

English Anti-Semitism: A Counter-Narrative

[NOT FOR QUOTING WITHOUT THE PERMISSION OF THE AUTHOR]

In the introduction to their collection on Debating Judeophobia in Twenty-First Century Britain, Paul Iganski and Barry Kosmin give examples of the kind of language used to describe the rise of a “new” anti-Semitism in Europe. They speak of an “alarming rise”, an “upsurge”, a “new wave”, an “eruption”, an “epidemic” or “virus” with Europe allegedly “sick again” (p. 1). Most notably Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks speaks of a “tsunami” of recent anti-Semitism. The history of anti-Semitism in England has an unusual “literariness” or literary quality as Anthony Julius notes in his recent Trials of the Diaspora: A History of Anti-Semitism in England (2010). We can see from the examples taken from Iganski and Kosmin that in describing anti-Semitism in England metaphors are taken for reality, representations for actuality (can we really bring together a “tsunami” of anti-Semitism with an actual “tsunami”; or an “epidemic” or “virus” with actual epidemics or viruses?).

When thinking through these issues I turned again to Geoffrey Hartman’s Scars of the Spirit: The Struggle Against Inauthenticity (2002) in the search for what is “real” and “authentic” in relation to this highly charged and divisive topic. How “authentic” is our current experience of anti-Semitism? Bernard Harrison in his introduction to his recent account The Resurgence of Anti-Semitism: Jews, Israel, and Liberal Opinion (2006 with a preface by Alvin Rosenfeld) balks at the definition of anti-Semitism offered by Iganski and Kosmin: “it is very much for Jews to decide” (p.5). But who speaks for “Jews”? Besides, Bernard Harrison (together with many other scholars working on anti-Semitism in England) is not Jewish. He describes as a “blocking move” the idea that the “complaint of anti-Semitism” should be, in his words, “occult to all except Jews” (xiii-xiv). Such

definitional confusions and polemicized debates are also catalyzed by Trials of the Diaspora which has an unusual and powerful ally in the figure of Philip Roth who has endorsed the book describing it as an “essential history”. Roth also spent a great deal of time attempting to decide what was “authentic” and “real” when it came to Jews and anti-Semitism. So please excuse a short opening excursus on Philip Roth before returning to the subject of my talk. Not that English anti-Semitism and Philip Roth are as far apart as one might suppose.

Why is Philip Roth concerned with English anti-Semitism? There are, in fact, many references to this topic in Roth’s fiction published in the 1980s and 1990s beginning with the climax to The Counterlife (1987) which followed Zuckerman Bound: A Trilogy and Epilogue (1979-89). In these two books, published between 1979 and 1989, Roth spent over a thousand pages trying to unite Zuckerman's “dwarf drama” with the essential issues of the day, “war, destruction, anti-Semitism, totalitarianism” (REF). In this early incarnation, Nathan Zuckerman, Roth’s doppelgänger, is a comic figure who highlights the unbridgeable gap between serious and trivial history (or authenticity and fakery). Much of Roth’s humor results from the disjunction between the miniscule world of his alter ego and the “world of massive historical pain” (ZB REF) as he puts it in The Anatomy Lesson. How could Zuckerman, born into a comfortable lower-middle class home in Newark, New Jersey, compete with the pain and suffering on the European continent? After a thousand pages of dialectics, veering with increasing rapidity between historically grave and historically trivial versions of Jewishness and anti-Semitism, Zuckerman has an unusual resolution to these competing identities. On the last page of The Counterlife—which is part of the “Gloucestershire” and “Christendom” sections of the novel—Zuckerman finally resolves his search for identity with the following:

England's made a Jew of me in only eight weeks, which, on reflection, might be the least painful method. A Jew without Jews, without Judaism, without Zionism, without Jewishness, without a temple or an army or even a pistol, a Jew clearly without a home, just the object itself, like a glass or an apple. (C 324)

Looking back at his time in England, in a book within a book, Nathan comes to the conclusion that it is England that has transformed him into a mere product of English anti-Semitism not unlike the imaginary Jew in Sartre's Anti-Semite and Jew (1948). But, in this case, it is specifically *English* anti-Semitism (rather than its French variant) which has transformed Zuckerman into a "Jew". No wonder the "Roth" figure in Deception (1990), published three years after The Counterlife, tells the reader that he has never "felt more misplaced in any country" (109) than in England (and this, of course, is the same Philip Roth who regularly visited Stalinist Eastern Europe, especially Czechoslovakia, in the 1970s and 80s while living in London for over a decade). Clearly Roth has good reason to endorse an 800 page history of English anti-Semitism.

