

THINKING  
THE  
TWENTIETH  
CENTURY  
TONY JUDT

*with*

Timothy Snyder

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THE PENGUIN PRESS | NEW YORK | 2012

THE PENGUIN PRESS  
Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, U.S.A. • Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3 (a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.) • Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England • Penguin Ireland, 25 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd) • Penguin Books Australia Ltd, 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia (a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd) • Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi – 110 017, India • Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, Auckland 0632, New Zealand (a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd) • Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices:  
80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

First published in 2012 by The Penguin Press,  
a member of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING IN PUBLICATION DATA

Judt, Tony.

Thinking the twentieth century / Tony Judt, with Timothy Snyder.  
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-101-55987-1

1. Judt, Tony—Interviews. 2. Judt, Tony—Political and social views. 3. Political science—Philosophy—History—20th century. 4. History—Philosophy—History—20th century. I. Snyder, Timothy. II. Title. III. Title: Thinking the 20th century.

JC257.J83J8 2012

320.092—dc23

2011031473

DESIGNED BY AMANDA DEWEY

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ALWAYS LEARNING

PEARSON

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# CONTENTS

[FOREWORD \(Timothy Snyder\)](#)

[1. THE NAME REMAINS: JEWISH QUESTIONER](#)

[2. LONDON AND LANGUAGE: ENGLISH WRITER](#)

[3. FAMILIAL SOCIALISM: POLITICAL MARXIST](#)

[4. KING'S AND KIBBUTZIM: CAMBRIDGE ZIONIST](#)

[5. PARIS, CALIFORNIA: FRENCH INTELLECTUAL](#)

[6. GENERATION OF UNDERSTANDING: EAST EUROPEAN LIBERAL](#)

[7. UNITIES AND FRAGMENTS: EUROPEAN HISTORIAN](#)

[8. AGE OF RESPONSIBILITY: AMERICAN MORALIST](#)

[9. THE BANALITY OF GOOD: SOCIAL DEMOCRAT](#)

[AFTERWORD \(Tony Judt\)](#)

[Works Discussed](#)

[Index](#)

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# FOREWORD

This book is history, biography and ethical treatise.

It is a history of modern political ideas in Europe and the United States. Its subjects are power and justice, as understood by liberal, socialist, communist, nationalist and fascist intellectuals from the late nineteenth through the early twenty-first century. It is also the intellectual biography of the historian and essayist Tony Judt, born in London in the middle of the twentieth century, just after the cataclysm of the Second World War and the Holocaust, and just as communists were securing power in Eastern Europe. Finally, it is a contemplation of the limitations (and capacity for renewal) of political ideas, and of the moral failures (and duties) of intellectuals in politics.

To my mind, Tony Judt is the only person capable of writing such a broad treatment of the politics of ideas. As of 2008, Tony was the author of intense and polemical studies of French history, essays on intellectuals and their engagement, and a magnificent history of Europe since 1945, entitled *Postwar*. He had allowed his gifts for moralization and for historiography to find distinct outlets in brief reviews and longer scholarly studies, and had brought both forms very close to perfection. This book arose, however, because at a certain point that November I understood that Tony would be incapable of any further writing at all, at least in the conventional sense. I proposed to Tony that we write a book together the day after I realized that he could no longer use his hands. Tony had been stricken with ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis), a degenerative neurological disorder that brings progressive paralysis and certain and usually rapid death.

This book takes the form of a long conversation between Tony and myself. On Thursdays during the winter, spring and summer of 2009, I took the 8:50 train from New Haven to New York's Grand Central Station, then the subway downtown to the neighborhood where Tony lived with his wife, Jennifer Homans, and their sons, Daniel and Nick. Our meetings were scheduled for eleven in the morning; usually I had about ten minutes in a café to collect my thoughts about the day's subject and make a few notes. I washed my hands in very hot water in the café and then again in Tony's apartment; Tony suffered terribly from colds in his condition, and I wanted to be able to grasp his hand.

When we began our conversation in January 2009, Tony was still walking. He could not turn the knob to open the door to his apartment, but he could stand behind it and greet me. Soon he was welcoming me from an armchair in the sitting room. By spring his nose and much of his head were covered by a mechanical breathing apparatus, doing the work that his lungs no longer could. In summer we met in his study, surrounded by books, Tony looking down at me from an imposing electric wheelchair. Sometimes I would work its controls, since of course Tony could not. By now Tony was largely unable to move his body at all, save his head, eyes and vocal chords. For the purposes of this book, that was enough.

To watch the course of this destructive illness was a great sadness, especially in moments of rapid decline. In April 2009, having seen Tony lose the use of his legs and then his lungs in a matter of

weeks, I was convinced (as were, I had the impression, his doctors) that he had no more than a few weeks to live. I was and am thus all the more grateful to Jenny and the boys for sharing Tony with me during such a time. But the conversation was also a great source of intellectual sustenance, bringing the pleasure of concentration, the harmony of communication and the gratification of good work achieved. Attending to the subjects at hand, and keeping pace with Tony's mind, was an absorbing labor, and also a happy one.

I am a historian of Eastern Europe, where the spoken book enjoys a proud tradition. The most famous example of the genre is the Czech writer Karel Capek's series of interviews with Tomáš Masaryk, the philosopher-president of interwar Czechoslovakia. This happens to be the first book that Tony read in Czech from cover to cover. Perhaps the best spoken book is *My Century*, the magnificent autobiography of the Polish-Jewish poet Aleksander Wat, as extracted from him over tape recorders by Czesław Miłosz in California. This I read for the first time on a train from Warsaw to Prague, just as I was beginning doctoral studies in history. I wasn't thinking of these examples as such when I proposed a spoken book to Tony, nor do I regard myself as a Capek or a Miłosz. As an east Europeanist who has read many such books, I just took for granted that something enduring could arise from conversation.

My questions to Tony arose from three sources. My original and rather general plan was to talk through Tony's books from beginning to end, from his histories of the French Left through *Postwar*, seeking general arguments about the role of political intellectuals and the craft of historians. I was interested in themes that are indeed prominent in this book, such as the elusiveness of the Jewish question in Tony's work, the universal character of French history and the power and limits of Marxism. I had the intuition that Eastern Europe had broadened Tony's ethical and intellectual outlook, but had no idea just how profoundly true this was. I learned about Tony's east European connections, and much else, because Timothy Garton Ash and Marci Shore suggested, and Tony agreed, that we devote some of our sessions to Tony's life rather than to his work. Finally, Tony revealed that he had been planning to write a history of intellectual life in the twentieth century. I used his chapter outline as the basis for a third round of questions.

This book's conversational character required that its authors be familiar with thousands of other books. Because Tony and I were speaking to each other in person, there was no time to check references. Tony did not know in advance what I would ask, and I did not know in advance what he would answer. What appears in print here reflects the spontaneity, unpredictability, and sometimes playfulness of two minds purposefully engaged through speech. But everywhere, and especially in its historical sections, it depends upon our mental libraries, and in particular upon Tony's improbably capacious and well-catalogued one. This book makes a case for conversation, but perhaps an even stronger case for reading. I never studied with Tony, but the card catalogue of his mental library overlapped considerably with my own. Our previous reading created a common space within which Tony and I could venture together, noting landmarks and vistas, at a moment when other kinds of movement were impossible.

