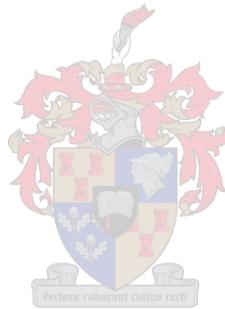


Literature of impasse:
A comparative analysis of
Joseph Roth's *Radetzkymarsch*,
Giorgio Bassani's *Gli Occhiali d'Oro* and
Henri Fauconnier's *Malaisie*

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**Dissertation delivered in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of PhD in Comparative
Literature in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
at the University of Stellenbosch**

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*For Freddie
and to my late parents*

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

So many are those to whom I owe a debt of gratitude: those who have helped me in this arduous endeavour – those who have been bored to tears with my mental meanderings on this topic, but who have also, through conversations and insights, helped me to formulate some of the ideas contained in this dissertation.

Firstly, on a practical level, I wish to thank the University of Cape Town for the generous leave the University, as my home institution, has granted me. In particular, I wish to thank Professor Clive Chandler and Professor David Wardle of the School of Languages and Literatures who supported me in my various leave applications over the years to do the necessary research in Italy, Austria, Hungary, Singapore and Malaysia and who allowed me time to confer with Professor Mike Hanne of the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. Without their support I would not have been able to attend the various conferences and seminars in Penang, Singapore and Wellington, New Zealand, which, over time, enabled ideas to distil.

In Italy, I should like to thank the staff of the Fondazione Giorgio Bassani, in Codigoro, near Ferrara, who gave me every assistance in accessing their copious holdings. I should like to thank the staff of the Fondazione Giorgio Bassani, in Codigoro, near Ferrara who also gave me every assistance in accessing their copious holdings, and so to the staff at Rhodes House, Oxford, the National Library of Singapore and the Singapore National Archives for the material relating to colonial Malaya.

In Malaysia, I should like to thank Dr Mohamad Rashidi bin Mohd Pakri and Dr Nazima Versay Kudus, of the Universiti Sains Malaysia. It was through Nazima's studies of the hill stations of colonial Malaya that I was introduced to Henri Fauconnier and it was Mohamad Rashidi who introduced me to Fauconnier's contemporary, Sir Hugh Clifford. It was through their generosity in sharing their knowledge during my sojourns in Penang and in the effortless conversations that I began to acquire an understanding of the nuances and complexities of colonial literature in 1930s Malaya. In this regard I should also like to remember with fondness my late cousin, Marita (Babs) Keeling (née Tasker), who made me, as a child, aware of Malaya, recounting her time in Malaya in the 1930s and her escape from Singapore on the eve of the Japanese invasion in 1941/42.

I should also like to thank my colleagues in German, in particular Ms Brigitte Selzer and Professor Gunther Pakendorf who gave me free reign to teach one of my favourite authors, namely Joseph Roth, and who gave me every support in enhancing my background in German literature. So too, in the same vein, I should like to thank my former colleagues in Italian, namely Dr Giuseppe Stellardi and Dr Guillaume Bernardi, who introduced me to Giorgio Bassani, and to the late Nelia Saxby who over many years encouraged me and gave full support to Bassani being on the teaching programme. I should also like to thank the students to whom I

taught Bassani's texts, who, with their incisive questioning, forced me, regularly, to re-evaluate my reading of Bassani's works.

I should also like to mention, with due thanks, a remarkable individual, Dr Carsten Wieland, who first introduced me to the works of Ernest Gellner, both in conversation and through his study entitled *Nationalstaat wider Willen*.

To Drs Jörg Hennig and Cristina Pizzini, who gave me every support imaginable during my various sojourns in Italy (thus enabling me to spend time in Ferrara) I owe a debt of profound gratitude for their warmth and generosity.

My gratitude also goes to Mrs Sue Beele and Ms Marcelle Holt who marshalled all the leave and funding applications over the years, to bring this project to fruition.

A debt of heartfelt gratitude goes to my supervisor, Dr Catherine du Toit, of the Humanities Faculty of the University of Stellenbosch, who had the courage to take me on as a student and who supervised this project, often under trying circumstances, for both parties. Her superhuman patience with a "senior student" has been accompanied by a welcome candour, discipline, depth of knowledge and insight, and an attention to detail from all of which I have personally benefited enormously. To her, again, and especially, my heartfelt thanks.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation sets out from the assumption that there is a phenomenon one can call *literature of impasse*. By this is meant that there is a body of literature that can be defined as a *literature of impasse* because of the specific time of writing or of its setting. The definition used in this exploration is based upon the historical, social, political and psychological forces that shape literature of impasse. Broadly speaking the term refers to works of literature of which the authors are considered to be fully aware that what they were describing, analysing and exploring was the impasse which the Western individual had to navigate in order to arrive at any coherent sense of self. The authors in this study – Joseph Roth (1894-1939), Giorgio Bassani (1916-2000) and Henri Fauconnier (1879-1973) – can be regarded as three such authors, and the aim of this dissertation is to demonstrate in what way they are indeed authors of impasse in the works under discussion and what the devices are that they have employed to convey their vision. Far from being a vision that (myopically) sees no resolution, the authors demonstrate a need to identify the impasse itself and its causes and consequences in a narrative style. As part of the acknowledgement of impasse, the description of the ontological impasse of the protagonists is also explored as is the central discussion of modernity and Modernism and how modernity appears to exacerbate the sense of impasse. The position of the protagonists in these works leads in turn to the exploration of individual attempts to overcome the impasse and, in so doing, the study inevitably has to explore the philosophical attributes reflected in each of the works.

The comparative nature of this analysis, straddling three languages and literary traditions, and the complex contexts of “impasse”, necessitates studies in other disciplines. The works of Ernest Gellner (1925-1995) seemed particularly suited to this exploration as an analytical springboard inasmuch as his works examine the anthropological and philosophical aspects which have determined the historical forces and milieux with which the three novelists have to contend in the formulation of their respective visions.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie proefskrif berus op die veronderstelling dat daar 'n fenomeen bestaan wat letterkunde van *impasse* oftewel van die *dooie punt* genoem kan word. Dit beteken dat daar 'n korpus van letterkundige werke is wat gedefinieer kan word as *letterkunde van impasse* op grond van die spesifieke tydperk waarin dit tot stand gekom het of die narratiewe agtergrond daarvan. Die definisie wat in hierdie studie gebruik word is gegrond op die geskiedkundige, sosiale, politiese en sielkundige kragte waardeur letterkunde van *impasse* gevorm word. Die term verwys in die breë na werke wat geskep word deur skrywers wat ten volle daarvan bewus is dat dit wat hulle beskryf, ontleed en verken die dooie punt is waardeur die Westerse individu moet beweeg om enige koherente sin van die self te bereik. Die skrywers in hierdie studie – Joseph Roth (1894-1939), Giorgio Bassani (1916-2000) en Henri Fauconnier (1879-1973) – kan beskou word as drie sodanige skrywers en die doel van hierdie proefskrif is om aan te toon waarom hulle inderdaad skrywers van *impasse* is in die werke wat bespreek word en op watter maniere hulle hierdie persepsie oordra. Dit handel hoegenaamd nie oor 'n persepsie wat stiksienig geen uitkoms sien nie en die skrywers toon veral 'n behoefte om die *impasse*, sowel as die oorsake en gevolge daarvan, in 'n narratiewe styl te identifiseer. As deel van die erkenning van *impasse*, word die beskrywing van die ontologiese *impasse* van die protagoniste ook ondersoek sowel as die sentrale bespreking van moderniteit en Modernisme en die wyse waarop moderniteit die gevoel van *impasse* blyk te vererger. Die posisie van die protagoniste in hierdie werke lei weer na die verkenning van individuele pogings om die dooie punt te oorkom en gevolglik moet die studie noodwendig ook die filosofiese standpunte ondersoek wat in die werke gereflekteer word.

Die vergelykende aard van hierdie ontleding wat strek oor drie tale en literêre tradisies en die komplekse konteks van "*impasse*" maak verwysing na ander dissiplines noodsaaklik. Die werke van Ernest Gellner (1925-1995) het besonder geskik voorgekom vir hierdie verkenning as analitiese wegspringplek aangesien sy werk die antropologiese en filosofiese aspekte ondersoek van die geskiedkundige kragte en omgewings waarmee hierdie drie romanskrywers te kampe gehad het in die formulering van hulle onderskeie sienings.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation intends to explore the extent to which three 20-century novels in three different languages and from three different literary traditions can be said to exemplify “literature of impasse”. Joseph Roth (1894-1939), Giorgio Bassani (1916-2000) and Henri Fauconnier (1879-1973) were chosen because their respective works *Radetzky*, *Gli occhiali d’oro* and *Malaisie* have a thematic congruency which at first reading might not seem that obvious. However, one is dealing with three Modernist authors, and while each literary tradition may be deemed to have its “own modernism”, these texts by Roth, Bassani and Fauconnier share more with each other than they might do with other texts in their own language or literary tradition.

However, the question that concerns one is not primarily the languages the authors employ, but the ideas and concerns and visions that they share. While clearly they might not have termed their writing as “literature of impasse”, what each of the authors is expressing is a sense of doom, a sense of being beleaguered by a world, by a history which they understand all too well and which by all accounts – and with ample evidence – points to a state of impasse. What may start off as an historical awareness gradually matures into a philosophical awareness; one could even say existential awareness, or to use the a term more specifically associated with “being in the world”, an ontological awareness.

Any number of authors in say Hungarian, English, Russian or whatever might have been equally valid exponents of literature of impasse. However, this study is a step towards an exploration of the term ‘literature of impasse’ to see whether it can “pass muster” in three such thoroughly divergent writers, backed by such deeply rooted discrete literary traditions.

Although the notion of *impasse* is hardly unknown in Western literature it has not often been isolated as a complex but identifiable literary aggregate involving historical, social, political and psychological forces. The term is encountered in Irving Howe’s epilogue to *Politics and the*

Novel entitled “Politics and the Novel after *Politics and the Novel*” where, after mentioning the “wrenching conflicts” (1987:254) that characterize contemporary political novels he states: “There is no conclusion. We are charting paths here that twist and turn each day, and sometimes come to a halt in the pain of impasse” (273). John Whalen-Bridge, in his work *Political Fiction and the American Self* (1989:6) refers to Howe as he pursues his analysis of the interaction between politics and culture. In this light, he mentions Nadine Gordimer, Isabel Allende, Milan Kundera and others whom he sees as exemplars of the close interaction between politics and culture, and literature specifically. He says the following:

The notion of politics as the Fallen realm and culture as the Unfallen has not really been rejected by those who practice ideological critique, cultural studies, and so forth. Rather, the taint of politics has extended into the realm of culture. Culture has become politics by other means.

This is an engaging idea in that one asks oneself, to what extent are works of literature necessarily expressions of the political milieu in which they were written? While the question may appear obvious, it merits closer analysis. Can literature be extricated from politics, and by extension from history? Do the novels *Radetzky*, *Gli occhiali d'oro* and *Malaisie*, by Joseph Roth, Giorgio Bassani and Henri Fauconnier not provide examples of that which is deemed unattainable in reality, becoming attainable only in literature? While the link between history and literature is a given in certain circumstances, it also follows that history is inevitably also political history, depending on where one puts the emphasis. It can be social, economic, but sooner or later history becomes a phenomenon that forces one to consider the political and hence one has to ask oneself, does literature necessarily have to reflect political circumstances? Jane Austen and George Eliot might reflect the social realities of their day, and the same can be said of Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky, the latter perhaps more politically “conscious”. Alessandro Manzoni would be a superb example of a political novelist, for example. But how would authors in a more extreme period of Western history fare, extreme because modernity has revolutionised the way many societies function?

In the aforementioned epilogue, Howe maintains: “One thing, I believe, can profitably be said about [contemporary political novels]: they constitute a literature of blockage, a literature of

impasse" (252).

This reference gives rise to the question, firstly, what is meant by the "contemporary political novel"; why call novels "political" in the first place? Would novels that deal with the 1930s – with World War II looming inexorably, – not benefit greatly from a rereading in the light of the literary aggregate of impasse? Inevitably, the question of Modernism would come to the fore as would literature that reflects the intractability of Western humanity's dilemma in the wake of the First World War.

The limitation of calling novels "political" seems – at first – to doom such novels to being time-bound if politics is their central focus. At least that is an idea that one has to engage with recurrently. And yet, are all novels that are "political" necessarily time-bound, or do they rely on making sense only by virtue of being either written or set in a particular historical moment? What is more compelling is the fact that examples from the canon of Western literature, such as Roth and Bassani, (leaving Fauconnier aside for the moment), are not deemed time-bound. What is it that they tell us about history, about politics, about psychology that causes their works to transcend the time of their writing, even though the writers are responding to a political milieu that readily makes them "authors of impasse". Is it that the impasse extends beyond the political? Is the impasse they speak of not existential? As writers who fit the Modernist mould, they would clearly be engaging in the existential impasse of their times.

But in the case of the three authors – Roth, Bassani and Fauconnier – one sees them responding to a very specific set of socio-historical circumstances, and within those circumstances they respond in ways that shed much light on perceptions of 1930s literature, or, as in Bassani's case, literature set in the 1930s, even though penned twenty years later.

Roth has his nostalgia, as does Bassani, though in the latter case suffused with a sense of poetic melancholy. They are both authors who look to the past and draw conclusions based on recollection and regret, but in their explorations of the past, their writing is, *inter alia*, suffused with an historical consciousness, an awareness that the march of history is set to condemn them if not as writers then as individuals. The fact that two of the writers are Jewish is a moot

point, but to give too much prominence to this fact would be to limit their respective approaches to their times to a putative “Jewish” perspective and contextualise them only in terms of the Holocaust, when what they are confronting goes beyond the political and beyond this moment in history. Besides which, Roth, as often remarked upon by various biographers and critics, oscillated between Judaism and Catholicism towards the end of his life, and he died before the Holocaust had occurred in all its ferocity.

Bassani does not deal with the Holocaust directly, being more concerned with the mentality that allowed the Holocaust to occur in the first place. He is not Primo Levi. Primo Levi experienced Auschwitz, Bassani did not, and some would suggest that this difference diminishes his significance or challenges his credibility as a Holocaust writer. This is a question to bear in mind, but is not one which has a bearing on the discussion of impasse. The impasse for both Roth and Bassani rather lies in the way in which history has stymied or crushed the individual, placing him in a position of resignation or apparently futile opposition.

Fauconnier, by contrast, is clearly an author in a stage of convalescence. Malaya (Malaysia after 1957) serves as a kind of “jungle rehabilitation centre” for two tortured souls, Rolain and Lescale, ravaged by the legacy of war and Europe’s obsessive strife. His novel *Malaisie* – winner of the Prix Goncourt in 1930 – is a novel that is, one could aver, symptomatic of impasse. The novel could be described as a jungle fantasy, set in colonial Malaya, one that eschews anything that has caused his pain – at least, that is in part how he presents his two central protagonists. Added to this, *Malaisie* is also a novel of defiance against the causes of upheaval and anguish, that which had cornered the protagonists in a situation of impasse, namely Europe and its struggles culminating in the First World War.

A consciousness of doom pervades each of the three novels, *Radetzkymarsch*, *Gli occhiali d’oro* and *Malaisie*, but they reveal much else as well, which a comparative approach seeks to address. *Malaisie*, by its very nature, sheds light on the “Euro-claustrophobia” of which both *Radetzkymarsch* and *Gli occhiali d’oro* are examples. Even so, all three novels are concerned with many of the same anxieties and aspirations, albeit from diverse vantage points. In a

comparative reading, one distinguishes various levels of impasse and, consequently, various levels of awareness and possibilities of evasion.

In *Radetzky*, the protagonist Carl Joseph, is a young lieutenant in the rickety imperial Habsburg army. His life is essentially tragic, determined as it is by the political and historical demands of his time and place in the world. In *Gli occhiali d'oro*, the unnamed first-person narrator (or *io narrante*), similarly constrained by his time and place in history, defies the tragedy which he knows awaits those who see themselves as victims, and he courts the danger of viewing himself as such but eschews this in the end; in *Malaisie* Lescale and Rolain see themselves as emancipated from tragedy entirely, and seek to live their lives not only in reaction to a given set of political and historical forces (inasmuch as these emanate from Europe and its self-induced woes). Ultimately, however, the ambiguous ending of the novel leaves one wondering whether they have not simply lured or lulled themselves into accepting yet another impasse as an opening.

All three novels, in other words, acknowledge an impasse, be that impasse political, historical or social, and by extension psychological. We see a trajectory towards an attempted escape from the impasse, with Fauconnier's novel going furthest in the attempt, while Roth and Bassani allude to emancipation from impasse, with different sets of historical circumstances to which their novels are a reaction or with which their works contend.

While the 1930s may be said to have an enduring fascination for myriad reasons, of the three novels, Bassani's *Gli occhiali d'oro* was not written in the 1930s, but is set in the 1930s. The ever-increasing tension is evident in Bassani's novel, also because its author has the convenience of hindsight, and consequently, he remembers and rekindles the sense of doom that beset his milieu, the city of Ferrara in 1938. The work by Roth which is most forbidding is his short novel *Das Spinnennetz*. This novel expresses with uncanny foresight what was to befall Europe. *Radetzky* by contrast, published seven years later in 1930, can be seen as almost an act of resignation: warnings and anxiety about the post-Habsburg world give way to nostalgia and to a sense of *Zukunftslosigkeit*, (lack of a future) in which looking to the past is

deemed more fertile than engaging with the present, let alone the future, as the author does in *Das Spinnennetz*. In Roth too, we have the notion of the act of writing itself becoming an act of *Geborgenheit*, of feeling sheltered and having a sense of belonging. Belonging itself thus becomes an abstract entity, as he seems to take solace in the act of writing, in the absence of anything more concrete in which to find solace: political and social institutions and predictabilities have been corroded by politics and so indeed had Roth's own livelihood. (He left Berlin as Hitler came to power and fled to France in 1933.) So his novel *Radetzkymarsch* shows signs of being written in a state of rootlessness or uprootedness since this prolonged epic engagement with a world that no longer exists, the Habsburg Empire, appears symptomatic of a state of impasse in itself. There is no future other than the written word.

In the comparative scrutiny, besides examining the novels textually, the historical, social and psychological aspects of the three novels will be considered where appropriate.

Initially, the idea of impasse in literature is expounded, followed by the ways in which this study will explore the notion in the primary texts and theoretical framework. Modernism is discussed in Chapter II, examining the extent to which each of the three novels reflects a Modernist approach, the extent to which they can indeed be defined as Modernist, bearing in mind the limitations of categorisation. Does a novel written in the 1930s mean it is *ipso facto* Modernist, and would this necessarily hold true in the case of these three novels? This will be followed by a textual analysis of each of the three novels and Chapter IV, "The personal and the political: Secularization, betrayal and mendacity in *Radetzkymarsch*, *Gli occhiali d'oro* and *Malaisie*," deals with the implications of the textual analyses in Chapter III.

Some general observations about the novels may help give an entrée to them and there are, clearly, many vantage points from which to examine these three novels that are products of their time, but also transcend it. For example, a quaint and amusing, but generous review of the English edition of Henri Fauconnier's *Soul of Malaya* appeared in the launch issue of the *Sunday Times* in Singapore on 20 December 1931 with virtually a whole page being devoted to the novel, under the column heading "Melodrama in Malaya". The review makes mention of the

unusual nature of the novel. The view, expressed by a Frenchman, that the British drink themselves to death once they arrive in Malaya is expressed as follows:

An unpleasant feature of the book from the point of view of the British reader is the strong emphasis which is laid so frequently on the drinking propensities of the white planter. [...] The uninitiated reader at Home has every reason to assume from M. Fauconnier's book that the first thing an Englishman does on arrival in Malaya is to proceed to drink himself to death in the shortest possible time. That is an aspect of "The Soul of Malaya" which is likely to give offence in this country (*The Sunday Times*, "Melodrama in Malaya", (Singapore), 20 December 1931, p. 5).

The relationship between Lescale and Palanai was deemed likely to cause some disquiet among the British colonial readership in Malaya as well as the "depressing philosophy" which was the reviewer's interpretation of Rolain's Nietzschean musings.

An aspect of it which is most likely to raise comment elsewhere is Lescale's frank and almost brutal description of his relations with Palanai. [...] Rolain who is often made the mouthpiece for rather too much heavy and often depressing philosophy, offers Lescale the opportunity of leaving his European employer, Potter, and thereafter the book is confined almost entirely to the thoughts and experiences of Lescale and Rolain (*Ibid.*).

That the book caused a stir is evinced by the fact that a whole page was devoted to its English translation, but it is hardly surprising that a book so centred on Malaya in itself should elicit a response in the Malayan press of the time. Fauconnier has continued to be the subject of sporadic academic interest through the decades, but especially in the English-speaking world by scholars such as Srilata Ravi and Philip Holden. But the general paucity of scholarship, including French scholarship, is surprising. Agnès Dureau makes mention of the book in her review of French contemporary literature in her article "La Littérature Contemporaine en France 1931-1932". She describes the work thus in a paragraph dedicated to other writers and in an article in which Fauconnier has to compete with Marcel Pagnol and André Gide:

Mais oui tout le monde voyage aujourd'hui et tandis que dans l'"Odyssee d'un transport torpille" Maurice Larrouy nous fait visiter l'Indo-Chine et les Indes Néerlandaises, Henri Fauconnier explore les secrets de la « *Malaisie* » (1932:110).

[But of course the whole world travels today and while Maurice Larrouy has us visit Indo-China and the Dutch East Indies in "Odyssee d'un transport torpille", Henri Fauconnier explores the secrets of "Malaya" [...] (author's translation).]

Fauconnier was also clearly considered with some esteem in Malaya as evinced by the announcement in *The Singapore Free Press* on 20 January 1921 to the effect that he was appointed consular agent for France in Kuala Lumpur, long before the publication of *Malaisie*. Another review in the local press states that:

It is a remarkable piece of work, and shows that the author has a deep knowledge of the people; in fact, some of the passages in the book might have been written by a Clifford or a Swettenham, while the author undoubtedly possesses a keen understanding of Malay and Tamil psychology [...] Fauconnier has caught the spirit of Malaya and her people, though he hardly touches on the ordinary European life of the country [...] (Sheridan, 1931:14.)

Bassani is better known than Fauconnier, with at least three of his novels having been filmed. He is firmly established in the firmament of Italian post-war fiction and considered one of Italy's major post-war writers. The influence Bassani has exerted over subsequent writers, such as W.G. Sebald, is quite striking. In comparing Bassani to W.G. Sebald, Hutchinson, for example, says the following:

Sebald, too, is clearly interested in the same period, although his stories are always narrated from the present, structured as a process of research into the past rather than a recreation of it. [...] Sebald repeatedly draws attention in his reading of Bassani [to]: the allusions to the gathering storm, the sense that this lovingly recreated pre-war period is doomed to disaster. [...] Chronologically, too, Sebald's prose very often follows a circular pattern, starting from the contemporary position of the narrator, diving back into the past and then returning to the present day. Both Bassani and Sebald have this tendency to circle around, to finish where they began, and it may be that this is an expression of a shared historical pessimism: just as Bassani's Jewish protagonists are doomed to die in the Holocaust, so the impossibility of "getting lost" on Sebald's work [...] can be seen as a critique of the notion of historical progress – indeed of the possibility of getting anywhere. The effects of the second world war, which seen from different perspectives, provide the common context for both Bassani and Sebald's work and provide grist for this pessimistic mill (2004: 79-80.)

One can discern in Bassani a quest for an absolute, a belief in a rationally arrived at set of right and wrong. He does not strive towards a facile absolute and this is evident in his writing. It is the unreachable goal, but one which he always bears in mind, alluding to it through metaphor in *Gli occhiali d'oro*. He expresses this notion most aptly in *Di là da cuore*, in the essay of the same title and which gives its name to the book:

Dopo Freud. l'origine di tutto quanto accade nel nostro cuore (e nel nostro ventre) non ha più nulla di misterioso. Il meccanismo è quello che è, certo. Eppure lo Spirito, l'Amore, anche se sono il prodotto di *quel* meccanismo stesso, esistono di per sé, ben di là dal cuore e dal nostro ventre. Come una volta, prima della rivoluzione freudiana, continuano imperterriti a rappresentare un valore autonomo, assoluto: l'unico in fondo davvero esistente. Il lubrificio di cui vorrebbe farne oggetto il nuovo positivismo resta al di là: non può toccarli. (1984: 330) also cited in *Critica testuale* 23, (October) 2011: 226). [After Freud, the origins of everything that takes place in our hearts (and in our bellies) does not contain anything mysterious. The mechanism is what it is, obviously. And yet the Spirit, Love, even if they be the product of *that* mechanism itself, exist in their own right. Well beyond our heart and our belly. As once was the case, before the Freudian revolution, they carried on regardless to represent an autonomous value, an absolute: the only one really existent. The ridicule which the new positivism wanted to hold it up to remains here: it cannot touch them (author's translation).]

Here one sees a confluence of ideas most notably with those of Ernest Gellner, an author used from time to time as a point of reference in this exploration, also with regards to Joseph Roth and Fauconnier. Gellner formulates a central question which could be applied to the three texts:

By the 1930s and during and after the Second World War, it was impossible not to reflect on the question – is adaptation, adjustment to *any* regime, including a tyrannical one, a sign of mental health? The earlier, simplistic-Stoic position was that the world is as it is, and the rational or sane person takes it as he finds it, and adjusts to it when he cannot change it (which in the overwhelming majority of cases he cannot). But this view has a disagreeable corollary: a person who accepted and made his inner peace with the Nazi regime, was mentally and morally sounder, than one who found it emotionally unacceptable. This problem continues to be acute... (2003: 76-77).

Gellner goes on to say:

The angel was the presupposition of knowledge and morality in the world. As such he was allowed to remain, but only on condition that he was never visible in the world. We know him by his fruits, and *only* by his fruits. We can never meet him face to face. The world-machine leaves us no room for either knowledge or value. The fact that we recognise them and respect both of these, shows that the ghost-angel is operating within us (*Ibid*: 102 [Gellner's italics].)

Gellner's point is significant here because, while the novels are viewed as examples of literature of impasse, that does not mean that they evince an inherently "pessimistic" view of life; rather the point is more subtle: one cannot cure the patient without a proper diagnosis and the three novels can also thus be seen as diagnostic, so to speak. Each of the three novels engages with

the ills of their respective societies or circumstances, rendered malignant by the forces of history, and consequently politics. That does not mean the authors are resigned to the diagnosis – the patient (be it Europe under the Habsburgs, Fascist Italy or the colonial Malaya) may be curable. But the authors do not indulge in wishful thinking either. Roth and Bassani expose and explore the pain their protagonists endure; they explore the darkness, always keeping “the light of reason” alive, in the hope of spying some redemption for their protagonists. One sees Carl Joseph in *Radetzky* being afforded a brief interlude of happiness; one sees the *io narrante* in *Gli occhiali d'oro* assert the validity of reason and a cognitive engagement with the world as having more validity than blind prejudice or resignation to a state of victimhood; in *Malaisie*, the light of reason, the quest for some “angel” to use Gellner’s term, is there, and very specifically so.

Fauconnier’s notion is very reliant upon the individual pursuing an individual truth, and shedding the mendacity that clutters thinking and because of which humanity suffers needlessly. Of the two protagonists, it is Rolain who acts as midwife, as it were, to the emancipation of Lescale, for him to have the courage to find fulfilment that is not reliant on mendacious received wisdoms, which in Fauconnier’s view have paralysed the soul of Western man.

So to return to the theme of impasse: the impasse has to be identified as such before it can be acted upon, and this exploration of the three works examines the way in which the impasse is presented. It is examined from the various vantage points of history, politics and where appropriate, the psychology at work in the individual protagonists, and how the authors choose to present these aspects. Nor can the notion of impasse be limited to the novels themselves because inevitably the novels form part of a greater continuum, which for present purposes of this study is limited to the idea of Modernism. Modernism is in itself a reflection of the greater impasse that besets the Western canon. The “quovadis” element, namely the question of engaging with the direction the world is taking is central and obviously does not only concern the three novels being discussed. However, an exploration of these specific texts sheds light on the overall and perennial discussion on what Modernism is. The impasse is there – the novels

are written, or reflect a state of impasse, but in so doing they shed light on much else, and are thus not limited to the notion of impasse.

CHAPTER I: LITERATURE OF IMPASSE

Reading and reflection around the concept of literature of impasse: the pertinent works of Ernest Gellner, the relevance of his thinking to this project and a rationale behind a thematic comparative approach.

The national always holds out the idea of the Promised Land. We may have escaped from the clutches of Empire, emerged from slavery in Egypt, but if we hold onto our principles, then we tell ourselves we may reach the land of the perfect life we desire. [...] No one ever reaches the Promised Land (Clingman, 2009: 246-47).

The above quote aptly sets out the dilemma explored in this investigation of literature of impasse. Each of the authors under discussion is expressing a state of unattainability, a utopian vision¹ albeit from radically differing perspectives, literary traditions, times and locales. Their respective works (*Radetzkyarsch*, *Gli occhiali d'oro* and *Malaisie*) have in common their apprehending of the imperfect state of the world, imperfect to such an extent that the world in which they find themselves or have created is doomed, cannot sustain the ideals they nurture for the harmonious cohabitation of humankind. The choices their protagonists are forced to make are a symptom of the inherent disease² of Western culture, a culture which seems to thrive on self-examination, it might be said, even to the detriment of its own survival. The authors act in pursuit of an ideal, knowing full well that it is a Sisyphean exercise. Each of the authors is conscious of an impasse that informs his writing, that determines his view of life. The expression of this state of impasse is nuanced and differentiated: in Roth we have a plunging despair, that the world is not the way it once was, to give his *Radetzkyarsch* an initially reductive reading; Bassani, however dire the circumstances not only of the writer at the time referred to in his *Gli occhiali d'oro*, but also of the times he was writing about, retains a faith in

¹ See, Magris Claudio. *Utopia e disincanto – Storie speranze illusioni del moderno*. Roma: Garzanti, 1999, 2001.