The complement is repaid in two ways. Firstly, in an essay on the "new anti-Semitism" published in 2003, Anthony Julius reinforces Zuckerman's position at the end of The Counterlife:

[England] has given the world three Jewish figures of mythic intensity, Shylock, Fagin and Svengali, while also developing a new anti-Semitism which has, as its principle characteristic, an ability to influence the very character and conduct of Jews themselves. It creates the parameters for their self-definition. The English

Jew is what he is in part because of English anti-Semitism. In this sense, one might say while German anti-Semitism killed Jews, English anti-Semitism helped to create them (70).

Clearly Zuckerman was onto something. Not that I agree with this lachrymose characterization of Anglo-Jewry (pace Salo Baron) as a community which has somehow been determined or created by English-anti-Semitism. I have spent a great deal of time researching British-Jewish literature precisely to combat this kind of determinism.

The second homage to Roth can be found at the beginning of Trials of the Diaspora in the form of an epigraph taken from Operation Shylock: A Confession (1993). It reads as follows:

In the modern world, the Jew has perpetually been on trial; still *today* the Jew is on trial, in the person of the Israeli—and this modern trial of the Jew, this trial which never ends, begins with the trial of Shylock (OS 274)

In Operation Shylock it is Supposnik, a rare bookseller and possible Mossad agent, who talks about the endless trial of “the Jew” from Shylock to contemporary Israelis. According to Supposnik, Shylock is the “savage, repellent and villainous Jew, deformed by hatred and revenge” who has, over the past four hundred years, “entered as our doppelgänger into the consciousness of the enlightened West” (274). As Harold Bloom has argued, “‘Philip Roth’s’ shadow self or secret sharer is not the wretched Moishe Pipik in Operation Shylock... it is Shylock” (ES 113). This is a more subtle version than the argument that English anti-Semitism has created Anglo-Jews but it is along the same

lines. In the words of the novel, it is the “*depths* of antipathy” (221) towards Jews not merely in “bigoted, backwater, pope-ridden Poland” but even in “civilized, secularized, worldly-wise England” (221) that is the defining reality. The Roth character reminds the reader that he “lived eleven years in London” [221] and knows about these things.

As we can see, the title of Julius’s history *Trials of the Diaspora* is taken from *Operation Shylock*. Near the beginning of *Trials of the Diaspora*, the Supposnik quotation is repeated but this time in its more popular form: “Israel, the Jew among the nations” (p. xxx). The influential reconceptualisation of Israel as “the collective Jew among the nations” was a key feature of a publication by the Jewish People Policy Planning Institute in Jerusalem in 2002 by Irving Cotler. Cotler, who has spoken in this seminar series, argued that constructing Israel as “the Jew among the nations” was an entirely new form of anti-Semitism which has been renamed, in the last two chapters of *Trials of the Diaspora*, a “new” anti-Zionism. But there is a subtle but crucial difference between Roth’s and Kotler’s use of this trope (and I need to ask Cotler if Roth was an influence here given that *Operation Shylock* was published nine years before his *New Anti-Jewishness*). The difference is as follows: Roth is highlighting the figure of “the Jew” (“in the person of the Israeli”) whereas Kotler (and Julius) speak of the “Jew among the nations” which is a metaphorical extension of Roth’s more exact phrasing. One phrase focuses on the racialized Jew; the other on its figurative extension as a pariah nation.