Still, to speak is one thing, and to publish is another. How exactly did that conversation become this book? Each session was recorded, then saved as a digital file. The young historian Yedida Kanfer then undertook the transcription. This was itself a demanding intellectual task, since to puzzle out what we were saying from imperfect recordings Yedida had to know what we were talking about.

Without her dedication and her knowledge, this book would have been far harder to achieve. From summer 2009 through spring 2010 I edited the transcripts into nine chapters, according to a plan approved by Tony. In October and December 2009 I flew to New York from Vienna, where I was spending the 2009–2010 academic year, so that we could discuss progress. From Vienna I sent Tony draft chapters by e-mail, which he then revised and returned.

Each of the chapters has a biographical and a historical component. Thus the book moves through Tony's life and across some of the most important loci of twentieth-century political thought: the Holocaust as a Jewish and a German question; Zionism and its European origins; English exceptionalism and French universalism; Marxism and its temptations; fascism and anti-fascism; the revival of liberalism as ethics in Eastern Europe; and social planning in Europe and the United States. In the historical sections of the chapters, Tony appears in plain text and I in italics. Although the biographical sections also arose from conversation, I have removed myself entirely from these. Thus each chapter begins with a bit of Tony's biography, in Tony's voice in plain text. At a certain point I appear with a question, in italics. Then the historical section proceeds.

The point of uniting biography and history is not, of course, that Tony's preoccupations and achievements can be drawn in any simple way from his life, like so many buckets of water from a well. We are all more like vast subterranean caverns, uncharted even by ourselves, than we are like holes dug straight into the ground. The urge to insist that the complex is just a disguise for the simple was one of the plagues of the twentieth century. In asking Tony about his life, I wasn't looking to quench a thirst for a simple explanation, but rather tapping on walls, seeking after passages between underground chambers whose existence, at the beginning, I only dimly sensed.

It is not the case, for example, that Tony wrote Jewish history because he is Jewish. He never really has written about Jewish history. Like many scholars of Jewish origin of his generation, he evaded the manifest centrality of the Holocaust to his own subjects, even as his personal knowledge of it motivated, at some level, the direction of his research. Likewise, it is not that Tony writes about the English because he himself is English. With a few exceptions, he has never written much about Great Britain. Englishness, or rather his particular English education, gave him a taste for literary form and a set of references that has seen him through (as I understand matters) the turmoil of his intellectual affections and of the politics of his generation—the generation of 1968. His strong association with France had less to do with origins than with a yearning (in my opinion) for a single key to universal or at least to European problems, for a revolutionary tradition that might yield truth when embraced or spurned. Tony is east European chiefly by his association with east Europeans. But it was these friendships that opened to him a continent. Tony is American by choice and by citizenship; his identification with the country seems to be with a great land in constant need of critique.

My hope is that this particular form, with biography introducing themes of intellectual history, will allow the reader to see a mind at work over the course of a life, or perhaps even a mind developing and improving. In some sense the intellectual history is all inside Tony: a reality that each week, speaking with him, I absorbed in a starkly physical way. Everything on these pages had to be in his mind (or in mine). How the history came to be inside the man, and how it came out again, are questions that a book of this kind can perhaps address.

**T**ony once told me that the way to repay him for his help to me over the years was to assist young people when the time came. (Tony is twenty-one years my senior.) At first, I saw this book as a



way to ignore his advice (not for the first time) and repay him directly. But the conversation was so gratifying and fruitful that I find myself unable to consider the labor of producing this book a repayment of any kind. In any event, whom exactly would I be repaying? Either as a reader or as a colleague I have known Tony in all of the guises in which he figures here. Throughout our conversation, I was personally interested (although I never raised the issue explicitly) in how Tony became a better thinker, writer and historian over time. In general, his preferred answer to related questions was that, in all of his various identities and in all of his various historical methods, he was always an outsider.

Is he? Is to be a formerly committed Zionist to be an insider or outsider among Jews? Is to be a former Marxist to be an insider or outsider among intellectuals? Is to have been a scholarship student at King's College, Cambridge, to be an insider or an outsider in England? Does doctoral study at the École Normale Supérieure make of one an insider or an outsider on the European continent? Does friendship with Polish intellectuals and knowledge of Czech make one an insider or an outsider in Eastern Europe? Is directing an institute for the study of Europe in New York the mark of an insider or outsider to other Europeans? Is being the scourge of fellow historians in the *New York Review of Books* an indication of insider or outsider status among scholars? Does suffering from a terminal degenerative illness without access to public health care make of Tony an insider or an outsider among Americans? One can answer each question both ways.

The truth, I think, is more interesting. Wisdom seems to come from being both an insider and an outsider, from passing through the inside with eyes and ears wide open and returning to the outside to think and to write. As Tony's life makes clear, this exercise can be repeated any number of times. Tony did brilliant work while thinking of himself as an outsider. The outsider implicitly accepts the terms of a given dispute, and then tries very hard to be right: to dismount the old guard and penetrate the sanctuaries of the insider. What I found more interesting than the many times that Tony was right (on his own terms) was his increasing capacity for what the great French historian Marc Bloch called understanding. To understand an event requires the historian to release any one framework and to accept the validity of several frameworks simultaneously. This brings much less immediate satisfaction but greater enduring achievement. It is from Tony's acceptance of pluralism in this sense that his best work, above all *Postwar*, arose.

It is also here, around this question of pluralism, that Tony's own intellectual path met the intellectual history of the twentieth century. The temporal trajectory of the two parts of this book, the biographical and the historical, meet in 1989, the year of the revolutions in Eastern Europe, the final collapse of the Marxist framework, and the year Tony began to think about how to write what became his unmatched, and perhaps unmatchable, history of postwar Europe.

It is also at about this time when Tony and I first met. I read a long draft version of an article of his on the dilemmas of east European dissidents in spring 1990, in a course on east European history taught by Thomas W. Simons, Jr. at Brown University. Shortly thereafter, thanks to the initiative of Mary Gluck, Tony and I met in person. Thanks in large measure to Professors Gluck and Simons, I had become fascinated with east European history, which I would study in earnest at Oxford. I was beginning then the two decades of reading and writing that would allow me to carry out this conversation. Tony was reaching in 1989 (as I see matters now) a crucial turning point. After one last polemic with another great polemicist (Jean-Paul Sartre, in *Past Imperfect*), and despite the occasion of one-sided essay still to come, he was turning to a more gentle, and a more fruitful idea of truth.

The intellectuals who contributed to the east European revolutions of 1989, people such as Adam Michnik and Václav Havel, were concerned with living in truth. What does this mean? Much of this book, as a history of intellectuals and politics, is concerned with the difference between the big truths, the beliefs about great causes and final ends which seem to require mendacity and sacrifice from time to time, and the small truths, the facts as they can be discovered. The big truth might be the certainty of a coming revolution, as with some Marxists, or it might be the apparent national interest as with the French government during the Dreyfus Affair or the Bush administration during the Iraq War. But even if we choose the small truths, as Zola did during the Dreyfus Affair and Tony did during the Iraq War, it remains unclear in just what truth might consist.