² See Biasin, Gianpaolo. *Literary Diseases: Theme and Metaphor in the Italian Novel*, Houston: University of Texas Press, 1975.

reason and individual dignity when all around him betrayal, venality, cowardice and mendacity are the order of the day; in Fauconnier's *Malaisie* unabashed escapism, rampant individualism and sensuality provide a panacea to the cultural pathogens from which he thinks he has escaped in his Malayan idyll.

"Literature of impasse" can be said to refer to what one might call a historical cul-de-sac that characterises not only the text, but also the situation, implicit or overt, in which the writer finds himself. This assertion has wide implications, but the main concern is the degree in which the protagonists reflect on their situations and are aware of their respective dilemmas.

It is a preoccupation that reflects the sense of displacement that the protagonists feel within the world and the moment in history in which they are condemned to live. As the narratives develop, one sees the protagonists in each of the three novels caught to varying degrees in a vortex of alienation partly of their own making, which in turn is the result of, and exacerbated by the situation in which they find themselves or have inherited. The protagonists, in some cases, assert themselves, consciously, to counter the historical moment and rise to the demands their situation makes of them.

All three of the novels, having an identifiable historical context, have an inevitable political dimension. This assertion can be clarified thus:

Few scholars now accept the dogmatic division of politics and culture, and yet the obsessive linkage of politics and culture in today's academy is better understood as the eclipse of culture by politics than as the rich intermingling of two areas of human activity (Whalen-Bridge, 1998: 6).

The comparative approach adopted allows for an over-arching view of the three novels. All three novels can be defined as modernist conforming to Claudio Guillén's (1993:337) view of modernism as being "apocalyptic" in its vision. The term *literature of impasse* and an apocalyptic view of the world would seem to have much in common, would even appear to overlap. The comparative approach of this study will illustrate what in effect constitutes a *literature of impasse*, while bearing in mind that *literature of impasse* can have differing expressions. As Susan Bassnett (1993:99) observes, "writers constantly position themselves in

relation to their point of origin in a culture and the context they are describing". This may at first view seem obvious, but in respect of the three novels, this statement has implications which open the way for an innovative way of gaining a deeper understanding of these texts, not only in themselves, but as examples of *literature of impasse*.

The fact that writers responded to the modern world in the ways they have is hardly a fresh debate: but the comparison of these three novelists, across linguistic and cultural borders with Ernest Gellner as a point of reference around the axis of *impasse*, generates a new reading that uncovers a different dynamic and unsuspected intertwining helices of meaning.

While this preliminary discussion focuses on how Gellner's writing may illuminate our chosen texts, it needs to be borne in mind that we are dealing with texts that exemplify many other aspects as well, most centrally the debate on modernity and Modernism itself. Roth's text, for example, is a classic of its kind even though it has no ambitions to be the intellectual tour de force that a more or less contemporary text such as Robert Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* is. *Radetzky* is more modest in scope, more intimate and personal. Bassani's *Gli occhiali d'oro* is also deeply personal. *Malaisie* by contrast is more overtly philosophical, and while describing an intimacy of sorts, is discursive, alludes to intimacy, it tackles the broad sweep of history more from an explicitly elevated stance than would seem to be the case with the other two authors.

That said, the much cited term "crisis of modernity" is implicit in each of the novels, their approach to the modern world *in a comparative light* poses questions which, with the help of Gellner, we may try to answer, bearing in mind that the terms "impasse", "modernity" and "Modernism" and an "apocalyptic vision" are intertwined. To put the debate in a wider perspective, the three novels under discussion, *Radetzky*, *Gli occhiali d'oro* and *Malaisie* can also be viewed as metanarratives, more closely defined as exemplars of "literature of impasse" with selected writings of Ernest Gellner serving to illuminate the metanarratives.

The following quotation from *The Power of the Story* by Mike Hanne may serve as a definition of what a metanarrative might mean:

A number of theorists, among them the philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, have, moreover, recently coined the useful term “metanarratives” (or “grandes narratives”) to denote certain overarching sets of religious, historical, and political assumptions structured in narrative terms: the belief in, for instance, decline after a golden age, or the expectation of a last judgment, or of reincarnation, the vision of history as progress or emancipation, and so on, the entire range of narratives which have functioned at certain times as legitimating frameworks shared by whole societies. They are controlling narratives of which the individuals and groups who live within them are not even perhaps consciously aware, though every lesser narrative bears the imprint of the metanarrative. Metanarratives can, in general, only be fully identified after they have ceased to be fully effective (1984:12).

The metanarrative for the present purposes would refer to the extra-textual elements that illumine the texts. We are forced to engage with a range of other factors. Looking at the metanarrative, the novels acquire a greater and deeper significance because they reflect a given set of “assumptions,” to adopt Hanne’s use of the term. These assumptions are in themselves problematic and contested because for a start one is, in this case, dealing with different languages and literary traditions and differing literary precedents. Also, one is dealing with different moments of a period of history that in this case spans the century from 1859-1958, i.e. from the Battle of Solferino of 1859, which is the starting point of Roth’s novel, through to 1958, the date of publication of Bassani’s *Gli occhiali d’oro*. So in effect one is dealing with literature that spans a century in its terms of reference, but is essentially Modernist, drawing in the elements of history, politics, religion and philosophy, which are by their very nature matters that elicit conjecture.

One is dealing, moreover, with differing ideas of the function of narrative, with differing ethical goals and assumptions and how these relate to the specific societies for which the works were initially intended. One is also dealing with historical and social forces that find expression in these novels, which in turn reflect a given time in history, either with regards to the time in which the novels are set or when they were written, especially in *Radetzky* and *Gli occhiali d’oro*. In the works of Ernest Gellner one finds a set of questions for which he implicitly seeks to find answers. The way he poses the questions and his erudition allow an entrée to seeing the novels under discussion more easily as “metanarrative”, with a fuller resonance.

As another approach to addressing the question of *literature of impasse* John Bull contextualises the question of metanarratives, which he describes as being “allinclusive explanations of human purpose and practice”. His assertion here also serves to illuminate our scrutiny:

In his 1986 epilogue to *Politics and the Novel*, Howe describes authors such as V. S. Naipaul, Nadine Gordimer, and Milan Kundera – among others – as creators of “a literature of blockage, a literature of impasse” (252) that offers “no way out of the political dilemmas with which they end their books.” He praises their ability to document “utterly intractable” circumstances while pointedly refusing to accept the totalist stances propounded by the subjects of so many of their novels (253-54) (1999: 215-229.).

Bull goes further, and while his observations are concerned primarily with the state of American post-war literature, they apply equally to our examination when he says:

Mapping the limitations of both certainty and cynicism in a world where the boundaries between religious faith, political orthodoxy, and “apolitical” evasion meet and cross, Stone and DeLillo are ideal constituents of Howe's literature of impasse, writers who reveal the full effects of political action in an age when clear-cut solutions no longer seem to exist. (*Ibid.* 215).

In the novels under discussion the elements Bull refers to are ever present. For example, in Roth one has the question of religious faith bound up with a political system in that the Kaiser in the Habsburg Empire functions also as the guardian of the faith. That is, over and above Roth's ambiguity when it comes to his Judaism and his subsequent Catholicism. In *Gli occhi di d'oro* too, the religious question is central in that the author as well as the protagonist are Jews during the passage of Mussolini's 1938 Race Laws. The whole question of politics and religion is funnelled through the novel, with the attendant choices that are forced upon the protagonists. Similarly, what Bull describes as “apolitical evasion” can be said to apply to *Malaisie*, where the protagonists are not reacting to anything as specific as Race Laws, or the demise of a particular political dispensation, but simply turning their backs on a given Western legacy, the specifics of which are mere icing on a cake which is stale in any event.

However, the task Gellner has set himself, as opposed to that of Whalen-Bridge, is much broader in its implications in that Gellner sets out to grapple with the gargantuan task of deciphering the coming-into-being of modernity itself. In the main, different works by Ernest

Gellner lend themselves to being adopted for specific texts. For example, his *Language and Solitude*, while generally applicable, is particularly appropriate in helping us understand the metanarrative operating in Roth's text. The central arguments in Gellner's *Reason and Culture* can help us fathom aspects of Bassani's novel. As far as *Malaisie* is concerned, Gellner's *Book, Plough and Sword* may seem more suitable, but then *Book, Plough and Sword* also has a bearing on all three novels. However, it remains true that each of the three novels must be read on its own terms before imposing a Gellnerian reading on them.

Since Gellner serves as a springboard for many of the guiding ideas in this exploration, it is necessary to provide a summary of his ideas and assess their value for this context. The fact that relatively recently after his death so much has been written about him that he continues to elicit critical response, demonstrates in part his continued relevance.³⁷

In his last book, *Language and Solitude*, the central theme in the first half of this work is a discussion of the battle between what he terms "rationalistic individualism" and "romantic communalism". He sees these two rival notions as pivotal in trying to understand modernity. He sees as oppositional the appeal of *Gesellschaft* (Society), i.e. a situation that enshrines the individual and his or her rights and responsibilities and *Gemeinschaft* (Community), i.e. a situation that enshrines the rights and responsibilities of the community before those of the individual. There are two fundamental theories of knowledge. These two theories stand in stark contrast to each other. They are profoundly opposed. They represent two poles of looking, not merely at knowledge, but at human life (1998:3). In this he is referring to another, more abstract definition of these terms, namely the "atomistic" and the "organic" views of the world.

³ A sample of the works published since Gellner's death in 1995 attest to the continued critical interest in his thinking: the monumental work by Hall, John A, I. Jarvie, (eds). *The Social Philosophy of Ernest Gellner*. Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi, 1996; Lessnoff, Michael, *Ernest Gellner and Modernity*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002; Malesvic, Sinisia, and Mark Haugaard. *Ernest Gellner and Contemporary Social Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007; Czegledy-Nagy, A.P. "The Words and Things of Ernest Gellner". In *Social Evolution and History* 2, (September 2003): 6-33. Significantly too is the additional study by John Hall, *Ernest Gellner – An Intellectual Biography*. London, New York: Verso, 2011.

The intriguing question is whether such a view of the world can find application to a literary text, and if so, which texts would be best suited to what can be called a “Gellnerian vision”?

Susan Bassnett highlights the following development in her study on comparative literature:

[...] there has been a move away from a concept of comparative literature based on an assumption of a fundamentally humanizing role of literature, there is another way of looking at trends in literary analysis. The study of themes and movements not only continues unabated, but possibly is even on the increase. The difference is, of course, that the impulse is now coming from within areas of work now defined under other headings than that of ‘comparative literature’ such as post-colonial studies or gender studies (1998: 116).

In the present case, while we may straddle gender studies in the case of Fauconnier and possibly Roth, the former because of its homoerotic undertones and the latter because of the peculiarly problematic encounters with women, the main focus of our argument would be to examine what Bassnett describes as the notion of cultural history as the story of progress towards modernity, deriving in part from a belief in the superiority of the present (*Ibid*:137). The means through which we do this is by a) deciding that there is such a phenomenon as literature of impasse, as put forward by Howes, Whalen-Bridge and others and b), trying to explain the phenomenon and its links to Bassnett’s notion of the linear progression towards modernity. As a matrix in that continuum we can turn to Gellner who, among many other theoreticians, has tried to understand the phenomenon of modernity in its ideological, philosophical, historical and anthropological manifestations. If, as Bassnett points out, Positivist thought maintained that there is a steady move forward from primitivism to enlightenment (*Ibid*:137), then the novels we are dealing with are salient examples not only of literature of impasse, but they also examine various areas of impasse – political, psychological and historical – and can create a clearer understanding of the trauma of modernity.

This is especially true of the three novels we examine because they reflect varying stages of consciousness: from the fraught emergence from a pre-industrial world into an industrial one; from the conflict between liberal enlightenment values clashing with Fascism – equally a manifestation of modernity – to the reinvention of the individual in *Malaisie*, an individual who thinks of himself as being emancipated and disenchanting by modernity.

As soon as we dip into that way of thinking, an idiosyncratic thinker such as Gellner is valuable beyond his professed disciplines of philosophy, social anthropology and history in providing a way of looking at literature. After all, don't novels also shed light on philosophy, social anthropology and history? Put differently, each of the novels manifests the "*sgretolamento*", (the crumbling away) as any number of modernist novels do, but the novels under discussion reflect a yearning for a lost unity, for a return to something absolute and an implicit rejection of the compartmentalisation of modern life. Or as Severino points out:

L'Occidente è una nave che affonda, dove tutti ignorano la falla e lavorano assiduamente per rendere sempre piú comoda la navigazione [...] Ma la vera salute non sopraggiunge forse perché si è capaci di scoprire la vera malattia? [Severino: 1972, p.263, quoted in Umberto Galimberti, *La terra senza il male – Jung: dall'inconscio al simbolo*, (2009:330) [The West is a sinking ship in which everyone is ignoring the leak and is working assiduously to make the navigation all the more comfortable [...] But is it not so that true health does come about for the very reason that we are capable of discovering the real malady? (author's translation).]

And does literature not have the function of seeking a unity, of addressing this "*sgretolamento*"? Literature is after all not a one-way street:

It has been the argument of much historical theory [...] that all historical writing is in large part fictional, not only in that historians sometimes get their facts wrong, but also because the facts they "get right" are only given shape and meaning in the telling. At the same time, what we call narrative fiction is, in large part, factual, not only in that much of its content refers accurately and recognizably to real places, times, objects, events, but also because much of the interest of fictional stories derives from the fact that readers perceive them to be accurate representations of real human and social processes. Louis O. Mink expresses it very simply, "histories are full of things that are not so, just as fiction is full of things that are so" (Hanne, 1994:34).

It is clear from the above inferences that a writer such as Ernest Gellner can be read as a means of trying to bridge the gap between fiction and fact and their interrelationship. The tension can be said to exist between the apparent dispersal and undermining of constants that literature reflects, on the one hand, and the striving for a return to a coherence, an ethical and historical coherence, on the other.

In the case of Gellner one could approach his oeuvre chronologically, or thematically, but it seems more appropriate to select firstly, the salient features of his writings.

1.1 Ernest Gellner and the search for cohesion

To briefly introduce Gellner's works, suffice it to say that they are steeped in a deep understanding of the effects of historical forces, historical forces that he was often fated to live through. Born in Paris in 1925 and growing up in Czechoslovakia, one can imagine the intimate experience he had of the ideological whirlwinds that held sway in Europe during his lifetime. He died in 1995.

To understand Gellner in the broadest terms, the introductory note to his *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* sheds valuable light on the argument:

On questions of faith, Ernest Gellner believes, three ideological options are open to us today. One is a return to a genuine and firm faith in a religious tradition. The other is a form of relativism which abandons the notion of unique truth altogether, and resigns itself to treating truth as relative to the society or culture in question. The third, which Gellner calls enlightenment rationalism, upholds the idea that there *is* a unique truth, but denies that any society can ever possess it definitively (1992:i.)

The question is not so much whether one agrees with everything Gellner has to say when he speaks as a social anthropologist, or anything he has to say about the rise of modernity, Reason or the rise of individuality, but rather whether his *modus operandi*, the questions he asks and the way he asks them can be of use to us in the analysis of specific literary texts.

While Gellner has much to say about how societies came about, how the coming into being of modernity was *not* inevitable, the central aspect for our purposes would be his vision of individualism: the recognition of the individual, of his or her situation in the world (*Dasein*) and what has been described as his "Rationalist Fundamentalism"⁴, i.e. his rejection of any system of thought that deliberately mystifies existence or seeks to find an all-embracing answer in

⁴ Buchowski, Michal, "The Social Condition of Knowledge: Gellner and the Postmodernist Menace" in *Social Evolution and History* 2, No. 2, (Summer 2003):34-54.

trying to explain existence. Predictably, Gellner abhorred what he considered “closed systems” (such as Islam, Marxist Leninism etc.) and was a champion of the “liberal polity”.

Gellner lays great stress on the rise of individualism as a *sine qua non* of modernity, and a consequence thereof, and on ideas of truth and knowledge, all of which led him to the conclusion that the search for truth is essentially a solitary activity. He traces much of his reasoning back to Descartes and the Protestant ethos. Of course, the rather naïve idea of “searching for truth” reveals an inevitable anthropocentric view of the world. In the introduction to *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* he refers to “faith”, and in a sense that is what we are dealing with here: the faith that we might be able to discern some elements that give us a better understanding of the world – and in our case, a closer understanding of some literary texts.

Alan MacFarlane, in an essay entitled “Ernest Gellner and the Escape to Modernity”, makes the following observation:

Ernest Gellner is in the great tradition of European thinkers. Poised between social systems, he is compelled to analyse the chasms that he straddles. Few writers in this century have been better placed to see and explain the peculiarities of modern industrialist-capitalist civilisation (1996: 207).

This is a passage which serves to place Gellner, and while we are familiar with this placement of Gellner by now, MacFarlane explains Gellner in another form here, to make Gellner’s contribution, his account, clearer for our purposes. We have already established the rôle of rationality and the Enlightenment in Gellner’s thinking, and how essential the rationalist basis, starting with Descartes, is for Gellner’s approach. MacFarlane goes on to say:

Put in another way, ‘rationality’ means that spheres have become sufficiently disentangled for the mind to move without constantly bumping into wider obstacles created by impenetrable barriers whether of religion, kinship or politics.

This ‘freedom of thought’ is of course bought at a price. Gellner takes from Kant and Weber, among others, his analysis of the consequences of this disenchantment. The modern world “provides no warm cosy habitat for man... the impersonality and regularity, which make it knowable are also, at the same time, the very features which make it almost uninhabitable” (Ernest Gellner, *Legitimation of Belief*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974.181).

Our world is 'notoriously a cold, morally indifferent world'. It is notable for its "icy indifference to values, its failure to console and reassure, its total inability to validate norms and values or to offer any guarantee of their eventual success..." (Gellner, 1988:64-5) The open predicament is one where logical inconsistency and openness is bought at the price of social and moral inconsistency. We are simultaneously strictly rational and open-minded, and totally lost and confused. Within the new world "there also is and can be no room either for magic or for the sacred" (Ernest Gellner, *Plough, Sword and Book*, (London: Collins Harvill, 1988) 66) (in Hall and Jarvie, 1996:209).

These observations by MacFarlane emphasise the moral dimension of modernity, and by extension one notes how the act of writing, i.e. by Roth, Bassani and Fauconnier, can be seen as attempts to "re-enchant" the world, to make a value system of sorts operate again, if only on the pages of novels, in a world where, as Gellner and MacFarlane point out, any sense of ethical cohesion has been lost or undermined, thanks to the rise of industrial capitalism, and the application of rationalism as a matrix of human action as an end in itself. Roth, Bassani and Fauconnier are in a sense rebelling against modernity, even though they are the quintessential products thereof. The "contradictions" of modernity force them either to seek alternatives, as does Fauconnier, or to identify in miniscule detail the ills that beset modernity, as in the case of Roth and Bassani.

The struggle for an Open Society, i.e. freedom of thought unencumbered by "religion, kinship or politics", as MacFarlane points out, is fraught with a myriad obstacles, and each of the three novels alludes to these obstacles: in *Radetzky* it may be all three, in *Gli occhiali d'oro*, certainly politics in the form of Fascism, but kinship and religion also play a rôle, paradoxically in the service of a rationalist conclusion. In *Malaisie* it is the search for a "cosy habitat", Gellner's term for pretending or attempting to do without with the modern world altogether.

Gellner illuminates this idea in many of his works, but in *Legitimation of Belief* he puts it thus, referring to Karl Popper:

It is our deep longing for the cosy social womb of the Closed Society which underlies totalitarianism. The liberation comes from *criticism* – whether in science or society. It is sufficient to *criticise*, and to be able to continue to do so, for progressive science, or the Open Society, to be born. [...] The enemy is always the tendency to *close* our vision, whether in science or society. It was so at the start, and it remains so. Nothing has fundamentally changed.

But this is a mistake. It is not *any* criticism which either makes or sustains science. At the very least, it is only criticism which submits to a certain kind of court of appeal, that of an orderly, symmetrical world of man-independent and lonely fact, fact which is not itself permeated by and tied to the very vision which is supposedly on trial. Criticism within a world that tolerates magic, in which there is one truth for the ritually pure and another for the impure, and so forth, would be powerless. (1974:181, Gellner's italics).

When Gellner says "liberation comes from *criticism*", this is in effect what we are dealing with in each case, in that all three authors are seeking to find a liberation through the exploration of their respective worlds.

By way of summary one should add that Gellner maintains that humanity progressed through what he saw as the three stages of human development, namely from hunter-gatherer to *agraria* to *industria*. This was Gellner's way of unravelling the emergence of the modern world as we have it today. He was not alone in this approach. But cardinal to his thinking is that the industrial age emerged out of the Enlightenment, and in doing so created a world – in having separated the social, religious and the political spheres – devoid of comfort, solace or meaning.

The "cosy habitat", as he terms it, describes a world where these elements are not separated, as in a pre-industrialised world. The "cosy habitat" is not to be found in a world where the institutions of state, the economy, religion and family have been so thoroughly separated.

While many critics have discussed the limitations of Gellner's view, presented here inevitably in a reductive fashion, the main criticism is that his "Trinitarian" (hunter-gatherer-*agraria-industria*) view is too limiting and excludes the unpredictable as well as those elements which arise out of history spontaneously. We get closer to our goal of understanding the chosen literary texts through Gellner's examination of one of the hallmarks of modernity, namely that the individual who is left to fend for himself is left to his own devices, without any of the support structures that were present during a pre-industrial age. In the case of Roth the state does in fact claim to be an authority and the individual, Carl Joseph, suffers as a consequence; in *Gli occhiali d'oro* the authority of society is challenged, as the protagonist subscribes to a set of values that are not those officially sanctioned by the Fascist state. In *Malaisie* we have an almost RobinsonCrusoe-like interpretation of the state, of society, i.e. both are absent or

rendered such by the choice of the protagonists to live free of the strictures of Western modernity – regardless of the inherently contradictory nature of such a stance. The inherent contradiction in *Malaisie* is Fauconnier’s creation of an idea in the far-flung British colony of Malaya which, while on the surface the protagonists eschew everything Western, their very presence in Malaya as planters makes them complicit in the Western economic and political enterprise – i.e. their idyll is in part dependent on a Western imposition of an economic and political order.

Above all, society never constitutes an authority or a vindication. If society itself, or some institution within it, makes such a claim, then that is a usurpation and to be strenuously resisted. Society has no right to impose its authority either on inquiry or on its outcome. Neither its views, nor its outcome is authoritative. Truth stands outside and above, it cannot be under social or political control. Legitimation of ideas by authority, by consensus, or the social creation of truth, is an abomination (Gellner, 1998:3).

Here Gellner asserts the solitary nature of the pursuit of truth, a solitariness that all the protagonists are forced to acknowledge, since each undergoes a transformation as he emerges into individuality, however briefly or precariously, from his respective society. Carl Joseph, in *Radetzky*, cannot challenge the authority of his society – he is ill-equipped to do so and his *Selbstverwirklichung* is short-lived; Bassani’s protagonist does challenge the dominant ethos of his society – just by being what he is, a Jew, but more specifically by adhering to values that predate the transitory episode of Fascism; Fauconnier’s protagonists disappear into the Malayan jungles in their conscious rebellion against the “social creation of truth”.

If one agrees with Gellner that the pursuit is essentially a solitary activity, linked to the rise of individualism within the context of modernity, then we have to examine how that truth is expressed and how this links with the implied history of each of the protagonists. So, inasmuch as language is a transmitter of values and knowledge for the authors being discussed, language not only echoes and reinforces a notion of continuity – but becomes a device all the more valuable because of the precariousness of the times represented in the novels. This varies in significance from *Radetzky* to *Gli occhiali d’oro* to *Malaisie*. In this regard Patrick Heady summarises Gellner’s observations about kinship and language:

[...] The first component of the ideal language would be a system of labelling each individual's relations to his or her ancestors so precisely that for any two members of the society it would become instantly clear from these labels (Gellner refers to them as 'names') what, if anything, the biological relationship between two individuals was... Gellner compares these 'names' to coordinate references in physical space. They would make it possible to identify one aspect of the kinship relationship between (physical) descent and marriage (reproductive partnership) (Heady, "Gellner's Ideal Kinship Language and the Connection between Biological and Social Relatedness" *Social Evolution and History*, 2, No. 2, (September 2003):75-87).

The milieu Roth has created in *Radetzkyarsch* introduces many terms that reflect the historical period; the letters from Carl Joseph's father, just to give one example, illustrate how language reflects the consciousness, both political and psychological, that Roth wants to convey. In *Gli occhiali d'oro* the tentative tone is reflected by the frequent use of the subjunctive mood; a reality that the protagonist lives through is deeply contested and intensely intimate. In fact the politics, the external world, has intimate implications. Things are alluded to; conjecture is rife as a means of not only immersing the reader into the small-mindedness of Ferrarese society, but writing in this fashion helps Bassani to tell the reader what other people said, as a way of dissimulating his authorship. Suppositions regarding Fadigati's homosexuality introduce the novel, as a way of building up to the novel's crescendo when Deliliers and Fadigati's "relationship" finally comes out in the public domain. This in turn is contrasted with the undeniable fact of the protagonist's Jewishness, which is not subject to conjecture, but clear and well known to all. Many references to Jewishness both in *Gli occhiali d'oro* and *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* illuminate and emphasise the physical kinship along with use of Ferrarese dialect and a sub-dialect used only by the Jewish community themselves. Language and physical descent are most closely linked in *Gli occhiali d'oro*, whereas in *Radetzkyarsch* they appear to be more incidental and used to indicate ethnic origin by way of emphasising the multi-ethnic nature of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a reality that contributed to its uniqueness but which was its fatal weakness. In *Malaisie* the use of Malay words and the very prominent use of *pantuns* (a form of Malay poetry) at the head of each chapter serve to remind the reader that the reality Fauconnier has created is one beyond European sensibilities. The *pantuns* also allude to a world with a wisdom and a validity in its own right, one that does not feel the need

to refer to a Western model. For example, many *pantuns* deal with the abnegation of the self, self-surrender and complete surrender, themes which, along with love, are central to *Malaisie*.⁵

Consider Gellner's statement from the last book he wrote, *Language and Solitude* where he says right from the start:

There are two fundamental theories of knowledge. These two theories stand in stark contrast to each other. They are profoundly opposed. They represent two poles of looking, not merely at knowledge, but at human life. Aligned with these two polar views of knowledge, there are also related, and similarly contrasted, theories of society, of man, of everything. This chasm cuts right across our total social landscape. (Ernest Gellner, *Language and Solitude – Wittgenstein, Malinowski and the Habsburg Dilemma*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3).

If we agree with the statement that knowledge and how one apprehends what one holds to be true can be arrived at by various means, then Gellner's view expressed above is essential to our notion of literature of impasse in that the way the world is perceived is reliant upon a set of cognitive processes which can in turn be culturally determined as well as being contingent on the social and historical circumstances in which the various protagonists in our novels find themselves. Gellner's division of knowledge into two spheres, namely the "organic" and the "atomistic", helps us to see how the impasse is experienced and articulated; it helps us to understand the possible premises upon which specific worldviews depend.

This is how Gellner refers to the chasm between the "atomistic" view of the world and the "organic" view of the world.⁶

⁵ See Hamilton, A.W. *Malay Pantuns, (Pantun Melayu)*. Sydney: Australasian Publishing Company, 1941.

⁶ Gellner explains his vision thus:

The standing of the two philosophic visions is not altogether similar. Their histories, their places in the world, are not fully parallel. The atomistic one was the first to receive deliberate formulation, but not the first to come into existence. Partisans of the organic vision would say that just because it is the primordial and normal form, it needed no articulation. It was at its best when it was free of self-consciousness, when it had no need to reflect on its own existence. Its innocence was its glory, the sign of its primordial and legitimate place in human life. Formulating it and presenting it as a theory may well soil it. Its validity lies beyond argument, arguing its merits only demeans and contradicts it. A real traditionalist does not know that he is one, his tradition simply is his life and his being: once he knows it as *a* tradition, one among others, or even as opposed to reason, he has been corrupted by his knowledge of something else.

Significantly for the present purposes, Gellner goes on to say:

The confrontation between the two visions is not something which occurs only in intellectual, literary or academic spheres. It is far more deeply rooted in life and pervades social and political conflicts and options. In some places it does so neatly and conspicuously. It may tie in with the fissures in the society in question. Sometimes, on the other hand, it may cut across them [as in the societies represented in the novels and the period being studied]. For instance, romantic organicists are not unknown in Britain: Burke, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott and later, D.H. Lawrence, Hoggart, Raymond Williams, Oakeshott, Scruton. As for the atomist individualists,

The fact that the atomistic view was formulated before it ever was loved may likewise be a sign of its artificial, indeed pathological character. Live first, think after: those who need to think out their identity before living it betray their unfitness to live. Nobility is conveyed by the priority of being over thought, which is but a kind of embellishment, not a refuge or a fortification. Aristocrats simply *are*, parvenus *do*, the rootless try to *argue* their identity. Such, at any rate, would be the 'organic' view of the matter. (Gellner, *Language and Solitude*:7, italics Gellner)

Gellner goes on to point out the characteristics of the atomistic vision, starting with Descartes:

Descartes was perhaps the chief, certainly the most famous and elegant, progenitor of intellectual individualism, the Samuel Smiles of individualist, entrepreneurial entrepreneurialism. He insisted that true knowledge could best be obtained by a single individual, who had bravely and ruthlessly freed himself from the incubus of the conventional wisdom of his own culture and had built capital exclusively from neat, distinct, clear elements, separate from each other. Acting alone, step by separate step, *that* is the basic rule of the procedure. Such an inquirer [...] trades with his own self-made capital and need fear no taint which might devalue his future achievements. [...]