Before leaving Roth, and moving onto *Trials of the Diaspora* in more detail, I want to make one final connection (or, to be more precise, non-connection). This time what I want to say is historiographical rather than literary. Towards the end of *The Counterlife*, Nathan recalls the time that he ate in a restaurant in London with his non-Jewish wife,

Maria Freshfield, and experienced an elderly woman complaining of a “terrible smell” or “abominable stink” (C 291). There is some debate between Maria and Nathan whether the “large, white-haired, elderly woman” (290), no more than ten feet away, is committing a “racial insult” (291). Maria thinks that the elderly lady is merely being “ridiculous” (291) and is quite “mad” (294) whereas Nathan is convinced that she is “hypersensitive to Jewish emanations” (292) and associates “stink with Jews” (293). The issue is left open in *The Counterlife* but is taken up again in *Deception*, published three years later, where the “Philip Roth” figure speaks explicitly about the incident with the “anti-Semitic woman in the restaurant” which the “English reviewers [of *The Counterlife*] said... was impossible in every detail” (202). (Elsewhere Roth has insisted on the veracity of this incident).* By the time of *Deception* the restaurant incident is cited, by Roth’s fictionalized wife at least, as part of the explanation for his decision to leave England.

The reason why I mention the perceived “racial insult” is that it is part of a wider narrative in *The Counterlife* on the nature of English anti-Semitism from Chaucer to Trollope up to contemporary attitudes to the State of Israel which may, or may not, be mere paranoia, false and inauthentic. But, unknown to Maria and his “English” readers, Zuckerman is self-consciously evoking the medieval belief in the “foetor Judaicus” (or “Jewish stench”) which was a central feature of medieval anti-Semitism. By the early modern period, James Shapiro has argued in his *Shakespeare and the Jews* (1996) that “among English writers there was an unusually persistent belief that a hereditary feature transmitted by Jews was their stench, the so-called ‘foetor judaicus’” (36). And, Frank Felsenstein, writing on “anti-Semitic stereotypes” from 1660-1830, concludes his study by noting that a secular version of this medieval slur was carried into the nineteenth-century in the figure of the Old-Clothes Man (257-59). Such “olfactory indecency”, in

Felsenstein's phrase, was associated with diseased Jewish immigrants living in the East End of London at the turn of the twentieth-century (Holmes, Chapter 3) and with the feminization of the Jewish male (with particular regard to the question of menstruation) throughout the twentieth-century (Jay Geller).

Once again, Zuckerman was clearly onto something. But the reason for mentioning this scene at the end of *The Counterlife*—as part of a narrative of contemporary English anti-Semitism—is that there is not a single mention of the “foetor Judaicus” (or more secular versions of such “olfactory thinking”*) in *Trials of the Diaspora*. This is not to say that Roth, especially at his most deceptive, is an authority in these matters (even after his endorsement of this history). But others, such as Colin Holmes, Frank Felsenstein and James Shapiro, write with unimpeachable scholarly authority on English anti-Semitism. Even a glance at any standard history of European anti-Semitism will find copious reference to the “foetor Judaicus”. This is because a malevolent belief in a “Jewish stench” was at the heart of theological discourses concerning the supposed Jewish desecration of the Host. According to this nasty doctrine, Jews needed the blood of Christ to rid them of their stink. The “foetor Judaicus” was also at the heart of medieval debates (carried through to the early modern period and beyond) concerning the supposed validity of Jewish conversion to Christianity. Does baptism remove the so-called “Jewish stink” or are there still irredeemable traces left even after Jews become Christians? So why is this malign belief—at the heart of Christian theology and secular versions of the debased “Jew”—missing from *Trials of the Diaspora*? Two issues are raised by this curious absence which goes to the heart of the conceptualization of anti-Semitism in this book.

The first issue is a straightforward point concerning the narrativisation of history. One key argument in *Trials of the Diaspora* is that the “master trope” of English anti-Semitism is the “blood libel” (xxx). In the book it is both the beginning and end of English anti-Semitism taking as its starting point Chaucer’s *The Prioress’s Tale* and culminating in two rather minor texts, Tom Paulin’s poem ‘Killed in Crossfire’ and Caryl Churchill’s play *Seven Jewish Children*. The “master trope” is transmitted through the figures of Shylock and Fagin who both, in this reading, enact the “blood libel” in their texts which are timelessly repeated and re-enacted on the page, stage and screen throughout the centuries. Again, the accusation of Israeli’s as “child-killers” acts as a way of uniting the “master trope” of anti-Semitism across time and, equally, is a means of uniting anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism. In these terms, the “blood libel” is less a “master trope” of English anti-Semitism but rather a master narrative in this particular account of English anti-Semitism. For this reason, other forms of anti-Semitism, such as the “foetor Judaicus”, which do not fulfill the narrative function of uniting medieval and twenty-first century forms of anti-Semitism, are simply ignored.