An intellectual challenge of the twenty-first century might be this: to endorse truth as such, while accepting its multiple forms and bases. The case that Tony makes for social democracy at the end of this book is an example of how this might look. Tony was born just after the catastrophe brought by National Socialism, and lived through the slow-motion discrediting of Marxism. His adulthood was the time of several attempts to regenerate liberalism, none of which finds universal acceptance. Amidst the wreckage of a continent and its ideas, social democracy survived as a concept and was realized as a project. Over the course of Tony's life social democracy was built, and then sometimes dismantled. His case for its reconstruction depends upon several different kinds of argument, appealing to several different intuitions about different kinds of truth. The strongest argument, to use a word that Isaiah Berlin favored, is that social democracy enables a decent life.

Some of these different sorts of truth dart across the pages of this book, often in pairs. The truth of the historian, for example, is not the same as the truth of the essayist. The historian can and must know more about a moment of the past than an essayist can possibly know about what is happening today. The essayist, far more than the historian, is obliged to take into account the prejudices of his own day, and thus to exaggerate for emphasis. The truth of authenticity is different from the truth of honesty. To be authentic is to live as one wishes others to live; to be honest is to admit that this is impossible. Similarly, the truth of charity is different than the truth of criticism. To call forth the best in ourselves and others requires both, but they cannot be practiced in the same moment. There is no way to reduce any of these pairs to some underlying truth, let alone all of them to some ultimate form of truth. Thus the search for truth involves many kinds of seeking. This is pluralism: not a synonym of relativism, but rather an antonym. Pluralism accepts the moral reality of different kinds of truth, but rejects the idea that they can all be placed on a single scale, measured by a single value.

There is one truth that seeks us rather than the other way around, one truth that has no complement: that each of us comes to an end. The other truths orbit around this one like stars around a black hole, brighter, newer, less weighty. This final truth helped me to give this book its final shape. This book could not have arisen without a certain effort at a certain time, little more than a companionable gesture on my side, but an enormous physical campaign on Tony's. But it is not a book about struggle. It is a book about the life of the mind, and about the mindful life.

*Prague, 5 July 2001*

## THE NAME REMAINS: JEWISH QUESTIONER

These are two ways to think about my childhood. From one perspective, it was an utterly conventional, somewhat lonely, very lower-middle-class London childhood of the 1950s. From another perspective, it was an exotic, distinctive, and therefore privileged, expression of mid-twentieth-century history as it happened to immigrant Jews from East Central Europe.

My full name is Tony Robert Judt. Robert is an English twist, chosen by my mother Stella, so let me begin with her. My mother's father, Solomon Dudakoff, grew up in St. Petersburg, the capital of the Russian Empire. I remember him (he died when I was eight) as a huge, bearded Russian military type, a bit like a wrestler crossed with a rabbi. In fact he was a tailor, though he probably learned the trade in the army. My mother's mother, Jeannette Greenberg, was a Romanian Jew from Moldavia, whose family was rumored to have had inappropriate liaisons with gypsies at some point. She certainly *looked* like a gypsy soothsayer off the back of a wagon: tiny, mischievous, slightly frightening. Because there were many families of that name from the same region of Romania, some of whom must have come from the same town and been related, my sons have long traded on the plausible but unlikely claim that we are related to the great Jewish slugger Hank Greenberg.

My mother's parents met in London, where Jeannette Greenberg and her family had come after the 1903 pogrom in Chisinau. Like thousands of Jews, they fled what was for its time an event of unparalleled violence: the murder of forty-seven Jews in the nearby Bessarabian province of the Russian Empire. They made it to London no later than 1905. My mother's father Solomon Dudakoff had fled Russia for England, but for different reasons. According to family legend, in defending his father from hooligans he accidentally beat one of them to death. He then hid in the oven of a baker uncle for the night before fleeing the country. This account is probably somewhat romanticized, since the timing suggests that Solomon left Russia at much the same time and probably for the same reason as hundreds of thousands of other Jews. In any case, he made directly for England. So my mother's parents were in England by 1905, and were married that year. My mother, Stella Sophie Dudakoff, was born just south of the Jewish East End of London in 1921, the youngest of eight children. She always felt a little out of place in her cockney, working-class neighborhood near the London docks; but then it was my impression that she was never quite at home in her own family or community either.

Like my mother, my father came from a Jewish family with roots in Eastern Europe. In his case, though, the family made two stopovers between the Russian Empire and Britain: Belgium and Ireland. My paternal grandmother, Ida Avigail, came from Pilviskiai, a Lithuanian village just southwest of Kaunas: now in Lithuania, then in the Russian Empire. Following the early death of her father, a carter, she worked in the family bakery. Sometime in the first decade of the century, the Avigails decided to make their way west to the diamond industry in Antwerp, where they had contacts. There in Belgium Ida met my paternal grandfather. Other Avigails settled in Brussels; one started a dry-goods

store in Texas.

~~My father's father, Enoch Yudt, was from Warsaw. Like my maternal grandfather, Enoch too served in the Russian Army. He seems to have deserted around the time of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905, making his way west in stages, reaching Belgium before World War I. He and my grandmother, together with their extended families, then made their way to London in anticipation of the German armies' advance on Belgium in August 1914. They both spent the First World War in London, where they married and had two children. In 1919 they returned to Antwerp, where my father Joseph Isaac Judt, was born in 1920.~~

My first given name, Tony, comes from the Avigail side of the family. Growing up in Antwerp, my father was close to his cousins, his maternal uncle's three daughters: Lily, Bella and Toni—presumably short for Antonia. My father saw a lot of these girls, who lived in Brussels. The youngest Toni, was five years my father's junior, and he was very fond of her, though they lost regular contact once my father left Belgium in 1932. A decade later, Toni and Bella were transported to Auschwitz and killed. Lily survived, interned by Germans as a London-born Jew: in contrast to her Belgian sisters—one of the minor mysteries of Nazi categorization.

I was born in 1948, about five years after Toni's death. It was my father who insisted that I be named after his cousin; but this was postwar England and my mother wanted me to have a good English name so that I could “blend.” Accordingly, I was provided with Robert as a backup and insurance, though I have only ever been known as Tony. Almost everyone I meet assumes that my first name must be Anthony, but few inquire.

My father's father Enoch Yudt was a Jewish economic marginal in a state of permanent migration. He had no particular skill except selling, and not much of that. In the 1920s he apparently got by on the black market between Belgium, Holland and Germany. But things must have got a bit warm for him around 1930, probably because of debt and perhaps on account of the impending economic collapse; he was obliged to move on. But whither? Enoch had been assured that Eamon de Valera's newly self-governing Ireland was a welcoming place for Jews and in some measure he had been well informed. De Valera was very keen to attract commerce to the new Ireland; being a conventionally anti-Semitic Irish Catholic, he naturally assumed that Jews were good at buying and selling and would be an asset to the economy. Accordingly, Jewish immigrants were welcome in Ireland with almost no restrictions, as long as they were willing to work or could find employment.

Enoch Yudt turned up in Dublin, initially leaving his family behind in Antwerp. He set himself up in business, making ties, ladies' underwear, stockings: *schmutters*. In time, he managed to bring over his family, the last two of whom, my father and his older brother Willy, arrived in Dublin in 1932. My father was one of five children. The eldest was a girl, Fanny; then came four boys—Willy (for Wolff), my father Joseph Isaac, Max and then Thomas Chaim (known as Chaim in Antwerp, Hymie in Dublin and then Tommy in England). My father was Isaac Joseph in Belgium and Ireland, and then Joseph Isaac, in England, or finally just Joe.

