and routine of army life often resulted in a sense of betrayal, compounded of course by the fact that Germany had lost the War. A sense of distance from the older generation and particularly from women, who had suffered the privations of life at home, but been spared the immediate dangers of

total war, was fairly common amongst War veterans. This sense of distance was undoubtedly informed in part by a right-wing discourse of gender difference made explicit in texts such as Otto Weininger's *Geschlecht und Charakter* (1903), which posited the physical and 'spiritual' superiority of the Western male over 'weak' women. Many men experienced the War, despite its horrors, as a realm of 'healthy' masculinity and bonding from which women were excluded. Maurizia Boscagli writes: 'Women, whose bodies signified weakness and passivity, did not fight and remained caught in the private sphere of the city apartment and of civilian life'.<sup>6</sup> This idea found resonance far beyond Germany and those involved in, and at the fringes of, far-right activism. Yet it was at these fringes that such concerns festered and deepened with the passage of time, and it was there that they became a matter of life and death. Theodor Lohse, the central character in *Das Spinnennetz*, 'wäre gern sein Leben lang bei der Armee geblieben' (W, IV, 66). In this respect the character anticipates others in Roth's later texts set in a variety of times and locations. The function of the army for these socially incompetent men is clear: it provided a sense of wholeness and belonging they lack in civilian life.

In his essay 'Of Other Spaces' Michel Foucault analyses certain 'sites' he terms 'heterotopias'.<sup>7</sup> By 'site' he understands not a geographical place but an area defined by the relationship it provides between certain elements. A heterotopia is what he considers a 'counter-site' to real space, a kind of realised utopia, a place or situation invested with meaning beyond what is physically apparent. In these terms, then, the army is precisely such a 'site' (defined by the strictly ordered relations between soldiers), and would seem to fall under what he terms 'crisis heterotopias', under which he lists boarding schools and 'military service for young men'.<sup>8</sup> Whereas other heterotopic sites, such as theatres and cinemas, saunas, or gardens, may be directly linked with mental and physical health, Foucault describes 'crisis heterotopias' as

'privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis'.<sup>9</sup> Bearing in mind what I have already said of the attitudes of Lohse and others of his generation, Foucault's account would seem quite accurate. Nor does it seem an exaggeration to link, as he goes on to, 'crisis heterotopias' with punitive and controlling institutions such as psychiatric hospitals and prisons.<sup>10</sup> The parallel function of the prison and of the military in producing 'docile' bodies is a feature of Hermann Ungar's novella *Geschichte eines Mordes* (1920). The text is narrated by an imprisoned murderer, a sickly and perverse man with a pseudo-Nietzschean contempt for all that is 'weak' and feminine. The following comment reveals the depth of masochistic self-loathing required to thrive in any disciplinary/punitive system:

Ich bin nicht unglücklich in diesem Haus und nicht ungeduldig. Ich freue mich der Strenge meiner Aufseher, ich freue mich des Zwanges zu Regelmäßigkeit in Schlaf, Arbeit, Spaziergang, dem ich unterworfen bin. Ich liebe solch ein Leben und manchmal ist mir, als sei ich nicht Sträfling, sondern Soldat, ein einfacher gehorchender Soldat, was ich gerne geworden wäre. Ich liebe es, zu gehorchen.<sup>11</sup>

Roth's understanding of the pernicious psychological power of the military machine is evident in the early article 'Teisinger' (1920), in which the career soldier is likened to a prisoner. Writing about the Austrian *Feldmarschalleutnant* Teisinger, who passed 200,000 sick or injured men as fit for action during the War, he states: 'Teisinger mit der *moral insanity* des zum Pflichtmord und Ehrentod erzogenen privilegierten Häftlings in dem großen Kerker des Militarismus ist nicht klagbar, nur zu bedauern' (W, I, 229). As Theweleit suggests, the army was perceived as entirely self-

sufficient, providing a release from the psycho-sexual tensions and conflicts of the family unit, and instilling, through ceaseless drill and exercise, a makeshift sense of 'self' in the physical: in the uniform, but also in skin, muscle and bone. Theweleit writes of the satisfaction felt by such 'soldatische Männer' in belonging to the 'Ganzheitsmaschine Truppe',<sup>12</sup> 'Teil einer ganzen Maschine zu sein, einer Makromaschine, einer Maschine der Macht, in der das Teilchen nicht seine eigene Lust besetzt, sondern die des Machthabers erzeugt'.<sup>13</sup> In his book *Discipline and Punish* Foucault also analyses the application of 'discipline' to the body of the soldier, and the manner in which his body becomes the 'object and target of power'.<sup>14</sup> He describes the emergence of the army in the eighteenth century as a controlling 'mechanism', and employs much the same imagery as Theweleit: 'The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it'.<sup>15</sup> He is, however, less concerned with the individual psychology of the soldier than with the means by which he is shaped and controlled, and reduced to a 'fragment of mobile space'.<sup>16</sup> To understand Roth's character it is more useful for us to think in terms of the 'Körperpanzer' adopted by these men, as detected by Theweleit in the writings of such fascist and nationalistic writers as Ernst Jünger (who revels in the 'Stahlgestalt' of soldiers: 'prächtige Raubtiere'). This psychological 'armour' served to hold in check everything that was, metaphorically and literally, 'inside'. With this in mind, then, compare the reaction of Anselm Eibenschütz in *Das falsche Gewicht* (1937) to life outside the army:

Er hatte Zivilkleider nicht gern, es war ihm zumute wie etwa einer Schnecke, die man zwingt, ihr Haus zu verlassen, das sie aus ihrem eigenen Speichel, also aus ihrem Fleisch und Blut, ein viertel Schneckenleben lang gebaut hat. Aber anderen Kameraden ging es beinahe ebenso. Die meisten hatten Frauen: aus Irrtum, aus Einsamkeit, aus Liebe: Was weiß man! Alle gehorchten den Frauen:

aus Furcht und aus Ritterlichkeit und aus Gewohnheit und aus Angst vor der Einsamkeit: Was weiß man! (W, VI, 130)

The feminine, the sexual, the emotional are feared and denied by these men, often with terrible consequences for themselves and others. Yet Eibenschütz, though displaying much the same background as Lohse, is able to occupy, as a civilian in the stable bureaucratic hierarchy of the Habsburg empire, a role similar in authoritarian status to the soldier's (an 'Eichmeister'). In the unstable and flawed system of the Weimar Republic, no such surrogate role is available to Lohse.

The relatively brief text of *Das Spinnennetz* documents Theodor's rejection by his family, his antisemitic prejudices (typical for many in his situation and associated with the myth of the Bolshevik threat and the 'Novemberverbrecher'), and his involvement with a 'secret' far-right group. He works his way rapidly and ruthlessly to a position of influence, murdering his superior *en route*, determined like Hitler during his rise through the ranks of the NSDAP (Hitler is mentioned in the text, as is Ludendorff, in an unusual mix of the factual and the fictional) to prove that he is a 'Gefahr' (W, IV, 103). Robert Cohen has characterised Lohse as a 'weak' man, 'der sich unter dem Eindruck seiner Bedeutungslosigkeit in wiederkehrende Machtphantasien zurückzieht'.<sup>17</sup> We can, however, be a good deal more specific about his 'weakness' and fantasies. As already suggested above, Lohse's difficulty in adapting to life after the War and outside the military is entirely typical of the men of the early fascist movement in Germany, many of whom continued the army lifestyle as members of *Freikorps* units, mercenary groupings, and paramilitary organisations such as the nascent SA. Theweleit convincingly demonstrates that their vicious campaigns against 'reds' in the East, and against German communist revolutionaries in charge of the short-lived Soviet-style *Räterepubliken* in Munich and elsewhere, were motivated not so much by politics as the

desire and psychological need for acts of violence. As sexual fulfilment is, in practice, denied to the soldier whose ego has been transferred entirely to a metaphorical 'Körperpanzer', the existence beneath which of unstructured, fluid (i.e. feminine) desires and feelings is vehemently denied, the only 'lustvoll' action he is capable of is aggression. For Lohse, at the start of *Das Spinnennetz*, finding an outlet for this aggression is a matter of urgency, for he finds himself in the humiliating position (to him, that is) of working in precisely the 'feminine' 'private sphere' mentioned by Boscagli: he is a private tutor to a wealthy Jewish family.

Like the subjects of Theweleit's study, Lohse remains sexually frustrated. He seems caught in a 'double-bind' in which he feels sexual urges, but encodes them as demeaning and shameful. In an encounter with the homosexual aristocrat Prinz Heinrich he allows himself to be literally 'feminised' as the object of a man's lust, an episode he subsequently represses. His encounters with prostitutes are also coloured by feelings of shame and contamination, of raw lust combined with fear: 'die kleinen Mädchen für billiges Geld, die hastige Minute kalter Liebe im nächtlichen Dunkel des Hausflurs, in der Nische, umflattert von der Furcht vor dem zufällig heimkehrenden Nachbarn, die Lust, die in der Angst vor dem überraschenden Schritt erlosch' (W, IV, 68-69).<sup>18</sup> He claims to feel desire only for a woman who is to all intents untouchable to him: his employer's wife, who is upper class, Jewish, and of course married. She is described in terms which reflect the ambivalence of this desire, for she seems to represent an 'angelic' mother/sister figure: 'Oh, wie war sie gut, schön, jung, Theodor hätte sich so eine Schwester gewünscht' (W, IV, 69). The barely suppressed desire for mothering is spelt out by the narrator of *Das Spinnennetz*, providing as clear an indication as we need that Lohse is unlikely to be satisfied by sexual relationships with women: 'Mädchen mit breiten Hüften sind Theodors besondere Lieblinge. Er liebt es, Zuflucht und Heimat zu finden im Weibe. Er will nach vollendeter Liebe Mütterlichkeit,

