

Papers

Petra Herczeg

»World history does not pay enough attention to rays of sunshine«

The political and social dimension of Joseph Roth's journalistic work

Abstract: Joseph Roth (1894 to 1939) was one of the most significant authors of the 20th Century, familiar to a wide audience with works such as »Job« and »Radetzky March« and through the films of many of his literary works. But he was more than this, leaving behind a comprehensive body of journalistic work. Both his literary and his journalistic work is shaped by precise observations and a sociological look at people and society. This paper analyzes the journalistic work of Joseph Roth, especially his journalistic efforts to counter the rise of National Socialism, and discusses its topicality for journalism today.

The German-language perception of Joseph Roth's work tends to differentiate between his roles as a journalist, feature writer, and poet. Yet it is precisely the interconnection between his journalistic and literary work that is so essential to its perception. Hackert points to »classic English authors like Defoe or Dickens, whose contributions to the journalistic genres are not considered per se of lower value than their narrative work« (Hackert 2013: 5). He adds that »fiction« in this context is not a value in itself that would attribute »a higher value to its text types« (Hackert 2013: 5). Although referring to Defoe and Dickens here, this consideration also applies to Roth's work. This is further evidenced by the six-volume collection of his works published in 1992, which consists of »half literary, half journalistic work« (Haas 1999: 259).¹⁾

1 All texts by Joseph Roth are taken from the six-volume collection of his works and are quoted in the text as: JR, Work 1; JR, Work 2 and JR, Work 3.

Hackert quotes Helen Chambers (2013), who refers to the modernity of Roth's work »when his thoughts and writing revolve around the question of human identity. It forms a focal point of the motifs in both the narrative work and the newspaper texts, although the interweaving of the invented and the experienced, of fiction and faction, can also be found in the book and newspaper medium, where sections of the serial novel precede the book version« (Hackert 2013: 6).

It is precisely these connections that characterize Joseph Roth's work, documenting both the diversity of the oeuvre and the difficulty of categorizing Roth's work.

Roth spent his entire life as a journalist. Most of his narrative works first appeared in newspapers (cf. Westermann 1987). He wrote his last journalistic text, »Die Eiche Goethes in Buchenwald« [Goethe's oak in the beech wood] – »with the addition by someone else: »Last article before his death Monday 22.V.1939« (JR Work 3, 1991: 946) – just a few days before his death on May 27, 1939, in a paupers' hospital in Paris.

In terms of the academic (and public) reception, the journalist Joseph Roth – as Hannes Haas also writes – was discovered very late. »Incomprehensible not only because of the quality, but also the scope of his journalistic work« (Haas 1999: 259).

By way of illustration, it is to be noted that Roth wrote more than 1,300 articles in the interwar period. Having joined up to fight in the First World War voluntarily in 1916, he wrote his first journalistic texts for the war journal of the 32nd Infantry Division, which was disbanded in 1917 (cf. Westermann 1989: 1110).

Born in Brody, modern-day Ukraine, in 1894, Joseph Roth lived through various developments in society that had a lasting effect on both his literary and his journalistic work. They included the development of the city in the industrial age, the formation of different milieus that accompanied it, the First World War, the collapse of the Imperial and Royal monarchy, the return of soldiers from the front, the misery of the people, the rise of Adolf Hitler, the persecution of the Jews and people of differing views, and exile.

After the First World War, Roth published journalistic texts for the »Abendblatt Arbeiterzeitung am Abend« [Workers' Evening News] newspaper and »Die Filmwelt« magazine in Vienna. Roth saw himself as part of the tradition of Peter Altenberg, Karl Kraus, and Alfred Polgar (cf. Bronsen 1974) and published his first articles as a young journalist under Alfred Polgar. Polgar was a literary deskman at the pacifist Vienna weekly magazine »Der Friede.« He then followed Alfred Polgar when the latter became Head of Features at the newly founded daily newspaper »Der Neue Tag,« which printed Roth's first feature in 1919. Although the paper folded after just 15 months, it was enough to demonstrate the extraordinary productivity of Joseph Roth, publishing more than one hundred of his articles, reports, and features.