He recalls Ireland as idyllic. The family were tenants in a big house just south of Dublin, and my father had never seen so much space or greenery. Coming from a Jewish tenement in Antwerp, he and his family had landed in what must have seemed the lap of luxury, an upstairs apartment in a small manor house, overlooking a field. His memories of Ireland are thus entirely colored by this sense of ease and space, and almost completely unclouded by recollections of prejudice or hardship. My father came to Ireland with no English, of course, but with three other languages from his first twelve years of life in Belgium: Yiddish from home; French from school; and Flemish from the street. Slowly he lost the Flemish, which had gone completely by the time I appeared; he no longer speaks active

Yiddish, though the language remains there as a passive presence. Curiously, he retained a lot of French, which prompts the thought that the language you are forced to study is the one that you retain longest when you lack any motive to use the native tongues.

In 1936, after the family business had failed in Dublin, my grandfather's brother, who had settled in London, invited him to England. And thus my Yudt grandfather transposed his economic incompetence back across the Irish Sea. My father joined him, leaving school at fourteen to work odd jobs. Thus while both of my parents spent their late teens in London, my mother was and remained far more English in her soul than my father, having been born there. Both of them left school upon turning fourteen, but unlike my father Stella had a defined skill and trade. Despite her misgivings, she was apprenticed to a ladies' hairdresser, then a respectable and reliable trade for ambitious girls.

It was World War II that brought Stella Dudakoff and Joe Judt together. Upon the outbreak of war my father sought to join the army but was told that he was not acceptable: his lungs were scarred with tuberculosis, a sufficient justification for exemption. In any case, he was not a British subject. In fact my father was stateless. Though born in Belgium, he was only a Belgian resident, but never a citizen. Belgian citizenship laws in those days required that your parents be citizens of the country before you could claim citizenship, and Joe's parents were, of course, immigrants from the Russian Empire. Thus my father had come to London on a "Nansen passport," the travel document for stateless people in those days. In the autumn of 1940, the Luftwaffe began to bomb London in the course of what became known as the Battle of Britain. The bombing—the *blitz*—brought my parents to Oxford, where they were to meet. My father's older sister, enamored of a Czech refugee (probably Jewish though I'm not sure) had followed the young man to Oxford. After their house in North London was bombed, most of the rest of the family, including my father, followed her there, where my father lived for two years on the Abingdon Road, working for a coal yard and for the Co-op, making deliveries—in a van he was permitted to drive despite having no license; the requirement was suspended during the war. My mother also spent the war years in Oxford. The area of East London where she grew up was now under permanent attack, thanks to its proximity to the docks, and her home and the hairdressing salon where she worked disappeared in the bombing. Her parents moved to Canvey Island on the east coast, but she went to Oxford, a town she grew to love and always describes in a warm glow of nostalgic recall. My parents were married there in 1943 and would return to London shortly thereafter.

After the war, my mother established herself again in London as a hairdresser; between them my parents set up a small hairdressing establishment which supported the family in a limited but sufficient manner. The first years after the war were hard, as my parents remember them. My father even thought of emigrating to New Zealand in 1947, but had to abandon the plan since he still had no British passport and his stateless condition precluded easy acceptance in the British Dominions (he finally got a passport in 1948).

I was born in 1948 in a Salvation Army hospital in Bethnal Green, East London. The first thing I remember is walking along what must have been Tottenham High Road. In my memory we go into a tiny hairdressing establishment, with a staircase leading to the flat we lived in over the shop. I once described the scene to my mother, and she said, yes, that's exactly how it was. I was then somewhere between eighteen months and two years old. I have other memories of North London life, including looking at trucks and buses out of my parents' bedroom window. I also have very early memories of seeing, meeting, being introduced to young men who were camp survivors taken in by my grandfather Enoch Yudt. By then I must have been about four or five.

I cannot recall a time when I did not know about what was not yet called the Holocaust. But it was confused in my mind by its misleading representation in England, as exemplified by my very English

mother. She used to stand up when the Queen gave her Christmas greeting, on radio and then television—my father, by contrast, would stay firmly sitting down, both on political grounds and because he did not feel particularly English: all of his tastes were continental, from cars to coffee. In any event, my mother, when she thought of the Nazis, always referred to Belsen—images of which she had first seen on British Movietone News at the time of the camp's liberation by British forces.

She was thus typically English in those days in her unfamiliarity with Auschwitz, Treblinka, Chełmno, Sobibór and Bełżec, camps where Jews were killed in very large numbers, in contrast to Bergen-Belsen which was not primarily a Jewish camp. And so the image that I had of the Holocaust combined my familiarity with young survivors from the eastern camps with visual images of skeletons at Belsen. As a small child, I knew little more than that. I learned who Toni was, and why I bore her name, only much later, although I myself cannot remember the precise moment. My father insists that he told me when I was young, but I don't believe he did. He spoke often of Lily (who lives in London and whom we occasionally saw) but rarely if ever of her sisters Bella and Toni. It was as if the Holocaust penetrated everything—like a fog, ubiquitous but inchoate.

The stereotypes of course remained, not only about gentiles but about Jews. There was a clear pecking order among us *Ostjuden*, Jews from Eastern Europe (who were all of course despised by the cultivated German-speaking Jews of central Europe). Broadly speaking, Lithuanian and Russian Jews saw themselves as superior, in culture and social standing; Polish (particularly Galician) and Romanian Jews were lowly creatures, to put it politely. This ranking applied both within my parents' marital antagonism and across their extended families. My mother in moments of anger would remind my father that he was nothing but a Polish Jew. He would then point out that she was Romanian.

Neither of my parents was interested in raising a Jew, even though there was never any genuine question of complete assimilation; after all, I had a foreign father, even though his spoken English was more or less perfect and he had no accent that you could place. I always knew we were different. On the one hand, we were not like other Jews because we had non-Jewish friends and lived a decidedly anglicized life. Yet we could never be like our non-Jewish friends, simply because we just were Jewish.

My mother in particular seemed to me to have no friends at all, except for a German Jewish lady, Esther Sternheim, whose sadness I sensed even as a child. Her parents had been shot by the Germans. Her older brother was killed in action as a British soldier. Her sister escaped to Palestine, but later committed suicide. Esther herself had escaped Germany by train with her younger brother. The two of them survived, but he was mentally disturbed in some way. In postwar England such immigrant family tragedies were commonplace and somehow familiar; yet they were typically treated and referred to in isolation from the larger catastrophe which had produced them. But to grow up knowing such people was to imbibe unawares a certain sort of experience.

Even as a boy I always felt that we were so different that there was little point in trying to understand how and why. This was true even in a self-consciously un-Jewish family like ours. I was bar-mitzvahed because it would have been inconceivable—and very hard—to deal with the grandparents had I not been. But other than that, there was nothing Jewish about our household. In 1952 my parents escaped the stifling, *ersatz mitteleuropäisch* ghetto of North London Jewry and moved south, across the river to Putney. In retrospect I can see that this was an assertive act of ethnic self-rejection: there were almost no Jews in Putney—and such Jews as there were would probably have shared my parents' perspective, actively disposed to put their Jewishness behind them.