weite, breite, gütige. Er will seinen Kopf zwischen großen, guten Brüsten betten' (W, IV, 75).

Thus the only site of genuine lust for Lohse is the act of violence: directed against individuals, but also against undifferentiated, fluid 'bodies' of people, or crowds. Theweleit discerns three 'Triebziele' in which the fascist male gains partial satisfaction: the reduction of the enemy to 'blutiger Brei', the total removal of the enemy ('entleerter Platz'), and the loss of consciousness in the black-out. We find the first of these states achieved by Lohse in the aftermath of his cold-blooded murder of his superior, the 'detective' Klitsche, in a forest. The act is more than just a reluctantly executed step towards the fulfilment of Lohse's ambition to lead, as indicated by the language employed by the narrator in the aftermath of the murder. Having killed Klitsche with a pickaxe Lohse feels something close to exultation: 'Es war wie ein leichter, roter Jubel, ein Triumph, der ihn hob, ein beschwingtes Rauschen, Tod der schweren Gedanken, Befreiung der verborgenen, begraben gewesenen Seele' (W, IV, 91). The parallel with Theweleit's characterisation of this state is quite explicit: 'Weißgrauer und *blutiger Brei* quoll aus seiner Stirn' (my italics). By reducing someone else to the condition which he most fears - indistinct, liquid mess (what is 'inside'), Lohse affirms his own survival, the solidity of his own externalised ego - hence the triumph.

The sense of satisfaction he feels in the aforementioned scene is multiplied when achieved in the context of an urban riot, the nearest approximation to frontline combat available to the peacetime fascist. To the fascist mind, 'Masse' is a term of abuse. It is the natural state of the Bolshevik, an uncontrollable (which is to say *un/leadable*), flood-like force, diametrically opposed to 'Rasse'.<sup>19</sup> The association of masses with fluidity implies their 'femininity', and in this respect the fascist shares the fears of the bourgeois, whose 'safe' urban territory had, in the previous hundred years,

been the site of mass proletarian expansion. As Andreas Huyssen observes, this fear of an 'engulfing femininity' may be understood primarily as the fear of 'the loss of identity and stable ego boundaries in the mass'.<sup>20</sup> The association of the masses with 'barbarism' and a lack of 'culture' had been lent a degree of intellectual credibility by Gustave Le Bon's influential work *Psychologie des Foules* (1895; translated as *The Crowd*). The success of Le Bon's text undoubtedly derived as much from his affirmation of the élitist, racist, and sexist values of the affluent European conservative as from his psychological insights. He writes: 'Isolated, [a person] may be a cultivated individual; in a crowd he is a barbarian - that is, a creature acting by instinct'.<sup>21</sup> A few pages on he makes explicit the link between this 'creature' of 'instinct' and femininity.<sup>22</sup> Only in isolation, then, can this precariously constructed masculinity maintain integrity. Thus we read of Lohse, in an echo of Le Bon's sentiments: 'Den einzelnen hätte er vielleicht verstanden, in der Menge aber gab es keine Kontur, keinen bleibenden Punkt. Alles schwankte und schwamm' (W, IV, 115). The verbs in the latter sentence provide an implicit contrast to the 'phallic' stance of the soldier. The imagery in the following needs no comment: 'Erst als er vor dem Major Pauli stand, straffte sich der Schlaffgewordene, [...] und mit schneller Sorgfalt raffte er alle Kräfte zusammen und machte sie einem einzigen Zweck nur dienstbar: der militärischen Strammheit' (W, IV, 95). It is when this 'stramm' assertion of masculinity falters or comes under threat that the fascist is most dangerous. An unregimented, amorphous crowd, without a charismatic leader, represents a direct threat to the hemmed-in 'Körpermaschine', and his automatic reaction is to penetrate, to attack, to destroy. When plunged with his troop of young paramilitaries into a full-scale street battle with protesting workers Lohse momentarily shows weakness when he flees from a worker, who apparently knows the truth about the death of Günther, whom Klitsche murdered immediately prior to his own death at Lohse's hands. He compensates for this 'disgrace' by indulging in an horrifying period of