The second reason for excluding the “foetor Judaicus” exposes the conceptual limitations of *Trials of the Diaspora*. As I stated above, this malevolent discourse had two main strands both based on interpretations of Christian theology. The first concerns the malevolent mythologies which presumed the desecration of the Host as Jews needed the blood of Christ to rid them of their supposed “stink”. To be sure, these nasty doctrines in turn fed into “blood libel” myths and the kinds of persecutory discourses which are emphasized in the book (albeit while minimizing the theological dimension). But the “foetor judaicus” also spoke to the anxieties surrounding Jewish conversion to Christianity. Only the “balm of baptism”, in Felsenstein’s words, could expunge the “foul

odor” of “the Jews” (257). But this conversionist discourse leads to an entirely different version of anti-Semitism—combining fear and desire, persecution and embrace— than is offered in *Trials of the Diaspora*.

Anthony Bale’s recent account of *The Jew in the Medieval Book: English Antisemitisms, 1350-1500* (CUP 2006) represents most scholarly work in these terms by stepping back from what he calls “the massive transhistorical narrative of gentile vilification and Jewish suffering” (9). The advantage of this approach is that it acknowledges that images of Jews and Judaism gain meaning and power not in and of themselves but in relation to specific contexts and events (this is a key characterisation of most of the best scholarly work). The “full range of responses to Judaism”, according to Bale, are not merely reduced to “negative” images (19). Not that this is just a question of the long history of English philo-Semitism as William D. Rubinstein has argued (in a mirror-image of the long history of English anti-Semitism).* In Bale’s words, “the key point is that philosemitism praises an equally fictitious entity as that which antisemitism slanders” (20). What is more, “the philosemitism: antisemitism binary [is] increasingly unhelpful as each presentation of Judaism ... complicates even seemingly ‘simple’ narratives of judgement and retribution” (20). This is why my work speaks of a Semitic discourse.

A history of anti-Semitism based on one-dimensional hatred and hostility fails to recognize the foundational ambivalences at the heart of Christianity. This ambivalence has been summarised by Harold Fisch as a discourse which constructs Jews as both "a deicide nation [and] also a nation... on whose redemption the fate of mankind hangs" (15). As we have seen in the range of meanings which attach to the “foetor judaicus”, Jews can be constructed as both anti-Christ and potential converts. As is noted in the

introduction, most recent historians and cultural critics have held that “anti-Semitism” is “too blunt a conceptual tool” with which to analyze “the Jews” within the “English imagination”. It is for this reason that most recent scholars working on this area have expanded the meaning of anti-Semitism to include ambivalence (lv). David Cesarani summarized this position as follows: “[a]mbivalence towards Jewish particularity, rather than unequivocal hostility, is probably a more useful category [than anti-Semitism] with which to explore... a spectrum of attitudes” (66).

What are the consequences of only focusing on one aspect of anti-Semitism? I’ll return to the contemporary era with this question in mind. The extent to which the figure of the Jew is a figure of ambivalence was summarised a few years ago when Martin Amis distinguished, in an interview, between his own pronounced philosemitism and his father's "mild" anti-Semitism (19). Both father and son, he tells us, considered Jews to be "exotic and different". As a result, Martin Amis ended up liking Jews whereas Kingsley Amis disliked them. As both father and son are two of the most influential English writers of their generation, one should not underestimate this statement. Once again, the interview reveals that philo-Semitism and anti-Semitism are, in fact, two sides of the same coin. Whether sympathetic or hostile, both writers perceived Jews equally as different or Other. These perceptions of Jewish Otherness, I contend, are deeply ingrained in British culture.