So I was not brought up Jewish—except of course that I was. Every Friday evening we would get into the car and drive across London to my grandfather Enoch Yudt's house. Enoch had chosen,

characteristically, to live at the very edge of Stamford Hill, in inner North London. Stamford Hill was where the religious Jews lived—“cowboys” as my father called them for their black hats and kaftans. Thus my grandfather kept his distance from the orthodox world of his childhood, while cleaving close enough to be observant when he felt the need. Since we arrived by car on the Sabbath eve, we had to park around the corner in order not to offend my grandparents (who knew perfectly well that we had driven but who did not wish to share this information with their neighbors).

Even the very car in which we drove suggests a certain non-Jewish Jewishness on my father’s part. He was a big fan of the Citroën car company, though I don’t believe he ever once mentioned to me that it had been established by a Jewish family. My father would never have driven a Renault, probably because Louis Renault was a notorious wartime collaborator whose firm had been nationalized at the Liberation as punishment for his Vichyite sympathies. Peugeots, on the other hand, got a favorable pass in family discussions. After all, they were of Protestant extraction and thus somehow not implicated in the Catholic anti-Semitism of Vichy-era France. No one ever said a word about the background to all this, and yet it was all somehow quite plain to me.

Well into the mid-1950s, the other guests at my grandfather’s Friday-evening meals were often the Auschwitz survivors my grandfather referred to as “the boys.” He had first met some of them, overhearing them speak Polish or Yiddish, in a London West End cinema in 1946. These boys, young men by now, joined the Primrose Jewish Youth Club, where my father and his brothers were active. At one point, my father, two of his brothers, and two of the “boys” were among the eleven starters on the football team. In the team photos you can see the tattoos on the arms of the young men.

My Lithuanian-Jewish grandmother would mount the complete Jewish Friday meal, with marvelously soft, sweet, salty, highly-flavored food in seemingly endless quantities (a striking contrast to the rather etiolated Anglo-Jewish cuisine of my culinarily-challenged mother). And thus I would fall into a warm bath of *yiddishkayt*—because of course Yiddish was spoken on those Friday evenings, at least among the older generation. This was an utterly Jewish milieu—and therefore also very east European one. Forty years later I was to experience a similar sense of homecoming when I started to visit and make friends in east-central Europe: there I found people drinking tea from glasses, dunking little bits of cake into them, while energetically talking across one another through cigarette smoke and brandy fumes. My private *madeleine*? Apple cake dripping sweet lemon tea.

My family experienced its own brief simulacrum of postwar prosperity, from about 1957 to 1964. Ladies’ hairdressing was a profitable trade then; it was the age of big hair. My parents had acquired a larger women’s hairdressing salon and were making decent money. They could even afford, in those years, to have a series of au pair girls, hired to care for me and my sister Deborah (born in 1956). Most au pairs in Britain in those days came from Switzerland, France or Scandinavia. But by a curious accident we had one au pair girl from Germany, though her stay with us was brief: my father fired her after finding in her room a prominent photo of her father in Wehrmacht uniform. The last au pair girl to grace our home was just sixteen years old, and I remember her primarily for the very attractive anatomy she used to reveal while performing handstands in front of me. She too did not last long.

Thus my family could now afford some comforts, including foreign travel. My father was always seeking ways to return to the continent—from the early postwar years he would travel back and forth on brief vacation sorties. My mother, characteristically English in this as in so many other respects, would doubtless have been content to go to Brighton. In any event, in the summer of 1960 we found ourselves in Germany thanks to an invitation from a former Danish au pair. Agnes Fynbo, from the little town of Skjern, had invited us to spend a couple of weeks with her family in Jutland. Quite why we did not take the boat directly from Harwich to Esbjerg I don’t know. But my father is a person of

habit, and we had always gone to Europe via the Dover-Calais ferry: so we took that route, driving in Belgium and thence Holland, where I remember we visited some relatives of my father who lived in Amsterdam.

It is remarkable that these Amsterdam relatives had survived the war. My grandfather Enoch Yudofsky had an older sister called Brukha, who had married in Poland and had two children there. She left her first husband in Poland and came to Belgium, where she married husband number two, Sasha Marber (a relative of the playwright Patrick Marber). Brukha had brought her two children with her; her second husband already had two children of his own, and then they had two more children together. This sort of thing was much more common in the old Jewish world than we sometimes suppose. Brukha was murdered at Auschwitz, together with much of her family.

But Paulina, one of Brukha's daughters from her first marriage, survived. In 1928 Paulina had married a Belgian Jew; my father, her first cousin, remembers the wedding well: he traveled to Brussels in order to take part in the celebrations. Paulina's husband could find no work at home and took his young family to Indonesia where he secured employment as a manager on a Dutch rubber plantation. Thus Paulina found herself in Indonesia, then a Dutch colony. The couple had three children, all girls: Sima, Vellah and Ariette. During the war Paulina and her daughters were interned in a camp in Indonesia by the Japanese: not as Jews of course, but as enemy subjects. According to family legend, which seems to be true, her husband was beheaded by the occupying Japanese after attempting to defend the rights of his indigenous employees. But Paulina and the girls survived the war, returning to Holland in 1945. When the Netherlands recognized Indonesian independence in 1949, the four women were offered the choice of Indonesian or Dutch citizenship, and thus became Dutch. And so we found them in Amsterdam.

From the Netherlands, you have to cross Germany in order to reach Denmark. My father had bought as much gas as he could in Holland, so as not to have to stop in Germany, and indeed we made it two-thirds of the way across. But everyone was tired in those pre-freeway days, and we were obliged to pass the night in Germany. Had he so wished, my father could doubtless have made his way in German via Yiddish, but he simply could not bring himself to communicate with Germans. Nevertheless, there we were in a hotel in Germany and communication was unavoidable. I was twelve and was duly primed to do all the talking. I already had passable French—thanks to school classes together with visits to French-speaking family members—but I had not yet started German. So I had basically to invent my German, with my father pre-instructing me in Yiddish equivalents. And thus I, a little boy named after a child gassed at Auschwitz just seventeen years earlier, went downstairs to the reception in this provincial German hotel and announced: *Mein Vater will eine Dusche*—my father wants a shower.

The world of my youth was thus the world that was bequeathed us by Hitler. To be sure, twentieth-century intellectual history (and the history of twentieth-century intellectuals) has a shape of its own, the shape that intellectuals of right or left would assign to it if they were recounting it in conventional narrative form or as part of an ideological world picture. But it should be clear by now that there is another story, another narrative that insistently intervenes and intrudes upon any account of twentieth-century thought and thinkers: the catastrophe of the European Jews. A striking number of the *dramatis personae* of an intellectual history of our times are also present in *that* story, especially from the 1930s forwards.

In some sense it is my story, too. I grew up and read and became a historian and, I like to think, an intellectual. The Jewish question was never at the center of my own intellectual life, or indeed my historical work. But it intrudes, inevitably, and with ever greater force. One of the aims of this book is



to allow such themes to encounter each other, to permit the intellectual history of the twentieth century to meet the history of the Jews. This is a personal as well as a scholarly effort: after all, many of us who have, in our work, kept these themes distinct are ourselves Jews.