gleeful slaughter, in doing so reaching an ecstatic state close to a 'black-out', and similar to those described and glorified by Jünger (*Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis* (1922)).<sup>23</sup> Given the orgiastic horror described in the following quotation, in which the narrator employs the historical present, as do Jünger, Ernst von Salomon and others in their autobiographical accounts of combat, reference to a form of 'verwandelter Eros' does not seem far-fetched: 'Den Gewehrkolben stößt er gegen Leichen. Er schmettert die Waffe gegen tote Schädel. Sie bersten. Verwundete tritt er mit den Absätzen. Er tritt die Gesichter, die Bäuche, die schlaff hängenden Hände. Er nimmt Rache an den Toten, sie wollen nicht sterben' (W, IV, 127).<sup>24</sup> The suggestion that he considers his actions to be 'Rache' is interesting. The reference to 'die schlaff hängenden Hände' provides an indication of what he has to avenge. They are, perhaps, a visual provocation to him, a symbolic reminder of the non-erect, submissive, indefinable being within him. Merely killing the owner of the hands is not a solution, for the hands are 'schlaff' precisely because the owner is dead or unconscious. The only option for Lohse is the total obliteration of the dead, the violation of physically non-threatening corpses until they 'bersten': quite literally 'overkill'. This explains the apparently paradoxical assertion that the 'Toten' will not 'sterben'. In Lohse's eyes a corpse is not truly 'dead' until it has been obliterated. Only then does it present no psychic threat whatsoever and his own 'Strammheit' is restored. This is the 'Sieg der Ordnung' (W, IV, 128, 129) on a psychological level which allows Lohse's restoration as a man of influence.

Of course, the process is inherently paradoxical, for in reducing the other to a bloody mess he is simultaneously affirming the existence of precisely that which he wishes to deny. Foucault observes that the army imposes what he terms an 'instrumental coding of the body', that is an ideal symbiosis between the disciplined body and, say, a rifle. The distinction between the two is broken down: 'Over the whole surface of contact between the body and the object it handles, power is introduced,

fastening them one to another. It constitutes a body-weapon, body-tool, body-machine complex'.<sup>25</sup> Though it is not made explicit, the reference to power is important, as are the frequent references in his work to the 'coercion' of the body, for they imply a tension, an unnaturalness to such a relationship which may prevent it being maintained in the long term. The weleit suggests that the fascist takes pleasure in the fact that he (his body) has remained intact after combat, unlike that of the 'other'. Yet this must be a very superficial consolation for an act in which there seems to be a strong element of 'self-negation': 'the avowal of what is vigorously denied'.<sup>26</sup> Jacques Lacan, writing of what he terms the 'paranoia of self-punishment', in which a murder victim paradoxically represents an externalised 'Ich-Ideal' for the murderer, describes a similar process:

The madman wants to impose the law of his heart on what appears to him as the disorder of the world, a "mad" enterprise [...] in that [...] the subject does not recognise in the world's disorder the very manifestation of his present being, and insofar as what he feels to be the law of his heart is only the image, both inverted and virtual, of that same being.<sup>27</sup>

For 'Ordnung' ever to be wholly established, then, the fascist must destroy himself. The momentary pleasure of seeing another destroyed cannot compensate for the subconscious awareness of his own body's vulnerability. We might compare this with the fate of the officer in Kafka's well-known tale *In der Strafkolonie* (1919), who masochistically anticipates in the spectacle of other men's agonies his own ultimate exposure and 'martyrdom'. When he places himself upon his killing machine he finds that the 'disorder of the world', which he believed would be controlled and removed by the machine and the totalitarian system which produced it, is a part of him. The machine reflects this and malfunctions. The self-destructive impossibility of the National

Socialists' programme upon gaining power - including the ultimate 'mad enterprise', the Holocaust - may also be understood as the vain attempt to impose 'order' on what seemed (to a disordered mind) to lack it. If this interpretation seems extreme, consider Zygmunt Bauman's depressing yet illuminating contention that the genocides perpetrated by National Socialism and Stalinism, with their pseudo-scientific justifications, should not be viewed as aberrations, counter to the spirit of 'progress' as it has been understood at least since the Enlightenment, but as the 'legitimate offspring of the modern spirit, of that urge to assist and speed up the progress of mankind toward the perfection that was throughout the most prominent hallmark of the modern age.'<sup>28</sup> Elias Canetti would seem to agree: 'Es ist etwas Mörderisches in der Ordnung: nichts soll da leben, wo man es nicht erlaubt hat.'<sup>29</sup>