The return to Vienna after the First World War was difficult. Roth encountered a world that was unravelling: The situation was chaotic, people injured or

traumatized in the War wandered the streets, the Habsburg Empire no longer existed. These consequences of war became one of the core topics of Joseph Roth's work. Roth described his journalistic approach thus: »I have to reduce every event of world history quality to the personal in order to feel its size and estimate its effect. In a certain way, to let it pass through the »ego« filter and be cleansed of the slag of monumentality. I want to translate it from the political to the human« (JR Work 1, 1921: 570). This is the start of his reportage on Upper Silesia, where he examines the situation of workers in the coal mine from his own subjective perspective. Roth concludes: »I would give a lot to know how many of the one hundred and twenty-five thousand catch the last shimmer of a ray of sunshine. World history does not pay enough attention to rays of sunshine« (JR Works 1, 1921: 571).

In his remarks, he links the private perspective with the public by discussing how individuals are inextricably involved in world events. He knew how to shape his articles to attract an audience. »Changing perspectives is a classic strategy in reportage. It primarily serves to grab and retain the reader's attention« (Chambers 2013: 51). A diverse range of access points, »always curious, always anxious to show his bourgeois readers in particular the life that they passed by unnoticed« (Ortheil 1992: 67) – that was what Joseph Roth offered and how he saw himself as a journalist.

The »social aspect« in reportages by Joseph Roth

Authenticity is a key criterion in social reportage. It is found when the reporter was at the scene of the action, describes the events and actors based on his own observations, and draws his own conclusions. After the First World War, Joseph Roth first observed and described the life of the individual in a period of economic, political, and social hardship in a column entitled »Wiener Symptome« [Viennese symptoms] for the newspaper »Der Neue Tag.« In the reportage »Von Hunden und Menschen« [Of dogs and people] in 1919, he wrote:

»The many street scenes of the misery of war in Vienna have been joined by a new one in recent days: A person transformed into a right angle by the war – an invalid with a broken spine – moves along Kärntnerstrasse in an almost inexplicable way, selling newspapers. On his back, which is parallel to the pavement, sits a dog. A well-trained, clever dog that rides on his own master and takes care that he does not lose a single newspaper. A modern mythical creature: a combination of dog and man, devised by the war and placed in the world of Kärntnerstrasse by the misery of being an invalid. A symbol of the new age, in which dogs ride on people to protect them from people. A reminiscence of the great age, when humans are trained like dogs and called

›pig dogs,‹ ›bl**** dogs‹ etc. in pleasant combinations of words by those who themselves were bloodhounds but could not be called it« (JR Work 1, 1919: 95).

This excerpt shows how Roth links the perspective of an individual person with the current situation and demonstrates how the War affected individuals – giving the people a status as subjects – as well as how criticism of the political system can be expressed.

In the reportage »The island of unfortunates,« Joseph Roth reports on the psychiatric hospital at Steinhof in Vienna:

»There she lies, the garden city of the insane, refuge of those who have foundered on the lunacy of the world, home of fools and prophets. [...] The houses are all built the same and are called ›pavilions,‹ have Roman numerals on the gable ends and locked doors. Some are surrounded by a garden where the residents stroll, sit, walk, and stand around. It is now the time that they are taken outside« (JR Work 1, 1919: 23).

Here Roth focuses on a group of people more often than not forgotten by the majority in society:

»A man squats on the ground and tries in vain to draw clear circles in the still-hard earth. Another is moving his fists, turns one fist inwards, holds the other horizontally and still and follows every one of his own movements attentively. But around other houses it is silent, there is no garden. [...] Then comes the reunion. Some of the invalids are happy to get visitors, some are perturbed, do not want to know, some laugh, others cry. But almost everyone I saw first looked through the bags, most are more excited about what the visitors have brought with them than about the visitors themselves« (JR Work 1, 1919: 23f).

Roth describes the people in the institution with respect and conducts interviews with them in order to find out first-hand how they feel and how they view their situation. At the end of his reportage, under the sub-chapter heading »Farewell,« he notes: »To be honest, I find it difficult. Evening envelops the island of unfortunates – or fortunates? – in a blue mist. Perhaps he is right, the little professor? Is the world not a madhouse? And is it not useful to secure a warm spot at ›Steihof,‹² in good time? Perhaps I will do that. And – set up a newspaper. This is how I will look for staff...« (JR Work 1, 1919: 27).