*One starting point from which to grasp the complexities of Jewish and intellectual history in our time is Vienna, a place that you and I have in common. One image of the city we have inherited from Stefan Zweig: a tolerant, cosmopolitan, energetic central Europe, a republic of letters with an imperial capital. But the tragedy of the Jews impinges upon that story. Zweig's memoir, The World of Yesterday, is backward-looking description of the twentieth century, uniting the horrors of the Second World War with nostalgia for the world before the First.*

For Zweig and his Jewish contemporaries, that world of Habsburgia before the First World War was limited to the urban oases of the empire: Vienna, Budapest, Cracow, Czernowitz. Intellectuals of his generation were as unfamiliar with rural Hungary, Croatia or Galicia (if they were Jews) as those other worlds were unacquainted with them. Further west, the Habsburg monarchy extended to Salzburg, Innsbruck, Lower and Upper Austria and the mountains of the South Tyrol, where the Jews of Vienna, or Viennese cultural life in general, was either a mystery or an object of hate, or both.

So one must be careful when reading Zweig and others as a guide to the lost world of central Europe. In 1985, I visited an exhibition in the Historical Museum of the City of Vienna, "*Traum und Wirklichkeit: Wien 1880–1930.*" In one room the curators had pasted enlarged pages from a Viennese right-wing paper. The article, in German of course, was about the horrors of cosmopolitanism: the Jews and the Hungarians and Czechs and Slovaks and others who were polluting Vienna and creating crime. The curators had highlighted this text in different colors according to the words and their roots to show how very little of it was in literary German: much of this characteristically nativist rant was, unbeknown to its author, written in words of Yiddish, Hungarian or Slavic origin.

The Habsburg monarchy, the old Austrian empire thus had a double identity. More than anywhere else in Europe at that time, it was here that one was most likely to encounter overt prejudice on the Freudian principle of the narcissism of small differences. At the same time, people and languages and cultures were utterly intertwined and indissolubly blended in the identity of this place. Habsburgia was where a Stefan Zweig or a Joseph Roth could feel most completely at home—and it was from there that they were the first to be expelled.

*Let's press this irony a little further. It was precisely the Roths and the Zweigs and other assimilated central European Jews writing in German—what else?—who were to play such a prominent role in creating the high literary German which marks the literature of the age. I wonder whether this is sufficiently emphasized in Carl Schorske's classic account, Fin-de-Siècle Vienna. Schorske seems to underplay the distinctively Jewish qualities and origins of the Austrian protagonists in his story, adoringly grounded in a German culture which was to reject and abandon them within a generation.*

Yes. The East European Jews of my own background had no such grounding in a local high culture to which they had assimilated and whose value they acknowledged: they could hardly identify with the language and culture of the hostile Poles, Ukrainians and Romanians who surrounded them and with

whom there was for the most part a relationship based exclusively upon antagonism, ignorance and mutual fear. As for their own Jewish heritage of religion and *yiddishkayt*, by the twentieth century a growing number of younger *Ostjuden* were disposed to reject that too. Thus the very idea of a unified history of European Jews is itself problematic, to say the least: we were divided and splintered by region, class, language, culture and opportunity (or its absence). Even in Vienna itself, as the Jews of the provincial empire poured into the capital so the culture of the German-speaking Jews faced dilution and division. But well into the 1920s, Jews who had been born in Vienna or Budapest, even if their families were of eastern rural extraction, were brought up to think of themselves as “German.” And therefore they had Germanness to lose.

On her mother’s side, my first wife’s family were prosperous Jewish professionals from Breslau: representative types from a long-established Jewish German bourgeoisie. Although they had escaped Nazi Germany and settled comfortably in England, they remained profoundly German in everything they did: from the décor of the household, to the food they ate, to the conversation, to the cultural references with which they identified one another and newcomers. Whenever one of the aunts wished to put me in my place, she would politely inquire as to whether I had read such and such German classic. Their sense of loss was palpable and omnipresent: the German world that had abandoned them was the only one they knew and the only one worth having—its absence was a source of far greater pain than anything that the Nazis had perpetrated.

My father, from a very different, *Eastern* European Jewish background, was unfailingly astonished to learn that his in-laws returned year-in, year-out to Germany for their vacations. He would just turn to my mother in utter bewilderment and ask, silently, but how could they? To tell the truth, my first mother-in-law remained rather fond of Germany—both the Silesia of her childhood and the prosperous, comfortable new Bonn Republic with which she was increasingly familiar. Both she and her sister remained convinced that it was Hitler who was the aberration. *Deutschtum* for them remained a living reality.

German civilization was one Jewish ideal of universal values; international revolution—its polar opposite—was another. In some ways, the tragedy of our century lies in the discrediting of both these universals by the 1930s, with the implications and horrors of that unraveling rippling outwards for decades to come. Yet the place of anti-Semitism in this story is not always as straightforward as people fondly suppose. When Karl Lueger was first elected mayor of Vienna in 1897 on an overtly anti-Semitic platform, the culturally confident Jews of Vienna by no means conceded to him an authority to define national or cultural identity. They were at least as secure in their own identity and would probably, if asked, have preferred that he choose (as he claimed to do) who was and was not Jewish rather than who could and could not be German. Lueger for them, like Hitler for a later generation, was a passing aberration.

*In the Habsburg monarchy, anti-Semitism was a new form of politics that Jews and liberals found distasteful but which they thought they could accommodate. It was in these years, at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, that Austrian socialists spoke of anti-Semitism as the “socialism of fools,” of workers who could not yet recognize their own class interest, and so instead blamed Jews—as factory-owners or department store magnates—rather than capitalism for their exploitation. After all, if the problem is just foolishness, then it can be addressed by education: when workers are properly self-aware and informed, they will not blame Jews. Imperial liberalism in the central urban zone of Europe had*

Take the case of Nicholas Kaldor, the prominent Hungarian economist. He had grown up in interwar Hungary and thought of himself first and above all as an educated member of the upper middle class of his native Budapest: his world was that of cultivated, German-speaking, German-educated Hungarian Jews. By the time I first met him, in the early 1970s, he was being visited by a younger generation of Hungarian economists and intellectuals whom he regarded with, at best, a sympathetic distance: newly promoted provincials, shorn of the culture and language of their parents and reduced to life in one small communist outpost. Whereas in my own English Jewish childhood, Jews were always and obviously parvenus or pariahs, to apply Arendt's categories. Nicki Kaldor had clearly never acquired either identity in the course of his Budapest youth.

*Budapest was an even more distinctive instance of elective assimilation than Vienna. The Hungarians, having attained something very much like state sovereignty within the Habsburg monarchy in 1867, set about building their capital as a kind of model modern city, importing architectural and planning templates from elsewhere to raise a remarkable urban world of squares, cafés, schools, stations and boulevards. In this new city they managed to achieve, to a striking degree and without any very deliberate intention, the integration of many urban Jews into Hungarian society.*

Such integration, even if inevitably imperfect, would not have been available even to the best assimilated Polish or Romanian Jew. In the space assigned to the Pale of Settlement of the Russian Empire, and those regions just to its west, Jews were constrained to work against the prevailing assumption: that whatever the admirable or assimilable qualities of any given individual, the community itself was by definition and long-standing practice alien to the national space. Even in Vienna, Jews were restricted in practice to membership of the German *cultural* space which had been opened up by the empire, especially after the constitutional reforms of 1867; after 1918, once German Austria was redefined as a nation, the place of Jews within it became far more problematic.