The organic counter-picture was formulated explicitly only in reaction to the atomistic/individual vision. Previously it had needed no formulation, but it needed vindication against the new solitary men. So in this sense, but in this sense only it was *later*. Its adherents, of course would deny that it was in any real sense 'later'. Its overt articulation might have come later; but what it describes had long existed, indeed it had been the normal and healthy condition of mankind. It had been *lived* and practised, long before it had been turned into a theory. It feels distaste at its opponents, who have soiled it and deprived it of its innocence and, in some measure, reduced it to their own level, by forcing it to argue, to articulate, to render life subject to abstraction. If forced to do so by the need to reply to its opponents, it does so only with distaste.

Men had been members of organic communities as they had spoken prose, without knowing they were doing so, taking it for granted: without being in possession of a concept or a word for expressing what they lived, and without feeling the lack of it. It was only when an unnatural, scientific vision of knowledge, which detached cognition from all that was social and human had appeared on the scene, that the organic perception was provoked into consciousness and self-definition. (Gellner, *Language and Solitude*, 8, italics Gellner)

there is of course a great lineage leading from Hobbes to Russell (Gellner: *Language and Solitude*, 8-9).

The implications of the above passage and the quotations in the footnote are far-reaching and quoted at length because reference will be made to them as they are central to our discussion.

The quote above is also significant because knowledge, whether arrived at by ritual, observation or intuition, takes on many forms and functions, as he points out:

What counts as “a philosopher” differs far more from country to country. Or even within them, than is the case for any another “subject”. Societies and cultures which do not differ radically in other respects, display extreme differences at this point, which would seem to suggest that the shared intellectual or social situation of our time does not of itself impose any single solution on us (Gellner, 1979:14).

In other words, while we may want to arrive at an umbrella definition of impasse, we have to acknowledge that the *impasse* is very much in the eye not only of the beholder, i.e. the author, and determined at the time of writing, but also, to use Bassnett’s phrase, we assume the elevated position that the present offers us to look back and decide retrospectively that our novels represent an impasse. We can do this by trying to discern the elements within each author’s works which reflect their cognisance of their circumstances. So, for example, Spencer points out that there is a certain disingenuousness operating in *Radetzkyarsch*. What on first reading would seem to be an historical novel is in fact a fable with the characters performing a symbolic function:

Radetzkyarsch is thus a retrospective fable and not in any credible sense a historical novel. Roth is not really interested in the individual fates of the characters he places in his fable but only in his story and in the symbolic meaning of the events in it. When these meanings are examined more closely, it becomes apparent that they relate far more to Roth’s own time than to the period in which the novel is ostensibly set (Spencer, Malcolm. *In the Shadow of Empire – Austrian Experiences of Modernity in the writings of Musil, Roth and Bachmann*, (Rochester, New York: Camden, 2008: 177).

In other words, whether one agrees with Spencer’s assessment or not, one is dealing in *Radetzkyarsch* with a perceived impasse recognised and acknowledged at the time of writing. In other words in the late 1920s and early 1930s, he was projecting retrospectively the anxieties felt then onto an earlier epoch. The impasse is perceived as such after the fact – the First World

War – not during it. The same applies, albeit differently to Bassani. Writing in the late 1950s, his notion of *impasse* relates both to the time of writing (as a means to awaken unpleasant memories for his contemporary readership in the midst of Italy's economic miracle, a time when the Second World War was deemed best forgotten) and to the situation prevalent in 1930s Ferrara. But the sense of doom, the sense of *impasse* in his novel relies upon what we know subsequently to have happened to Europe's Jews. Bassani's sense of *impasse* is not diminished by the fact that the war is over, and it is left undiluted by a sense of moral disenchantment and disgust with what post-war Italy had become – a view held by many of his contemporaries, most notably Pier Paolo Pasolini, of an Italy that was losing its traditional values which had sustained it for centuries to facile, materialist values that came in the wake of US dominance in Western Europe after World War II. It is a convenient amnesia that Bassani inveighs against, implicitly, in *Gli occhiali d'oro* and in his other writings. It is not coincidental that another one of Bassani's non-fiction works is entitled *Un'Italia da salvare* (*An Italy to be saved*). So the *impasse* is not limited to the time of the novel's setting; it is a prolonged sense of *impasse*.

In *Malaisie* the sense of *impasse* is not retrospective, nor is it projected on to the future: the *impasse* is rooted in the present, and is born out of the *impasse* that the past represents for his protagonists. In this sense Fauconnier's novel is a celebration of the here and now, in a kind of Camus-like existentialism, *ante litteram*, and presents a reaction, a solution to the *impasse*. Gellner elucidates his stance and remains loyal to it – in broad terms – forty years later:

Truth stands outside and above, it cannot be under social or political control. Legitimation of ideas by authority, by consensus, or the social creation of truth, is an abomination. This vision is atomistic as well as individualistic. It not only makes the solitary individual a foreigner in his own world, separating him from it, requiring him to assert his independence; it also makes the part sovereign over the whole (Gellner, 1998: 3-4).

This passage is especially significant in relation to Bassani and the *impasse* in which he finds himself – his protagonist does indeed stand outside “social and political control” as much as he is able. His protagonist rebels against the “legitimation of ideas by authority, consensus, or the social creation of truth” and he does indeed find it an “abomination” when he sees how these

forces come into play against Fadigati in *Gli occhiali d'oro*, this providing him with a clear parallel to his own situation as a Jew. In *Radetzky marsch*, the protagonist Carl Joseph has neither the courage nor the ability to assert his individuality, overwhelmed as he is by the “legitimation of ideas by authority, by consensus, or the social creation of truth”. Fauconnier’s protagonists see themselves, Rolain especially, as emancipated from any form of Western social control and assert their individuality accordingly in a manner that reflects Fauconnier’s philosophical convictions.

Gellner’s assertion about truth, just quoted, thus finds application and resonance in all three authors’ texts. Furthermore, Gellner’s contestable statement reveals his liberal view, his plea for an open society, unhindered by political expedience. He assumes a free-thinking, critical reader, something that can only occur when a certain level of preparedness is assumed and in societies where the forces of coercion⁷ are minimised.

1.2 Mendacity

Gellner makes passing reference to the word “atomistic”, which as we know stands in contradistinction to “organic”. Put differently, re-read for present purposes, “atomistic” would refer to the vision of the world, a vision unencumbered by cultural determinants, a vision of the world in which Reason dominates, not the adherence to preordained ritual or political coercion, for example. “Organic” by contrast refers to a vision of the world that is culture-specific, i.e. a truth that is considered such within a specific set of cultural determinants, and one which cannot survive outside the cultural determinants. For Gellner rationalism, or Reason, individuality and the “atomistic” vision of the world are practically interchangeable. The search for truth then is, in an “atomistic” vision of the world, inevitably

⁷ Here one needs to bear in mind that in an agrarian society political forces and clerical forces were often functioning in unison, as in pre-Renaissance Europe, the Counter-Reformation or at any rate post-Renaissance and pre-French Revolution Europe – and there are examples of the same processes in the contemporary world. Gellner’s writings are pertinent in this regard.

“solitary”, because it is the individual search for truth that transcends cultural specificity, as opposed to truth that remains circumscribed by ethnic or political or religious specificity, i.e. cultural specificity. These two terms are critical tools in the discussion of the novels, because they can be applied variously to the texts. We can see, for example, how in *Radetzkymarsch* Carl Joseph is raised and becomes part of an “organic” world. An “atomistic” vision of the world gradually emerges in him as he begins to apply reason to his dilemma and comes to terms with the solitary nature of the truth at which he has arrived. Or, put differently, the solitariness that truth imposes on him is that, towards the end of the novel, he finds he can no longer rely on the “organic” version of truth that has proved itself to be false. In other words, his membership of the “organic” world has not served him well; being part of the “organic” establishment has been his undoing. This realisation comes too late: events have overtaken his private battle with himself when the First World War breaks out, heralded by the assassination of the Crown Prince Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in the last week of June 1914. Roth gives us a specific time when the demise “kicks in”, when the Empire enters its final death throes and the “atomistic” world finally manifests its capacity to dislodge and destroy the “organic” world. But the pain of the novel does not end with Carl Joseph. The pain is perpetuated in the life of the father, the *Bezirkshauptmann*, who not only has to live with the death of his son in the service of *his* world, i.e. that of the *Bezirkshauptmann*, but the further layer of irony is that the *Bezirkshauptmann*, whose roots in the Empire perforce go deeper than those of his now defunct son, has to experience the demise of all he has held true for so much longer, thus multiplying the pain and disillusionment. Carl Joseph’s life was too short to appreciate and hence to suffer the implications of the demise of the Empire. The father in a sense gets to live out the full range of the identity that the Empire imposed on him, that defined him, and he has to experience the full collapse of that identity and his part in perpetuating it, his part in the perpetuation of a lie. The lie referred to is the implicit mendacity that can be said to be essential to the maintenance of any political order as a means of justifying its existence. Naturally, the depth of the lie is a question of degree, and the lie is made more tenable depending on the extent to which the political order reflects the social and economic reality of those governed. When, as in the case of the Austro-Hungarian

Empire, the political order was heavily dependent on maintaining the myth of the emperor's infallibility and the durability of the Habsburg dynasty, the maintenance of the lie becomes all the more desperate and coercive, especially in an empire consisting of a myriad ethnic groups and religious loyalties. The latter included Jews, Muslims and Protestants, each with a history of intra-ethnic conflict with the Catholic centre of the Empire. This, over and above class conflicts, in which socialism tried to minimise the significance of ethnic differences in favour of shared class interests. The rise of socialism was also another menace gnawing away at the precarious edifice of Empire.

Carl Joseph has to face the full weight of the mendacity of the Empire – something that thought itself to be true (a “socially induced truth”, to use Gellner's turn of phrase) and eternal, but showed itself to be a veneer to cover the incipient pathologies inherent in the political and social structure of the Empire.

In *Gli occhiali d'oro* the “atomistic” vision is recognised and lived, without the links to the “organic” being severed. It is in Bassani a case of the “organic” awareness of his Jewish and Italian culture that spurs him on to an “atomistic” vision of the world, or to be more precise, helps his protagonist to recognise the “atomistic” basis of his own culture. So in *Gli occhiali d'oro* we have an elaborate interplay between the “organic” and the “atomistic”. The burden *Gli occhiali d'oro's* protagonist carries is that of being loyal to his sense of identity, a duality of identity, namely being Italian and Jewish. The Fascist regime after 1938 brought the two identities into conflict, suggesting that being one excludes the other. As Fascism was not primarily a race-based doctrine, at least not at its inception in 1922, many Jews were card-carrying members of the Fascist party, for reasons as varied as they were among non-Jewish Italians themselves. *Gli occhiali d'oro's* protagonist seeks a way out of this conflict and finds it in a kind of transcendental rationalism of which there was a strong tradition in contemporary Italy, most notably in the writings of Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile, over and above the rationalist precepts which defined Italy's bourgeois revolution, namely the Risorgimento. The “organic” in *Gli occhiali d'oro* is this adherence to something irrational, namely a religious tradition and a sense of belonging that this affords the protagonist, whereas the “atomistic”,

buttressed by the Risorgimento ethos of his upbringing, provides him with the means to counter the political and social marginalisation of which his protagonists are the victim. Bassani's *io narrante* in *Gli occhiali d'oro* refuses to be a victim and chooses the path of defiance, rather than expedient complicity with the Fascist "master narrative". As in *Il giardino dei Finzi Contini* the protagonist asserts his individuality not only because he is Jewish (an awareness of which obviously became more acute as discriminatory measures came to be felt), but because of a firmly held belief in the inviolability of human dignity and reason. The demise of the Jewish community and of Italy itself Bassani sees as being linked to the willingness of Italians to compromise these Risorgimento ideals, these Enlightenment ideals, for the short-term benefits of being complicit with the demands of Fascism.

In *Malaisie* we have a more extreme rejection of the "organic" and the immersion into the "atomistic". So how do we define "organic" and "atomistic" in the case of *Malaisie*? Without "straightjacketing" Fauconnier's novel to fit into a Gellnerian framework, one can clearly discern in *Malaisie* a happy acceptance of the clearly "organic" elements of Malay culture, and a rejection of the trappings and mendacity of a Western "atomistic" vision, reliant as it is upon neat empiricism. While it can be said that Western empiricism and Reason had been perverted to serve "organic" ends, i.e. the First World War, when in Gellnerian terms the power of empirically defined and created technology was used for essentially "organic" ends, i.e. to pursue various nationalist ideals, Gellner's "village green" had the power to pursue a "village green" agenda in Europe. And was not the Second World War also a case of "atomistically arrived at" technology used on a vast scale to further essentially "organic" ends? Herein ultimately lies the perception of doom, in that the doom, the *impasse* that is alluded to in each of the novels, is a fatal catastrophe embodied as the Second World War.

Hence, while Fauconnier's two protagonists lose themselves in the "organic" delights offered to them in the Malayan context, they do so because they reject both the "organic" and the "atomistic" determinants of the Western heritage. They see through the "atomistic" manifestations of an essentially "organic" worldview – the perilous attempt to resurrect a

pre-industrial morality while the machinery of state, the means to bring this about, was essentially modern and atomistic. Herein lies the fundamental contradiction of Fascism/Nazism – both of which saw themselves as revolutionary. Behind the revolutionary façade there was an essentially irrational, anti-liberal – and hence conveniently anti-Jewish – inspiration. If we view anti-Semitism as an “organic” revolt against the “atomistic”, the question of anti-Semitism in two of the novels becomes easier to decipher. The cliché about Jews having no home becomes particularly appropriate for the Jewish characters in *Radetzky*, while in the case of *Gli occhiali d'oro* the opposite is true; the cliché does not function in *Gli occhiali d'oro* because the author has his protagonist celebrate his sense of belonging in Ferrara, proudly Italian and hence the sense of betrayal that underscores Bassani's novels is all the more acute.

The “Jewish question” – to differing degrees – acts to some extent as a catalyst for an exploration of the human condition generally in both *Radetzky* and *Gli occhiali d'oro*, with homosexuality also having a catalytic function in *Gli occhiali d'oro*. What are the catalytic elements in *Malaisie*? The suggested homoeroticism would be the most obvious, inasmuch as it defies Western conventions and legitimises heterosexual relations with locals: Fauconnier seems to be saying that heterosexual relations with fellow European women would be a way of legitimising the original colonial enterprise that Malaya represents. Homosexuality and “sleeping dictionaries” (famed in W. Somerset Maugham's short stories), i.e. “going native” or in other words having a Malay concubine, represent the subversion of the colonial enterprise.

1.3 Degrees of Impasse

[...] our real situation which involves choosing our forms of life, as best we can, and *not* treating them as ultimate (Gellner 1979:34).

The quotation heading this section, while being self-explanatory, does pose a challenge to the protagonists in each of the three novels under discussion, in that we can measure them according to this matrix and discuss the extent to which they meet Gellner's criteria. In effect,

then, we can measure the degree of impasse that each of the novels represents – impasse thus meaning the extent to which the protagonists are able to “choose their forms of life” and how they are frustrated in this endeavour, as in Carl Joseph’s case; or how they rise to the challenge of the obstacles in this quest as in *Gli occhiali d’oro*; or choose their “forms of life” most successfully, as is arguably the case with Fauconnier’s protagonists. Of course the question of choosing one’s “forms of life” implies a series of philosophical, anthropological, historical and even psychological assumptions that need to be explored where applicable.

When Gellner says that what counts as “a philosopher differs far more from country to country, or even within them, than is the case with any other “subject” (*Ibid.*:14), he is in effect addressing the question of the relativity of knowledge, of ways of interpreting the world. He makes the important point that ideas of what constitutes knowledge can differ from one society to another. This is pertinent to our discussion if one views literature as a transmitter of knowledge, insight and attitudes, and as narrative that has a function in society. This is a cardinal point in a comparative literature approach because not only are we dealing, as Gellner does, with different traditions – literary and philosophical traditions – but we are also confronted with an ethical framework that each of our writers refers to and assumes as a given. Furthermore, each of the three novels under discussion purports to convey or lays a claim to, a truth of sorts, a truth conditioned by the historical circumstances in which the writing took place, either literally, or as regards the setting of the narrative. So Gellner’s point in the first quote is inevitably central to our discussion.

This aspect of how a reading of Gellner can elucidate a literary text can be viewed from a different angle when we recognise that “cognition”, to use a word Gellner likes, referring to his usual sources of Descartes, Kant, Durkheim and Weber. He surmises that rationality cannot be viewed in isolation – or conceived as a way of arriving at truth – and reminds us that:

Truth can be secured only by stepping outside prejudice and accumulated custom and refashioning the world. It can only be achieved by means of proudly independent, solitary Reason. We pursue it rationally, and we do it alone (Gellner, *Reason and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 8).

This is obviously a highly contestable statement, if not joyously naïve, but the important point that he makes is that this truth is arrived at “alone”, its pursuit is a solitary exercise, very much in the way the protagonists experience this in our novels. In the case of Bassani’s *io narrante* (first-person narrator) protagonist in *Gli occhiali d’oro*, while other factors force him into an acknowledgement of certain truths, his cognition is such that he responds independently to the forces being enacted around him and on him; he doesn’t follow the herd, not even his own Jewish herd. He acknowledges the painful truth of his situation to himself: “enlightenment rationalism, upholds the idea that there *is* a unique truth, but denies that any society can ever possess it definitively” (Gellner, Introduction to *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*, 1992).

In *Radetzkymarsch* the process through which the protagonist Carl Joseph arrives at the truth of his situation is also solitary, and arrived at too late for it to make any difference to his life. His arrival at a distillation of the truth has been a long and painful journey, with subterfuges, illusions and traps interfering and stymieing the process. Gambling, women, and drink and treacherous friendships and loves are the signifiers. It is only when he recognises the solitary nature of existence that he withdraws from his mendacious life and the station in society that the military has conferred on him, that he comes into himself. But then events catch up with him.

In *Malaisie* solitariness is seen right from the start as an idealised state and much of the novel consists of Rolain weaning Lescale emotionally from him and from the illusions of meaning that a Western heritage has imposed on Lescale. In *Malaisie* solitariness is celebrated to the point of being the triumph of individualism, an individualism that triumphs paradoxically because it denies the individual.

If one can it is possible to agree – for the moment – that Reason is the realm of the solitary individual, then there would again seem to be an easy confluence of Bassani and Gellner’s thinking. Bassani presents us, as does *Radetzkymarsch*, with an individual undergoing the process of cognition. *Gli occhiali d’oro*’s protagonist arrives at it sooner, through force of circumstance and thanks in no small measure to the close observation of, and in recognising the

symbolic significance of, Dr Fadigati. Dr Fadigati is in a sense a catalyst to the protagonist's becoming aware of himself and of the ethical import of life. The passage of the Race Laws in 1938 also has a catalytic effect on his awareness. Significantly though, while Bassani allows his protagonist in *Gli occhiali d'oro* to arrive at it himself (through the technique of a first-person narrator), in *Radetzky*, the author depicts the protagonist, in true *Neue Sachlichkeit* fashion, i.e. looking at the character from a putatively objective stance. In *Malaisie* Reason, or to be more specific, rationalising, is taken to an extreme in that much of the novel is devoted to the discussion of philosophical convictions and attitudes. Reason is employed constantly to arrive at truth, even if that truth is founded upon a speculative base, i.e. as one finds it in Nietzsche, as opposed to an empirical and purely Rationalist base. Where Fauconnier differs somewhat from Gellner's assertion that the search for truth is a solitary activity is that the two protagonists arrive at truth in an almost dialectic fashion, even if the ultimate goal is a recognition of the inevitably solitary nature of the journey towards truth.

It takes a long time before, if ever, Reason becomes a collective asset, and when it does, it lends itself to being undermined by social and political forces and being used for social or political ends. It can buttress any one of a number of "closed systems" against which Gellner often inveighed. This theme of "the collective" vs. "the solitary" recurs in much of Gellner's writing, as he questions the degree to which either is tenable.

One can see the roots of his anthropological thinking also in the space he devotes in much of his writing to ritual and how these and other manifestations of the collective help to bring about a conceptual conformity. In *Gli occhiali d'oro* this is very much what we are confronted with, the collective and the individual at variance with a collective, someone who is "stepping outside prejudice and accumulated custom and refashioning the world". And he does so "alone". Bassani's protagonist does not react in an overtly emotional manner, but rather he filters the circumstances in which he finds himself after the passage of the Race Laws through a rational mechanism, sufficiently so to be able to step outside of what affects him and to draw from the other aspects of his heritage in order to confront and assimilate the betrayal experienced thanks to his fellow Ferrarese. The *io narrante* musters sufficient courage and

distance to perceive the parallels between himself and Fadigati, even though Fadigati is not someone he particularly likes. The power dynamics between the *io narrante* and Fadigati are on the protagonist's side. He belongs to a community, even though that community of Jews is threatened, but they are threatened collectively. Fadigati is ostracised individually and has no support other than from someone similarly ostracised – a Jew. The *io narrante* “steps outside prejudice” (i.e. his own prejudice against homosexuals perhaps) and outside the prejudice, which if he shared it with his peers would possibly have attenuated their prejudice against him as a Jew. The *io narrante* chooses not to share in the collective prejudice against Fadigati, not to be part of the “master narrative” and by refusing to be part of the herd, puts himself possibly at further risk of opprobrium.

In *Radetzky marsch* too we have the protagonist at variance with the collective, only he does not recognise it. He is not forced, through the bulk of the novel, to recognise that the enemy is in himself and the position he holds in society as a member of the ruling class, a class that will ultimately destroy him, and to which he has devoted his life, albeit unwittingly. The military symbolises and represents the collective in *Radetzky marsch*. The fact is that the military, i.e. society, is inimical to Carl Joseph and to his prospects of fulfilment or happiness. Moreover, this is not something Carl Joseph seems able to appreciate. *Gli occhiali d'oro's* protagonist, however, is forced to recognise that the forces of society at large are conspiring against him. This is made blatantly obvious with the passage of the Race Laws.

In *Malaisie* the collective is Western society at large. It is consciously rejected, right from the start: that is why the two protagonists find themselves in Malaya in the first place – a refuge from a perceived oppressive collective. The fact that they seek an alternative collective in the Malay world might aid their sense of enchantment; it is a moot point whether in fact they are accepted as part of the dominant Malay collective. Rolain and Lescale can be said to enjoy a sense of enchanted seclusion, rendered all the more alluring because of the elevated economic status they enjoy as planters in charge of a number of people at their beck and call, a position further underscored by their being French in a colony which is officially British, thus relieving

the protagonists of the need or pressure to conform even to the prevalent dominant hierarchies.

A further consideration in this vein of choosing “forms of life” is to touch upon the aspect of “victimhood” – a theme that is addressed by writers such as Primo Levi in Holocaust literature, along with the fraught question of “survivor guilt”, amongst others. Bassani is defiantly opposed to any notion of playing the victim in either *Gli occhiali d’oro* (where he implicitly upbraids Fadigati for his assumed rôle of the victim) or in *Il giardino dei Finzi Contini* where he has distilled the notion of victimhood and turned it on its head – the thinking being that the story of Europe’s Jews during World War II is tragic enough without dressing it in vulgar sentimentality. This would explain – in part – the measured and defiant stance he adopts on the Holocaust as a whole.

That said, in *Gli occhiali d’oro*, where everything would seem to conspire towards his protagonist seeing himself as a victim, Bassani has Fadigati play the victim. The *io narrante* is the victim through no fault of his own, whereas Fadigati openly courts disaster by making an ill-conceived display of his homosexuality, knowing that doing so would not be well received by his fellow Ferrarese. The scenes in Riccione in the novel attest to this. In other words, Fadigati makes it almost unavoidable that he will be cast as the victim and, once having done so, the consequences of his actions and poor judgement mount and accumulate and intensify his exclusion and marginalisation. Bassani’s *io narrante* has no such choice; no amount of discretion or forced conformity will diminish his Jewishness or make it less obvious. With regards to Fadigati, it is not his homosexuality which elicits opprobrium, but his display thereof and his arguably wilfully naïve misreading of public tolerance which lead to his demise. Sheer despair might also have led him to act rashly, but despair was also the outcome of his actions. What is clear in the novel is that Bassani’s protagonist does not approve of Fadigati, never mind liking him.

However, that does not deter his protagonist from not being empathetic and recognising in the treatment meted out to Fadigati a violation of the liberal, democratic, rationalist values that *Gli*

occhiali d'oro's protagonist holds dear. When we consider this aspect in the other two novels, we can safely say that Carl Joseph is an unwitting victim of the Empire, and the accumulation of pain the young lieutenant endures is an inevitable consequence of a variety of factors, not least of which is his being forced into a mould that is not of his making and one too strong for him to resist. He cannot choose his "form of life" and is a failure as a result and indeed a victim, but one who has not sought victimhood. Bassani's protagonist can, and does, choose his "forms of life", i.e. the values according to which he chooses to act. His Jewishness is poignant, but only of limited relevance because it is not a choice. The cardinal difference between Bassani's protagonist and Carl Joseph is that Bassani's protagonist is aware that he is faced with a choice, whereas Carl Joseph is not and acts instinctually, and is for the most part of the novel a relatively unaware individual as he absorbs layer upon layer of indignity, humiliation upon himself and never seems to question why this happens. Bassani's protagonist is far more observant and deduces the origins of his and Fadigati's exclusion. In *Malaisie* the fact that the two protagonists have survived the trenches of the First World War makes it clear enough that they are victims, but more pertinently that they are survivors and the halcyon environment of Malaya is a celebration of survival, with no further commitment being present other than the discovery and celebration of the self. In *Gli occhiali d'oro* the reward of survival is social commitment and being a self-appointed conscience of contemporary Italian society. In *Radetzkmarsch* Carl Joseph is killed; he does not survive the world he is born into nor the values he is supposed to have upheld. It is left to the other characters, most notably his father, as mentioned before, who has to bear the whole weight of the tragedy of the demise of Empire; and Graf Chojnicki, who for all his insights into why the Empire's demise was inevitable, spends the rest of his life in an asylum.

1.4 *Ichfindung* or the Finding of the Self

Inasmuch as each of the three novels (and indeed any number of novels would conform to this precedent) conforms to the definition of the *Bildungsroman*, we can clearly see how the

protagonists explore a growing awareness of self, a kind of *Ichfindung*. This is quite clear in Roth and Bassani's novels, while in *Malaisie* the protagonists are juxtaposed, with Rolain embodying the individual who has already found himself, as it were, and Lescale learning to do so, at the feet of Rolain. In other words each protagonist is asserting that they are able to "choose their forms of life". Gellner makes the following pertinent observations:

[...] but it is far less interesting and important than the view that what makes us human and social is our capacity to be constrained by compulsive concepts, and the theory that the compulsion is instilled by ritual, and that ritual is the core of religion. In this sense it was religion, and religion alone, that made us human. I do not know whether this theory is true, and I doubt whether anyone else knows either: but the question to which it offers an answer is a very real and serious one. No better theory is available to answer it. No other theory highlights the problem so well... Collective rituals inculcate shared compulsions thereby quite literally humanizing us. We co-operate because we think alike, and we think alike thanks to ritual. Durkheim's version of the Social Contract has the merit of not being circular. It does not assume rationality and social obligation among those who set up the social order. It shows how those who lack either can be induced to acquire it. In this way, rituals make society possible, and in this way, they also make us human. This is the core of Durkheim's theory (Gellner, 1992:37).

Whether we agree with Durkheim, or Gellner's reading of Durkheim, is less at issue than the applicability of their views to the situation in which our protagonists find themselves in the novels under discussion.

Gellner's assertion below dovetails with what the protagonists in all three novels experience.

Bassani's *io narrante* –

[...] sifts out the impurities introduced into his experience by the prejudgements, the prejudices of his social milieu...[...] (Gellner, *Language and Solitude*, 17).

The *io narrante* in *Gli occhiali d'oro* "sifts out the impurities" when he sees through the mendacity of the Fascist state and those figures in the novel who perpetuate a belief in the chimera of human progress that Fascism seeks to inculcate in the general populace. In one scene in *Gli occhiali d'oro* the inimitable Signora Lavezzoli typifies the kind of petit bourgeois mentality that nurtured Fascism so effectively. Paying no heed to the Jewishness of her

interlocutor, Signora Lavezzoli speaks of Hitler's greatness, his "*innegabile grandezza*" (undeniable greatness) and goes on to say:

Assunse l'espressione compiaciuta e longanime della maestra di scuola disposta a giustificare nel primo della classe qualsiasi marachella.

"Sono purtroppo le esigenze della politica" continuò. Lasciamo stare le simpatie o antipatie personali. Fatto si è che in determinate circostanze un Capo di Stato, uno Statista davvero degno di questo nome, per il bene e il vantaggio del proprio Popolo deve anche sapere passar sopra alle delicatezze della gente comune... della piccola gente come noi" (Giorgio Bassani, *Gli occhiali d'oro*, 1983: 67). [She took on the complacent and long-suffering expression of the school mistress inclined to overlook any foible committed by her favourite in the class.

"Such things are unfortunately political necessities," she proceeded. "Let's leave aside any personal prejudices for or against. The fact is that in certain circumstances a head of State, a true Statesman worthy of the name, must also be capable of moving beyond the delicate feelings of the common people, of the small people like ourselves." (Jamie McKendrick, *The Gold-rimmed Spectacles* (Penguin, London: 2012, 68).]

Besides being a withering comment on the effortless spirit of expediency employed by Signora Lavezzoli, brushing over the Race Laws as "delicate feelings of ordinary people", Bassani is expressing the spirit of cowardice and opportunism that seemed to infest the unthinking masses of his day. The implication in Bassani's writing is that in post-war Italy nothing had substantially changed.