Let me give you another example. The construction of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Jews has been called by Bill Williams the “anti-Semitism of tolerance”. It is this Semitic discourse, at the heart of English liberal culture which, I believe, informs the Guardian newspaper. It is worth remembering that the Guardian has radical Quaker roots and one of its best known

editors, C. P. Scott, helped to instigate the Balfour Declaration of 1917. Editors that followed Scott were equally philo-Semitic and consistently moralised Jews as victims of persecution. But, after the Suez Crisis of 1956, and the Six Day War of 1967, Israel could no longer be regarded as a country made up of passive victims (or ‘good Jews’) in need of the Guardian’s liberal embrace. The “disenchantment” of the Guardian (the title of Daphna Baram’s book on the Guardian and Israel) is largely due to the limits of the newspaper’s liberal philo-Semitism where Jews were once loved primarily for their victimhood. Once it became clear, after 1967, that the creation of Israel gave rise to another set of victims, “good Jews” could no longer be embraced unequivocally and loved for their victimhood. The often-expressed expectation (in the Guardian’s letters pages) that Jews should behave differently, because of their suffering, exposes the weakness of such moralising. Persecution does not lead inevitably to better human beings.

My argument is that The Guardian remains trapped in the assumptions of its historic ambivalent representations of Jews. Journalists debate whether the Palestinians have been sufficiently represented as victims (which is why Israeli victims of suicide bombers or rocket attacks are sometimes wrongly down-played). Here is the nub of the problem. It is as if we are engaged in a zero sum game (in the words of Michael Rothberg).* Once the “good Jew” is no longer with us then his “bad” counterpart re-emerges and, as a result, Jews can be portrayed as all-powerful. This is one reason why Jemima Khan’s claim that “the Jews” control “the media” in the United States was, unfortunately, allowed to stand in The Guardian (REF).

We need to dismantle a view of anti-Semitism as a free-floating eternal hatred, and locate discourses about Jews, certainly in the modern and contemporary era, within the context of the development of the liberal nation-state which gave rise to the “anti-Semitism of tolerance”. All of my work, in fact, sees the history of modern and contemporary anti-Semitism as part of the history of liberalism (or, more broadly, the history of modernity) and this context has been, unfortunately, missing from any discussion of the rise of the ‘new’ anti-Semitism. This European context, as Derek Penslar has argued, is very different from the Middle Eastern context in this regard which has a very different relation to Western modernity.* A conventional account of anti-Semitism (as we have already outlined) tends to stress mainly hostile negative images and violent acts against Jews. This approach focuses primarily on a free-floating discourse (outside of time and space) which is, by definition, decontextualised. Anti-Semitism, in these terms, can only be understood as something that is essentially illiberal which automatically locates it outside of a British liberal cultural context. An alternative approach, which is closest to my own work, views the figure of "the Jew" through the lens of certain dominant discourses -- whether they be empire, nation, religion or race -- and therefore perceives the representation of Jews as a microcosm of broader concerns. (Jewish Questions, in the words of James Shapiro, help us to understand English Questions).

In summary: much of the so-called “new anti-Semitism” in Europe is in fact a continuation of a centuries-old anti-Semitism of tolerance (and the so-called “new” anti-Semitism today is certainly not more intense or more violent than post-war English anti-Semitism up until the 1960s). But here we have to distinguish between a maximalist and a minimalist approach to English anti-Semitism (and this is a key distinction which I will return to). When I first started working on this area it was crudely teleological.

Representations of "the Jew in the Victorian novel" were written, for instance, with "the memory of Nazi Germany still fresh".* The key point is that by decontextualising anti-Semitism, the only context that is allowed-- that implicitly addresses anti-Semitism as an "eternal problem" in the words of Hannah Arendt-- is that of Nazi Germany. Such teleology (predicated on the lethal consequences of anti-Semitic rhetoric which led to the Death Camps) precisely disallows other kinds of cultures, other kinds of anti-Semitisms, which are located in a specific English cultural and social context. The work on the long history of English anti-Semitism has, up until now, helped us to challenge a teleological view of European anti-Semitism (culminating in the Holocaust) so that it is no longer characterised as an aberrant or pathological phenomenon.