Franz Tunda, in *Die Flucht ohne Ende* and Nikolai Brandeis, in *Rechts und Links*, are also capable of killing with little hesitation. Indeed, there in fact exists a remarkable parallel between Lohse's association of killing with 'revenge' and a similar application of the word to the actions of the non-committal revolutionary Tunda. Claiming that he is fighting for the Red Army in the Russian Civil War only because he believes he is in love with the idealistic revolutionary Natascha, Tunda orders the execution of an orthodox priest and five farmers who are accused of murdering Red Army soldiers. They only stand *accused* of the crime, yet Tunda does not hesitate. Further: 'Ihre Leichen ließ er zur Abschreckung liegen. Er haßte noch die Toten. Er nahm persönlich Rache an ihnen' (W, IV, 405). Like Lohse, Tunda considers his action to be 'Rache'.<sup>30</sup> This is clearly not a political action and needs some explanation.

Tunda is participating in the Revolution quite by chance, having been caught up in it whilst crossing Russia on his way back to Vienna from Siberia, where as a captured Austrian soldier he had been imprisoned before escaping. The function of the Revolution for him is indicated by his adoption of the pseudonym Baranowicz. This is an

attempt to deny or cast off his former identity. Whereas Lohse is only able to 'lose' himself in the ecstatic frenzy of combat, Tunda uses the revolution, literally an overturning of the past, to achieve something similar for longer periods. It is not a political 'cause' for him but rather a suspension or reversal of accepted values. Revolution, with its associated violence, functions psychologically as a 'carnavalesque' state, in Bakhtinian terminology, which may be linked again to Foucault's identification of the festival as a form of 'heterotopia'. Unlike the 'crisis heterotopia' of the military or the prison discussed above, Foucault conceives of carnivals, festivals and fairgrounds as sites linked to temporality, 'to time in its most fleeting, transitory, precarious aspect'.<sup>31</sup> In other words, the pleasure of these heterotopias (which he compares with contemporary 'vacation villages') is that nothing - identities, roles, commitments - is permanent or 'real'. The danger for participants, though, is that one's actions may have very permanent effects, and that the desire for the festival never to end must lead to disappointment. Roth's texts reflect both the appeal of revolution and its inherent dangers.

In 1926 Roth had travelled extensively for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in Russia and others of the new republics, and his articles about the Soviet state two years after the death of Lenin and five years after the introduction of the New Economic Policy represent a high-point in his career as a political journalist. Writing of the decidedly un-revolutionary culture of *nouveau riche* 'NEP' men and 'American' technophilia, he remarks:

Wenn bei uns eine alte und, wie man sagt: müde Kultur durch Girls, Faschismus, flache Romantik pathologisch banal wird, so wird hier eine eben erst geweckte, brutal kräftige Welt gesund banal. Unserer dekadenten Banalität steht gegenüber die neurussische, frische, rotbackige Banalität. (W, II, 630)

Brutality and strength, two qualities central to a discourse of masculinity associated with fascism but still current in popular culture today, are here dissociated from the 'old' world of capitalist *bourgeois* society of which in Roth's view fascism is a part. It would seem he is referring to the Revolution here not as a political change (which is also considered banal) but as an exhilarating bloodletting of old values, old truths, old *selves*. This is precisely how it functions for the characters I am concerned with in *Die Flucht ohne Ende* and *Rechts und Links*.

The Revolution allows Tunda to exist in a state of flux, of constantly changing impressions of great intensity: 'Er liebte die Revolution und Natascha wie ein Ritter, er kannte die Sümpfe, das Fieber, die Cholera, den Hunger, den Typhus, die Baracke ohne Arznei, den Geschmack des verschimmelten Brotes' (W, IV, 406). He gains a degree of satisfaction from transforming himself, from playing the *role* of revolutionary leader. This is in contrast to Theodor Lohse, for whom the desire to lead, to be seen as a 'Gefahr', is a primary motivation. Violence is a necessity to Lohse, the mutilation and destruction of another an erotic and fulfilling experience. When Franz Tunda kills or orders people to be killed, however, he seems to do so dispassionately, feeling neither desire nor regret. In the temporality and flux of the Revolution (precisely the chaotic state Lohse fears despite achieving a parallel state of self-loss in combat) the obligation to relate to others as individuals is lifted, as is all sense of moral responsibility. Thus Tunda is willing to kill, 'ohne zu wollen' (W, IV, 405). Why then does he 'hate' the dead? I would suggest that the permanence of the dead, as concrete evidence of an irreversible action, is what Tunda hates. He does not regret killing individual humans - indeed as his fantasy-based relationships with women indicate, he seems unable to relate to others as individuals - but resents their physicality as a reminder that he has made a difference to the world. We might relate this to his subsequent reluctance to participate in the relatively banal work of building up a workable (i.e. permanent) state in