More to the immediate point is of course the process by which the *io narrante* sees through the mask that Signora Lavezzoli presents, and by extension the mask that the Fascist state presents. As far as Gellner's observations on Durkheim are concerned, we see the incipient exclusion of the *io narrante* and his co-religionists and other non-conformists from the hallowed Ferrarese ritual of the summer seaside holiday. The seemingly innocuous monologue by Signora Lavezzoli is portentous and has a resonance that goes perilously beyond the confines of her narrow mind. She is the "Fascist mind", as a new set of rituals and orthodoxies is being created with grave consequences for those not deemed acceptable. We see our relatively naïve protagonist at the beginning of the novel being forced to "sift out the impurities" – in his case the mendacity prevalent in his society, the illusions of moral rectitude being revealed for what they

are, namely hypocritical social conformity and judgementalism harbouring cowardice in the face of the Fascist state.

Roth “sifts out the impurities” through his description of the main protagonist and how he navigates his way through life. Carl Joseph’s life is a long exercise in just that – sifting out the impurities. But it is left to others in the novel to articulate this sifting process – Carl Joseph, by definition in terms of his character, is ill equipped to articulate the contradictions between appearance and reality. It is Graf Chojnicki who is the most eloquent commentator on the true state of things when the *Bezirkshauptmann* says:

„Ich verstehe nicht! Wie sollte die Monarchie nicht mehr da sein?“

„Natürlich!“ Erwiderte Chojnicki. „Wörtlich genommen, besteht sie noch. Wir haben doch eine Armee“ – der Graf wies auf den Leutnant – „und Beamte“ – der Graf zeigte auf den Bezirkshauptmann. „aber sie zerfällt bei lebendigem Leibe Sie zerfällt, sie ist schon zerfallen! Ein Greis, dem Tode geweiht, von jedem Schnupfen gefährdet, hält den alten Thron, einfach durch das Wunder, daß er auf ihm noch sitzen kann. Wie lange noch, wie lange noch? Die Zeit will uns nicht mehr. Diese Zeit will sich erst selbständige Nationalstaaten schaffen! Man glaubt nicht mehr an Gott. Die neue Religion ist der Nationalismus (Joseph Roth, *Radetzky Marsch*, (Köln: Kiepenhauer and Witsch 1978), 188) [“I don’t understand!” said Herr von Trotta. How can you say the monarchy no longer exists?“

“Naturally!” replied Chojnicki. “In literal terms, it still exists. We still have an army” – the count pointed to the lieutenant – “and officials” – the count pointed at the district captain – “but the monarchy is disintegrating while still alive; it is doomed! An old man, with one foot in the grave, endangered whenever his nose runs, keeps the old throne through the sheer miracle that he can still sit on it. How much longer, how much longer? This era no longer wants us! This era wants to create independent nation-states! People no longer believe in God. The new religion is nationalism” (Joachim Neugroschel, *Radetzky March*, (London: Penguin, 2000),161-162).]

Count Chojnicki peels away the deception, sifts away more than the impurities, rather pointing them out, revealing the mendacity that underlies the massive edifice of Empire. With Empire came ritual, in the Durkheimian sense, and religion, and the Kaiser’s specific function historically was defender of the faith. If no one believes in God anymore, as the count says, then the Kaiser is perfectly superfluous; the lives of all those around the table in this scene are also superfluous, enacting a charade for the sake of maintaining an ever more illusive identity.

In *Malaisie* we see the impurities have already been sifted, or to be more precise, Lescale still labours under illusions of the validity of the Western norm, but is emotionally captivated by Rolain who, in turn, gradually disabuses him of any faith he might have had in Western norms and the Western bourgeois heritage. This leads to an ethereal level of consciousness, in which purity is sought, unsullied by the demands of Western norms. One among many examples of this “sifting” we find in *Malaisie* as well – the peeling away of illusions to arrive at veracity:

Notre affection ne tient pas compte de la personnalité de nos amis. Elle voudrait les retoucher selon le modèle de son idéal, ou qu'ils fassent au moins semblant de s'y conformer. Habitué à l'hypocrisie par notre éducation, nous n'essayons pas de comprendre les mots que l'on nous dit, mais de surprendre des intentions embusquées derrière ces mots. Ils n'ont plus ainsi qu'un sens vague, que nous pouvons transposer à notre gré tout le long de la gamme des analogies et des contraires. Cette mascarade du langage fait la solitude de tous les hommes (Fauconnier, 1930:82-83) [Our affection does not take account of our friends' personalities; it tries to remodel them by its own ideal, or demands at least that they shall make some semblance of conforming to it. Accustomed to hypocrisy by our education, we do not try to understand the spoken words, but to catch the purpose behind them. Thus words have only an indeterminate meaning, which we may adjust as it suits us all along the scale of analogies and contraries. This masquerade of language is what creates the solitude of man (Sutton, 1990:58).]

Here Fauconnier arrives at the heart of the mendacity that he sees lying at the core of the Western consciousness, much in the same way Pirandello did with plays such as *Enrico IV* and *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, published eight years earlier, works that typify Modernism. Fauconnier articulates the factors, starting with language itself, which cause the impasse in the first place, making it inevitable that doom would ensue and that isolation or the perpetuation of dangerous illusions can be the only outcome, which in turn leads to disaster as competing illusions clash, as they did in World War II, or in a variety of conflicting and murderous ideologies.

Synthesising Kant and Hume, Gellner concludes that *Ordnung*, human universality – rather than cultural specificity – is the key to a moral approach to the world. *Ordnung* in *Radetzky* is the social and military hierarchy. Only, the problem is that it is an *Ordnung* in the service of something doomed. It is an *Ordnung* that lays claim to being universal, with all the trappings and prestige of the Emperor Franz-Joseph symbolising that *Ordnung*. The fact that the *Ordnung*

is, in this case, pathological, is at the centre of Roth's invective. The cultural specificity of which Gellner speaks does, in the case of *Radetzky*, refer to a very real concern, both Gellner's and Roth's, in that it was cultural specificity that ruined the longed-for symmetry, the longed-for universality, a universality that would endure and protect even those minorities who were not, in the case of the Habsburg Empire, part of an ethnic group as such, i.e. the Jews. It is this loss of *Ordnung* that Roth laments, and hence a loss of the key to a moral world, a moral, *rational* world.

Again one sees how this operates in *Gli occhiali d'oro*. The *io narrante* seeks to find an "impartiality and a symmetry", (Gellner, 1998: 17) to use Gellner's words, in a world and milieu where symmetry has been lost, where the moral and social are out of kilter with the principles of civil co-habitation and specifically in a society such as Ferrara of the 1930s, where the citizenry harbour claims of adhering to civilised norms, as long as those norms exclude homosexuals and Jews.

In *Malaisie* the premise is that there is no inherent surprise that symmetry, *Ordnung* and universality are absent, that they are absent wherever a Western paradigm operates. This is so because the Western paradigm cannot, does not, allow for that which lies outside its specific frame of reference and heritage. The Western model is inevitably, irretrievably flawed and mendacious.

Hence one can discern a progression of consciousness in the three novels: the unaware protagonist in *Radetzky* vs. the aware protagonist in *Gli occhiali d'oro*. Both novels set in Europe retain a faith, or a delusion, sustained by the Western paradigm. In *Malaisie* the paradigm itself is rejected in its entirety, even if one might aver disingenuously so.

Gellner's observations relate to his investigation of the theory of knowledge. While he is sceptical of the notion that impartiality can really exist, what is pertinent in Bassani's and Roth's portrayals is the blend of culturally specific values combined with a rationality as something to be aspired to. In *Radetzky* the cultural specific values are mired in the decrepit political dispensation of the Habsburg Empire, not on a millennial religion. In *Gli occhiali d'oro* the *io*

narrante has in mind the culturally specific nature of being Italian, as something that like his Judaism is legitimised by history itself. He does discriminate and does not adhere to the moral relativism, Gellner's *bête noire*, caught as Bassani's protagonists are between Gellner's atomistic vs. organic view of the world. In *Radetzky* the protagonist is a lamb being led to the slaughter by his heritage. In *Gli occhiali d'oro* the lamb is aware that slaughter is imminent and tries to do something about it. However, in *Malaisie* there is the transgressive search for something new and more universally sustaining, the first step towards which is dispensing with the Western paradigm altogether in all its forms. In *Malaisie* the lambs have survived the slaughterhouse, namely the First World War, and are looking for respite in greener pastures, in an individually arrived at truth, not one fraudulently peddled by Western tradition and which is hence by definition unavoidably mendacious.

1.5 Anthropology vs History

Culture and social organisation are universal and perennial. States and nationalism are not (Gellner, 1997:5).

This observation is an aspect of the mechanism by which we can – in comparative literature terms – further explain the causes of impasse, namely the inability to distinguish between the universality of culture and social organisation and the non-universal nature of states and nationalism. In other words, here we have an anthropological reality contrasted with a historical reality. A root cause of impasse is the attempt to elevate states and nationalism to a universality which they do not inherently possess: the Habsburg Empire and Fascist Italy can be seen as attempts to enshrine states and nationalism into a millennial carapace by means of the state and its institutions and through the constant assertion of nationalism. Historical occurrences or phenomena, such as the Habsburg Empire and Fascist Italy, were but transitory manifestations that perceived themselves, or were perceived, as eternal, but which buckled under the test of time, i.e. when confronted with the truth of culture and social organisation which characterised human behaviour long before states or nationalisms ever came into being. This, over and above historical events, undermined any ideological contrivances engendered by

the state. The impasse occurs through the determination of mankind to perpetuate a false sense of meaning, to sustain an illusion that has no basis in reality, and which mankind in despair perpetuates so as to find a justification for itself, its ideas and aspirations. Our novels illustrate not only the consequences in human terms of sustaining illusions, political ones especially, but also the effects thereof on an individual level. *Radetzky* and *Gli occhiali d'oro* are classic examples of this. Fauconnier's *Malaisie* purports to be an emancipation from the tyranny of seeking meaning, but it too is an illustration of the limits of emancipation, especially when it comes to the amok scene,⁸ when the protagonists are confronted by something that defies explanation.

Malaisie perhaps suffers from being too overtly a reactionary novel in one sense, in that for all its eulogising of individual freedom, it cannot escape from its Western conception. The immersion into a Malayan idyll is in itself a problematic indulgence borne out of disgust with the West. Gellner says: "we discover truth alone, we err in groups" (Gellner, 1998: 5). How can the individual not find himself or herself in a situation of impasse when the group of which he or she forms a part is "erring"? This encapsulates the dilemma of both Roth's and Bassani's protagonists. Fauconnier, seen thus, is simply trying to find a new "group" and consciously illustrates and pursues the idea of the solitary search for truth, divested as his protagonists are of the encumbrances of the group.

Umberto Galimberti addresses this dichotomy in a similar way and summarises this aspect of the debate thus:

Vien da pensare che l'Occidente, percorrendo il sentiero dischiuso prima della filosofia e poi dalla scienza, non abbia inseguito altro scopo se non quello di difendersi dalla *multiformità* della

⁸ In its original Malayan context, "amok" can be described as violent, ritualistic, homicidal behaviour, characterized by frenzied attacks often with sharp instruments such as a kris (see page 229.) It is a reaction, motivated by perceived mistreatment, personal injury or misfortune, perpetrated by "apparently sane, healthy Malays [...] (with) a desire to relieve [...] anxiety through acts which restored dignity and self-respect" (Spores 1988:106). Running amok was believed to be an involuntary act, caused by possession by an evil tiger spirit and the person concerned was not deemed to be conscious of his actions. "Because of their spiritual beliefs, those in the Malay culture tolerated running amok despite its devastating effects on the tribe" (Saint Martin 1999:67).

natura mediante *l'uniformità* dell'idea. Lo scopo forse è stato raggiunto, ma al costo di profondissime *lacerazioni* che oggi non consentono più all'uomo di abitare il mondo e nel mondo ritrovare se stesso. Non stiamo facendo letteratura per difenderci dalla scienza. Il nostro intento è solo quello di sapere se oggi, componendo le parti in cui è stato diviso dal metodo scientifico, l'uomo è ancora in grado di trovare l'unità da cui risulta la sua vita. In caso diverso non resta che tornare all'origine o rassegnarsi al disagio della lacerazione (2007:85). [The thought occurs to one that the West, following the pathway revealed first by philosophy and then by science, did not have any purpose other than defending itself against the *multiformity* of nature by means of the *uniformity* of the idea as such. The goal perhaps was reached, but at the cost of the deepest of *lacerations* which today do not allow many to any longer live the world and in order to find himself in the world. We are not creating literature in order to defend ourselves from science. Our intention is only to know whether today, putting together the parts into which it has been divided by the scientific method, man is still able to find the unity of which his life is a consequence. The alternative can only be a return to the origins or to resign oneself to the discomfort of laceration (author's translation).]

Gellner starts the second chapter of *Nationalism* with the words of the epigraph to this section: "culture and social organisation are universal and perennial. States and nationalism are not" (1997: 5) which have an obvious political resonance in our texts. In *Radetzky*, for example, it is this very issue that lies at the heart of the novel. The statement in effect summarises the dilemma of Roth and his protagonist. Culture and social organisation are obviously "perennial" and "universal" as they occur everywhere in the world and have done for millennia. What is new, Gellner asserts, is the rise of nationalism, especially nation-states, i.e. distinctive political organisations, centralised authorities that reflect a certain ethnic or cultural uniformity. While this can be discussed citing a myriad examples, the dilemma of the Habsburg Empire that Roth describes is the dilemma of a state that does not embody an ethnic uniformity. Quite the opposite. The Habsburg Empire was held together by an idea and the novel as such is an investigation of how the idea is maintained, sustained, regardless of the consequences for the individual, i.e. Carl Joseph. In modern terms one would speak of the Habsburg Empire being a state (more accurately an empire, not merely a state. State is intended here to mean a political authority, more or less legitimate, as the case may be) "in denial". That is to say, in denial about its own fragility, its *raison d'être* and its capacity to defend itself and assert itself in the face of external and internal threats. The Habsburg Empire can be seen as a political dispensation that had lost the basis for its existence.

In Gellnerian terms one would describe it as an agrarian state, as opposed to an industrial state. In Gellner's definition of the term, *agraria*, briefly summarised (1997:15 et seq)⁹, would mean a feudal set-up, lack of technical innovation in the production of food (such as is more readily found in an industrial society), a limited need for a professional innovation of any kind and consequently a social hierarchy that is either land- or caste-based, not based on ability or, importantly, on mobility, one of the features of industrial societies. The Austro-Hungarian Empire on the eve of World War I was characterised by many of the failings of a class and land-based society, where positions of power more frequently were given to those belonging to a certain class. The fact that other societies managed to operate socially on a class-based or hierarchical system while being industrialised, such as Great Britain, underscores the extent to which Austria-Hungary was behind the other powers involved in the First World War. Hierarchies are features of an agrarian society, and we see how hierarchies frequently manifest themselves in *Radetzky*.

Roth's novel shows how conflicting theories of knowledge do compete in the society he has portrayed, a salient feature of Roth's novel being the portrayal of Vienna as a den of vice – the one part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, along with Budapest and to a lesser extent Prague, where the maintenance of the political dispensation was openly challenged and contested, in intellectual and political circles, places where the untenability of the political dispensation was most evident. Central too to this consideration is the rôle played by Jews, who lived the paradox of the empire, and saw in its maintenance the only bulwark against a rurally based ethnic hostility towards them. The Kaiser protected the Jews, lest the forces of ethnic chauvinism be unleashed against them, forces also inimical to the survival of the Empire itself. In *Language and Solitude* Gellner addresses the situation of the Habsburg Empire thus:

Once upon a time, notably 1848, liberals and nationalists could be allies within this Habsburg Empire, united in their shared opposition to the authoritarian, hierarchical, traditional, though not specifically ethnic centre. But later that tended to change. In the end virtually all the 'ethnics', including even or especially the German speakers, turned against the centre, which,

⁹ This discussion occurs in various guises in Gellner's works and forms the assumptions of much of his argument.

however dynastic and traditional, was finally only able to rely on the support of the new men: the commercial, industrial, academic, professional meritocrats, interested in maintaining an open market in goods, men, ideas, and a universalistic open society. This was the great paradox of its [the Habsburg empire's] terminal condition (1998:10-11).

Already here we have a wealth of reference points that help us understand Roth and “unpack” *Radetzkymarsch*. (Gellner also maintains the view of the Habsburg Empire being in a state of terminal disease). The novel is replete with metaphors for disease, social and political disease. The centre that Gellner refers to above is of course Vienna, and we note for example, in passing, that Carl Joseph's father has to go to Vienna to see the Kaiser himself to obtain a royal pardon for his son. The further irony is that the son's errant ways can be attributed to the political impasse of the empire and the way it has eroded the young Carl Joseph's sense of self. Yet we have the father having to obtain a pardon from the personage who symbolises everything that has oppressed and rendered Carl Joseph less than the sum of his parts, made him psychologically unfit for the rôle he is forced to play. His father has no mean part in this.

Cardinal too in Gellner's thinking is the notion of the free movement of “ideas, men and goods” which are instrumental in creating an open society, a universalistic open society, such as much of the world has today. Vienna is the place where much of this movement happens. The rôle of Vienna as a centre of the *avant garde* is well documented, but what is significant in *Radetzkymarsch* is the contrast he maintains between the rural realm of the Habsburg Empire and its urban centre, Vienna. Vienna symbolises all that is new, daring and risqué, in stark contrast to the pre-industrial rural vastness of its hinterland. Vienna almost exists in reaction to its rural hinterland, is everything the hinterland is not. It is a home to undifferentiated ethnic minorities, the home of liberalism, emancipation and, significantly, home to those Jews who have emancipated themselves from the *shtetls* of the East. Significantly, much of the plot of the novel takes place in the rural hinterland, in fact on the borders of the empire, far away from the centre. As Gellner puts it:

This above all, was the basic, pervasive cleavage of the Empire during its terminal decades (which were not known to be terminal, for few anticipated or even desired its demise). But the ethnics went crazy about roots even though some of their leaders were quite moderate and wished to combine their nationalism with a general humanism; and, irony of ironies, the old

centre, the dynasty of obscurantism, was in the end deserted by all except the pariah liberals...The village green stood against Café Central of Vienna, or so it seemed (1998:34).

But even though this example from *Language and Solitude* looks specifically at the Austro-Hungarian political order, the quote provides us too with a tool to look at Bassani more closely. While we may not be dealing with Vienna in Bassani's works, we are looking at an urban environment, at Ferrara – a bourgeois city par excellence. Bassani represents that very liberal, rationalist tradition which flies in the face of the ethnic and doctrinaire nationalism of the Fascists. Bassani's *io narrante* is at loggerheads with the dominant political culture while fully embracing the culture *per se* of his native land, Italy. In fact he, as well as his protagonists, are steeped, and proudly so, in their cultural heritage. But then, to look at Bassani in Gellnerian terms, what kind of people do Bassani's protagonists represent? (As there is so much that is autobiographical in Bassani's novels, it is tempting to see him and his protagonists as virtually interchangeable). They represent the apex of a certain class, and this finds its most complete expression in the portrayal of the Finzi-Contini family in *Il giardino dei Finzi Contini*, who hold themselves aloof from the Fascist "riff-raff" and their déclassé Race Laws of 1938. Bassani and/or his protagonists are the outcome of the tradition of free movement of trade, goods and ideas. They are urbane and sophisticated, even if provincial in some aspects. We have in *Gli occhiali d'oro* the individual again rebelling against the collective, or where the collective acts in such a way as to undermine and oppress the individual. This then in turn leads us to consider the relationship between individualism *per se* and the search for truth, which as Gellner has said earlier, is essentially a solitary activity. The anti-Semitism in the novel then adds another distinguishing layer over the individual, forcing him to become aware of his difference and hence of the truth of his situation in a given society.

Being excluded from society forces him to question why that is so, what are the rational grounds for the exclusion and what does it leave the individual with? The protagonist in both *Gli occhiali d'oro* and *Il giardino dei Finzi Contini* has to assess and assert himself, in relation to his society, in relation to the collective. Unlike the situation in which Carl Joseph finds himself, the Bassanian protagonist does not live in an agrarian society, but one that is industrialised, at

least in the part he occupies. Other value systems are competing that are inimical to the protagonist's liberal-rationalist view of the world. Our protagonist is infinitely more self-aware than is Carl Joseph because his very existence is overtly threatened by the state. Bassani's protagonist inevitably has to question the legitimacy of the state, especially as the state is not buttressed by the tradition and ritual of centuries, but is represented by an opportunistic clique, many of whom in Ferrara were Jews like himself,¹⁰ and who have no legitimacy in his eyes because they have abused power and the liberal traditions upon which the modern Italian state was founded in the Risorgimento.

In *Malaisie* we read above all the absence of all references to Europe other than as a place to be avoided or whose manifestations in Malaya are rejected. We see the disentanglement from Europe and its paradigms and in Gellnerian terms, too, we see two individuals immersing themselves in a kind of anthropological-existential *terra incognita* of their choice. They aspire to the *terra incognita*, because the *terra cognita*, especially in its extreme form, is sickeningly familiar. The *terra incognita*, Malaya, allows them the freedom to be the individuals they want to be, to celebrate their freedom and individuality, even if that means an encounter with meaninglessness and an acceptance of meaninglessness. This in turn opens the debate whether meaning – to paraphrase Wittgenstein – is nothing but a cultural construct. Fauconnier is presenting the reader, albeit disingenuously, with two protagonists who eschew meaning in its Western guise.

When it comes to *Radetzky*, what binds his protagonist so closely to his destiny is that his meaning is entirely conditioned by the context that he lives in and for which he is killed.

¹⁰ A most compelling and revealing study of the dilemma of Ferrara's Jewish Fascists is Ilaria Pavan's *Il Podestà Ebreo – La storia di Renzo Ravenna tra fascismo e leggi razziali*. Laterza: Bari 2006. Herein we read a detailed account of the man who was Ferrara's mayor from 1926-1938 in these crucial years, thus revealing the complexity and contradiction and searing sense of betrayal experienced by Ferrara's Jews. While in other cities in Italy, notably Turin, being Jewish was more readily associated with anti-Fascism, in Ferrara for complex social and political reasons Jewishness and anti-Fascism were not synonymous, as one might have expected, given the liberal traditions often associated with urban Jewish life in Western Europe.

In *Gli occhiali d'oro* meaning is derived by opposition to that which is wrong in his context. But Europe remains the locale of meaning, for the protagonists and the authors alike. This does not hold true for Fauconnier's characters, only inasmuch as Europe, as a locale for meaning, has ceased to exist and the individual (Rolain primarily, followed by Lescale) has to find a transcendent meaning as an individual, not bound to a specific context and milieu. Malaya helps him to find that. Whether it does so or not is less at issue than the attempt itself. As Clingman says: "In every sense of the word, our place on earth can only be a place of *approach*" (2009:247).

1.6 Gellner and coming to grips with modernity

Among the many perspectives that Gellner offers, he is essentially a thinker trying to come to grips with modernity, unsatisfied inasmuch as he deemed empiricism to be a facile solution to a much greater problem. To understand the modern world, through the examination of assumptions, is what he attempts. This he does by posing questions. He is, moreover, backed by a significant personal experience as well as being steeped in four disciplines, namely history, anthropology, philosophy and sociology. This placed Gellner in a unique – but certainly not unassailable – position to evaluate modernity.

It is therefore helpful to see how he was evaluated by his peers and to see what they distilled from his writings, also so as to better appreciate and assess the vast scope of Gellner's investigations as they can be used to elucidate the three novels under discussion.

Gellner's account of modernity stresses two elements: it is a mode of cognition (openness to falsification) and a mode of production (*industria*), and both are interrelated. The spirit of cognitive openness makes invention possible, which advances industrial production, and that, in turn, gives the productive classes the resources to dominate the specialists in coercion. Following Weber, the initial trigger for this was Protestantism because, on the cognitive side, it removes magic from the world and teaches rule-following, and, on the economic side, it instils a work ethic in which sensuous excess is avoided.

Gellner argues that traditional societies are divided between literate 'high' culture and 'folk culture'. As modernity is a mass literate society, there is a tendency for 'high' culture to

effectively colonise 'folk' culture. In Western Europe, Protestantism, with its emphasis upon the text of the Bible, was partly responsible for this colonisation of folk culture. Because of the Protestant emphasis upon rule-following and the absence of magic, it also contributed to the creation of a critical mass of people within society who had the appropriate cognitive framework for *industria* (Malesvic, Sinisia, and Mark Haugaard, 2007:21).

Mention has already been made of some aspects of Gellner's thinking touched on in the above quotation. Nonetheless, the passage neatly summarises some fundamental aspects of Gellner's writing. Gellner addresses the cognitive aspects of human history, the gradual emancipation from "magic", or put in another way, the ritualised imposition of meaning through religion. Protestantism can be viewed thus as a process of stripping away the magic and leaving the individual solely responsible for the relationship with that which is deemed to be transcendent, with the metaphysical. There is no intercession, other than the written word. This is indeed a heavy weight for the individual to bear but, Gellner would assert, with reference to Weber, Durkheim, Kant and others, that therein lies the foundation of the modern era. Roth, Bassani and Fauconnier lived and wrote in the moment of greatest crisis of the modern era, on the eve of catastrophe. It is the awareness of this self-destructive direction that underscores and informs Roth's, Bassani's and Fauconnier's narratives, and hence the term "literature of impasse".

It is one thing to write, convinced of the viability of one's society and one's culture and place in history. It is quite another to confront the imminent and seemingly inevitable demise of the same. It is also possible to navigate through, assert and uphold a set of transcendent values in the midst of doom, a Sisiphean task, in the full knowledge that change is not necessarily for the better (*Radetzky*), that change is essentially an individual endeavour (*Gli occhiali d'oro*) or that change is pointless except on an individual level and in an extra-European context (*Malaisie*).

MacFarlane goes on to point out:

I have argued that basically Gellner specified the problems very well in terms of accident and uniqueness and the tension between open and closed. He addressed the deepest questions he had posed in a brilliant way. What I have tried to do here is to add three qualifications or modifications.

Gellner never explained satisfactorily how the open society, resting on civil society, could emerge against the predatory tendencies which he so graphically outlined. F.W. Maitland's solution, a combination of accident, islandhood and a number of chance yet powerful events partially helps to complete Gellner's story in this most important element of his general account.

Gellner was well aware of the fragility of the world of liberty and was apprehensive about its continuation [...] the most important condition for liberty is freedom from fear [...] (Malesevic and Haugaard) 2007:47-48).

This passage illustrates Gellner's preoccupations with an open society and a closed society, themes that, as mentioned previously, are echoed in *Radetzky Marsch* and *Gli occhiali d'oro* and given a further twist in *Malaisie*. Gellner shares with our texts the notion of the fragility of liberty, and our authors ultimately are concerned with liberty and especially how the individual arrives at a liberty after navigating through all the obstacles that impair liberty. Acquisition of liberty, or the lack thereof, is a central concern of the question of impasse in that it can determine the sense of fulfilment the individual can attain in a given society. The impasse relates thus as well to the extent to which the individual's aspirations are frustrated in the search for fulfilment and meaning in a given society, which in turn is closely bound up with what is intended by liberty and the form that fulfilment may take and what ideals it embodies. Mark Haugaard assesses the dilemma Gellner grapples with thus:

Gellner used the term 'civil society' in place of liberal democracy, which points to a general cultural transformation that facilitated modern politics. This is entirely consonant with my argument that modern power presupposes a fundamental cognitive transformation.[...] One of the premises of Gellner's account of the 'origins of civil society' is that modernity entails a change of relations of domination. He interprets modernity in terms of a transition from agrarian societies in which the economy and polity were interconnected, with the former dominating the latter, to a society in which the two have been separated and the economy becomes dominant. Gellner was at pains to argue that this was a unique event in world history. [...]

To Gellner, agrarian society is a historical norm and has structural tendencies towards relative stability, whereas modernity is dynamic and based upon economic growth. The absence of growth in agrarian societies is explained by an inherent dilemma which is confronted by those who, for whatever reason, manage to produce economic surplus. [...] The Protestant faithful facing God on their own and the scientist who continually distrusts traditional communal truths embody a uniquely modern individualist identity central to capitalism and modern politics. If we

take Descartes as paradigmatic, for him truth was arrived at by introspection into the self (Gellner 1992). By implication, the latter could exist in splendid isolation from the world. The liberal modern self seeks freedom not in community and culture but in a separation from it. Of course, in the phenomenon of nationalism we see a reaction against this kind of self. Gellner sees modernity as characterised by a continual ideological conflict between the liberal individualists and the romantic communitarians (Gellner, 1998). While the liberal individualists are not the straightforward heroes of this story, they are responsible for a new type of social subject who is essential to the emergence of the modern conditions of liberty which constitutes one of the conditions of possibility for the essentially private realm of 'civil society' (*Ibid.*:78-80).

Here Haugaard crystallises, again, a central tenet of Gellner's thinking that serves to illuminate our authors' works. The emergence of a liberal view of life that is inevitably in conflict with the "village green", i.e. the romantic, ethno-centric communitarians. This paradigm, of the open (liberal/atomistic) vs. the closed (romantic/organic) type of society is key to understanding our authors, and comes to our aid when the conflict is differentiated and nuanced as in *Gli occhiali d'oro*, more obvious than in *Radetzkyarsch* and totally refashioned in *Malaisie*.

1.7 Power relations and the quest for an Open Society

Haugaard goes on to summarise Gellner's account by highlighting the following:

In Gellner's Trinitarian universe of plough, book and sword, power is exclusively equal to the sword. The conditions of liberal democracy are created when the sword is kept in check by the economy and its offshoot, 'civil society' (*Ibid.*, 81).

We shall see how this applies to our texts. The question of power is intrinsic to the question of modernity because, as has been pointed out above, modernity simply implies a shift in power relations. In a sense our novels deal with that shift in power, the gradual emancipation of the societies they describe, and their protagonists' ability to negotiate those power relations.