2 Joseph Roth did not live to see it, but Steinhof in Vienna was not a »warm spot« during the Nazi era, becoming instead a place of horror: the center of the Nazis medical crimes. Cf.: <http://gedenkstaettesteinhof.at/de/ausstellung/wien-steinhof>

In this journalistic text, Roth employs a change of perspective, telling the story from the patients' own view and combining this with his own observations and facts, such as a copy of the menu and interviews with doctors. He does not answer the question of whether it is really the inmates who are »crazy.« Roth describes his experiences very vividly and atmospherically.

Following the closure of the newspaper »Der Neue Tag,« Roth moved to Berlin in 1920 to find new sources of income. The »traveler with burdens« – referring to a reportage by Roth from 1923 – became one of the best-paid journalists of his time. In his articles, he tackled various topics, traveled, and also composed reviews of books, plays, and films that, as Westermann notes, were often purely to fulfil his duties: »A sparkling idea, a brilliant formulation – the rest nothing more than routine filled with cliché« (Westermann 1989: 1113).

The individual perspective and the political effects: Joseph Roth's reports on the »Leipzig trial of the Rathenau murderers« (1922)

In his reports for the »Neue Berliner Zeitung – Das 12 Uhr Blatt,« Roth expressed his opinion of the court proceedings against Walther Rathenau's killers. The Foreign Minister had been murdered by members of the far-right group »Organisation Consul« (OC). Before this, the nationalist press had stirred up significant hatred against Rathenau as a representative of the »Jews' Republic.« Joseph Roth wrote nine articles about the trial published in the »Neue Berliner Zeitung« (»Das 12 Uhr Blatt« [The 12 o'clock paper] was added to the title in 1919) between October 4 and 13, 1922, and one article for the social democratic newspaper »Vorwärts.« In his biography of Roth, Sternburg writes that these may be the best political reportages Roth ever wrote (2009: 259). Westermann, too, claims that Rathenau's murder had been a »key experience« for Roth (1987: 120). Rathenau was killed in his car – a Mills grenade was thrown into the car and he was shot with an automatic pistol^[3] (cf. Mergenthaler 2014). Thirteen mostly young men who had been accomplices or accessories to the murder of Rathenau were put on trial. The two main perpetrators were already dead: The 23-year-old law student and former first lieutenant Erwin Kern had been killed by police in an exchange of fire, while the 26-year-old engineer and former second lieutenant Hermann Fischer had shot himself. There was huge public interest in the trial, with many people following events outside the State Court House in Leipzig. In his reports, Roth describes the proceedings in various segments, concentrating on accurately presenting the scene and the individual defendants. He instantly makes connections between the court room and the people in the dock: »The room in which the trial is taking

3 The roof of Rathenau's car was open.

place is excessively lined with images of the emperors. Oil-painted witnesses of former epochs, perhaps they speak for the defendants by pardoning them. The painted purple and torn clothing of Rathenau – a contrast and a causal link at the same time« (JR Work 1, 1922: 872)

Historical details are interwoven with the current political situation of the time. Roth also pays a great deal of attention to the murder weapon – the defendants are not only linked to the murder weapon, but their political sympathies are also discussed in parallel:

»With an indifferent expression, the defendants look at the weapon as if it were an immaterial kitchen device and not the instrument with which they allegedly wanted to liberate the nation. Indifferently, Techow discusses the speed of this weapon like an expert in shooting, while the lips of Lieutenant Tillessen betray a smile of contempt for all those in the room who have absolutely no idea about weapons and heroic deeds. [...] It is peculiar that the murderer's expertise immediately stops when the topic becomes political. One hears that he was convinced that Rathenau belonged to 300 Elders of Zion, that his sister was engaged to Radek, of »creeping Bolshevism,« and that Judaism was harmful. Although he has not read any of Rathenau's extensive writings, because he is no longer interested in the science of shooting, he is not even brave enough to admit his total ignorance. He claims to have read just a single paper by Rathenau, and that in Harden's »Zukunft,« for which Rathenau had not worked for more than ten years. Why read it? Why see for oneself? Better to go straight to the murder: It is easier« (JR Work 1, 1922: 874f).