The main problem with *Trials of the Diaspora* is that it is teleological. Modern history is very much skewed with regard to the present moment in relation to the "blood libel" and attitudes to Zionism and the British Mandate in Palestine. History is therefore written backwards. The book divides up the topic into Medieval (up to the General Expulsion of Jews in 1290), Modern (from the 1660s to the 1960s) and Contemporary (post-1967) with the literature chapter covering all three periods. Four different kinds of anti-Semitism are deemed to have a specific "English provenance". The first of these is a "radical anti-Semitism of defamation, expropriation, murder and expulsion" in Medieval England which is called anachronistically the "war against the Jews" after Lucy Davidowitz. After the expulsion of Medieval Jewry, literary anti-Semitism from Chaucer to Shakespeare and Dickens enabled the figure of "the Jew" to be "continuously present" in English culture. With the Readmission of Jews in 1655, under Oliver Cromwell, a modern, everyday anti-Semitism of "insult and partial exclusion" is said to have been prevalent up until the 1960s. In the contemporary period, a "new anti-Zionism" treats Zionism and the

State of Israel as “illegitimate Jewish enterprises” which has “renewed anti-Semitism, and given it a future” (REF).

By repeatedly describing the events which led up to the expulsion of the 5000-strong Anglo-Jewish community as “the war against the Jews”, *Trials of the Diaspora* knowingly sets this up as a maximalist form of English anti-Semitism—radical, innovative and lethal in its consequences in the language of the book. As James Shapiro has noted, this is simply bad history. “Historians have compellingly argued that while the Jews of Thirteenth-Century England were the subject of great violence and abuse, the expulsion was driven not by anti-Semitism but by constitutional and financial pressures”.* But in *Trials of the Diaspora* the medieval expulsion of Anglo-Jewry is set-up as England’s nearest (if anachronistic) equivalent to maximalist anti-Semitism (the “war against the Jews” obviously refers to Lucy Davidowitz’s influential history of the Holocaust from 1933-1945). It is in these terms that the potentially lethal consequences of anti-Semitism (shown in a medieval context) are continually present in the form of the “blood libel”. We have, that is, another version of teleology. This is why medieval anti-Semitism, the time when the worse did happen in England, is evoked in the present context in relation to an equally radical, innovative “new anti-Zionism”.

This argument has two main consequences with regard to skewing the long history of English anti-Semitism. The first is that the Modern period of English anti-Semitism (from the 1660s to the 1960s) is down-played considerably and dismissed as a history of “insult and partial exclusion”. The chapter on “The Mentality of Modern English Anti-Semitism”, for instance, stresses the “minor”, “non-lethal” “modest”, “invisible” aspect of the subject. In other words, the book moves from a maximalist to a minimalist

approach to English anti-Semitism. But just as the maximalist approach over-states its case considerably, the minimalist approach downplays and simplifies its subject which is equally ahistorical.

There is not enough time to list in detail everything that is left out of the history of modern English anti-Semitism (and for this I would return to Colin Holmes's earlier standard history). On the one hand, because modern anti-Semitism is down-played, best-selling anti-Semitic potboilers are largely ignored. Here context is everything. It is possible, for instance, to read popular fiction, which sold in its hundreds of thousands, and find every nasty Jewish representation under the sun -- not least the figure of powerful male Jews corrupting the world as a whole. These books, written for a certain class and outside of the dominant ways of constructing the Jews at the time cannot be isolated from the liberal cultural context which rejected such representations as unEnglish and medieval and offered in its stead the figure of the good Jew (respectable, family-loving, communal, devout). The point is that these crudely anti-Semitic images gained meaning and power not in and of themselves but in relation to a wider social and political context.