Russia, or to Nikolai Brandeis's similar fear of the physical trappings of success in *Rechts und Links*: "Glauben Sie mir, der Generaldirektor gehört seiner Tafel, seiner Visitkarte [*sic*], seiner Rolle, seiner Stellung, der Furcht, die er verbreitet, den Gehältern, die er bewilligt, den Kündigungen, die er ausspricht; nicht umgekehrt!" (W, IV, 743) The dead bodies, as a 'product' of his action, may be considered an extension of Tunda's self. In leaving them to decompose, just as Brandeis chooses to leave his own business empire to 'decay', he experiences an ersatz disintegration of the self, the form of 'expenditure' or wastefulness conceived of by Georges Bataille as a deep-seated need in many societies and individuals.<sup>32</sup> Tunda thus kills neither out of revolutionary zeal nor, as does Lohse, as a 'lustvoll' compulsion. However, his actions are the result of a general strategy of avoidance of the trappings of a conventional identity, the necessary price of citizenship and a life in a stable society, which leaves him 'überflüssig wie [...] niemand in der Welt' (W, IV, 496) at the text's conclusion. In this respect Lohse's lust for power, as a means of controlling society rather than submitting to it, is merely an alternative strategy of avoidance to that adopted by Tunda.

In the structurally and formally uneven novel *Rechts und Links* Nikolai Brandeis is not introduced as the novel's central character. However, as his power in the story increases so the narrator (a first person narrator whom Roth seems to forget about after the first paragraph) tends to focus upon him. By the end his disappearance from Berlin functions as a signal for closure (or at least cessation) of the narrative. Brandeis may in fact be considered the embodiment of Roth's doubts at the time of writing concerning 'whole' characters with consistent psychologies and life histories (see for example his article 'Selbstverriß' (1929)). Though in part a literary-theoretical issue, this is also a psychological point, a reflection of Roth's conception of humans' ability to transform themselves, to act in non-rational ways. Thus we read of Brandeis's conviction that he is able periodically to start afresh in his life, leaving behind the 'self' he has previously

occupied:

Auch Nikolai Brandeis machte die Erfahrung, daß der Mensch in einer einzigen Stunde - die ihm gar nicht wichtig erscheint - imstande ist, was man seinen "Charakter" nennt, so vollkommen zu verändern, daß er vor den Spiegel treten müßte, um sich zu überzeugen, daß seine Physiognomie noch die alte geblieben sei. Seit jener Veränderung, die er selbst erlebt hatte, pflegte Brandeis zu sagen, daß die Menschen sich nicht entwickeln, sondern ihr Wesen wechseln. (W, IV, 687)

Although Roth denied, for effect, that his characters had consistent psychology, we are provided with enough clues, as in the case of Lohse and Tunda, to make sense of this. I suggested above that Brandeis's decision at the novel's conclusion to abandon his lucrative business is motivated primarily by a fear of permanent ties, of being taken for granted. We learn that this is in fact his 'second life', and that he was previously a career soldier in Russia, first in the Imperial, then in the Red Army. The career the army provided was, as it was for Lohse, primarily one of discipline and security, replacing the need to establish a *personal* identity. His behaviour during the War and the Revolution is motivated, one might say, not by principle but by the desire to retain the 'wholeness' the structure of the army could provide: 'Er hatte sich vorgenommen, um jeden Preis Soldat zu bleiben. Mitten in der Verwirrung, die ihn nicht bekümmern sollte, war dieser Entschluß etwas Sichereres, und er führte auch zu etwas verhältnismäßig Sicherem' (W, IV, 687). Insofar as the Red Army preserved the conventional hierarchy and leadership structure of other armies, this behaviour is entirely consistent with that of the 'soldatischer Mann' as described by Theweleit: Brandeis does what he has to do to avoid 'Verwirrung'. Where he differs is in his attitude to violence. Like Tunda, he is quite

capable of following orders and killing men if it helps preserve the 'Sicherheit' of his lifestyle, but, again like Tunda, he derives no pleasure from it. Theweleit argues that the fascist's 'Körperpanzer', the root of his dysfunctional behaviour, has literally been beaten into him - through the brutal regimes of Wilhelmine schools and military academies. Neither Tunda nor Brandeis has undergone quite such a schooling, and their behaviour patterns are correspondingly different. Brandeis's far less developed 'shell' is penetrated when he carries out an order, like Tunda, to execute a priest:

Nun aber, da die Leiche des Pfarrers, der kniend gestorben war, vornübergesunken vor der blau gekalkten Mauer lag, vor der Mauer, auf der Nikolai als Knabe so oft rittlings gesessen hatte, und die dunkelrote Blutlache zaghaft immer größer wurde und auf dem abschüssigen Boden zwischen die Fugen der unregelmäßigen Steine ein paar Bächlein vorzuschicken begann: In dieser Minute verwandelte sich Brandeis. Er nahm die Mütze ab in Anblick der ganzen Bevölkerung und machte eine Verbeugung vor der Leiche. (W, IV, 688-689)

The moment has religious overtones, perhaps anticipating a theme more apparent in a later novel of the Russian Revolution and Civil War, *Tarabas*, in which a violent man becomes repentant of his sins. Certainly, Roth was well aware of the connotations of the notion of 'Wiedergeburt'. Yet Brandeis's subsequent career as an entrepreneur in Berlin is characterised not by the humility of the repentant sinner but by amorality and an insistence upon distance from others. This suggests that his 'Verwandlung' is not explicable within the clichéd framework of the sinner/saint dialectic, which some critics have suggested is a hallmark of Roth's work. The contrast onomastically implicit in Brandeis's name does not symbolise a struggle between good and evil but rather an

internal struggle between competing identities: “Wieviel bist du? Bist du *einer*?” fragte er. “Ich bin zehn!” (W, IV, 689) His transformation is psychological rather than ethical. It is interesting, for example, that Brandeis associates the wall in front of which the execution takes place with his own childhood. His memory of his childhood self, whose presence is suggested by the location, provides Brandeis with a convenient representation of the otherness of his own ego. As Lacan stresses, the ego can in any case never be directly ‘felt’ or ‘experienced’, having been formed from one’s image in the mirror at an early stage. If the ego in some sense always remains an *object* it can of course, in extreme cases, be projected onto other objects of our subjective gaze. Something of this nature takes place in the soldier whose sense of self is intimately bound up with his unit, and on a larger scale with the entire army, and who is surrounded on a daily basis by uniform(ed) ‘doubles’. Projection of oneself onto an object is, however, likely to produce contradictory feelings. Discussing Lacan, Borch-Jacobsen writes that it is quite possible to:

run up against that hard, frozen “object” that I am and am not, that I am not all the while I am ravished in it. So [...] I will be able to meet myself, run into myself in mirrors, struggle with my doubles, love myself in them while hating myself, project myself into them while losing myself.<sup>33</sup>

For Brandeis, gazing at the priest with the concentration of the executioner and imagining simultaneously his childhood self, the condemned man becomes himself, a double, an extension of an ego previously placed ‘in the service of the machine’ (the military).<sup>34</sup> This helps explain the fascination with the pool of blood, a phenomenon documented by Theweleit as a common one for soldiers and reminiscent of Lohse’s intense interest in the ‘product’ of his murderous aggression in the forest. It is as though

Brandeis is staring at *his own* blood, that he has executed himself, leaving - in logical extension - another person in his place. His behaviour thereafter is motivated by the knowledge that, in one sense, he has seen himself die, that he is a 'ghost' walking amongst the living, both superior and inferior simultaneously. Wolf Marchand observes that many of Roth's figures undergo some sort of transforming 'rebirth', though without examining the psychological mechanisms which allow this, and attempts to relate it to his apparent adoption of topoi of fascistic discourse.<sup>35</sup> Hitler, according to Hans Jochen Gamm's analysis of the cult elements in National Socialism, recognised the power of presenting himself as simultaneously dead and alive, as human and god. Brandeis's experience echoes this, however, not so much as part of an underlying discourse related to that of *Blut und Boden* literature but as a representation of the displaced ego of the career soldier reaching a crisis point and undergoing a surrogate 'death'. As becomes clear in his relationship to Lydia Markowna, an actress he literally purchases as a sort of concubine and treats as an object, Brandeis pays a heavy price for his 'rebirth': the ability to relate to other people.

The link between masculinity and violence is not absolute in Roth's work, but rather present only under particular conditions - a dangerous cocktail of military training, frontline combat experience, and social and political instability. Marchand contends that Roth 'erliegt dem Reiz' of male characters whose psychology he had portrayed, in *Das Spinnennetz*, as negative.<sup>36</sup> It is true that there are parallels between the behaviour of Lohse and that of the later characters. Theodor Lohse's attempt at a wholesale 'Sieg der Ordnung' - the violent assault on the 'other' within oneself - is partially mirrored in the individual acts of violence performed by Roth's revolutionary characters. Marchand's assertion ignores, however, the price they must pay for the brutality they direct at the world of permanent values and identities, and their inability to integrate into society. In later texts set in the period of 'satter, behäbiger, übermütiger Frieden' (W, VI, 417)

before World War I, as it is described in *Die Geschichte von der 1002. Nacht* (1939), the controlling and stable social hierarchy is seemingly permanent, and narrative closure is achievable in the literal or symbolic self-destruction of the flawed male protagonist. In the earlier texts the opposite is the case. Confrontation with one's own ego is constantly deferred, and the texts are not resolved by death but by dislocation - from oneself and the world. The texts can and should be read, then, as cautionary tales of the lasting psychological damage inflicted by military training and warfare, and of the consequences of an archetypally masculine employment of violence and evasion as solutions to a problem. In an age of technology-dominated wars and widespread desensitisation to violence, they retain their relevance.