Roth describes the atmosphere in the court room and observes the onlookers: »Their necks craned hungrily, their mouths open as if one could eat words, a mass of the hostile crouch together, each of them wishing his neighbor in the dock or even straight to the scaffold. No end in sight. Up there surges a sea of human desire for sensation« (JR Work 1, 1922: 879). And: »I am amazed by more than six hundred people every day, who have nothing to do for seven or eight hours and live just to listen. Their profession is being »the public.« They seem to live well, as they eat abundantly and noisily. Their appetites grow with their curiosity« (JR Work 1, 1922: 880). And the defense attorneys: »have to put up with being profiled here, as it is in their own interest to be seen in a kind of juridical spotlight. They are without exception upright, forceful, and wear their political stripes on their sleeves« (JR Work 1, 1922: 880).

Roth contrasts the defendants, the defense attorneys, and the audience, demonstrating the various power structures. Sternburg cannot be disagreed with when he states in his Roth biography that Roth did not write about the political

developments and background, but that his »insight into the political drama of the Republic« (Sternburg 2009: 261) provides a better description of the social conditions »than many of the editorials published on this topic« (Sternburg 2009: 261). Through the individual descriptions, Roth captures »the porousness of politics, crime, and justice« (Wagner 2011: 236) very analytically in his reports. Mergenthaler analyzes that, although Roth's court reports on the Rathenau murder do not provide the precise background to the conspiracy, they do deliver precise, »concise psychological portraits« (Mergenthaler 2014: 98) of the various actors, from the judge to the guards, the audience, the defense attorneys, the visitors, the witnesses, the chief prosecutor, and everyone involved in the trial in all the various functions.

In his article, Mergenthaler examines the political and aesthetic reach of the reportages. Roth refers to the robe of the state prosecutor as a toga in which dangerous intent lies dormant (cf. JR Work 1, 1922: 877). The term »toga« calls to mind »the habit of classical Romans, the citizens and dignitaries of the Roman Empire« (Mergenthaler 2014: 100). Continuing his argument, Mergenthaler claims that Roth states that it was not a German state prosecutor speaking, but a classical Roman. Roth quotes Cicero with »How long, oh Catiline?...« (JR Work 1, 1922: 885). Catiline, a Roman senator with an extravagant lifestyle, led a failed putsch against the Roman Republic in 63 BC. As a consequence, the Consuls were granted comprehensive powers in order to guarantee the stability of the Empire. »In 1922, no great hermeneutical efforts were needed to see the granting of these rights as a prefiguration of the right of emergency decree created in Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution – not least because the President of the Reich made use of this right as early as August 26, 1921 following the murder of Reich Minister of Finance Matthias Erzberger [...] Therefore, when Roth quotes the first speech with which Cicero attempts to convict his political opponent Catiline before the Senate and transfer responsibility, then he, Roth, could assume that more than a few were able to link this to the subject of the trial in Leipzig, the murder of Walther Rathenau« (Mergenthaler 2014: 103).

Reporting on the trial is thus embedded in a further political context that is no longer only about detailed characterization of the individual protagonists, but about the murder being an attack on the Weimar Republic itself. This approach is typical of Roth. Critics often accuse him of not conducting detailed research and being more interested in describing details (cf. Oei 2012: 32; Pott 2016) than in providing an overall picture. However, Roth takes a clear viewpoint and leaves it up to his audience to make the connections themselves. This requires an educated readership.

Joseph Roth's trip to the Harz mountains (1930/31) as an insight into his journalistic approach and how he deals with the public

Like Heinrich Heine (1824/26), whom he greatly admired, Joseph Roth took a trip to the Harz mountains for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* newspaper. However, only three articles were published in the paper, rather than the planned five (cf. Westermann, epilogue 1989: 1073). Westermann suspects that there may have been interventions against the reporting. Roth's texts were written as »letters from the Harz mountains« to a »dear friend.« In the first »letter from the Harz mountains,« Roth explains his journalistic approach by describing how he explores the small towns. Descriptions of the landscape alternate with those of the people Roth meets: »I sit in small cake shops, I go to medium-sized movie theaters, I eat in large public houses, I wander through late-opening bars. [...] I do not know any people, let alone a soul. Reichswehr soldiers seem familiar to me, merely because I was once also a foreign soldier in small garrisons. But I look at the faces of the soldiers: Now they are foreign to me. [...] The school children, too, seem to me close and related« (JR Work 3, 1930: 271).