Haugaard goes on to point out that:

In the literature of power there are two broad theoretical traditions. Those who largely consider power as entirely conflictual [and here Haugaard cites a number of authors.] Opposed to this there exists a minority consensual school, including Parsons (1963) Arendt (1970) and Barnes (1988) (*Ibid.*: 81).

Again one can investigate the conflictual and consensual elements in the power relations in our authors' works, but that does require us to examine as well how power is manifested in the three novels.

Haugaard goes on to ask "What is social order?" He comes to the conclusion that "At its most fundamental, it is the predictability of others. What makes their actions ordered is the fact that their social action makes sense by being meaningful". And "Meaning", he says, "is reproduced through the reproduction of structure" (*Ibid.*: 83). Haugaard hits on an important point here, no doubt inspired by Gellner, that would require an examination as well of how meaning is produced in Roth's Habsburg milieu, in Bassani's Fascist Ferrara and in Fauconnier's Malaya. As soon as one enters into the realm of "meaning", as Haugaard says, one is dealing with the "reproduction of structures". What structures uphold the Habsburg Empire, Fascist Italy and colonial Malaya, and how are our protagonists at variance with those structures? How are they able to arrive at meaning within them, or does meaning lie in defying the structures and refusing to reproduce them?

Haugaard points to Gellner's assertion that modernity is caught in a dilemma, namely being caught "between attempting to construct a value-free 'view from nowhere' and the realisation that this is in fact a possibility" (*Ibid.*: 92). Hence Gellner's invective against Wittgenstein, because Wittgenstein's view of the world, Gellner deemed to harbour and maintain the illusion that a value-free world could exist. Using Gellner then to analyse our texts substantiates the claim that a value-free society cannot exist and in the novels one does indeed see value systems operate, either in unison or in conflict with one another.

Malesevic (*ibid.*: 148) goes a long way in creating a paradigm to position *literature of impasse*, in that he highlights the contradictions which Gellner identifies as being inherent to modernity. The "doom" perceived by the authors is one derived from experience these contradictions: in *Radetzkymarsch*, the mass culture, while it might be an attempt at being egalitarian, was in the case of the rise of Nazism, as Haugaard describes, the result of "single-stranded thinking":

The ability to think about others single-strandedly makes possible liberal justice, democratic elections, the correction of examination papers, and many other associated structural practices. Unfortunately, this form of single-stranded thought also facilitated the Holocaust. [...] Discipline makes self-restraint possible, which, in turn facilitates rule-following. However, abject obedience to rules leads to the outcome of the Milgram experiments. People who are so obedient they will carry out any action as long as it accords with the rules of the game are dangerous. In these situations it is the law-abiding person who is dangerous, not the deviant: the indiscipline of seeing multi-strandedly can be an asset (*Ibid.*: 99).

In *Gli occhiali d'oro* we see overt opposition to single-stranded thinking, to the kind of *idée fixe* upon which ideology thrives, with the individual returning, like in *Radetzkymarsch*, to time-honoured values in order to assert dignity in an intolerable situation. In *Malaisie* we have the author amply convinced that the contradiction in modernity is unsustainable, unbearable, and he seeks solace in values that are essentially pre-modern.

With the adoption of a wider paradigm of signification, we can now see how these works reflect not only the transition to modernity, but also that they are novels that describe this transition. They can also be viewed as heroic attempts to make modernity perhaps not more palatable, but provide a narrative solace which is derived from a stern, a verifiable diagnosis of the ills of modernity. The disease is at least recognised, and one does not have to resort to unhinged fantasy for the world to make sense. While one could accuse Fauconnier of perhaps following this latter route, if he does so it is with the same aim in mind: the retention of an Open Society, (to use Gellner's and Popper's terms), the retention of freedom of thought. Significantly too in the case of *Malaisie*, criticism is levelled at what Fauconnier perceives to be the by-now Closed Society of the West, and magic is indeed tolerated in his milieu, but as a means to invalidate the arrogant epistemological certainty with which Western thought has imbued itself. In *Gli occhiali d'oro* one has the obvious rejection of Fascism, as being the *non plus ultra* of a Closed Society, strangled by "single-stranded thinking". In *Radetzkymarsch* again the battle for an Open Society is represented especially by Graf Chojnicki and his doomed liberalism. But more specifically, one has the birth pangs of an Open Society being described, and personified, in the characterisation of the main protagonist, Carl Joseph.

MacFarlane goes on to encapsulate Gellner's vision of modernity thus:

What has happened is that thought, cognition, has been set free from its usual masters – politics, religion or kinship. We are open to all thought and to all doubt. God is dead, the father is dead, and the king is dead. We are our own masters, to think what we please. The barriers are down and everything is levelled to one plane (as Simmel described the effect of money). This is one feature of ‘modernity’ for Gellner. [...] This separation of spheres, where politics, economics, religion and kinship are artificially held apart, is the central feature of modern civilisation. None of the institutions is dominant. There is no determining infrastructure, but a precarious and never to be taken for granted balance of power (in Hall and Jarvie, 1996: 209-10).

It is through this mayhem that our authors navigate their way and in each of the novels we can discern the extent to which they succeed, or at least, how their protagonists succeed in maintaining a modicum of freedom, of ethical conduct, of personal ‘meaning’. In *Radetzkyarsch*, we detect Roth’s despair at the inevitability of the old order vanishing, an old order based indeed upon religion, politics and kinship. What has come in its wake disgusts Roth. In *Gli occhiali d’oro*, the protagonist is an aware adversary of the crumbling of an order, a liberal democratic order, only to be abused by a political system (Fascism) which claims to reconstruct and fuse bonds of kinship, religion and politics into a unifying totalitarian system. Bonds of religion are maintained voluntarily in the form of Judaism and thus an alternative bond of kinship is maintained, in defiance of the political order that would have it be otherwise. In *Malaisie* we have the conviction that modernity offers no solutions, hence we see an idealisation of a pre-modern society, in the form of Malaya, in its jungles and peoples.

Gellner makes the following observation that circumscribes our novelists well:

One of the main lessons of human history is that these self-maintaining and closed circles of ideas, for all their occasional ingenuity, cunning and viciousness, often disintegrate into chaos. Alternatively, two or more of them coalesce, like clashing galaxies, interpenetrating into an incoherent jumble. But they do not have some inexorable hold over men, and often have difficulties in practising that self-maintenance with which functionalist sociology would too easily credit them (1974:19-20).

This, among many of the aphorisms which pepper Gellner’s broader vision, applies succinctly to our texts (as they would arguably to a variety of Modernist texts). In *Radetzkyarsch* the ‘closed circle’ is the political and social milieu of the Habsburg Empire; in *Gli occhiali d’oro* it is

Fascism and in *Malaisie* it is the entire edifice of the Western heritage. The chaos that ensues in the wake of religion, kinship and the political being separated, requires something transcendent, and it is this transcendence for which Gellner makes a case, as do our novelists.

Gellner states for example:

Philosophic thought is primarily an attempt at transcendence. [...] What is at issue is not the grand totality of things, but only the transcendence of this or that society. 'Transcendence' of *this* kind is not merely possible, it is – regrettably for some – often inescapable. It is not merely often easy, it is often impossible to evade this kind of liberation. Whether you think of a closed cultural 'form of life' as a prison or a shelter, either way, it often crumbles and frees you, whether you wish it or not (1974:19 [italics Gellner]).

Here one has *in noce* a viewpoint which helps us to unfathom the texts at hand. In a sense it is nothing new in that ultimately the act of writing can in itself be the acquisition of distance from and perspective on, one's subject, whatever it may be. The authors find themselves in the dilemma of trying to offer an alternative to the worlds they describe, the worlds which they inhabit, and from which the act of writing is a means of extricating oneself, in this case, the moral turpitude being described. Writing clearly becomes part of a collective consciousness to alleviate the malady, by at least describing it, by being able to stand outside the malady, yet understanding it intimately; hence the facility in describing it.

1.8 The appeal of transcendence and moral order

It is also clear from the extract above that Gellner, while making a very particular appeal to the idea of transcendence, is deeply wary of the alternative trap, namely that of seeing everything as being merely relative or upholding the notion of the relativism of all things as being a solution. Absolutes exist in the Gellnerian vision, here described as "transcendence", a transcendence made understandable by closer analysis and examination, with a heavy reliance on Kant's notion of transcendence.

“It is only in the mystical relation of collective ritual that men acquire shared concepts and shared obligations [...] the roots of moral and conceptual compulsion are the same, as they are for Kant” (1998:66), Gellner says, referring to the anthropological origins of thought.

Relativism Gellner eschews totally, as do the authors: there *is* a moral order, an absolute, but one that can never be party to a closed order of things. It is the balance between the open society and the closed society, a power play that is unceasing and that to a certain extent relies on the myth of rationality.

John Wetterson makes further observations about the problem of relativism in Gellner, and why his stance towards absolute norms is as nuanced as it is. He introduces Gellner as follows:

The philosophy of Ernest Gellner is widely known, yet no clear idea, whether true or false, of its place or significance has been identified. Gellner has a view of rationality which is difficult to come to grips with, even though his central problems (how and to what degree can we be rational?) are universally recognized as important. [...] (in Hall and Jarvie, 1996: 505).

Wetterson, under the heading “Two Types of Relativism” points out that:

Gellner criticizes harshly two patterns of choice of theory. The first are those who find internal justification for their theories, thus providing what Popper call [sic] a reinforced dogmatism. The second are those without standards, those who flit from without seriousness from view to view. Both these mistakes are examples of the same underlying mistake. This is to presume that there are no external standards for theories. As a result some theorists believe anything and some believe that internal justification is sufficient. Internal justification is a circular process of self-justification. One part of a doctrine justifies another which in turn justifies another until a circle is achieved. From inside the circle everything is justified. [...] Gellner reserves his highest praise for Collingwood. The grounds for the praise are that Collingwood recognizes that thought is culture-dependent. But he does not, on this account, fall into relativism. This is a feat which Gellner would like to repeat. Gellner does not claim that Collingwood has a solution to the problem. Instead he praises Collingwood for adopting a theory very much like Wittgenstein’s [and one has seen what Gellner thinks of Wittgenstein...] theory of the forms of life, but not like Wittgenstein, turning to relativism. It is not that relativism is a consequence of doctrine, but rather that it itself is an unacceptable view. Gellner’s analysis of the problem leaves us with a view which by its own logic easily leads to relativism. But Gellner thinks the logic of relativism, though easy to fall into, should be avoided – even if we have no prescription for how to avoid it (*Ibid.*:505-506).

What one has here is another view on Gellner's rejection of relativism. The search for knowledge and truth – while being culturally determined for Gellner – does not necessarily lead to the abyss of relativism. This brings us back to his essential argument that modernity is a once-off event, which has its origins in a particular socio-historical context and can be judged according to that context. Gellner takes this argument further and, as a corollary to his views on relativism, he defends, implicitly, the idea that absolutes do exist. This is important to our discussion of the three authors because they defy being “negatively endorsed”, being relegated to mere relativism. In other words, all three the novels hark towards an absolute set of values, an absolute sense of right and wrong.

Gellner (1994:54-5), referring to R.G. Collingwood, makes the following point:

Negative re-endorsement is academically far more fashionable than evolutionism, which has a rather nineteenth-century ring, or relativism, with which however it can be fused, and is indeed fused in the case of at least one very fashionable contemporary style of thought. That particular argument runs: because every language/culture carries its own distinction between that which is real and that which is not, and because no culture may rightly be judged by the norms of another, it follows that each and every culture is quite in order and that we may and must *qua* philosophers, endorse its beliefs, at least for its members. Philosophers do not usurp the role of judges of cultures and their faiths. No questions here are asked about fate and destiny of the culturally *déracinés*, notwithstanding the fact that in our time they may be more typical and numerous than those secure within the norms of some cultural island. This is a specimen of re-endorsement philosophy at its most blatant.

The ideological charms of negative re-endorsement are very considerable and help to account for its popularity. [...] Furthermore, as the negative re-endorsement possesses no overt, visible positive view, this has the great advantage that its substantive views, not being articulated, are not open to criticism. The task it sets itself is thus incomparably easier than that of systems of thought which remain squarely in the open.

The implications of Gellner's account here are layered. Besides being an invective against relativism, it is a critique of the fear of taking an absolutist stance; it is a plea for a coherent assessment of truth and universal validity. It is also a way of assessing the dangers in the discourse on modernity and its inability to cohabit with its inherent contradictions. What Gellner is in effect saying is that while modernity has traceable origins, this does not mean that

everything is an incoherent morass in which “anything goes”. Any idea can have validity as long as it can be measured by an identifiable matrix. Gellner would like that matrix to be rationality, but as Wetterson points out:

In order to meet Gellner’s challenge we need to form a unified theory of rationality which will explain how social standards of rationality can be rationally improved. Perhaps Gellner is right, there is as yet no clearly adequate theory (though there are candidates). Nevertheless it seems desirable to pursue such a theory. The pessimism Gellner advocates is certainly not required: if we have a choice it certainly seems better to avoid retrenchment and to pursue rationality and progress in whatever way our problems require, rather than to treat rationality as a social accident which we must seek to describe (in Hall and Jarvie, 1996:520).

Gellner thus illustrates the desire for a rationally arrived at matrix. This is preferable to sinking into dogmatism, or relativism, when seeking to grapple with modernity’s inconsistencies.

It is in this light, then, that the novelists provide the reader with compelling alternatives. Each of the writers does offer a matrix, peculiar to the world they have created in each of their novels. They do seek the transcendent, they do operate in an ethical paradigm and are not content to “relativise” the suffering and the tragedy of which their novels speak. The novels are attempts at creating an ethical framework for the very reason that in the world they described and inhabited such an ethical framework was not discernible. Hence the sense of *impasse*. It is the creation of an artistic narrative that allows for a deeper understanding and a complexity which philosophy on its own cannot render more accessible. However, Gellner aids the reader in identifying and examining the modern milieux which led to the *impasse* in the first place.

CHAPTER II: THE MODERNIST DILEMMA IN ROTH, BASSANI AND FAUCONNIER

The central question that this chapter poses is to what extent the three authors can be called Modernist? Arising out of this, in which respects do they differ as exponents of the Modernist genre?

The kaleidoscopic nature of modernity could perhaps be compared to a pack of playing cards: some modern societies might hold some of the cards, others might hold similar ones albeit in a different “hand”, but no modern society could ever hold “all” of the cards because the number of perceptible facets of modernity is infinite. (Spencer, 2008:48)

Modernism can be seen as a response to, and at the same time a symptom of, modernity. But it can also be seen as much else. Indeed the discussion on Modernism is so fraught, so complex, it is necessary to delineate at least some features of the approach and to place it in its historical context more fully and to examine certain features that arise out of Modernism, namely the questions of individuality and identity.

Among the many and varied definitions of Modernism, it has been seen as the *ideology* of modernity: “The Western ideology of modernity, which we can describe as Modernism [...]” (Touraine, 1995: 11). This definition has many permutations: Viennese Modernism is different to the Parisian, to Russian Modernism; Modernism has been grafted onto many different traditions and histories and so inevitably it is varied in its forms. Also at issue is how a reaction against a “Subject”-centred world was formulated, to use Touraine’s term.

The tension between the rational world and the world of the Subject, between Reason and subjectivity, is echoed by many critics, however disparate, and seems to lie at the core of any definition of Modernism:

[Modernism] replaced the idea of the Subject and the related idea of God, just as meditations on the soul were replaced by the dissection of corpses or the synapses of the brain (Touraine, 1995: 11).

The conflict between rationality and the inner self, and the conflict inherent in the individual who has to navigate through a changing world, are central preoccupations in the discussions on what Modernism is supposed to be, what it is as a phenomenon that has manifestations in all the arts. Modernism can be seen as a double-edged sword in that while it purports to liberate the individual from the superstitions of traditions and what one might call “metaphysical comfort zones”, it leaves the individual stranded to conjure up his or her own sense of meaning, without the solace of community, religion or whatever else one may see as a panacea for the modern individual. Le Rider makes the same point, with reference to the seminal works of Georg Simmel (1858-1918), when he says:

For myself I have laid stress on the crisis of the individual in modernity and its corollary, the identity crisis, and in a way I have reconnected with the analyses of Georg Simmel. Simmel showed how modern man, solely responsible for himself in the face of whatever values he may meet with, is in a state of permanent anxiety, “because the essence of the modern is psychologism, the experience and interpretation of the world according to the reaction of our inner selves, as if in an inner world; it is the dissolving of all stability in subjectivity” (Le Rider, 1993: 29).

What happens when the system, the tradition, the Subject is a political and social order sanctioned and legitimised by religion, as we have in the case of Viennese Modernism? This led, according to Le Rider, to an “identity crisis” (Le Rider, 1993: 17). Hence, the emphasis Le Rider places on what he terms “psychologism”, which takes us right into the heart of Viennese Modernism and to the likes of Joseph Roth, Arthur Schnitzler and many others for whom the question of identity is bound up with psychology, as a result of the anxiety induced by what is perceived to be a transient and precarious identity. The precariousness of Being is experienced socially, historically and linguistically. The latter manifestation, of course, found its major exponent in Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951). The identity crisis of which Le Rider speaks opens up the discussion of what constitutes the individual, and how the individual asserts himself or herself, bearing in mind that the notion of individuality is in itself inevitably a culturally mediated phenomenon. To clarify this aspect, one has to examine what psychology has to say on the subject, as Le Rider says above. The individual, chiselling away at a sense of self, of identity, does not grow up in a social and cultural vacuum. A process of socialisation is

inevitable, a *sine qua non* of being. And it is this aspect of Modernism that is particularly relevant in exploring the Modernism at work in the three authors.

The Hungarian author and critic, Sàndor Mài (1900-1989), takes an even broader view and sees the crisis of Modernism as the failure of the 20th-century middle classes to keep alive the Humanism characteristic of the Renaissance and the Reformation.

[...] the intellect had lost its exalted place and fundamental role in European culture during the twenty-five-year period after the First World War and that, by doing so, the middle class had rejected humanism [...] Europe's greatest gift to mankind's domain, for it produced the Renaissance and the Reformation, two climactic periods of intellectual change in the history of Western civilization. [...] only in Europe was humanism a living imperative shaping life, human destiny, intellectual attitudes and social responsibility (Mài, 2005: 9).

With this assertion, Mài takes the debate into another realm, and significantly would seem to concur with Le Rider, who takes the notion of civic responsibility as a foundation for the thinking behind Rousseau's belief in Reason.

Touraine then makes the following point in this regard:

Machiavelli's admiration for the struggle of the citizens of Florence against the Pope led him to formulate a new concept of politics: their love of their native city outweighed their fears for the salvation of their souls. That is why the Renaissance and subsequent centuries so readily turned to examples borrowed from Ancient Greece and Rome. Antiquity made a virtue of civic morality and recognized citizenship within a free *polis* as the supreme good (Touraine, 1995: 16).

So for Touraine, as for Mài, the concept of Modernism has antecedents that go much further back than merely the 19th and 20th century manifestations thereof. Modernism is thus not merely a reaction against metaphysical, pre-Kantian notions or against religion as such. Modernism is a response to the world as it has become, i.e. all too often a place without any coherence or possibility of human fulfilment. Like Mài, Touraine also brings in the notion of civic responsibility and makes use of Rousseau's refusal "to see divine revelation as the organizing principle behind society and replaces it with reason" (Touraine, 1995:17), to see Modernism as a debate that has to include the social order. Once one is in the realm of social order, one is in the realm of history, individuality, politics and ultimately, identity.

Touraine also examines the seemingly paradoxical nature of Rousseau's views and those of Max Weber (1864-1920), in his unravelling of the phenomenon of modernity and its attendant debates. Touraine says, for example, that "Rousseau argues the case for the absolute submission of the individual to the general will" (Touraine, 1993: 23). The point that Touraine emphasises is that society, according to Rousseau, is "a product of the will and natural, or in other words which ensures that [the] collectivity can commune with one another" (Touraine, 1993: 23).

Henri Meschonnic echoes both Touraine and Carl Emil Schorske (1915-) in saying:

[...] la modernité met à découvert ce qu'on ne comprend pas, et qu'on essaie de cacher par toutes les formes du savoir. C'est le heurt du moderne et du contemporain. Mais on n'a pas le même présent ni le même avenir selon qu'on a eu, ou non, la même histoire. On n'a pas le même langage. [...] Parce que la littérature – la poésie – est dans la langage ce qu'il y a de plus sensible aux pressions de l'époque, aux tensions du connu et de l'inconnu, du subjectif et du collectif, elle est ce qu'il y a de plus révélateur du langage et du social. De leurs pratiques, de leurs théories (Meschonnic, 1994:18). [Modernity uncovers that which one doesn't understand, and that which one tries to hide using the forms of knowledge. That is the conflict of what is modern and what is contemporary. But one doesn't have the same present nor the same future, according to whether one has had, or not, the same history. One doesn't have the same language. [...] Because literature – poetry – is in the language, language which is sensitive to the pressures of the era, to the tension, known or unknown, to that which is subjective and that which appertains to the collective. It is that which is most revealing of language and society. In their practices, in their theories (author's translation).]

That said, while Meschonnic here places the emphasis on language, Le Rider emphasises a more pathological aspect of Modernism as follows, moving from the more collectivist awareness shown by Mârai and Touraine to a discussion on the individualist aspects of Modernism: "According to George Gustdorf's definition, which applies equally to the 'neo-Romanticism' within Viennese modernism, the Romantic movement put the ego in a place of honour" (Le Rider, 1993: 46).

Le Rider goes on to explore the ideas of Otto Weininger (1880-1903) and the *Ich-Ereignis*. Le Rider emphasises as well the contribution to psychology by Ernst Mach (1838-1916), saying:

The importance of Mach's psychology for Viennese modernism has often been studied. [...] I shall rather be emphasizing the *reaction* to Mach, not only in Weininger (who most clearly shows the need to outdo Mach), but also in Hofmannsthal, and later in Musil. [...] For the

intellectuals of Young Vienna [...] Mach's neo-empiricism was a symptom of the cultural crisis which Hermann Broch summed up in his great essay on 'Hofmannsthal and his Times': 'Vienna was the centre of the vacuum of European values' (Le Rider, 1993: 47 [Le Rider's italics]).

This theme of a *Wertevakuum* according to Le Rider, Broch sees as the "reign of the sceptical rationalism which set scientific and technical research at the pinnacle of cultural values. It was a depressingly banal insistence on the primacy of scientific knowledge" (Le Rider, 1993: 47).

The reaction to this utilitarian approach to life is found in the notion of heightened individualism (as we find it, for example, in Otto Weininger (1880-1903) and Carlo Michelstaedter (1887-1910)) in whose works the ideas of the mystic, the genius and the narcissist become intertwined. Le Rider devotes much of his analysis to this cultivation of the self, thus providing a spectrum of the dizzying forms that Viennese Modernism acquired and generated.

In the novels being examined one can see how all these aspects apply to varying degrees to Roth, Bassani and Fauconnier. Touraine emphasises, too, that neither Kant nor Rousseau sees the quest for happiness as a virtue in itself. Rousseau, like Kant, Touraine avers, wants to unify reason and the will, to defend a freedom which is not so much a revolt against the social order as a submission to the *natural* order (italics author's). This is an important point as far as the three authors are concerned, because one sees the transformation from a rigid social order and political order in *Radetzky* and *Gli occhiali d'oro*, while in *Malaisie*, the modernity that he reflects, and the Modernism of which he is an example, conform more to the restoration of Rousseau's notion of a natural order.

Significantly, Touraine sees modernity as follows:

This is the central principle behind the 'illuminist' conception of what has yet to be called modernity, but which must be retrospectively known by that name. It is not a philosophy of progress, but almost its antithesis, namely a philosophy of order which combines classical and Christian thought. It can be seen as a break with tradition or as a secular mode of thought which destroys the sacred world, but at a deeper level, it must be seen as a new and powerful attempt to preserve, with a culture that has been secularized, *the unity of man and the universe* (1993:23) (Touraine's italics).

One notes above that Touraine does not see the philosophy behind modernity as necessarily one of progress and when it comes to more conventional uses of the term Modernism – the rupture between the individual and the world outside the individual – Rousseau’s view, according to Touraine, is in effect one of trying to prevent social and hence individual disintegration, a hallmark of modernist writing. The rise of the individual, and the demise of communitarian systems of thought, hold a great danger, and this is what Rousseau perceives. Of course, Rousseau could not predict the forms that modernity would assume in the 20th century.

Meschonnic puts the debate succinctly when he says:

C’est qu’on prend encore le nouveau, le dernier nouveau, pour le moderne. La modernité est la vie. La faculté de présent. Ce qui fait des inventions du penser, du sentir, du voir, d’l’entendre, l’invention de formes de vie (Meschonnic, 1994 :13). [That which one accepts as being new, that which is the latest, as modern. Modernity is life. It is the faculty of the present. That which creates inventions in thought, in ways of hearing, in ways of seeing, understanding, in the invention of forms of life (author’s translation).]

Gellner explores this as well, relying heavily on Max Weber as well as on Schorske, and reveals a more ventilated approach to the debate in which historical events and the reaction to them are given primacy.

Gellner makes the distinction between what he calls “the village green” (Gellner, 1998: 35) and the “Café Central of Vienna”, i.e. the perceived unity of man and the universe/religion and/or whatever else is deemed sacred being the “village green”. The distance from the certainty that the “village green” represents is the Café Central of Vienna. In other words, the café represents the cosmopolitanism, Jewishness, liberalism, the loosening links to ethnic origins and all that which is *völkisch*. The Café Central represents, in Gellner’s idiosyncratic terms, Modernism itself, reacting against the “village green” and the “village green” in turn reacting against the godless cosmopolitanism, against Vienna. *Blut und Boden*, the term favoured by the Nazis to encapsulate German ethnocentrism, reflects this rupture with cosmopolitanism, i.e. a byword for Jewishness as well. Broadly speaking, this is how Gellner unravels the origins of anti-

Semitism (Gellner, 1998: 35 et seq.) which, besides being pertinent to two of the novels under discussion, can arguably be viewed as a corollary of European modernity. Hence the fact that major exponents of modernity and Modernism were Jewish should not be surprising given their situation, that of standing on the outside looking in, while at the same time being at the centre of not only Viennese Modernism.¹¹

The great *ideological* confrontation was between the closed, cosy Community and the open, icy, individualist Society. In certain parts of the world, notably the region which concerns us¹², it pervaded both politics and general sensibility (Gellner, 1998: 37 et seq. [Gellner's italics])

From Meschonnic to Gellner, from Schorske to Touraine, this duality, this tension between the subject and the outside world, between the individual and the collective recurs in the varied analyses of Modernism.

The disjuncture, which Rousseau feared and which Touraine expresses, is given the following interpretation by Gellner when it comes to the rôle played by Viennese Modernism:

[...] the new men who had risen by their own efforts were naturally drawn to liberalism, especially as their own social acceptance and recognition was partial, vacillating and ambivalent. They had good cause to fear both the exclusiveness and the communalistic leanings of the new nationalisms. They had every reason to wish the Empire, precluded by its ethnic pluralism from becoming ethno-chauvinistic, to remain in existence and to move in the direction of an open, non-ethnic state and society of *individuals*.[...] their penchant for individualism may have been strengthened by the constant inflow into Vienna of new migrants from the provinces, provocative by their non-assimilation (as yet), and reminding their predecessors in the move to the centre of the fact that they hadn't been there all that long and that their acceptance was not wholehearted or beyond challenge. The new migrants not only were not yet assimilated, they had a stronger sense of kin collectivity and did not exemplify real individualism, thereby aggravating the offence of their existence (Gellner, 1998: 35, (author's italics))³.

¹¹ Marx, Freud, Svevo, Wittgenstein, Weininger, Kraus, Schnitzler, Michelstaedter, Proust, Roth, Bassani were Jewish, and for the greater part secularly so. Of course exponents of Modernism were not only Jewish, for example, Musil, Mann, Joyce, Pirandello, to mention but a few, but the preponderance of Jewish exponents is noteworthy.

¹² Gellner is here referring to the Habsburg Empire, and the quote is taken from the last book he wrote before his death in 1995, namely *Language and Solitude – Wittgenstein, Malinowski and the Habsburg Dilemma*. In giving his work this title he encapsulates the origins and symptoms of modernity and, by extension, of Modernism.

The point Gellner makes here is pertinent to the discussion in that he roots the notion of the history of ideas in history itself, whereas Touraine seems to content himself with the history of ideas as such, as distinct. Gellner presents historical and sociological reasons why certain notions of individuality gained currency and why Vienna was particularly prone to the challenges that modernity represented and thus there emerged a particular strain of Modernism in that milieu.

With the world around them being so contested, it seems little wonder that refuge was sought in an extreme individualism, which is found in the likes of Weininger, Michelstaedter and Wittgenstein.

Touraine, however, takes the discussion further, as does Gellner, towards Weber and makes the links between religious conviction and how this may be seen to have contributed to modernity (and hence Modernism) and not necessarily to have been a force *against* modernity and Modernism:

Does a given faith encourage the appearance of a particular form of economic activity? How can we accept such a paradox, given that the religious spirit, as transformed and revived by the Reformation, is indeed a worldly asceticism resulting in a detachment from worldly goods and that it is difficult to reconcile this with a life devoted to work, trade and profit? [...] The essential factor is not, it would appear, faith, and therefore a religious culture, but the breakdown of the social bonds imposed by the fear of being judged by a hidden God (Touraine, 1993:25).

Touraine goes on to point out:

Weber himself had a tragic awareness of the impasse facing modern society trapped into instrumental rationality, devoid of meaning and constantly set in motion by charismatic action and therefore by an ethics of conviction (*Gesinnung*) that modernity seeks to eliminate in favour of legal authority and an ethics of responsibility (*Verantwortung*) (1993: 28)..