## NOTES

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1. Joseph Roth, *Werke*, ed. by Fritz Hackert and Klaus Westermann, 6 vols, Cologne 1989-1991, II, 456. Further references to this edition appear in the text as 'W'.
  2. Klaus Theweleit, *Männerphantasien*, 2 vols, Reinbek 1989, I, p. 177.
  3. On the genesis and rediscovery of the text see Jansen's afterword in: Joseph Roth, *Das Spinnennetz*, ed. by Peter W. Jansen, Cologne 1967.
  4. Compare for example the parallel experiences of American veterans of the Vietnam War documented by Tracy Xavia Karner, 'Engendering Violent Men: Oral Histories of Military Masculinity', in *Masculinities and Violence*, ed. by Lee H. Bowker, Thousand Oaks 1998, pp. 197-232.
  5. On the effect of close-quarters combat upon soldiers see also Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare*, London 1999. Bourke explores the manner in which killing, otherwise taboo in society, is officially legitimised and encouraged in warfare.
  6. Maurizia Boscagli, *Eye on the Flesh: Fashions of Masculinity in the Early Twentieth Century*, Boulder 1996, p. 89.
  7. Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics*, 16 (Spring 1986), 22-27.
  8. Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 24.
  9. Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 24.
  10. Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 25.
  11. Hermann Ungar, *Knaben und Mörder: zwei Erzählungen*, Reinbek 1993, p. 58.
  12. Theweleit, II, p. 154.
  13. Theweleit, II, p. 152.
  14. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan, Harmondsworth 1991, p. 136.
  15. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 138.
  16. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 164.
  17. Robert Cohen, 'Männerwelt, Gewalt, Weimarer Republik: Rechtsextremisten im Frühwerk Joseph Roths und in Ernst Ottwalts *Ruhe und Ordnung*', *Modern Austrian*

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*Literature*, 30 (1997), 48-68 (p. 52).

18. Compare Theweleit, I, p. 188.
19. Theweleit, II, esp. pp. 77-109.
20. Andreas Huyssen, 'Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other', in Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Post-Modernism*, Basingstoke 1988, pp. 52-3.
21. Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, trans. anon., London 1952, p. 32.
22. Le Bon, p. 36.
23. Karner documents this phenomenon amongst the experiences of Vietnam veterans - hesitation in combat followed by the 're-proving' of manhood in 'gratuitous violence'. Karner, pp. 228-229.
24. Theweleit, II, p. 187.
25. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 153.
26. Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *Lacan: The Absolute Master*, trans. by Douglas Brick, Stanford 1991, pp. 26-27.
27. Borch-Jacobsen, p. 27.
28. Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, Cambridge 1991, p. 29.
29. Elias Canetti, *Die Provinz des Menschen: Aufzeichnungen 1942-1972*, Munich 1973, p. 204.
30. Compare also the revolutionary Friedrich Kargan's personal rather than ideological motivation in *Der stumme Prophet* (1929): 'Er bereitete sich vor, Rache an der Welt zu nehmen, von der er glaubte, sie behandelte ihn als einen Menschen zweiter Klasse' (W, IV, 780).
31. Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 26.
32. See *The Bataille Reader*, ed. by Fred Botting and Scott Wilson, Oxford 1997.
33. Borch-Jacobsen, p. 71.
34. Borch-Jacobsen's description of Lacan's vision of the world is both suggestive and revealing in the context of the present discussion: 'A mechanical, persecuting world, much like the one that Nathaniel, Hoffmann's hero, sees through the Sandman's diabolical glasses: there, man puts himself "in the service of the machine", his ego moulds itself into the "protective shell" of his automobile, his movements decompose into "kaleidoscopic" images, his living arm transforms itself into an "instrument" of technical aggression.' Borch-Jacobsen, p. 60.
35. Wolf R. Marchand, *Joseph Roth und völkisch-nationalistische Wertbegriffe: Untersuchungen zur politisch-weltanschaulichen Entwicklung Roths und ihrer Auswirkung auf sein Werk*, Bonn 1974, p. 55.
36. Marchand, p. 49.