To put the matter schematically: the linguistic divisions and institutional insecurity of Europe's eastern half made the region peculiarly inhospitable for multiple outsiders like Jews. Since Ukrainians, Slovaks, Belarusians and others faced their own challenges in defining and securing a national space distinct from that of their neighbors, the presence of Jews could only complicate and antagonize, offering a target for expressions of national insecurity. Even in the Habsburg monarchy, what Jews had really been part of was an urban civilization contained within a rural empire; once the latter was broken up after World War I and redefined by national spaces in which towns and cities were isolated islands in a sea of agrarian life, Jews lost their place.

Early on, I think, I came to appreciate in the context of my own family something that I would only later discover in the course of reading Joseph Roth: my parents and grandparents, for all that they originated there, knew nothing of Poland and Lithuania, Galicia or Romania. What they knew was *empire*: in the end, all that mattered for most Jews were decisions taken at the center, and protections afforded them from above. Jews might live at the periphery, but they were bound by ties of interest and identification to the imperial center. People like my paternal grandmother, growing up in her *shtetl* in Pilviskiai in southwestern Lithuania, knew nothing of the world around them. Like her, they

knew the *shtetl*, they knew the imperial regional capital Vilna, a largely Jewish city—and then the world (to the extent that this meant anything to them). Everything else—the region, the surrounding population, local Christian practices and the like—were little more than an empty space in which the lives were fated to be played out. It is frequently observed today—and true, withal—that their Christian neighbors (Ukrainians, Belarusians, Poles, Slovaks etc.) were miserably ill informed about the Jewish communities in their midst. They cared little for them and harbored ancient prejudices in their regard. But the same was largely true of Jews in their feelings towards “the *goyim*.” The relationship, to be sure, was profoundly unequal. But in this respect at least there was a certain symmetry.

Indeed, it was precisely that interdependence of mutual ignorance which would account for the ease of ethnic cleansing and worse in central and Eastern Europe over the course of the twentieth century. This emerges very clearly when one reads survivor testimonies from, e.g., Ukraine or Belarus: when Jews recall what it was that gave them away as Jews—beyond incontrovertible physical markers such as circumcision—they typically list the things that they (we) could simply not do, because they lived in a hermetically separated social space. Jews did not know the Lord’s Prayer; it was a rare Jew in this part of the world who could saddle a horse or plough a field. Jews who did survive were characteristically from that minority within the community who for some chance reason knew about such things.

This speaks to something that we can read, for example, in Franz Kafka’s tormented trajectory back and forth across the boundary markers of ethnic exclusivism: the “horrors” of Jewish narrowness and the “glories” of Jewish culture. To be a Jew was at one and the same time to belong to a constrained, circumscribed, ill-educated and often poor little world—and yet, by the standards of the surrounding population, this claustrophobic Jewish world was at the same time unusually well educated and literate, and although its culture was inward-looking it was a culture for all that; moreover, it was attached to a universal civilization extensive in time and space. Out of this paradox were born both the much-remarked-upon Jewish sense of overweening pride—we are the chosen people—and the profound sentiment of vulnerability that marked a perennially insecure micro-society. Understandably enough, many young Jews in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries strove hard to turn their back on both dimensions of this culture.

*In Vienna or Budapest or even Prague (not to mention cosmopolitan cities further west), professional integration, upward economic and social mobility and linguistic assimilation were all open to ambitious young Jews. But there was a glass ceiling; politics. It was one thing for Jews to make their way to the center of the Christian world: to know its streets, to share its topography, to understand its high culture and make it their own. In the days of empire, this sufficed. “Politics,” the business of government and rule, was beyond the reach of most Jews; it was less an activity than a shield against society. But in post-imperial spaces in nation-states, politics worked quite differently, making the state a threat rather than a patron.*

Yes. Odd as it may sound today, democracy was a catastrophe for Jews, who thrived in liberal autocracies: notably in the window that opened up between the eighteenth-century Austrian Empire under Joseph II and its curious apotheosis in the long reign of Emperor Franz Joseph II, from 1848 to 1916, an era of ongoing political constraint but cultural and economic liberation. Mass society posed

new and dangerous challenges: not only were Jews now a serviceable political target, but they were losing the increasingly ineffectual protection of the royal or imperial figurehead. In order to survive this turbulent transition, European Jews had either to disappear altogether or else change the rules of the political game.

Hence the emerging Jewish proclivity, in the early decades of the twentieth century, for non-democratic forms of radical change with an accompanying insistence upon the irrelevance of religion, language or ethnicity and a primacy attached to social and economic categories in their place; hence too the much-remarked presence of Jews in the first generation of left-wing authoritarian regimes that emerged from the revolutionary upheavals of the age. Looking forward from 1918, or back from the present day, this seems to me perfectly comprehensible: short of an active commitment to Zionism or else departure for other continents, the only hope for the Jews of Europe was either perpetuation of the imperial status quo or else radical, transformative opposition to the nation-states that succeeded it.

The obvious exception, in the interwar decades at least, was the truly democratic and relatively tolerant Czechoslovakia of Tomáš Masaryk. Here, at least by comparison with neighboring Romania, Hungary or Poland, was a multinational state in which all minorities were at least tolerated: to be sure there was no “Czechoslovak” majority community—even the Czechs themselves constituted only a relative majority, such that Germans, Slovaks, Hungarians, Ruthenes and Jews could all find their place, although the Germans especially were susceptible to irredentist sentiments imported from their neighbors.

*It is striking that you read Kafka as migrating uncomfortably back- and forward across his various identities—Jewish, Czech, German. It seems just as reasonable to interpret his subject as the sheer terror that one faces when the state, hitherto a distant protector, advances into dangerous proximity and becomes the source of oppression, forever observing, assessing, judging.*

Indeed so, and it is altogether understandable that his readers would absorb that lesson above all from Kafka’s best-known writings. But it has often struck me that the issue of authority in Kafka is richly inlaid with a mix of the personal and the political: while there is much to be said for reading him in the shadow of his tormented communications with his father, it does not hurt to locate him in the broader context of Czech, Jewish and central European history. Authority and power, in that time and place, were at once oppressive and ambivalent. The ambiguity in, for example, *The Trial* and *The Castle*, regarding the protagonist’s feelings towards the “authorities” echoes and illustrates an ambiguity we can find in Jewish history and indeed in the response of many in the region towards serial dictatorship and occupation.

*When thinking about the 1890s and the 1900s, a lot perhaps hangs on whether one understands the father is a symbol of authority, or authority as a symbol of the father . . .*

*I’d like to develop a little the categories we’ve been discussing. The other pattern to which you’ve alluded is Poland, where assimilation proceeds but not nearly so far as in Hungary, and so where many though not most Jews do come to feel that they’re part of the nation. And thus you have the phenomenon of the quite remarkable Jews of Łódź or Warsaw who, beginning in the last years of the old*

*Russian Empire, elected quite consciously to assimilate into Polish civilization and culture, regarding themselves unproblematically as both Poles and Jews. That said, the Polish language and culture suffered from a fatal characteristic (and fatal not just for Jews): it was and is substantial and attractive enough to provincialize those who partook of it, drawing them away from cosmopolitan allegiances; but it was not large or self-confident enough to absorb and shield minorities.*

I've never detected in German, or Hungarian, or Austrian Jews, the same complex mix of familiarity, attraction and *ressentiment* that you get among educated Jews of Polish background.