At the same time, because the ambivalent nature of English anti-Semitism is not recognized, key discourses such as the figure of The Wandering Jew are again either ignored or down-played (the growing scholarship on the Romantic tradition and the figure of The Wandering Jew is, for example, ignored even though it was central to nineteenth-century English thought). In 1982 Lord Denning, Master of Rolls at the Court of Appeal, stated that "The wandering Jew has no nation. He is a wanderer over the face of the earth" which ensured that this trope, which was present throughout the twentieth-

century, had a renewed life in contemporary Britain. This is just one example from the work of Didi Herman, Professor of Law, whose considerable publications on Jews and English law will result in an Oxford University Press book next year (again scholarly work ignored in [Trials of the Diaspora](#)). As Herman shows, the distinction between “English Jews” and “foreign Jews” was often a key aspect of law-making and fed into insurance under-writing.

This last point—that the “anti-Semitism of tolerance” has very real consequences in English liberal culture and is hardly “minor”, “modest”, “invisible” and apolitical—is the most important. The institutionalization of this form of anti-Semitism has been emphasized by David Cesarani in relation to inter-war years anti-alienism and William Joynson-Hicks (known as Jix), the British Home Secretary from 1924 to 1929, who justified the Aliens Act precisely by distinguishing between so-called “English” and “foreign” Jews. Such distinctions led to the deportation by the Home Office of hundreds of so-called Jewish “aliens” after the First World War and very real institutional discrimination for those who remained especially with regard to local government employment.*.

The downplaying and skewing of anti-Semitism in the modern period (redefined as the “vilification of Jewish projects”) merely paves the way for the return of a maximalist version of anti-Semitism (in the form of a ‘new’ anti-Zionism) in the contemporary period. In these terms we are told that when it comes to anti-Semitism “no other country” (not even France or Germany it seems) has the “density of history”, nor is as “innovative”, as England. England’s “gifts to Jew-hatred” are, equally, the medieval Jewish expulsion and the “new anti-Zionism”. But this is more about making cases than giving a rounded account of the historical record. That the “new” radical and innovative

anti-Zionism is hardly indigenous to England and that indigenous forms of anti-Semitism (post-1967) are ignored is again not commented upon (a scholarly study on post-1967 English anti-Semitism is much needed). To be sure, many extreme anti-Zionists, influenced globally, may well reject the liberal nation-state but this rejection, as I have argued, is a key social and political context for understanding English anti-Semitism (as opposed to anti-Semitism in England). The unselfconscious evocation of medieval English anti-Semitism in the twenty-first century, as radical forms of the “war against the Jews”, does not aid our understanding.

Trials of the Diaspora makes cases but ignores actual case law concerning Jews (documented by Herman). Once again we are in the realm of distinguishing between metaphor and reality, fantasy and authenticity. In a bid to bring a sense of legal certainty to the subject, Trials of the Diaspora engages in a mania of classification (I counted 22 sub-categories in Chapter One alone). Such endless classification, attempting to give meaning to ambivalence and uncertainty, return us, once again, to the fiction of Philip Roth.

In his YIISA working paper, David Hirsh argues that Roth was one of the first to characterize the “paranoid zeitgeist” in the first decade of the twenty-first century (78). There is no question that Roth’s late work speaks powerfully to a post 9/11 America and this has placed him at the heart of the American canon (as only the third living author to have his work reprinted by the Library of America after Saul Bellow and Eudora Welty). A mature Nathan Zuckerman has, in recent years, re-entered post-war American history in a second trilogy. No longer is "war, destruction, anti-Semitism, totalitarianism" elsewhere in Europe. It can now be found in Zuckerman’s own backyard in the form of

McCarthyism, internal terrorism and political correctness (not to mention the various wars which the United States has fought since 1945). America is no longer the exception to these traumatic histories which is quite a powerful statement to make in the context of a “sick” Europe against which the United States has always been defined. We can agree that England is also no longer the exception (not that it ever was) when it comes to anti-Semitism. After 9/11, as Geoffrey Hartman writes in Scars of the Spirit, the “struggle against semblance and inauthenticity” has entered an “especially perilous phase” with the “profiling [of] differences” returning in “all its crudeness” (236). But the historical record, when it comes to the liberal nation-state, still gives me quite a bit of hope that we can overcome such crudeness even in the form of the continuing presence of the long history of English anti-Semitism.

Professor Bryan Cheyette, (April 15, 2010)