The »master of miniature« (Haas 1999) observes the Central German small town and its inhabitants in great detail. Through »disclosure of his own point of view, i.e. through declared subjectivity, second-order objectivity is achieved« (Haas 1999: 243). Later descriptions by Roth demonstrate what Haas means by this:

»No museum, no church can compensate me for the sinister sight I am given by the window of a book shop in a small town, for example: a representative abundance of stupidity, lyrical amateurism, misunderstood idyllic ›local art,‹ and an empty dependence on a ›floe‹ of newspaper and cardboard lids in which one cannot pack more than a cylinder, that never houses a feeling, no seedling and no seed. [...] So much poison in violet chalices! From the charged countenance of the foreign dictator who holds the North in noble affection, whose chin is reminiscent of an upturned steel helmet, to Adolf Hitler's physiognomy, which anticipated the faces of his voters and into which every follower can look as if into a mirror: Everything is there, everything is in stock (...)« (JR Work 3, 1930: 274).

In this section, the travelogue is combined with criticism of the »dullness of public life« (JR Work 3, 1930: 274) and thus of how the political system acts. Without explicitly addressing it, Roth refers here to the Reichstag elections of September 1930, in which the Nazi Party gained 22.2 percent of the votes in the region travelled by Roth. »It is not the style of Roth's journalism to list or comment on such figures, however, but instead to capture trends in society through his own ever-

yday observations, be they real or pretend« (Kröhnke 1998: 108). Roth describes the mood in the provinces in a very pointed and clear-sighted way (cf. Kröhnke 1998), entering a confectioner's and a restaurant in order to observe the people and the scene:

»I drink beer and smoke cigarettes, for assimilation purposes and so that I am not noticed. [...]. It is not enough to just drink beer and smoke cigarettes; I also have to read the newspaper. Although it is an official gazette, it has it in for Severing⁴ and mocks democracy. It makes me look busy, and none of the talkative gentlemen dares to disturb me, as though I were deep in prayer. The views of the newspaper reassure them about my own. And one seems so satisfied with me that he raises his glass to toast me. I respond seriously yet charmingly and, in a flash, decide to escape him« (JR Work 3, 1930: 284).

This is another clear demonstration of the way Joseph Roth works as a journalist – the change of perspective, the incorporation of the actor in the surroundings, and the effects of developments in society on the individual.

In his second letter, entitled »Der Merseburger Zauberspruch⁵« [The Merseburg incantation], Roth examines the effects of the Leuna works chemical plant on the area of Merseburg and Frankleben through which he travelled.

The Leuna works had demolished the village of Runstedt, near Merseburg, in order to extract potassium. An interesting aspect of this report is Roth's very brusque and critical way of writing about his great role model Heinrich Heine and his journey through the Harz mountains:

»Heinrich Heine was, at least in the Harz mountains, a superficial traveler. What he saw and heard was blown his way by chance, the author's most treacherous and dangerous friend. It befell him. With cheerful indifference, he recorded it, wrote it down« (JR, Work 3, 1930: 275). Unlike Heine, Roth attempts to explain his own approach. After all: »But we, dear friend, who are gradually losing grace in a long and murderous fight with the stone cold facts of this world and who truly receive no further favor from God, when He sends them through an ever more gruesome world, it no longer befits us to harvest the anecdotes that the wind of chance blows in, and to gossip about encounters that have no valid relationship with the place in which they occurred« (JR Work 3, 1930: 275f).

4 Roth is referring here to Carl Wilhelm Severing, a social democratic politician who was Reich Minister of the Interior from 1928 to 1930.

5 The Merseburg incantations are two texts preserved in Old High German. The first relates to the release of a prisoner, the second to healing the sprained foot of a horse (cf. Eichner/Nedoma 2014).

He also criticizes not only Heine, but also the journalists who he claims do not report on certain events: »The spy reporters of the spy newspapers, who turn to the misery with such abrupt enthusiasm and use such large letters to grow the catastrophes that occur into the catastrophes that are depicted, strangely sometimes tend to miss the thunder that heralds a horror and the flames of an improbable blaze« (JR Work 3, 1930: 276).