I once saw the distinguished medieval historian and Solidarity activist and foreign minister Bronisław Geremek interviewed on French TV. The well-intentioned interviewer kept asking: what have you read that gives you great personal pleasure and succor in hard times? Geremek would then stream off a series of unpronounceable (Polish) names that the guy had clearly never heard of; the audience, similarly mystified, reacts with polite silence. You could see that the French interviewer, primed for a central European intellectual—Jürgen Habermas as it might be, or Gershom Scholem, has nothing to say. Poland is big enough for educated Jews within it to be highly sophisticated and yet to the otherwise well-informed outsider, to appear utterly obscurantist when speaking of their own culture. I don't believe this is true of any other European Jewish community.

*It always seems to me that Jewish Poles, Polish Jews, Jews who are Poles, have a problem of scale which is like the one that Poles have in general—that it's a mid-sized country, and therefore proudly awkward in its existence and at the same time uncomfortably non-existent to others.*

Poles and Jews have a lot more in common than that. There is this Polish-Jewish propensity—Polish and Jewish propensity—to feel that unless you overstate your centrality, you are always at risk of marginalization. In Norman Davies's *Europe*, the introductory map of Europe has been adjusted such that Warsaw is at the epicenter. And, indeed, in Davies's account of Europe, Poland itself manages to be at the heart of its own history and everything else. This seems to me patently silly: Warsaw is not, and for most of European history never was, the center of very much at all.

But Jews do this too: placing their own history, for example, at the center of the twentieth century and its meaning. It can be very difficult, particularly when teaching here in the United States, to convey how far the Holocaust was from the center of people's concerns or decisions during World War II. I don't mean by this that it did not matter, much less that it does not matter today. But we cannot, if we wish to give a fair account of the recent past, read back into it our own ethical or communitarian priorities. The harsh reality is that Jews, Jewish suffering and Jewish extermination were not matters of overwhelming concern to most Europeans (Jews and Nazis aside) of that time. The centrality that we now assign to the Holocaust, both as Jews and as humanitarians, is something that only emerged decades later.

*But in a certain important sense Poland is in the center of everything. European history, so far as Jewish life is concerned, passed through three stages. Its medieval center was clearly in Western and Central Europe. Then came the great Plague and the expulsions, after which Jews and Jewish life moved eastward to*

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*the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Ottoman Empire. Finally we have the modern period—beginning, let us say, in the late eighteenth century with the revolution in France and the Polish partitions—as a consequence of which a very significant part of European Jewry, living in Galicia, falls under the Habsburg monarchy for the first time. Their children and grandchildren move to Moravia and finally Vienna, where they create European modernism. These are the people we have been talking about, indeed the people who invented many of the concepts we are using, so in any conversation about Jewish integration, assimilation and participation in modernity, we have to begin with Poland.*

If you stop the clock in 1939, I would have nothing to object to in what you say. Both the narrative and its significance would have to be keyed to a process which culminated in the urbanization and liberation of the Jews of Polish-speaking Europe and the consequences of that narrative for Europe at large. But what happens then? Poland is brutally extruded from the picture: first by World War II, then by the communist takeover, then—in coming decades—by a growing appreciation for what happened to the Jews; this restoration of memory and increased sensitivity to the recollection of Jewish suffering not only reduces Poland's place in the Jewish narrative, but crucially recasts it in a negative light. Poland, once a Jewish homeland, becomes the bystander and occasional participant in the destruction of the Jews.

This bleak image is then, as it seems to me, cast backward across the history of Jews in Poland: beginning in the 1930s and working its way back through into earlier centuries. The Poland that emerges—certainly this was the Poland I grew up with in our family—was a bad place to be Jewish. The history of the Jews becomes instead a forward-looking narrative of geographical emancipation: escaping the wrong places and finding our way to better ones. The latter in this modern narrative might be Western Europe, Canada, the U.S. or, more problematically, Israel. But it is never Eastern Europe. Conversely, the wrong places are almost always located in a real or (more commonly) imagined Eastern Europe, stretching from the Leitha to the Bug. This version of Jewish geographical victimhood now so completely overlays earlier accounts that it is very hard to disentangle them.

*I think that's utterly right. But what I'm trying to do is connect your two lines of Jewish history, the provincial East European and the cosmopolitan Central European.*

*Let's look again at the static, asynchronic image of Jewish life in fin-de-siècle Vienna. This is the beautiful portrait that one gets through Zweig and Roth and Schorske. You look along the horizon of Jewish achievement, and you see something which is tactile, firm, coherent, and then you wait for it to break because you know it's going to break. But it was never so firm and coherent. The Jews were one generation away from Moravia and two generations away from Galicia, and so not far at all from that older Polish world that was itself destroyed at the end of the eighteenth century.*

*What that account does is reify the youth of a certain generation of Jews at the end of the nineteenth century, who rather than inherit this Viennese world, in fact made it, and then modestly in old age give credit to history for their own*

Zweig doesn't just write about it, he kills himself because of it. And because of what is going to happen—first after 1918, then in 1934 with the Nazi coup attempt and civil war in Austria and of course above all from 1938 to 1945 when Austria was part of Nazi Germany—his version acquires retroactively a plausibility that it would otherwise have lacked: in short, that this was a peculiarly poignant catastrophe because something unique was undone and lost forever.

I wonder whether much the same could not be said of the fin-de-siècle wonderland of post-impressionist Paris? After all, France (and Paris above all) was in actuality a profoundly divided society, riven by competing political memories and abrasive disagreements over religion and social policy. In retrospect, however, and within just a few years, the French themselves had come to explain and understand these decades—à la Zweig—as a glorious dawn, overshadowed and displaced by war and politics—the former and perhaps even the latter self-servingly credited to others.

An echo of this nostalgic account can be heard even in the writings of the outstanding British economist John Maynard Keynes, in his *Economic Consequences of the Peace*. As early as 1921, we find him speaking with palpable longing and loss of the misplaced world of his pre-war youth. This is very much a trope of the generation born in the last decades of the Victorian era. Old enough to recall the confidence and security of the last years of the nineteenth century and the optimistic first decade of its successor, they would live long enough to see the utter collapse of what had once seemed not just a permanent condition of prosperous well-being, but a new and promising world in the making.

*Naturally we think of Keynes above all as the economist who created an entire school of economic thought, based upon the argument that the state can intervene during times of economic downturn. But of course you're right that he arrives at this conclusion from personal experience. We'll focus on that a bit later. But for now in the most general terms: Keynes has the wonderful sentence about the world before the First World War as being one where, in order to travel, one didn't need a passport, one simply had one's man go to the bank and get the appropriate amount of gold bullion and then book passage across the channel, and one was on one's way.*

*Keynes and others may indeed have been right that things were getting better at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and not just in Britain. Global trade was on the increase. The Austrians were making their way southward into the Mediterranean; even in Russia, agrarian reform appeared at last to be making serious inroads on the rural economy.*

This was indeed an age—economically, not politically nor ideologically—of enormous self-confidence. That confidence took two forms. There was the view—of neoclassical economists and their followers—that capitalism was doing very well, would continue to do well, and indeed bore within it the sources and resources of its own indefinite renewal. And then there was the parallel and no less modernist perspective which saw in capitalism—whether or not it was thriving in the present—a system doomed to decline and collapse under the weight of its own conflicts and contradictions. From very different starting points these were both, so to speak, forward-looking perspectives, and both more than a little self-satisfied in their analysis.



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