Touraine offers a further definition of modernity, which again applies in varying degrees to the novels under discussion:

Modern societies [...] reject both the individual and the sacred in favour of a self-generating, self-controlled and self-regulating social system. There thus emerges a conception of modernity which actively eliminates the idea of Subject (1993: 29).

In each of these three quotes Touraine intertwines and alludes to the various factors that lead inevitably to a hegemony of individuality, not necessarily of individualism, and the consequent quest for identity, as something non-transmutable. If the ideas around what constitutes society are in such flux, over and above specific events and social and political upheavals, it stands to reason that notions of what constitutes individuality are similarly subject to inconsistencies. In other words, identity itself is subject to a bewildering array of interpretations and ways of being constructed.

2.1 Individuality, Identity and Selfhood

Put another way, with the rise of individuality and the supposed freedoms this confers on the individual, one simultaneously one has to grapple with the question of identity. Mark Freeman takes the discussion of identity as far back at St Augustine (November 13, 354 – August 28, 430).

In addition to rewriting the self on the plane of personal experience, it has been suggested that Augustine is partly responsible for rewriting the very meaning of selfhood itself (Freeman, 1993: 25).

He goes on to point out that:

[...] despite the fact that a *sense* of self – qua psychophysical entity, set apart from the outer world – may plausibly be considered a universal phenomenon (at least for those who have developed beyond the sensorimotor stage, primary narcissism, symbiosis, whatever we wish to call it), there is ample evidence to suggest that the *concept* of the self is very much relative to time and place (Freeman, 1993: 27).

This observation allows us to acknowledge that the ideas of self which we encounter in each of the three novels under discussion must be seen in their respective contexts, and the myriad variations that the three contexts offer, namely the erstwhile Austro-Hungarian Empire (taking on in its final form in 1867 and ending in 1918), Fascist Italy (1922-1943) and colonial Malaya (1880-1942, 1945-1957). The dates themselves indicate the times in which the novels were set, not necessarily the times when the novels were written, a fact which is in itself bound up with

the question of memory and sense of self, as a component of “selfhood”, of the creation of the self.

Touraine instead places the emphasis on the tension between Reason and Subject, between what he terms rationalization and “subjectivation”. What Freeman calls the “mysteries of interior life” Touraine would term the Subject, allowing for the interaction between the Subject and the world outside of the self, which is infinitely variable, but discernible. Touraine stresses as well that

[...] Modernity destroys the sacred world, which was once natural and divine, transparent to Reason and created. It did not replace it with the world of reason and secularization or relegate final ends to a world that human beings could no longer attain; it introduced a divorce between a *Subject* which came down from heaven to earth and was humanized, and a world of objects manipulated by *techniques*. It replaced the unity of the world created by divine will, Reason or History, with the duality of *rationalization* and *subjectivation* (1993: 4 [Touraine’s italics]).

Other writers explore the occurrence of modernity and the attendant feature of Modernism and couch the debate more in terms of how the individual comes to terms with a bottomless pit of meaninglessness, or meaning being definable only in cultural terms, proscribed by a given set of circumstances, cultural, historical and linguistic circumstances. Here one is reminded again of Wittgenstein, Weininger and Michelstaedter amongst others, who explore the effect of modernity on the individual, within the broader societal phenomena of modernity. What these writers explore is also representative to varying degrees of Viennese Modernism: it is the crushing dilemma of identity and its effects on the individual within a world relativised by competing value systems, or contradictory value systems (see Schorske below).

Naturally this dilemma has psychological ramifications. The duality referred to previously is aptly illustrated in Robert Musil’s *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß* published in 1906. Musil was an ardent student of Freud and Mach, and this tension between reason and subjectivity is central to his novel, while his *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* amply explores a sense of loss of a fixed identity.

In Viennese Modernism the Jewish question is of particular significance in that Jewishness confers an identity, but one which is not defined geographically. This aspect is of particular

relevance in both *Radetzkmarsch*, whose author was a Jewish subject of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, proudly Galician¹³ and lived through the marginalisation that Jews experienced, while at the same time aspiring to the kind of cosmopolitanism referred to above. This cosmopolitanism can also be seen as a way of minimising the effects and significance of the conveniently fixed identities enjoyed by Czechs, Hungarians and others in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This would explain the loyalty – referred to often in *Radetzkmarsch* – shown by Jews towards the Emperor, a father figure for all the inhabitants of the Empire. This cosmopolitanism also manifests itself as political liberalism, a school of thought antithetical to ethnocentrism.

This is another way of saying what Gellner had said previously. In other words, an historical situation can arise where the individual places more faith in something transcendent, in an overarching sense of meaning. This is so especially when the individual feels at odds with a given political or social order in which he finds himself, or a social order that is deemed unfair, unreliable or precarious, as is the case in all three novels under discussion. Or, as one sees in *Gli occhiali d'oro*, the subject is nominally loyal to his society, but that loyalty is betrayed. In *Radetzkmarsch* one has a protagonist who is also betrayed by society, by the political order, but only belatedly realises that he is betrayed by that society and the political order. In *Malaisie* the protagonist is an end in himself, having rejected his society and the political order from which he hails.

The individual's sense of self is bound up with the surrounding milieu. When that surrounding milieu is in any way precarious or inimical to the individual, it can be argued, the individual is in crisis and consequently suffers a crisis of identity. The sense of self no longer finds an echo; there is no mirror in what surrounds him or her.

Turned on himself or herself, the individual can be said to look at history, memory and narrative as components for the creation of selfhood, and hence these need to be explored. This situation is not unlike the one St Augustine refers to, as Freeman describes:

¹³ See Wolf, Larry, *The Idea of Galicia – History and Fantasy in Habsburg Political Culture*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010

Augustine's text, by virtue of being a seeing-the-light story, is also very much about development, colloquially understood; he is revealing his own transformation from what he considered an inferior state of being to a better one. In this sense, again, the arrow of time seems to be moving forward, into the future (Freeman, 1993:20).

This is significant, because in the three novels under discussion the "arrow of time" bumps into a brick wall, the protagonists are seen as being at odds with their respective societies, and like St Augustine, each protagonist is seen as having undergone a process of transformation, from an unaware (Freeman says "inferior") state of being to a "better" one; or rather, in the case of the three novels, not a better state of being but one that is less sanguine about the human condition and the prospects of a better future, or of any future at all. The faith-driven optimism of St Augustine comes across as inverted in the modernist idiom. But the narrative element is there, obviously. The telling of one's story, one's *Ich-Ereignis*, based on history and memory, especially in *Radetzky* and *Gli occhiali d'oro*, is an integral part of searching for and defining an identity. The struggle for identity and its definition are woven into the three narratives, either as elements to be explored (Roth, Bassani) or reacted against as in the case of Fauconnier, whose protagonists can be said to be reacting against a too narrowly defined identity imposed on them by his home culture.

As regards identity, Gellner discusses this tension between ethnocentric identity and liberal individuality. His definition sheds light not only on *Radetzky* and *Gli occhiali d'oro*, but also on the limitations of modernity and individualism, and Wittgenstein's philosophy of language in particular, which can be seen as a high point in the articulation of individuality. While Wittgenstein would concentrate on language and individuality, Gellner addresses the extraneous factors which cause individuality, and hence identity, to be inevitably problematic and prone to infinite conjecture. In his seminal 1959 work, *Words and Things*, Gellner discusses modern thought as follows:

Modern thought does not live in a vacuum. It faces certain pervasive problems [...] (1) the problem of validation; the problem of enchantment [...] (3) the issue of its own professionalisation. [...] Liberalism and individualism have aggravated the problem. It is widely felt that every individual should take responsibility for the norms and standards which govern his activities. It seems somewhat shameful for him to pass the buck. So if he relies on some putative external proof or authority, he is guilty of *mauvais foi* or of abdicating his free choice or

whatever. If, on the other hand, no such proof is available or he makes no use of it, is he not guilty of caprice? You cannot win.

There are obvious features of our social and intellectual climate which underscore this problem. If a society has a homogeneous world picture, underwritten by both political and clerical authority, answers to terminal questions are built into that very picture. For a variety of familiar reasons there is no such picture now and, in liberal states, no one enforces it (Gellner, (1959), 1979: 3).

Here Gellner neatly encapsulates the dilemma of memory, meaning, identity and individuality. He points out that they are all interlinked, and are addressed as such by the very fact that the world in which we live requires a definition of the values which inform existence. The fact that nation states and value systems are rapidly becoming less homogeneous requires the individual to be liberal and individualist; the inability to adapt to this reality would, in Gellner's terms, be regressive. In other words, when the individual clings to a value system that is based on a non-existent cohesion of the world, he has no choice but to turn inward. Out of this inability to embrace the world "as it is", i.e. to be modern, according to Meschonnic's definition, the individual is isolated and prone to any number of pathologies. In turn, the pathologies of society can be said to be reflected in the individual. It is in this regard, too, that Jewishness became problematic in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and why Viennese Modernism has a particular stamp, the Secession movement, because it was clinging onto a past as well as being avant-garde; Jews did not get affirmation from a clerical hegemony, as Catholics would have in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Politically they found themselves having to support an outmoded form of government, namely the figure of the emperor, because he represented the only guarantee they had against the ethnocentric political movements that threatened them. It is therefore not surprising that much of the thought around individuality and identity is closely linked to Viennese Jewishness in that the Jews of Vienna had a reason to be liberal, while living the contradiction of being politically aligned to a high feudal monarchy.

Where Wittgenstein might have sought solace for this dilemma in his discourses on language, as a way of distilling oneself through language from the impasse of being, Gellner maintains that the question is far more complex than the way Wittgenstein sees it.

Gellner further defines the question of modernity as follows, and adds much to an understanding of individuality, whether that individuality is gained or lost. Gellner also unflatteringly reduces identity and the struggle for it in rather flippant terms when he says:

The problem is simple. Modern man is (a) numerous, (b) habituated to and greedy for comfort and affluence. He can only be maintained in the style to which he wishes to be accustomed at the price of abstract science, powerful technology and large-scale organisation. These jointly presuppose, in turn, a certain way of organising both our concepts and our institutions: they require regular, orderly explanatory schemata and conduct. These in turn destroy warmth, idiosyncrasy, individualism, magic, enchantment. These lost traits of course survived in our speech from the past, but the confidence had gone out of them. They are to a real enchantment as filling Xmas stockings is to a real faith-pervaded world (Gellner, (1959), 1979: 12).

Here one notes besides much else that Gellner in his own inimitable fashion is saying something that is not much different to what Touraine and others have said. The organising principle, the loss of individualism (as opposed to individuality – which one can assert is a *sine qua non* in a Western, liberal democratic context) is what Touraine refers to in his treatment of Rousseau and modernity. One need only compare what Gellner says above (and what Márai says earlier with reference to anti-humanism) and what Touraine says here below to see that there is indeed some confluence of thought on the subject:

The triumph of modernity meant the suppression of eternal principles, the elimination of all essences and of artificial entities such as the Ego and cultures in favour of a scientific understanding of bio-psychological mechanisms and of the unwritten and impersonal rules that govern the exchange of commodities, words and women. Structuralist thought was to radicalize this functionalism, and to take to extremes the elimination of the subject. Modernism is anti-humanism, because it is well aware that the idea of man is bound up with the idea of the soul, which necessarily implies the idea of God. The rejection of all revelation and of all moral principles creates a vacuum which is filled by the idea of society, or in other words of social utility. Human beings are no more than citizens. Charity becomes solidarity, and conscience comes to mean respect for the law. Jurists and administrators replace prophets (Touraine, 1993: 30).

What Gellner calls warmth, magic or enchantment can be contrasted with the “elimination of the subject” in Touraine. The anti-humanism of which Touraine speaks echoes the sense of loss Gellner expresses about individualism and the spontaneity of being. Again, here in Touraine we have the idea of a “vacuum”, which Touraine asserts is filled by the potentially dangerous idea of “society”. This comparison takes us back to Sándor Márai’s assertion earlier that it is the

Humanistic tradition (as exemplified by the Renaissance and the Reformation) that has been undermined by modernity. In other words, the very things that purport to liberate mankind, enslave mankind.¹⁴ An unsustainable paradox, in short. The master or godhead being the only

¹⁴ Janik and Toulmin, in their study of Wittgenstein's Vienna corroborate this idea of paradox. The ethical dimension of the confusion that characterised Viennese Modernism, they point out, was well captured by Karl Kraus who in turn relied heavily on the Danish philosopher, Kierkegaard:

Kraus, like Kierkegaard, knew all too well that ethics is not a science of morality, not a branch of knowledge like geometry or chemistry. Ethics has nothing to do with facts. Its basis is the subjectivity of conviction, and its sphere is not that of science but that of the paradoxical. Kraus further agreed with Kierkegaard that the unity of form and content in a work of art was absolutely essential. Aesthetic form and ethical content are two faces of the same coin. Only the good man knows what values are, and only he can communicate them. No amount of scientific knowledge can make a man good (Janik, Allan and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1973: 179).

This aspect is significant in that it points to the duality inherent in modernity, in Vienna's modernist circles – rampant individualism contrasted with the yearning for the “collective”. The inherent paradox which is explored by Viennese modernists is this unbridgeable dilemma between “the centre and the periphery”, (Scott Spector, “Beyond the Aesthetic Garden: Politics and Culture on the Margins of Fin-de-Siècle Vienna”, in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol.59, No 4. (October 1998), pp. 691-710) between the inner self and the world outside the self and hence an anxiety-ridden quest for identity. Amid a triumphalist Positivism, ethical questions require a response. It is this aspect which makes Viennese Modernism such an acute engagement with Being, over and above the political and cultural conflicts and tensions which characterised the period and the place. Janik and Toulmin address this ethical dimension further:

Despite all the differences between the resulting attitudes toward morality – Kierkegaard's being purely individualist, Tolstoy's collective – they were at any rate alike in strictly rejecting all attempts to give morality “intellectual foundations” in the world of facts – whether in the accepted codes of conventional morals or elsewhere. [...] In this aspect, all the men involved in this development had a natural appeal to a generation of Viennese thinkers, artists and social critics who found themselves, as a class, alienated from the values of the society in which they lived (Janik and Toulmin, 1973: 164).

This dualism, this paradox, of being liberated only to be enslaved on a more intimate, psychological, existential and linguistic level lies at the heart of Viennese Modernism. As we see in Roth, the form (the outside world) is constantly contrasted with the inner world of the protagonist, Carl Joseph. This dichotomy is echoed in the works of a host of writers, already referred to. The impasse for Roth, and other writers of Viennese Modernism, lies in this inability to reconcile what Touraine calls the Subject (as others do) and the outside world, i.e. society. This is what Gellner refers to when contrasting the “village green” to the Café Central, on a societal level, or Community vs. Society. The paradoxes of society, the inconsistencies of society are reflected in the individual and therein lies the pain of identity and the dilemma of language, or what Gellner calls the Habsburg Dilemma. The Habsburg Dilemma is Modernism's dilemma, i.e. a dilemma that goes beyond time and space.

difference. What could be seen as the tyranny of religion has been replaced by a tyranny of science and the consequent dehumanisation brought about the scientific or utilitarian organisation of society for material gain, for Gellner's modern man who has become "habituated to and greedy for comfort".

This brings us back to the contradictory, paradoxical nature of modernity and modern man. The Westerner lives the contradiction of being liberated from the tyranny of all that which is transcendent. But the product he has created has also created a psychological enslavement no different from that which he purports to have liberated himself from, namely a code of conduct and morals bestowed on him by a culturally homogeneous milieu. The Viennese Jew's dilemma is replicated; the Viennese Jew presaged and exemplified the dilemma of modernity. In his seminal work on *fin de siècle* Vienna, Carl Schorske makes the point that where society is a chaos of conflicting values and orientations, the general result is a "value vacuum" (Schorske, 1979: 13). Analysing Arthur Schnitzler's *Der Weg ins Freie* Schorske says:

The incapacity for commitment paralyzes Wergenthin's existence. He dwells in the sterile marchlands of the conscious life: between work and play, between affirmation and negation of his inner drives, between flirtation and love, between aristocratic wisdom and bourgeois rationality (Schorske, 1979: 13).

Schnitzler's Wergenthin bears many similarities to Roth's Carl Joseph, but significantly, not to the first-person narrator in *Gli occhiali d'oro*, although other aspects of Schorske's analysis of Viennese Modernism and the Jewish role therein are pertinent to both novels. With the crisis of identity and individualism well identified by Schorske, the next step would be the psychological aspect and the political impact of a certain psychological predisposition that characterised, according to Schorske, the liberal middle classes of Vienna.

But speaking more broadly again, a very significant point that Schorske makes is that in his view "morality and the dynamics of both instinct and history are incompatible" (Schorske, 1979:14). In effect, Schorske's analysis reveals a Vienna as a kind of vortex, a confluence of the psychological, political and historical forces of the day, rendered all the more urgent by the pressing social and ethnic tensions in the Habsburg Empire.

The precariousness, the confusion and tension of the socio-historical situation in Vienna would seem inevitably to lead to this emphasis on the individual, on identity and consequently to an exploration by Viennese thinkers of psychology and language as such.

Gellner again puts the dilemma of modernity – and hence Modernism, the ideology of modernity – more colourfully when he says:

Philosophy in free modern societies operates under terms of reference which are difficult if not downright absurd. Once upon a time it was not so. When there was a recognised final Authority and intellectual court of appeal, the professional thinker could perform a useful function, and he could do so with dignity – especially if the authoritative truths were available in a Holy Writ, and literacy, which gave access to it was a specialist accomplishment which he did not share with all and sundry. Surrogate final sources of truth have since been sought – the Inner Light of Reason, Experience, History, Nature – but unfortunately these ladies do not speak with a clear, single or unambiguous voice (Gellner, (1959), 1979:13).

While one can accuse Gellner of being reductive and elitist in this assertion, he again encapsulates the confusion, intellectual as well as psychological, that besets modernity and consequently the notions of identity and individuality which arise out of modernity and its noxious yet unavoidable relativism.

Giving a necessary distance from the questions, while not undervaluing their significance and pertinence, the dilemma of certainty, of fixed identities and individuality is ever pertinent.

The questions are still there, but the answers have gone. There are various further well-known features of our scene which aggravate the situation. Universal literacy and egalitarian liberalism deprive the thinker of any right to claim special insights. Substantive knowledge of nature is on the skids – it is now recognised that the findings of science are transient, and thus the most prestigious form of knowledge is also at the same time highly unstable and thereby, so to speak, sets a bad example for all those who understandably seek reliable and permanent solutions. The sheer quantity, specialisation and technicality of a great deal of knowledge makes synoptic visions difficult or impossible. Yet the general questions will not go away (Gellner, (1959), 1979:13).

One can see thus that questions of what constitutes identity, individuality, memory, history and the like – modernity in short – cannot be seen in isolation from the flux of human activities. Identity is as unstable as anything else, and yet certainty, stability of some kind, remains an elusive prerequisite for the sustainability of the individual.

Wittgenstein's attempt to establish certainty through the rigid application of logic in all spheres of life, to establish a certainty in a world where no certainty exists, is severely critiqued by Gellner who emphasises the need for what he calls "enchantment", i.e. a way of making life bearable amidst its inherent uncertainty. Gellner sees no solution in Wittgenstein's philosophy of language, inasmuch as Wittgenstein purports to provide a certainty where none inherently exists. Gellner decries Wittgenstein's solution as consisting of "pretending that history does not exist" (Gellner, (1959),1979: 25). Clearly, when it comes to the novels under discussion, history is central and the peculiarities of each of the novels have to be given their respective weight. However, Gellner's critique of Wittgenstein's "solution" to uncertainty goes further, and is worth noting in that it illustrates the extent of the debate of modernity and Modernism, and how it has to involve a multitude of disciplines and how these disciplines relate to identity and being. It is also clear that one has to venture into the realm of philosophy:

But the incredibly radical intellectual and social changes of the past three centuries have *not* left everything "as it is". Philosophy is the attempt to understand, codify and evaluate these changes. It is of course true that the notions of daily life are functional, they work, more or less, in the context of daily life. If their here-and-now functional adequacy constitutes validity, they are, in that sense, valid. But in fact they have a mass of far-reaching assumptions built in, whose validity is in no way automatically established or sustained by the practical viability of the life styles within which they occur. The connected problem of enchantment similarly cannot be solved in this manner. The two problems are connected because it is precisely the establishment of an impersonal, symmetrical world, subject to general explanations, which makes "disenchantment" acute. The problem of the validity of science and its vision is largely the problem of establishing reasons for *accepting* that impersonal picture; whereas the problem of enchantment is getting out of it once again, of finding limits to it which would enable us to retain a little humanity, and *escape* impersonality. The Wittgenstein crystallisation provided just this – but in an appallingly cheap, facile and invalid way (Gellner, (1959), 1979: 25 (Gellner's italics)).

Here Gellner is grappling overtly with the problem of modernity, allowing for the inclusion of history, of the distinguishing features in various societies and epochs, all of which cannot be contained by what he has termed "surrogate final sources of truth" – as he accuses Wittgenstein, by implication, of trying to effect.

Turning to the specialisation that Gellner speaks of, in the purely psychological realm, the question of identity is explored by Constantine Sedikides and Marilyn Brewer. One has to accept as well that psychology can but be an approximation in its aspirations to verisimilitude.

In literature psychology has been parodied by writers such as Italo Svevo in his *La coscienza di Zeno*, to mention but one example.

In discussing the central question of identity, Sedikides and Brewer assert that:

[...] the self concept consists of three fundamental self-representations of the individual self, the relational self, and the collective self. Stated otherwise, persons seek to achieve self-definition and self-interpretation (i.e. identity) in three fundamental ways: (a) in terms of their unique traits, (b) in terms of dyadic relationships, and (c) in terms of group membership (Sedikides, Constantine and Marilyn Brewer, 2001: 1).

These definitions would at first sight appear to be quite self-explanatory and the authors go into detail as to the distinguishing features of each form of identity.

However, instead of exploring the psychological ramifications of the scientific definitions of identity and selfhood, the above quotation provides a point of departure in examining the way the protagonists of the three novels under discussion relate to themselves, to the “relational self” (dyadic relationships) and to the group, i.e. collective self. Applying this framework to the three novels is illuminating in that it opens a further space for trying to understand the psychological make-up of the characters, and how the impasse with the world as they experience it comes to the fore. What are the factors in modernity, in other words, that militate against fulfilment and to what extent are the factors purely psychological and to what extent attributable entirely to historical and political circumstances? It is in this vein that one can approach the texts by Roth, Bassani and Fauconnier.

2.2 Modernism: A case study of Joseph Roth’s *Radetzky*, Giorgio Bassani’s *Gli occhiali d’oro* and Henri Fauconnier’s *Malaisie* as literature of impasse

[W]e should be suspicious of all ideas and conceptual frameworks that promise final emancipation (Foucault, 1984) (cited by Kevin Ryan in Malesevic and Haugaard, 2007: 227).

Ihab Hassan¹⁵ asserts that the features of modernist texts – as far as these are readily discernible – are different from those that are called post-modern. He places the emphasis on the adherence in Modernism to form, purpose, design, hierarchy and a narrative coherence that would in turn include “lisibility” as opposed to “scriptibility” and he makes use of terms such as “centering” and suggests that hierarchy is a feature of Modernism, as opposed to anarchy in post-Modernism. Hassan also makes a distinction between the “signified” in modernist texts and the “signifier” in post-modern texts. That said, it behoves one to examine to what extent Joseph Roth’s *Radetzkymarsch* is indeed a modernist text.

Radetzkymarsch conforms to Hassan’s definition of Modernism as far as form is concerned. Roth’s novel does have a traceable narrative. It conforms to the *Bildungsroman* genre and is “closed” in that its author has created a self-contained world, with its own structures, norms and values through which the main character, Carl Joseph, has to navigate. As far as “purpose” is concerned, the purpose in Roth’s novel is relatively clear: it is a novel that is an attempt to come to terms with a radically changed world order and an elegiac, nostalgic style and form serve his purposes. The novel is also redolent with notions of “hierarchy” as per Hassan’s formula, even in the undermining of hierarchy.

The social hierarchy of the Habsburg Empire is shown to be undermined and rickety at best, relying on form because it has no content.¹⁶ But there is also an aesthetic hierarchy; in other

¹⁵ Hassan, Ihab, *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Towards a Post-modern Literature*, 2ed., Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982, p. 267.

¹⁶ There is a remarkable coincidence between *Radetzkymarsch* and the novel by Hungarian novelist Péter Dobai, (*A Birodalom Ezredese*, Budapest: Magvető Könyvkiadó, 1985). First published in Hungary in 1985, it was translated into German as *Oberst Redl – Roman über die Donaumonarchie* [Colonel Redl – Novel about the Danube Monarchy] in 1990 by Aufbau Verlag, Berlin and Weimar, and translated by Dorothea Koriath and jointly published by Corvina, Budapest. Besides being based on a documented incident, the Redl Affair, it is also referred to in Janik and Toulmin’s *Wittgenstein’s Vienna*, (pp. 61-2, et seq). The novel is significant for two reasons: it also has a protagonist who tries to fit in, and survives in the Habsburg Empire as an officer, namely one Colonel Redl. A victim of intrigue and envy, his homosexuality is used to discredit him. The point is that the protagonist in this novel firmly believes in the Habsburg myth; he knows it’s a myth and that the only thing that keeps the empire in place is the myth, or the form. The empire has no substance, no legitimacy. This is ultimately what Roth is also saying. Like Carl Joseph in *Radetzkymarsch*, in *Oberst Redl* the protagonist, Colonel Redl, is also betrayed by the myth. He has

words, the need to write a clear narrative which contains within it a clear sense of an ideal by illustrating the degree to which the main characters fall short of the ideal. The novel reflects an unerring yearning for order, by illustrating how that order is being undermined from within the social and political structures of the empire itself. The author clearly has a sense of what he deems to be right, and what he deems to be wrong and unjust. In other words, there is a sense that a set of absolutes, in terms of values, has not been attained. But the notion of absolutes does exist.

While Schorske and others speak of the individualisation of values, in *Radetzky* one has the illustration of ineptitude and the lack of qualities in the individual to be equal to the demands made of the individual and the attendant lack of a believable system of values. Roth's narrative echoes this through devices such as irony, character descriptions and an awareness that value lies not in the outward manifestations of authority but in human qualities. A most notable example of this is where Onufrij, Carl Joseph's batman, digs up his buried savings to give to his officer so as to help the latter pay his gambling debts. This is but one example. So yes, Roth's novel does contain hierarchies, be they normative, aesthetic or social. This is not, as mentioned, so as to necessarily endorse the hierarchies he portrays in the novel, but the notion of hierarchy is there, of *Ordnung* – of a universal ideal.

shown loyalty to that society, but received none in return. The second reason for the significance of the novel, that while published many years later than Roth's novel, namely in 1985 compared to 1932, and under a Communist regime, it has the same elegiac quality, and is a modernist novel in form, while being written and published long after some would call the demise of Modernism. It is again a study in politics, in the dismemberment of a political order and of the vacuum of values, (*Wertevakuum*) referred to earlier by Le Rider.) Dobai's novel conforms in every aspect to Hassan's definition of Modernism, and echoes the traits of Viennese Modernism as discussed earlier, all this despite it being written much later. The question thus arises as to how useful the distinction is between Modernism and post-Modernism if the modernist form is returned to so long after the demise of "classic Modernism". The same problem arises with Bassani, where his novels are modernist in form although appearing within two decades of the end of World War II. Meschonnic's idea of Modernism simply meaning addressing the world "as it is" places the debate in a manageable form. Dobai's novel, like Roth's, is showing the world as it is by looking at the world as it *was*, and deriving from it, and conveying an insight that is pertinent to the present. It seems implausible that Dobai was unaware of Roth's *Radetzky* and his novel comes across as a deft grafting of historical fact onto a model provided by Roth.

Hassan's notion of "creation" as opposed to "decreation" also applies to Roth's novel in that Roth has created a world with characters with whom one can readily identify. They display human strengths and frailties and are elaborate products of the imagination. They do not merely serve a functional purpose, i.e. being arbitrary characters to move the narrative forward. As to the problematic term "centering", Hassan contrasts this to the notion of "dispersal". In other words, the centre of the novel holds and does not meander into narrative avenues on a whim. There is a cohesion to the novel, maintained aesthetically and by the obvious creation of a central character and ancillary characters. The main narrative theme, namely the demise of the Habsburg Empire, is buttressed throughout the novel.

The "signified" is clearly presented, with hardly any emphasis on the signifier, i.e. there is a paucity of neologisms and terms that require of the reader to invent meaning or guess the author's meaning, in the process of reading. Or to use Eysteinnsson's term, there is a "socially pre-established matrix of references" (Eysteinnsson, 1990: 132) that will be familiar to an informed reader, as opposed to "a kind of characterless eclecticism" – a term Gellner uses to describe aesthetic attitudes that have subsequently become vogue (Gellner, 1998: 173). This immediately relates to the next term Hassan uses, namely "lisible" or "readerly". The greater the conventionality, or apparent conventionality of the text, the more "readable" the text supposedly is, i.e. the more readers can successfully glean the author's meaning. However, even a "readable" text such as Roth's requires some infusion of socio-political resonances, but in the main these are supplied by the author to facilitate at least a first-level understanding of the text. Hassan's next point regarding narrative, places Roth squarely within the realm of Modernism, as opposed to that which is deemed to have come afterwards. The narrative structure is sound and even predictable. The author has set up the character for the reader, and the reader follows the events thus narrated. The novel contains abundant keys for a more satisfactory reading of the text. In other words, Roth's novel does not contain what Hassan describes as "anti-narrative".