Here, Roth complains that journalists do not explain and do not select and publish the topics that are informative and relevant to (the affected) people. He implicitly addresses the role conflicts in which journalists find themselves, as well as ethical questions like Max Weber's distinction between the ethics of responsibility and attitude, when it comes to the need for journalists to be aware that their actions can have consequences for which they need to take responsibility (Weber 1999). This journalistic responsibility is also addressed by Roth when he writes that the village was »not just killed, but also hushed up« (JR, Work 3, 1930: 276) and, not only that, but: »Reporting the naked facts in their gruesome magnitude was probably prevented simply by fear« (JR Work 3, 1930: 277). The fear of reporting on this probably relates to the company IG Farben, which until the Second World War was one of the largest chemical corporations in the world. In his epilogue, Westermann writes that »representatives of IG Farben [exercised] a massive influence on the publisher [of the Frankfurter Zeitung, P.H.] when Roth attacked the Leuna works as producers of poison gas. The editorial office probably even called their reporter back from the trip to the Harz mountains, as the series stops suddenly and abruptly after three articles« (Westermann 1991: 1073). Kröhnke states, however, that there is no proof that this was actually the case and that Westermann's suspicion may be based purely on a letter that Roth sent to his mother-in-law, in which he had promised five letters from the Harz mountains (cf. Westermann 1991; Kröhnke 1998).

In his reportage from Merseburg, Roth describes not only the destruction of the landscape, but also the way that the graveyard and the dead had been relocated. In doing so, he hears from a worker and quotes him directly. This worker confirms that the graveyard had been moved. In the article, Roth also comments on the situation of the farmers who had sold their property: »But war is coming, inflation, securities are melting away, the hungry world economy is crying out ever louder for potassium and coal, the owners are starting to tear down the village of Runstedt. The farmers move further into the country, destitute, and with worthless securities« (JR Work 3, 1930: 280). The various developments in society are interwoven with one another, the political and the social are interlinked, and the consequences embedded in the text with further reflection.

Joseph Roth's understanding of journalism is informed significantly by the kind of literary approach that Herodot and Heinrich Heine took. In 1921, as a reac-

tion to the »Kothurn-Pathetiker«⁶ [those who use pretentious and melodramatic language] (JR Work 1, 1921: 617) Roth wrote of the features section that, although they had learned grammar, they were also the source of the unfortunate, given that they are preachers and the scandalized (JR Work 1, 1921: 617): »There are absolutely appalling features writers. But those are the horses of the funeral cortege. The melodramatic who accidentally drop below the line. The coroners with the borrowed fools' bells« (JR Work 1, 1921: 618). Joseph Roth defies clichéd descriptions and, at this point, it becomes clear how difficult it is to classify Joseph Roth's work. According to Kröhnke, it is almost impossible »to differentiate strictly between [the different genres of] reportage, feature, travel piece« (Kröhnke 1998, footnote 1: 121). Rossbacher, who examined the apocalyptic fantasies in Roth's Merseburg incantation, comes to a similar conclusion (cf. Rossbacher 1991) and draws parallels between Roth's criticism of the environment destroyed by technological advances and the destructive effects of National Socialism. Roth observed the developments in society with pinpoint accuracy and addressed the contradictions of industrial progress in numerous articles.

In 1921, Roth wrote the following about Heinrich Heine and his travel letters:

»People say: Heine gave birth to the curse of features writing. But Heine's travel letters are not just amusing, but also a great artistic achievement and thus also an ethical one. The degenerate homo sapiens had spent ten years studying, it is claimed, and then written a boring, i.e. unethical, book. Heine may have fibbed about some small facts, but he saw the facts as they should be. His eye was more than just an optical instrument and optic tracts. If that is bourgeois, then bourgeois is very ethical. Long live the bourgeoisie! Was Herodotus, the features writer of ancient times, also bourgeois?« (JR Work 1, 1921: 617).

Joseph Roth and Heinrich Heine had something in common: As Bronsen writes, both had a strong need to share information and a great interest in political developments (cf. Bronsen 1974).

For Todorow, Roth is predominantly a political journalist »who professes to write apolitically, but who reaches his readers all the more effectively« (Todorow 1990: 380) and who uses a range of aesthetic means – such as very vivid images – to exploit »the options of political and intellectual semantics [...] in order to keep the perception of the readers awake under the emerging scarring, but not processing the Versailles trauma, the trauma of inflation, or the trauma of mediocre republican everyday conditions, if not to wake them up in the first place« (Kucher 2011: 224).

6 In the vocabulary of the educated classes: pretentious. It is interesting that Roth uses tautology here, as the word »Kothurn« can also be associated with melodramatic.

The juxtaposition of journalism and literature is always noticeable in Roth's work. For Roth, the reality he experiences is closely related to the literary reality. He argued that literature »occasionally« gives actions »a punch line« (JR, Work 1, 1922: 712) and that these punch lines reveal »the« reality better. Roth analyzes and casts judgment on the situations he observes; his journalistic texts aim never to instruct, but to explain.

Autopsy, analysis, and topicality: Joseph Roth's journalistic work

Joseph Roth, the precise observer and »prosector« who used different sources in his journalistic work and whose approach was characterized by Haas as a kind of »autopsy« (1999: 271), moved from the internal to the external view point and highlighted the discrepancies and contradictions. He proceeded »carefully like a newspaper reporter« (Bienert 1992: 151) and condensed »factual material, atmospheric impressions, and reflections [...] in an artistic report« (Bienert 1992: 151). Both political processes and the actions of individuals are not just described, but placed in the context of society. In his article »Das Dritte Reich, die Filiale der Hölle auf Erden« [The Third Reich, the branch of Hell of Earth], written in exile in France, Joseph Roth writes despairingly that journalists can do little to counter the regime in Germany:

»Because when one knows that the role of the German press is not to publish facts, but to conceal them; not just to spread lies, but to embed them in people's minds; [...] If one is to remark on a great achievement by Goebbels, it must be this: He made it possible to make the official truth limp as much as he limps. He lent his own club foot to the official German truth. It is no coincidence, but a deliberate joke of history, that the first German Propaganda Minister limps...« (JR, Work 3, 1934: 508f).

Joseph Roth was a deeply political journalist who recognized the danger of National Socialism very early and wrote against it – ultimately futilely. His understanding of journalism was shaped by introspection and precise observation, always incorporating social aspects and evaluating developments in society and technology ambivalently. He was ultimately a journalist who always felt he had a duty to an enlightened public.

His journalistic articles are up to date in the sense that they highlight mechanisms with which people can be instrumentalized; the role of journalists, policymakers, and the public; how developments in society can affect the individual; and how inhumanity can be revealed.

Joseph Roth died on May 27, 1939 in a paupers' hospital in Paris.

About the author

Petra Herczeg (*1966), PD Dr., Vice-Study Program Director and Senior Lecturer at the Department of Communication at the University of Vienna. Research focuses: migration and media; intercultural communication and journalism research. Email: petra.herczeg@univie.ac.at

Translation: Sophie Costella

Literature

Primary literature

All texts by Joseph Roth are taken from the six-volume collection of his works and are quoted in the text as: JR, Work 1; JR, Work 2 and JR, Work 3.

Joseph Roth: *Werke 1. Das journalistische Werk 1915-1923*. Hrsg. v. Klaus Westermann. Köln [Kiepenheuer & Witsch] 1989

Joseph Roth: *Werke 2. Das journalistische Werk 1924-1928*. Hrsg. v. Klaus Westermann. Köln [Kiepenheuer & Witsch] 1990

Joseph Roth: *Werke 3. Das journalistische Werk 1929-1939*. Hrsg. v. Klaus Westermann. Köln [Kiepenheuer & Witsch] 1991

Secondary literature

Bienert, Michael (1992): *Die eingebildete Metropole. Berlin im Feuilleton der Weimarer Republik*. Stuttgart, J.B. Metzler

Bronsen, David (1974): *Joseph Roth. Eine Biographie*. Köln, Kiepenheuer & Witsch

Chambers, Helen (2013): *Zeichen der Zeit: Aufsätze zur Reportage von Joseph Roth*. Schriftenreihe der Internationalen Joseph Roth Gesellschaft in Wien