In applying this same set of criteria to Bassani, we are likely to find a virtually identical adherence to the modernist criteria as established by Hassan: the form of *Gli occhiali d'oro*

adheres to a tightly woven structure, more so than Roth's *Radetzkymarsch*, with the main character, the first-person narrator, gradually revealing his dilemma, as Bassani unveils his growth towards an ethical consciousness and action. The "purpose" is also clearly delineated, with a strong ethical stance being adopted as the narrator begins to realise that the choices he makes have a resonance beyond himself, i.e. to participate in the victimisation of the homosexual Dr Fadigati, which in effect would mean acquiescing in his own victimisation. At risk to himself, he defines the purpose of his life for himself, namely to disavow the forces that entrap both himself and Dr Fadigati, i.e. the Fascist state. So "purpose", in Hassan's terms, is clear. The "design" that Hassan refers to is arguably more sophisticated in Bassani than the "design" of Roth's novel, which follows a straightforward chronological sequence; in *Gli occhiali d'oro* the order is also chronological, but the portent of doom is more subtly woven into the text itself and the narration is extremely economical; the novel is like a jigsaw puzzle as themes alluded to at the beginning dramatically intersect in the dénouement. The design of *Gli occhiali d'oro* is what gives it its force. Bassani's novel is not unlike Roth's, in that a lengthy immersion into the world is created and is the main aesthetic device the author uses. Bassani likewise manages to create for the reader a cohesive world, but does so without relying on lengthy description, but rather on focused, crafted sentences, aimed to unleash the inherent social, political and psychological resonance of the novel.¹⁷

As regards "hierarchy", the hierarchy that Bassani establishes is an undisputed rationalist, humanistic hierarchy that relies on a clear sense of right and wrong: the narrator is left to make the distinction between the two through his own emotional and rational involvement with his society, that of 1930s Ferrara. Similarly, Carl Joseph also reaches an apotheosis of sorts, when the essential truth of his existence becomes clear to him, albeit too late to save him. So, in *Gli occhiali d'oro* in effect, as in *Radetzkymarsch*, we are dealing with a hierarchy of values, not an anarchy of values – to use Hassan's point of contrast. The "totalization" or "creation" that Hassan refers to is exemplified by Bassani's effective evocation of the daily reality of Fascist

¹⁷ See Kroha, Lucienne. "The Same and/or Different: Narcissism and Exile in Giorgio Bassani's Novels." *Annali d'italianistica* 20, (2002): 307-324.

Italy and how the political dispensation affected the choices and the daily lives of the characters, the first-person narrator in particular. There's a unity and a constant interplay between the narrator and his environment, similar to what we see in Roth's novel. It is the quest on the part of the narrator to feel at one with his environment, and gradually realising that his environment is hostile to him, because he is Jewish – he is at variance with the environment. Carl Joseph in *Radetzky* also maintains the illusion as far as he can that he is adaptable to his environment, only to find out, at his personal cost, that indeed he is not able to conform to the expectations that the environment has of him. Psychologically, he is not up to the challenge. The illusion of belonging is maintained for much longer in *Radetzky*, whereas the inimical nature of society is made more brutally clear to the first-person narrator in *Gli occhiali d'oro*. And yet he is able to assess his situation realistically and adapts by not conforming, but by defying the ideological precepts of the moment in history that his country is experiencing. So, one has a "creation" of an environment as per Hassan, evident in *Gli occhiali d'oro*; the "totalization" of an environment, overwhelming the central characters. How they react to this "totalization" effectively shapes the core of Roth and Bassani's novels. Hassan's concept of "centering" is present in *Gli occhiali d'oro* in that the centre of his novel is his first-person narrator and the distinction between "totalization" and "centering" tends to become blurred as the focus placed on the central character in *Gli occhiali d'oro* is a response to the "totalization".

As regards the "signified", again Bassani conforms to a conventional notion of the "signified" – a young Italian, thus highlighting nationality, Jewishness and Fascism. These signifiers are readily discernible and come with a range of associations. Much of the reader's work is prepared in advance. This in turn, as in *Radetzky*, helps the "lisible" or "readerly" nature of Bassani's oeuvre, with *Gli occhiali d'oro* being a highly distilled example thereof. And, again, as regards Hassan's notion of narrative, as opposed to anti-narrative, Bassani conforms to convention, and thus, like Roth, is able to be subversive. If his narrative style had been experimental, the subversion of contemporary (1958) Italy might have been less effective.

Henri Fauconnier's *Malaisie* presents us, when viewed through Hassan's lens, with a less readily definable aesthetic and presages much of what was to come twenty years later. For a start, one has to bear in mind that while Fauconnier's novel is significant for a number of reasons, not least of which that it was recognised with the Prix Goncourt at the time of publication, Fauconnier was not a writer by profession and the shortcomings of his style and of the structure of his novel may, in part, be due to this. His *Malaisie* is emblematic, rather than being a novel that formed part of a continuum of creative writing to the extent that this can be said of *Radetzkymarsch* and *Gli occhiali d'oro* in respect of Roth and Bassani. That said, one can look at how Hassan's formula comes into play in Fauconnier's case. The form is not conventionally modernist to the extent that he seems to eschew a narrative structure that places events or characters at its centre, but rather ideas are at the centre. His main characters of Rolain and Lescale are vehicles for ideas, the filigree of their character development embellishing ideas dear to the author.¹⁸ So one could say that Fauconnier's narrative verges on "antiform", whether intentionally so or not. The *amok* scene at the end of *Malaisie* does not flow as naturally from the preceding episodes of the novel as one might have liked. It has a "tagged-on" effect, even though the scene is important in the wider context of the novel's emblematic function. So, to put it differently, there are "disjunctive" elements in the novel, with the "conjunctive" elements being much looser than in either Roth or Bassani. The "purpose" as per Hassan's definition of the novel, as such, is much less readily discernible than in either *Radetzkymarsch* or *Gli occhiali d'oro*. *Malaisie* forms the third element of the exploration envisioned in the three texts, namely of a change of consciousness that the comparative treatment of the three novels reveals. The "purpose" could be said to be the liberation of the individual from the stifling constraints of the Western *forma mentis*. This seems to be where the novel is heading, in that it illustrates and expounds a complete departure from Western normative thinking. Whether it is successful in this enterprise is debatable.

¹⁸ One need only look at E.M. Forster's *Passage to India* or *Maurice* or *Howard's End* to see ideas for their own sake emerging much more successfully and naturally from the narrative process without in any way compromising the aesthetic cohesion of the works themselves.

“Design” and “purpose” are intertwined, very successfully so, in *Radetzkymarsch* and *Gli occhiali d’oro*. In *Malaisie*, having eschewed conventional design, or structure, the author has elevated “purpose” arguably at the expense of design. The “design” of his novel has not quite caught up with the purpose. So, in Hassan’s terms, the element of “play” is more prominent – i.e. as the author is inspired, he writes, with large tracts of the novel being reliant on impressions and evoking the presumed jungle mystique of Malaya and its peoples and the effect thereof on one of the two protagonists, Lescale. With the emphasis on the evocative, on the exotic, one could argue that the form Fauconnier chooses is suited to his intent. A rigorous structure might have become a narrative straightjacket, which would be at odds with the freewheeling world that he evokes in the novel, on one level. So whether the purpose fits the design of the novel is debatable. *Malaisie* conforms only in a limited sense to the classic modernist structure, as per Hassan. The design of *Malaisie* is therefore problematic in that it veers towards the experimental, and represents a diluted revolt against the more traditional forms of novel writing.

We have seen how hierarchy is evident in *Radetzkymarsch* and *Gli occhiali d’oro* and how it comes to the fore in both novels. Hierarchy is present in *Malaisie*, but it is a hierarchy that again relies on, and is embodied by the other main character, Rolain. Rolain embodies and articulates ideas of individual liberation, of emancipation from the strictures of Western culture. The idea of liberation, as Nietzsche advocates, is overriding in the novel,¹⁹ namely the idea of mastery over the past and over the self, or to put it differently, the strength of the will. Rolain embodies these traits and as such becomes emblematic of hierarchy. Whereas in *Radetzkymarsch* and *Gli occhiali d’oro* we witness the growing awareness of the individual of the self, in *Malaisie* we encounter a character who, rightly or wrongly, has attained a kind of apotheosis in the original

¹⁹ Nietzsche, F.: “[...] aber mein Wollen, kommt mir stets als mein Befreier und Freudebringer.” (*Also Sprach Zarathustra*, Volume VI, *Werke*, Leipzig: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1919, p.125.) [...] but my *willing* always comes to me as my liberator and bringer of joy. (Hollingale, R.J. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, London: Penguin, 1961, p. 111.) In a similar vein, Rolain’s hierarchy can be further be seen in Nietzschean terms thus: Und von Niemandem will ich so als von dir gerade Schönheit, du Gewaltiger: deine Güte sei deine letzte Selbst-Überwältigung (Ibid, p.173.) [And I desire beauty from no one as I desire it from you, you man of power: may your goodness be your ultimate self-overpowering (Hollingdale, Ibid., 1961: p.141).]

sense of the word. Rolain is portrayed as verging upon sainthood. There is little psychological investigation as to how and why Rolain can acquire this role in the eyes of Lescale, but he is the character Fauconnier has created, an emblematic embodiment of freedom and emancipation from the mendacity of his culture, from which he has ostensibly successfully escaped by living in Malaya. So the hierarchy in *Malaisie* is an idea much like the emancipation from conventional notions of right and wrong. *Malaisie* holds out the prospect that individual happiness may indeed be attainable.

The opposite to “hierarchy” that Hassan articulates is “anarchy” and this is where the amok scene acquires significance. Fauconnier has created a scene of anarchy, of the unknowable when Smâil runs amok and has to be killed. One has thus the opposite of hierarchy, or to be more precise, a hierarchy that is not Western, or at least not comprehensible to a Western mind, as Fauconnier would have one imagine. While portraying scenes of high hedonistic abandonment on the beach on the East coast of the Malay Peninsula, Fauconnier contrasts these with the scene of inexplicable despair and rage that Smâil engages in, gripped as he is by imagined spiritual forces that dominate him. Often in the novel, especially too with the felling of trees, we encounter references to the spirit world, which the Western individual with his reliance on reason, cannot fathom or refuses to entertain.²⁰ So what at one level might appear to be a preference for the anarchic in *Malaisie* can in fact be viewed as being consistent with the notion of hierarchy; it’s just that the hierarchy is different – it is a hierarchy recognised by Malays, not one recognised or understood by Westerners, regardless of how long they have lived in Malaya. Seen thus, Hassan’s concept of Modernism can be applied to *Malaisie* where hierarchy plays a rôle, and the digression into anarchy still serves a hierarchical purpose. This might also be seen as taking Hassan’s theory too literally. There are other factors which make *Malaisie* a modernist novel, not least of which is that the author is experimenting with what he assumes is a new set of values, and presents one protagonist, Lescale, who has to grapple with an unfamiliar set of values presented to him by Rolain and by Malaya itself. There’s an attempt

²⁰ See Mannoni, Octave, *Prospero and Caliban – The Psychology of Colonization*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005.

by Fauconnier – not unlike that which Musil presents in *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß* – at representing a re-enchantment with life, to capture the immediacy of existence, uncluttered by the layers of rhetoric that civilisation imposes upon the individual. Lescale, like Törleß, is on a voyage of discovery, and as Törleß questions the world around him, so too Lescale is forced to question his assumptions. It is this idea of enchantment, one which Gellner also elaborates when discussing modernity and identity. Gellner’s notion of identity contextualises both the quest by Lescale (and Törleß) for acquiring an authenticity of Being; Lescale learns to read through the lies which Rolain has identified for him. Gellner, similarly, sees abstraction as the enemy of authenticity and of identity and his remarks serve as a measure for the entire question of identity when he says:

[...] those who need to think out their identity before living it betray their unfitnes to live. Nobility is conveyed by the priority of being over thought, which is but a kind of embellishment, not a refuge or a fortification. Aristocrats simply *are*, parvenus *do*, the rootless try to *argue* their identity (Gellner, 1998:7; italics Gellner’s).

It is the authenticity of Being that Fauconnier strives to illustrate through Rolain. Hassan uses the term “creation” or “totalization” as we have seen above. Does this apply to *Malaisie*? Hassan contrasts this with the terms “decreation”/“deconstruction”. One can certainly see that Fauconnier has created a world, much as Roth and Bassani have done. Like them, he has created a world, but he has taken it a step further in the *amok* scene. Whereas Roth and Bassani have retained a cohesive vision of a world of values breaking apart, they nonetheless remain consistent to the idea that there is in fact an ideal and an order worthy of aspiring to. Fauconnier destroys the idyll he has created in the *amok* scene by showing the unsustainability of the world he has created. Roth and Bassani’s points of departure are that a world has changed and has fallen short of an ideal. They attempt to retain a sense of a universal truth in their writing, a sense of right and wrong, that survives the ravages of their respective socio-political circumstances. Fauconnier, for all his lavish evocation of the world he has created, having rejected the Western world, confronts the crumbling of the world that he has created for himself in the Malayan jungle. His world is extremely individualistic, and espouses an emancipation of sorts, but then he illustrates how even the new world he has created is

ultimately incomprehensible and it is this that creates the impasse for him. It is a sense of impasse which initially has been born out of the impasse he sees inherent in the Western mode of life. So in a sense, as per Hassan, Fauconnier “creates” and “decreates”, “totalizes” and “deconstructs”. In short, Fauconnier undermines the precepts of his own creation. Roth and Bassani do not. Put differently, Fauconnier pre-empts the demise of his world, symbolically conveyed by Rolain relinquishing his rubber estate and giving it to Lescale. Rolain shows by the end of the novel that he is ready to live by the rules of the life he has wrought for himself, much like a latter-day Robinson Crusoe. In *Radetzky* and *Gli occhiali d'oro* the impasse their respective protagonists experience is not of their own making, but rather of the world outside the self. In *Malaisie* Rolain is presented as someone very much the creator of his own destiny and therefore the one best suited to dismantle the world he has created. This is a salient difference between Fauconnier’s protagonist, Rolain, on the one hand, and *Radetzky* and *Gli occhiali d'oro*’s protagonists on the other.

When applying Hassan’s notion of “centering” as a modernist stylistic device, one can see that Fauconnier’s novel conforms to this notion in that he has placed two characters at the centre of his novel, in a kind of Socratic relationship with one another, the one (Rolain) the teacher and the other the pupil, (Lescale). Narratively speaking they are the fulcrum around which the – at times – dissipated narrative revolves. Again, Fauconnier comes close to transgressing onto the anti- or post-modernist terms that Hassan refers to by creating a “dispersal” towards the end of the novel. *Malaisie* is in this sense a harbinger of what was to become more frequent twenty years hence, in literary terms. Fauconnier does to a large extent “disperse” his narrative, while retaining the narrative core of ideas and the two central characters. The central characters are crucial for him to anchor his flights into philosophical speculation; they provide him with an excuse to create a philosophical treatise disguised as a novel.

As regards Hassan’s juxtaposition of “signified” and “signifier”, Fauconnier relies on ideas about the self, of the individual as signifiers. The dilemmas, confusions and self-doubt of Lescale are easily identifiable and do not rely necessarily on an understanding of the wider context. Again, then, in a sense, Fauconnier “transgresses” into the realm of “signifier” in that his novel does

not require a profound acquaintance with the historical circumstances that gave rise to the British colonial enterprise of Malaya (the Federated and Unfederated States of the Malay Peninsula as well as the Straits Settlements of Penang, Malacca and Singapore). Hence, the reader can attach a personal significance, can identify with the situation in which Lescale finds himself, i.e. being in awe of another person, Rolain, who seems self-assured and not seeking consolation or solace in any form from the conventions of society. This is rendered all the easier because the environment is not Western and the individual is thus distilled from the trappings of his own society, thus bringing the existential questions, ontological questions more easily into focus. Fauconnier has created, as far as is possible a new “ontology” (Spivak, 1995) for a Westerner – a place of being, disconnected, ostensibly, from all that is Western. Of course we know colonial Malaya is not disconnected from the West, but it is in this environment that Fauconnier has created his world. Therefore the reader can more freely endow significance on the text than would be the case with *Radetzky* and *Gli occhiali d'oro*, where the context is more narrowly circumscribed, for aesthetic and structural reasons. So here Hassan's juxtaposition of signified and signifier is more fluid in its application to Fauconnier than it is to the Roth and Bassani texts. This leads to Hassan's notion of lisibility (readability) and in a sense, despite the shortcomings of narrative structure, Fauconnier is more accessible to the less informed reader in that, as mentioned, a background knowledge of locale, British Malaya, is less crucial for a satisfactory understanding of the text, whereas a knowledge of French, indeed European, exoticist writing and Nietzschean philosophy might be more helpful, as opposed to the purely historical context.

Aspects of Fauconnier's narrative have been mentioned, and their shortcomings. Whether Fauconnier stumbles into the realm of Hassan's “anti-narrative” is an open question when considering that his novel can be viewed as more of an overtly ontological exercise than a novel. In this sense Fauconnier is indeed pushing the boundaries of a strictly modernist novel, but the essential element of narrative is there – there is a development of the main characters, albeit truncated. But what is clearly discernible when looking at Roth, Bassani and Fauconnier is how the canvas changes for each of the three writers: from the broad sweep of the Habsburg

Empire and the individual's place in such a vast political structure, through to the individual in the more confined and circumscribed milieu of a city in Fascist Italy, to the individual as an end in himself amid the universalised, "ontological" realm of the unknown and unknowable jungles of Malaya. If one sees the fraught and isolated place of the individual and identity in modernist discourse, the three novels provide a compelling juxtaposition of the individual faced with an "outside world". Carl Joseph's "outside world" in *Radetzky* and that of the narrator in *Gli occhiali d'oro* each present formidable moments requiring self-assertion, and the validation of the individual. One is speaking of the extent to which each of the two protagonists in *Radetzky* and *Gli occhiali d'oro* reveals the modernist dilemma. *Malaisie*, seen thus, presents an "outside world" that by its exotic nature allows the subjects/protagonists to feel more at home, to enjoy a greater sense of belonging than is the case in either *Radetzky* or *Gli occhiali d'oro*, even though the milieux each of their protagonists are on "home turf", as it were, in Europe. They are supposed to belong, but they don't; Rolain and Lescale, are not supposed to belong, but they do, as far as they can, and on their own terms.

Besides this, it is also necessary to briefly examine which features of Modernism best apply to our texts (while being aware of its place in literary history). Does one adopt a strictly canonical approach, once one has decided to one's satisfaction that canons of literature should in fact exist? Even if one does not adhere to the view that canons are impositions after the fact, can one at least acknowledge that there are traditions of literature? Once one has agreed that a trajectory, that a tradition does in fact exist, to what extent do the three texts fulfil, undermine or enhance a particular canon of Modernist literature?

While postmodernism is *not* the focus of this chapter, one needs to ponder briefly the distinction between Modernism and post-Modernism in order to evaluate the texts that are read in a post-World War II world and as one of the texts, namely Bassani's, is a post-World War II text. Eysteinsson's view is pertinent in that the distinction she makes solves the dichotomy, for the present purposes, between post-Modernism and Modernism:

On the whole, to map the distinction between modernism and postmodernism onto the binary opposition of "obscurity" and "uncertainty" is, as I see it, to create a false difference. Actually,

by making our preregistered knowledge of such an opposition between modernist and postmodernist categories an integral element of the reading experience, one could argue for the reverse effect of “uncertainty”. [...] But what kind of reader would approach a text with the certitude that it does not possess a “meaningful,” socially pre-established matrix of references? (Eysteinson, 1990: 133).

Narratives often speak of displacement, uprootedness, disorientation and the challenges these pose for the individual consciousness that has to make sense of a changing world.

Essential is the idea of a disjuncture between the various aspects of human life, politics, religion and kinship (“socially re-established matrix”, referred to above, as Eysteinson calls this agglomeration of factors that renders a text intelligible).

Cardinal to the discussion is the idea that “a good life for the individual could be sustained by rational means”. This is of course fraught, because rationality is also culturally determined, and since cultures differ and have different precepts, it is likely that definitions of what constitutes rationality will also differ. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Gellner also says that different cultures, which while they may appear to be the same on the surface, differ markedly when it comes to their various definitions of what philosophy is, for example. So it behoves one to link, however flawed a definition of rationality and modernity might be, to agree at least on one aspect contained in the above, namely that “a good life can be sustained by rationality”. By rationality one can also assume an internal logic operating in each of the three novels. The behaviour of the protagonists makes more sense once one gains a better understanding of their authors’ *forma mentis*, and the cultural and historical milieux from which they have emerged. To some extent this has been discussed, but we will need to look at the texts themselves, after first reflecting on the implications of modernity in Gellner’s question-cum-definition thereof and what that implies about Modernism as a literary approach.

The emergence of the individualist spirit in Europe is a complex and much discussed phenomenon. How did men come to switch from accepting social authority to choosing their own vision, values, aims, style, identity? (Gellner, 1998: 14).

Each of the three novels deals with the individual emerging into an awareness of the self, in a world that has lost time-honoured social hierarchies, values and certainties. Each novel also represents an attempt to reassert and redefine certainty, even if that certainty is the certainty

of doom, of impasse. Hence the texts represent this impasse in that they reflect an attempt to strive towards something that can transcend the impasse brought about by the social, the political or the historical impasse in which the authors find themselves, or perceive to have found themselves. Or, what Eysteinson refers to as the “socially pre-established matrix”.

The novels in effect deal with what one might term “a calibration of modernity”: from what we might call initial stages of emancipation into the modern world as we have it in *Radetzky marsch*, through to modernity in conflict with ideology in *Gli occhiali d'oro* (in the form of Fascism), through to an active search for a universal truth – unsullied by the exigencies of maintaining a bourgeois, rationalist and individualist norm – in *Malaisie*.

The next question posed is that of the apocalyptic vision. As Eysteinson points out, quoting Robert Alter’s *Partial Magic*:

Interestingly Alter sees the modernists as “transitional” figures, arguing that their greatness “can be traced to their transitional character,” since “for all the affirmation of artifice in the classic modern novelists, they retain a residue of belief in the large possibility of capturing reality in fiction, however much they may be troubled by a sense of things collapsing historically” (Eysteinson, 1990: 109).

If one proceeds along the lines that Eysteinson alludes to here, namely that Modernism carries with it a sense of collapse, it becomes clear that the *impasse* that has been referred to previously is arguably a *sine qua non* of Modernism itself. So if *impasse* is a feature of Modernism, it has to be determined what distinguishes the works at issue here from any number of Modernist authors. Is it the specificity of their situations, namely the Habsburg Empire in *Radetzky marsch* and Fascism in *Gli occhiali d'oro* – two very distinct cultural and historical milieux? Seen thus, does Fauconnier’s *Malaisie* represent a reprieve from the pressures of what Western society imposes? Does it represent a way of eluding the impasse? Is the precarious and ethereal nature of a Western model inserting itself into the alien world of colonial Malaya there only to create another set of impasses?

One could also assert that the three authors’ works illustrate three differing states of consciousness within a Modernist framework, which in turn implies a form of progression of

consciousness. What is more, in the three authors one discerns the yearning to adhere to absolutes, paradoxically not a feature one would necessarily associate with Modernism, when we look at authors such as Pirandello, Svevo, James Joyce or any number of others, for whom the “self-consciousness of the text” (Eysteinnsson, 1990: 110) can often be perceived as an impediment to acknowledging the sincerity of the author. If there is one feature of each of the three chosen authors it is the “sincerity” of their narrative endeavour, couched in a form which is not experimental, but instead elegant, adhering to a style which seems oddly outdated when compared even to authors that precede them. The assertion then is that they are authors motivated by a yearning to express an absolute, or lamenting the lack of anything absolute so as to secure a continuity and an ethical security where, and when, there is little evidence of these qualities. So, to give but one example, while Pirandello gave us relativism in drama and narrative contemporaneously with Roth, Pirandello remains one of the canonical writers of Modernism. However, while Roth writes in a style that seems more at home in the 19th century, his invective and concerns are essentially Modernist, all the while lamenting the loss of absolutes and condemning the emptiness of the rituals that plaster over the cracks inherent in the Habsburg edifice. While Pirandello might see absolutes as the cause of human suffering, alienation and rootlessness, Roth might aver that the absence of absolutes causes the same sense of dislocation in modernity.

The apocalyptic vision in *Radetzky marsch* and *Gli occhiali d'oro* encompasses a range of views, but specifically it focuses on the Second World War. In *Radetzky marsch* there is the prophetic vision that sees catastrophe as inevitable and in *Gli occhiali d'oro* it is the catastrophe that has been lived through, survived. In addition, there is the realisation that modernity does not offer solutions to the unhappiness of humankind. Of course ideas of “the good life” will vary, but one could agree that a modicum of self-realisation is the goal of the individual in modernity, despite the obstacles that are put in the way of such a “good life” and despite the fact that the emergence of mass culture can be seen as inimical to individual happiness or self-realisation. This, while at the same time – paradoxically – mass culture appears to offer more opportunities for the pursuit of happiness. In each of the three novels the ideal of some kind of self-fulfilment

lies at the heart of each work. As we have seen, Carl Joseph almost reaches it in *Radetzky*; the first-person narrator in *Gli occhiali d'oro*, while pursuing happiness or self-fulfilment is not central, the adherence to what he considers right and wrong is. In *Malaisie* individualistic self-fulfilment is central. Each of the novels would seem to explore this idea of self-fulfilment, each in their own way, by virtually enumerating the obstacles that impede the individual in this goal, that impede happiness. The apocalyptic vision is contained in this: the direction that Western civilisation has taken is modernity, but modernity does not offer the consolation of the “good life”, despite the faith in rationality and notions of individual self-fulfilment as contained in the political and ideological currents alluded to in *Radetzky* and *Gli occhiali d'oro*, and in the philosophy expounded in *Malaisie*. This is the paradox of Modernism, and indeed modernity, if as mentioned earlier, Modernism is simply viewed as the ideology of modernity.

It requires one to look at each of the novels individually and see how the question of modernity and an apocalyptic vision are addressed and how this underlines the Modernist nature of each of the novels. However, there are some themes that require further elucidation before one can approach each novel individually and comparatively in the context of Modernism.

2.3 A modernist trajectory

Eysteinnsson poses the question: What guiding principles of literary historiography can be “reconstructed” when we observe the various uses of a concept like “Modernism”? (Eysteinnsson, 1990: 65). This is of course an inevitable and pertinent question when it comes to considering our three novels. She further (*Ibid.*: 71) discusses the question of trying to define Modernism and the extent to which it lends itself to definition. While it is not the goal here to attempt to define Modernism, it does behoove us to ask whether our novels fit onto what one might call a “modernist trajectory”. In other words, leaving Realism and other precursors aside, how Modernist are each of our novels?

At first glance, *Radetzkyarsch* is in its form, as mentioned, traditional – Roth uses a relatively traditionalist mode of expression to convey something that is profoundly undermining of a given order. (His invective is even more acute, even if less effective aesthetically, in *Die Kapuzinergruft*, written in 1937 and published in 1938). Eysteinson makes the following point, which can function as a guide through this chapter:

Although I see no reason to join those asserting the death of Modernism, it seems evident that the period of its most iconoclastic outburst in the face of tradition lies in the past, in the period 1910-1935 in most Western countries [...] I do not see, however, why we should restrict the use of the concept “modernism” to the period of its most energetic or concentrated outpouring, nor do I believe that we should assume the traditions it revolted against to have simply evaporated (*Ibid*,:136).

Firstly, Eysteinson would be in agreement with Meschonnic, for example, in desisting from a purely linear reading of Modernism, as a way of explaining that Modernism cannot be defined only according to a “time-line”. Bassani’s novel was written in 1958, in the midst of the rise of post-Modernism. Yet, in *Gli occhiali d’oro*, similarly to *Radetzkyarsch*, we have a very clearly defined enemy (namely Fascism and Anti-Semitism, bourgeois conformity, political and moral cowardice) and again a mode of expression that adheres to the canonical stylistic traditions of Italian prose, established by the *Trecentisìa*, Boccaccio, in particular, through to Foscolo, Leopardi and Manzoni, the latter of whom Bassani quotes in *Il giardino dei Finzi Contini*:

Certo, il cuore, che gli dà retta, ha sempre qualcosa da dire su quello che sarà. Ma che sa il cuore? Appena un poco di quello che è già accaduto (Bassani, 1974: 6.) [Of course the heart always has something to say, for one who knows how to hear it. But what does the heart know? At most, a bit about what is already past] (Quigly, 1974: 6.)

In other words, as with *Radetzkyarsch*, the content is modernist, even if the style and the literary echoes conjure up an earlier epoch, appear traditional and certainly not experimental, vicariously or otherwise.

Indeed Bassani, writing in the 1950s, can be considered as cultivating a style of great elegance and lucid simplicity. As with *Radetzkyarsch*, any experimentalism or linguistic innovations would detract from the force of the ideas and the ethical imprint of their works. While both Roth and Bassani seem less interested in breaking with any literary tradition, it is in *Malaisie*

that we see a more noticeable obvious Modernism at work, where subjectivity is given a higher resonance and characterised by a high solipsistic philosophising. *Malaisie*, unlike *Gli occhiali d'oro* and *Radetzkyarsch*, is more obviously “ideas-driven”, whereas in more traditional mode, Roth and Bassani have their ideas emerge through structure and plot. *Malaisie* has a number of ideas which the author imposes on a rather meandering narrative structure. Fauconnier would seem to share an affinity on many levels with André Gide, *Les Nouritures Terrestres* in particular. Both Fauconnier and Gide would come across as more self-consciously modernist. So all in all, the writers are, stylistically at least, of a relatively conservative hue, even if Fauconnier is perhaps the most daring, both conceptually and stylistically.