Eichner, Heiner; Nedoma, Robert (2014): *Die Merseburger Zaubersprüche*. Online: <https://www.univie.ac.at/an/publ/publ3044zf.pdf>

Haas, Hannes (1999): *Empirischer Journalismus. Verfahren zur Erkundung gesellschaftlicher Wirklichkeit*. Wien/Köln/Weimar, Böhlau

Hackert, Fritz (2013): Vorwort. In: Chambers, Helen: *Zeichen der Zeit: Aufsätze zur Reportage von Joseph Roth*. Schriftenreihe der Internationalen Joseph Roth Gesellschaft in Wien, pp. 5-6

Kröhnke, Karl (1998): Signum Ex Avibus? Joseph Roths »Harzreise« und seine Reise durch die Harzreisen anderer Harzreisender. In: *Neuphilologus* 82, pp. 107-124. doi:10.1023/A:1004259208992

Kucher, Primus-Heinz (2011): »Warenhäuser, Rummelplätze, Walkürenjung-

- frauen«. Zu Joseph Roths Berliner Bilderbuch-Feuilletons (1924). In: Lughofer, Johann Georg; Zalaznik Miladinovic, Mira (Hrsg.): *Joseph Roth. Europäisch-jüdischer Schriftsteller und österreichischer Universalist*. Berlin, de Gruyter, pp. 221-231
- Mergenthaler, Volker (2014): Wie lange noch, o Catilina? »Joseph Roths Reportagen über den Prozess „gegen die in die Mordaffäre Rathenau verwickelten Personen«. In: Brömsel, Sven; Küppers, Patrick; Reichhold, Clemens (Hg.): *Walther Rathenau im Netzwerk der Moderne*. Berlin, News York, De Gruyter, pp. 87-110
- Oei, Bernd (2012): *Joseph Roth. Der verbrannte Himmel: Metaphysik des Zweifels*. Berlin, Lit Verlag
- Ortheil, Hanns-Josef (1992): Ich zeichne das Gesicht der Zeit. Eine neue Roth-Werkausgabe. In: *Die Zeit* (8) v. 14.2.1992, p. 67
- Pott, Hans-Georg (2016): *Rezension: Sven Brömsel, Patrick Küppers, Clemens Reichhold (Hg.): Walther Rathenau im Netzwerk der Moderne. Berlin, Boston: de Gruyter 2014.* In: Musil-Forum. p. 331 über Roth, sonst: pp. 330-337
- Rosbacher, Karlheinz (1991): »Der Merseburger Zauberspruch«. Joseph Roths apokalyptische Phantasie. In: Chambers, Helen (Ed.): *Co-Existent Contraditions. Joseph Roth in Retrospect. Papers of the 1989 Joseph Roth Symposium at Leeds University to commemorate the 50th anniversary of his death*. Riverside, Ariadne Press, pp. 78-106
- Todorow, Almut (1990): Brechungen: Joseph Roth und das Feuilleton der »Frankfurter Zeitung«. In: Kessler, Michael; Hackert, Fritz (Hrsg.): *Joseph Roth. Interpretation, Kritik, Rezeption*. Stuttgart: Stauffenburg, pp. 373-384
- Von Sternburg, Wilhelm (2009): *Joseph Roth. Eine Biographie*. Köln, Kiepenheuer & Witsch
- Wagner, Karl (2011): Joseph Roths Kritik des homo academicus. Ein Beitrag zur Intellektuellendebatte. In: Lughofer, Johann Georg; Zalaznik Miladinovic, Mira (Eds.): *Joseph Roth. Europäisch-jüdischer Schriftsteller und österreichischer Universalist*. Berlin, de Gruyter, pp. 231-243
- Weber, Max [1919] (1999): *Politik als Beruf*. Stuttgart, Reclam
- Westermann, Klaus (1987): *Joseph Roth, Journalist. Eine Karriere 1915-1939*. Bonn, Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann
- Westermann, Klaus (1989): Nachwort. In: *Joseph Roth. Werke 1. Das journalistische Werk 1915-1923*. Köln, Kiepenheuer & Witsch, pp. 1109-1116
- Westermann, Klaus (1991): Nachwort. In: *Joseph Roth. Werke 3. Das journalistische Werk 1929-1939*. Köln, Kiepenheuer & Witsch, pp. 1071-1078