Another point of divergence is of course that Roth and Bassani are engaged with their respective societies, at a given historical moment, whereas Fauconnier is engaged with his society, France, by proxy, and equally by proxy, is engaged with the Malay and British colonial society that surrounds him. Thus stripped of his sense of belonging, he abstracts what for him is a universally valid individualism and philosophical, ethical code. The Western model is bankrupt for him; hence he seeks a type of existential solace in the unknown and unknowable world of Malaya. For example, Fauconnier writes:

La tristesse de l'Europe n'est pas apparente pour qui ne l'a jamais quittée » disait Rolain, « ou pour qui n'y est pas revenu après un long voyage. C'est une contrée où je ne pourrais plus vivre, une contrée inhumaine, car on n'y voit pas d'êtres humains, seulement des marionnettes. Cela manque de grâce. Il n'y a de beau, là-bas, que les paysages vides. Alors on peut être ému, comme devant la jungle ou le désert. Mais qu'un homme passe, et on n'a plus qu'à s'enfuir (Fauconnier, 1930: 178-9). [The melancholy of Europe is not seen by those who have never left it,” said Rolain; “nor by any who do not come back there after a long time away. It is a country in which I could no longer live; it is inhabited, not by human beings, but by marionettes. Utterly devoid of charm. There is nothing to admire but empty landscape. That, indeed, can be as moving as the jungle or the desert; but at the sight of a human being one must fly (Sutton, 1931:138).]

Contrast this vision of Europe with the voluptuous and sonorous descriptions of Malaya, for example:

Mais tout ce babil naïf et un peu désordonné des oiseaux n'est qu'un prélude. Des voix plus sonores se détachent des cimes lointaines. Le son est flûté, mais plein et souple, comme d'une flûte qui aurait le calibre d'un tuyau d'orgue et posséderait toutes les ressources de glissement,

du grave à l'aigu, du violoncelle. Un chœur nombreux s'organise. A mesure que croît la lumière et que le brouillard du matin s'évaporent, un long crescendo d'interrogations de plus en plus hautes, rapides, passionnées, s'élève. Et quand le soleil jaillit enfin des montagnes, cela s'épanouit en une longue acclamation. C'est l'hymne grandiose des singes gibbons (Fauconnier, 1930: 55). [But all this innocent unregulated babble from the birds is no more than a prelude. More sonorous voices are heard from far-off peaks. The sound is fluted, but full and flexible, like a flute with the calibre of an organ-pipe, and with all the 'cello's aptitude for sliding from treble into bass and back again. Voice blends with voice into a chorus. As it grows lighter, and the mists of morning fade, a long crescendo of questing cries rises from the trees, shriller and swifter and more passionate. And when at last the sun leaps above the mountains, it swells into a prolonged pæan of praise. This is the magnificent hymn of the gibbon monkeys (Sutton, 1931: 37-8).]

We see here words such as the sun *leaping* above the mountains; there is a joyous embrace of life redolent in the description of the waking Malayan jungle, a sensual celebration of life, which is echoed often in the novel. This represents a rejection not only of the conventional mode of life that Western civilisation imposes on the individual as Fauconnier has described previously, but a departure from its woes, wars and preoccupations, all of which have relied on something innately false, mendacious. The Malayan jungle represents a truth, albeit an unknowable truth. Indeed, truth is unknowable, certainty is but illusory, so there is a cohesion in the notion of setting the novel amid that which cannot be known, which cannot be subject to the paradoxical "subterfuge of certainty" – the Malayan jungle. Bassani and Roth celebrate what is knowable, and the expression of what is knowable is the expression of disenchantment and dismay with what Europe represents. On the other hand, Malaya here for Fauconnier represents the exploration that the mysterious, the unknowable and the rejection of an anthropocentric view of the world are what may render humanity happy. The immersion into the unknowable, as per the above hymn to the jungle, is a celebration of the immediacy of life, whereas in *Gli occhiali d'oro* and *Radetzky marsch* one has the lament of the suffering that men impose on each other, arrogating unto themselves a fictitious notion of certainty, all for the sake of maintaining a given socio-political order, either the Habsburg order or the Fascist order. Put differently: a political system, and hence a social and cultural embrace, that claims to be all-knowing, in order to provide a paradigm of certainty. Fauconnier's vision, by contrast, is wary of anything that mankind conjures up, ideologically or otherwise.

Thus we see how a modernist text can contain elements that in the case of Fauconnier are reminiscent of classic exoticist literature, while at the same time being an explicit modernist engagement with the world. The modernist nature of Roth and Bassani's texts focus on Europe and its decay and its pervading sense of doom, whereas Fauconnier has taken that as a given and "moved on", as it were, to a paradigmatic change of focus, no longer bothering to be rooted in Europe. Eysteinnsson's assertion below, contextualises the debate further:

No approach or method can be claimed to be more "authentic" than others. Thus, ironically, modernism may also have helped, indirectly, to legitimize the classical modes of writing it set to oust from respectability (Eysteinnsson, 1990:137).

The point she makes here is pertinent in that we can discern, speculatively, the intent of the authors: to be experimental for its own sake would jeopardise the force of the moral arguments contained in each of the three novels as well. Experimentalism would have detracted from the "message", to put it simplistically. The "message" is all the more powerful *because* it is couched in a traditionalist mode of writing, thus easing the more conventional reader into the complex world that each of the authors is trying to impart. Roth, Bassani and Fauconnier are not trying to break with tradition for the sake of trying to break with tradition; rather they each have a very specific goal which would not be well served by the indulgence of experimentalism and would have courted the danger of rendering frivolous the import of their respective invectives. So while the import of their invectives addresses their contemporary societies, especially in *Radetzky* and *Gli occhiali d'oro* and can be viewed as radical, the style each adopts is relatively conventional with well-established precedents. None of the writers has fused radicalism in social and political terms with the style of writing.

Cogent observations have been made in this regard and with specific reference to mimesis and verisimilitude in *Radetzky* (Landwehr, 2003: 398-410). Significantly, Landwehr makes a distinction between the two terms. Briefly put, Landwehr equates mimesis with the imitation of social reality, while verisimilitude would be the narrated semblance of truth, with the attendant internal consistency and plausibility of characterisation and plot. He goes on to note how the realist paradigm is undermined by Roth. Taking Landwehr's approach one can see how this mimesis vs. verisimilitude operates in *Radetzky*. In *Gli occhiali d'oro* the same

mechanism seems to be operating – again a question of a fiction rendered plausible by minute description of the past so as to convince the reader of the veracity of what he is writing about. Fauconnier by contrast does not give either verisimilitude or mimesis a high priority in that social engagement is less his concern than is individual emancipation from the ego. The ideas proffered in his novel attest to this. This will be discussed in due course.

Having alluded to the authors' possible intentions, this brings us to what Eysteinnsson calls "modernist self-consciousness and the kind of systematic metafiction that some find dominant in Postmodernism" (1990:113). In this regard, again it can be said that the urgency which infuses the writing especially of Roth and Bassani, the sense of commitment to their respective societies, milieux and epochs, tends to limit the "cleverness" found in many a self-conscious writer. None of the three seems interested in being "clever" or daring in their use of narrative because of the implicit urgency of their central inspiration. This would seem out of step with the sense of *impasse* which, as averred, underscores their writing: *impasse* is not a resignation to a perceived inherent meaninglessness. In all three texts it rather emerges as a distinct exploration of notions of right and wrong. Each of the three novels illustrates a clear, explicit or implicit, sense of moral judgment that has a resonance for the times in which they were written. While "right" and "wrong" may sound prosaic, the notion of the individual having to frame his or her own ethical paradigm has been mentioned as one of the features of Modernism, where no outside force tries to impose a would-be universally accepted notion of right and wrong. The danger in this regard of religious or ideological dogma would have been all too apparent to the writers and there is clear evidence of an ethical *Auseinandersetzung* in each of the three novels.

As Eysteinnsson points out referring to Patricia Waugh's work *Metafiction*:²¹

The problem Waugh has in the theoretical and critical application of her central concept is very telling for the difficulties of pinpointing self-consciousness in modern literature, or in language in general. According to her initial definition, metafiction "is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact [sic] in

²¹ Waugh, Patricia, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, London: Methuen, 1984: 68.

order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (Eysteinson, 1990: 110).

Significant in Waugh’s assertion above is the question of the relationship between fiction and reality and how this may vary from author to author. And while Eysteinson subsequently refers to Franz Kafka’s work as an example of metafiction, and the link between fiction and reality that his works represents, it becomes clear when considering our novelists that they are not engaged in linguistic self-consciousness nor in creating an elaborate metaphor, or a metanarrative, that relies on a greater suspension of disbelief, as might be the case of Kafka. In *Radetzkyarsch*, *Gli occhiali d’oro* and *Malaisie* we are dealing with metaphor as a literary device, not novels which are in themselves metaphors. They are rooted in convention, even if the resonance challenges convention.

Far from being exercises in exploring the would-be meaninglessness of existence in the relationship created between “reality and fiction”, the novels under discussion provide the reader with specific contexts – reality is a verifiable moment in history, and hence not entirely fictional. This applies to a lesser extent to Fauconnier, despite much of the novel being autobiographical, as is the case with Bassani. There is a faith in an overarching notion of right and wrong. In *Radetzkyarsch* too, causing his central character to be killed is a part of the fiction, of the verisimilitude that Landwehr refers to, not mimesis. Lurking throughout Roth’s novel is the underlying notion that the fate that befalls Carl Joseph, for example, is tragic, unnecessary. The fact that the world is crumbling all around the authors (hence the state of *impasse* in which they find themselves in the first place) does not mean they are resigned to the world as it is. Meaningfulness is assumed, thus lending their works a poignancy in that the writers dream of a better world, yearn for a better world, yet give all the evidence of a world that falls short of the ideal or at least of the liveable.

2.4 Patriarchy and Modernism

Another aspect which Eysteinnsson highlights and which merits consideration is the question of patriarchy. This aspect is of specific significance to our texts because they are female-free zones, at least as far as plot development is concerned.

Eysteinnsson poses the question:

How do male modernists support patriarchal laws and are they at the same time “otherwise avant-garde?” Are some of them perhaps torn between deep-rooted and patriarchal social habits, still guiding their individual lives, and a radical new view of human subjectivity expressed through language or whatever their artistic medium might be? If such were the case, we might come to the conclusion that whatever their individual positions as social beings their literary discourse disrupts patriarchal structures (Eysteinnsson, 1990: 93).

The implications of the above statement by Eysteinnsson are varied. Firstly, for present purposes the only novel of the three under discussion that could vaguely be described as avant-garde is *Malaisie* – and even then within certain limits. It can be considered eccentric, even if not avant-garde, in that men form the pivotal relationship in the novel. It does present itself as an exhaustive validation and manifestation of manliness, with no female character in the novel developing as a person, as a character in her own right, at least not as much as the male characters, even the non-European ones. Palanai is important, but viewed as part of the exotic landscape and part of the richness of Malaya. This is not surprising given the homoerotic, homosocial tone of the novel:

J’entends respirer doucement près de moi. Ai-je dormi? Quelqu’un dort ici... Où est-il? Où étions-nous tout à l’heure ensemble, peut-être perdus, mélangés en dehors de nous mêmes? Quand on ne rêve pas en dormant, c’est qu’on est dans le domaine de l’Universel. Est-ce bien cela que disait Rolain, hier soir? Mais ce qu’il dit, c’est toujours...jusqu’à nouvel ordre...(Fauconnier: 1930,121).[I hear a gentle sound of breathing close beside me. Have I been asleep? Someone is sleeping here... Where is he? Where were we all just now; – lost perhaps, commingled outside ourselves? When we do not dream in sleep, it is because we are in the realm of the Universal. Is that what Rolain was saying last night? But what he says is always ... so tentative...(Sutton, 1931: 89).]

Notably the erotic allusion is just that, an allusion, and a subtle one at that, but the entire novel reflects a deep bond between Lescale and Rolain that is evidently more powerful than the heterosexual relations in the novel.

The novel certainly does little to undermine patriarchy in any traditional sense, but rather can be seen to undermine traditional heterosexualised patriarchy in that the novel underscores the homoerotic. There may be said to be an implicit and unquestioned patriarchy at work in the relationship with women, but then inasmuch as women are not the focus of the novel, Fauconnier does not seek to undermine women as such; they simply are not the focus of the novel. This thus raises the question: what is the focus? Or more to the point, what is the political and social dimension to the marginalisation of women in *Malaisie*? A novel without women, or without men, is not at issue, but what is, is whether or not the treatment of women in this modernist novel represents a perpetuation of patriarchal norms. Does Fauconnier's Modernism include a more enlightened attitude in keeping with the times in which it was written? The answer would seem to be no, in that something much more subversive is at work in the novel, namely the de-inscription of Western women, inasmuch as they would be seen to represent in the colonial context of British Malaya the perpetuation and legitimation of the imperialist enterprise. The question remains whether *Malaisie* – including the attitudes towards women reflected in the novel – is not merely a reflection of colonial life, Fauconnier's novel being set in the pre-war heyday of colonialism. But colonialism is far too a varied phenomenon for one to speak of a "colonial life", nor was colonialism a monolithic occurrence, but all the elements of the trope of the pioneering white male are there.

Fauconnier's Malaya, moreover, represents a readily identifiable period in the history of colonial Malaya. After political stability was brought about with the creation of the Federated Malay States and the Unfederated Malay States, in the latter half of the 19th century, British capital along with Chinese investment in tin mining created the initial economic enterprise soon to be followed by rubber. The Malaya of Fauconnier was, by the time he lived there, well developed and the rubber industry was flourishing as a result of the invention and development of the motorcar. In Fauconnier's time British hegemony was relatively unquestioned. *Malaisie* could not have been set in post-war Malaya when the legacy of the Japanese occupation and The Emergency, which lasted until shortly before *Merdeka* (Independence) in 1957 and in part

instigated by Chinese Communists challenged Britain's hitherto unquestioned dominance.²² *Malaisie* is both symptomatic and axiomatic of British Malaya. Besides W. Somerset Maugham, and perhaps a few other contemporary authors, Bruce Lockhart captures the imperialist mood of Fauconnier's Malaya, amid its Britishness, superbly. In an attempt to provide an expert's opinion on the social structures and mores, he writes the following:

It is true that many changes have taken place in the life of the British community since 1910. In my day everybody knew everybody, and there were few men who had not received a public school education. The large increase in the numbers of the white population has altered this happy state of affairs, and the advent of motor-cars has destroyed that privacy and solitude which to my mind was the great charm of the old life of Malay [...] the day is nearly past when a white man can live his own life as he wants to without paying the consequences for his flouting of British social conventions [...] ...But in spite of the accessibility of hill stations and the improvement in health conditions, I doubt whether if the white woman will ever be suited to long residence in a tropical country like Malaya, and I cannot resist the contention that her presence in such large numbers is responsible, at least to some extent, for the decline in the white man's prestige (Bruce Lockhart, 1936: 110).

Significantly, Bruce Lockhart praises Fauconnier, Conrad and Maugham, but especially Fauconnier, by saying: "But the fact remains that the very best literary interpretations of the Malayan East are the works of a French planter called Fauconnier[...]" (Bruce Lockhart, 1936: 109). When one considers that the English translation of *Malaisie* had only appeared five years before Bruce Lockhart's book, he comes across as well versed on the subject of Malaya. But most significantly Bruce Lockhart says the following, which underscores Fauconnier's attitude and helps us place the latter's work within a Modernist context and within the patriarchy debate:

There is too among the British a division of classes which was unknown in my time, and which has been sharpened by the large increase in the number of white women. It is a replica of the same social life that exists in Britain, but in the East it is a disturbing and undesirable feature. Indeed the presence of a white woman in the tropical East sets a problem for which a satisfactory solution has yet to be found. [...] There are some women whose lives are little else than one long round of pleasure-seeking from their morning bridge to the moonlight drive at night with their young admirer of the moment (Bruce Lockhart, 1936: 110-111).

²² Any number of authors and historians can be referred to here including J.M. Gullick, Tim Harper and Margaret Shennan, to name but three, and of course Sir Hugh Clifford who was governor of the Straits Settlements for part of the time that Fauconnier resided in Malaya.

Bruce Lockhart illustrates prevalent attitudes towards Western women, especially in the last sentence. It explains to some extent the type of relationship Rolain and Lescale have, in that the presence of white women would accelerate, legitimate and justify the transplantation of suburban middle-class England to the colonies. This did in fact happen, with the arrival of more women as the wives of planters and government officials, and later as nurses, teachers and other professionals. So for Bruce Lockhart to mention this aspect helps us to contextualise Fauconnier's rebellion against the "embourgeoisement" of Malaya and explains the absence of normative heterosexual relations with white women. In its stead Lescale and Rolain turn to local women and each other. The term "sleeping dictionary" was also used to refer to the liaisons newly arrived government officials or planters had with local women.

Somerset Maugham's *Far Eastern Tales* contain many examples of the hypocrisy, dysfunctionality and self-delusional aspirations held by many colonials, as well as the loneliness of the men on remote plantations. "Force of Circumstance" (2000: 247-278) is one such short story, and particularly apt in this regard as a superb example of the steadfast refusal of British colonisers to, at least outwardly, adapt to the circumstances prevalent in Malaya. However, when night falls the situation changes and the existential plight of the lonely planter becomes too much to bear and one thing leads to another. Like Fauconnier's protagonists, Somerset Maugham's characters also are faced with a situation in which the trappings of "home" are absent and they have to face life unmediated by the regular rhetoric of domesticity and home country life. In his stories frequent references are made to clubs (as in *Malaisie*), bridge and tennis gatherings and the eccentricities that flourish in a colonial setting. Fauconnier's novel forms part of a literary tradition in this particular aspect – the psychological exploration of the Western individual living in an alien environment. The British way of life is grafted onto an alien tree. It is in this regard that Fauconnier's protagonists are doubly alien even from their fellow white men, the British, in that they find the British rituals absurd. These rituals form part of establishing a British hegemony, and it is quite plausible that Rolain and Lescale would feel out of kilter with their British counterparts.

Bruce Lockhart, however, provides us with an answer, an explication of the inherent attitude to patriarchy that informs Fauconnier's stance: the rejection of white women in favour of relations with Malay women as a way of exploring the mystery of Malaya, whereas the presence of a white woman takes the man back to the social and cultural straightjacket that is Europe. Patriarchal, or even misogynistic, Fauconnier may be, but he rejects a patriarchy that perpetuates an economic and political model which is inimical to him. Crinis (2004) suggests that the role assigned to women in *Malaisie* is what it is only to mask the nature of the relationship between Lescale and Rolain:

The women's body is in the text as a ploy to distract us from the men's relationships, to make Lescale appear heterosexual and to offset the male homosexuality. [...] I would argue, however, that the text is overwhelmingly about the sexual tension between the men and few could deny that Fauconnier was not writing about homosexual relationships (Crinis, 2004: 102).

Fauconnier does not come across as being concerned with the maintenance of the white man's prestige or hegemony in particular; it simply is. His concern would seem to have rather been the maintenance of an undomesticated masculinity that was closer to a philosophical truth, to what he sees as the essence of maleness. Bruce Lockhart sums up his discourse on white women as follows:

But in spite of the accessibility of hill stations and the improvement in health conditions, I doubt if the white woman will ever be suited to long residence in a tropical country like Malaya, and I cannot resist the contention that her presence in such large numbers is responsible, at least to some extent, for the decline in the white man's prestige (Bruce Lockhart, 1936: 111).

Roth's *Radetzkmarsch* also has mild homoerotic elements in it, but this does not diminish the patriarchal elements in the novel, which can also be read as a description of the collapse of patriarchy inasmuch as the novel describes the collapse and pathology of a highly patriarchal order, the ultimate embodiment of which is the figure of the doddering emperor, Franz Joseph. Whether Roth is consciously anti-patriarchal or not is not as pertinent as what he presents to us in *Radetzkmarsch*. From the housekeeper in the Von Trotta household, right through to Frau von Taußig the women are, whatever their psychological function for the protagonist, always in the service of the male protagonist, Carl Joseph. Frau von Taußig has a role to play in the young man's life, but her own motives and desires are scantily explored. The fact that Frau von Taußig

is, at the end of the novel, the one who has to look after Graf Chojnicki, who ends up in an asylum, is symbolically significant: Graf Chojnicki, the Polish aristocrat who with alacrity announces the inevitable doom of the Habsburg Empire, awash as he is in money, is equally a victim of the First World War in that he has shell shock and goes insane.

The women in *Radetzkymarsch* vary in their roles, in that all of them from Fräulein Hirschwitz, the housekeeper, to Frau Slama, to Frau von Taußig at first reading appear to be suitably subservient to the needs of males. Upon closer examination it becomes clear that the women represent an order, not merely a politically imposed order (and a fraudulent one), but a psychological order. However much despised Fräulein Hirschwitz may be by Carl Joseph's father, she represents a domestic order which nurtures the younger Carl Joseph; so does the old retainer Jacques, but his role has other dimensions to be discussed in due course. Frau Slama, with whom Carl Joseph has an adulterous affair, is but a stepping stone in Carl Joseph's path to self-knowledge. She is portrayed sympathetically, but the affair lays bare the hypocrisy that lies at the heart of the empire in that with Carl Joseph as a lieutenant, her sergeant-husband has no recourse to justice. In short, Carl Joseph abuses his military and social rank to satisfy an emotional and sexual need. He does not desist from doing what is patently unfair and wrong, thus Roth is illustrating in the early stages of the novel Carl Joseph's innate, or socially prescribed, weakness. In other words Frau Slama and the episode with her, and her subsequent death in childbirth, have a strong and obvious symbolic significance. The chances are that Carl Joseph was the indirect cause of her death and of her husband's consequent suffering and humiliation.

With Frau von Taußig Carl Joseph seeks out someone who is socially elevated, not of his own status. This time he is very obviously seeking a mother figure, in that Frau von Taußig is significantly older than he is. She views Carl Joseph as a toy boy, a rôle he is keen to fulfil, even though he is not fully aware of the fact that this is in effect the rôle he is fulfilling. He takes the relationship much more seriously than she does. Such is his need that he bankrupts himself to satisfy her imagined needs, imagined by him, in the form of an expensive necklace. The arrangement suits her, but Carl Joseph discovers in due course that she is Graf Chojnicki's lover

as well. In other words he endures what Sergeant Slama endured. The wheels of justice have come a full circle. But most significantly, the relationship with Frau von Taußig underscores the inherent malady which a “Frauenfrei” environment and childhood inflict upon Carl Joseph. No amount of military rigour and social conformity can compensate for this. In brief, Carl Joseph seeks in adulthood what he lacked as a child, a well-worn psychological pattern. It is clear from the above that Carl Joseph’s unhappiness is indeed due to patriarchy. Carl Joseph’s personal impasse is thus also a metaphor for the impasse of the empire, and the novel’s modernist attributes are in part illustrated in the relationships Carl Joseph has with eminently unsuitable women. While glimmers of respite are found in his relationship with Dr Demant, the regimental doctor and with his batman, Onufrij, who donates all his savings to spare Carl Joseph financial embarrassment, Carl Joseph’s unhappiness or unsuitability to function as expected in a given society is largely due to the nature of that society and its in-built inadequacies and mendacities.

Again, with its emphasis on the military, *Radetzkymarsch* is essentially a male-centred novel and certainly does not concern itself with undermining patriarchy, other than, and significantly so, by illustrating the demise of a system that holds patriarchy in place.

In this regard, the following observations are made by Isabel dos Santos in her doctoral dissertation entitled *Die Darstellung der Frau bei Joseph Roth* :

Nun stirbt der junge Carl Joseph zwar leider viel zu früh um patriarchalische Zustände aufrecht zu erhalten, aber es muss ihm zugestanden werden, dass er es wenigstens geschafft hat, sich im Fall von Frau Slama ihrer besonders gründlich zu entledigen! (Dos Santos, Isabel, 2009:158). [However, young Carl Joseph unfortunately dies too soon to maintain patriarchal circumstances, but it must be acknowledged that at least in the case of Frau Slama he manages to get rid of her quite thoroughly! (author’s translation).]

While Dos Santos summarises the various interpretations of Carl Joseph’s complex and his complexities, the emphasis in her discourse concerns itself mainly with patriarchy as such, not with the doom and impasse that are inherent in *Radetzkymarsch*. Roth illustrates the demise of patriarchy and its inadequacy in upholding a precarious socio-political order. However, later she points out that a sense of doom is present in the sequel to *Radetzkymarsch*, namely *Die*

Kapuzinergruft. Whereas in *Radetzky* the Empire seems psychologically doomed by the lack of motherly love, in *Die Kapuzinergruft* motherly love is portrayed as emasculating:

Obwohl im *Radetzky* die Mutter kaum vertreten ist, kann nicht davon die Rede sein, dass das bei Roths Österreich-Werk eine Konstante ist. Nicht übersehen werden sollte, dass im thematisch anschließenden Roman *Die Kapuzinergruft* die Trotta-Mutter eine besonders große Rolle spielt, die die Idee einer von Frauen befreiten, mythologisierten Männlichkeit der Habsburgerzeit widerlegt. Wieder gibt es dort eine Verschmelzung von Frau/Mutter und Monarchie: Frau Trotta steht symbolisch für die untergegangene Zeit, als die Monarchie noch intakt war. Bezeichnend ist dabei die Mutter-Sohn-Beziehung, die uncharakteristisch eng ist. In diesem Fall ist ihr der Sohn völlig ergeben, so dass ein positives Verhältnis zur eigenen Frau nicht zustande kommen kann (Dos Santos, 2009:173). [Even though in *Radetzky* the mother is hardly represented, one cannot say that this is consistently the case in Roth's Austrian opus. It should not be forgotten that in the sequel, *Die Kapuzinergruft*, the Trotta mother plays a particularly important role, which refutes the idea of the mythologised masculinity of the Habsburg era being liberated by women. Again there is intertwining of woman, mother and monarchy: Mrs Trotta symbolically represents the crumbling epoch, when the monarchy was still intact. It is significant that the mother-son relationship is uncharacteristically close. In this case the son is completely devoted to her, thus impeding a positive relationship to his own wife (author's translation).]

What Dos Santos is hinting at is the inherent sterility, physical as well as historical, that lies at the heart of Roth's exploration of the impasse his protagonist Carl Joseph has to live through.

The core of Roth's Modernism is the complex and seemingly contradictory approach to patriarchy, along with the paradoxes and ironies which inform the novel. It is Modernist in that it undermines its own premises: Roth presents us with a nostalgia for a previous socio-political order, but simultaneously illustrates why it could not be maintained. The inspiration for the novel comes in part from the dearth of anything better, respectable or worthy to replace the Habsburg Empire upon its demise. Out of his disillusionment Roth cannot foresee that anything better than the Austro-Hungarian empire could ever arise. It's a novel that can be described, as a pastiche of idealism, resignation and cynicism and is anti-traditional, in the Modernist sense, in that it does not seek to legitimise a *status quo* of any kind; it is in fact a searing critique, not only of the Habsburg Empire, but of the writer's contemporary world. Seen thus, it is also inevitably undermining of patriarchy, by default, if not by intent.

In *Gli occhiali d'oro* patriarchy is represented by the Fascist state. Fascism's relentless assertion of male dominance (the celibacy tax imposed on unmarried men, awards for large families and

the banishment to remote islands of known homosexuals) is well documented. Inasmuch as Bassani's novel is a searing critique of many things, including the Fascist state, it shows that while it is traditional in its story-telling technique, it is nonetheless subversive. As mentioned, it was written well after the period that Eysteinsson's considers to be of the zenith of Modernism. This does not diminish its Modernist credentials as opposed to post-Modernism, when we consider that Italo Calvino's *Il Barone Rampante*, for example, an infinitely less conventional novel than Bassani's in terms of style and content, was published the year before *Gli occhiali d'oro*. So here we have Bassani publishing a novel that was conventional in many ways, but thematically subversive not only in terms of the time of its publication, but also in the way it assails the collective amnesia that besets an Italy trying to sweep its past under the carpet. The implicit subversion of patriarchy in *Radetzky* is relatively innocuous in that the world Roth describes is dead and gone. The political order had changed not only radically at the time of its publication in 1932, but even more so in the wake of World War II in the 1950s. So Roth was addressing a situation which, at the time of writing, was essentially historical in that it no longer existed, nor did any institutions of the Habsburg Empire. This was not the case for Bassani. The Italy that he was writing for, as it were, was democratic, but many other writers, most notably Pier Paolo Pasolini, viewed democracy in Italy as merely a device for Italy to continue being essentially Fascist and hence also patriarchal. Many of the institutions of the Fascist state were perpetuated after the fall of Fascism, and Italy's complicated war history with the civil war of 1943-1945, allowed divisions and institutions such as the monarchy to continue into 1946. In other words, Bassani was addressing a situation that was still recognisable 13 years after the fall of Fascism, and the consequences of the Fascist excesses were evident in the post-war political arrangements, as shown by the surge in left-wing ideology in cinema and other spheres of artistic and public life, in opposition to US-backed Christian Democracy. While Roth was writing about a political entity that no longer existed in 1932 (even though the political arrangements that came in the wake of the fall of the Habsburg Empire were very much at the centre of the political problems of post-World War I Europe), Bassani was writing about a political, geographical and social entity, the legacy of which was very much discernible when he wrote in the late 1950s. This was also manifested by the reactions to Fascism.

As regards the reception of Bassani's much more well-known novel *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini*, the following gives some idea of the effect that Bassani's writing elicited from those who appreciated its significance. The following quote is taken from the much respected man of letters, Carlo Dionisotti:

[...] gli uomini della nostra generazione non possono leggere senza, per quegli anni, per quel nodo di attesa e di angoscia, una reazione immediata (Dionisotti, Carlo, *Studi sul fascismo e sulla Resistenza*, 2008: xxxiii, quoted in Introduction By Giorgio Panizza). [...] the men of our generation cannot read [it], bearing in mind those years, that knot of expectation and anxiety, without an immediate reaction (author's translation).]

As regards patriarchy, Bassani's portrayal of Dr Fadigati, is one of the relatively few examples of an overt portrayal of homosexuality in 20th-century Italian literature.²³ In cinema it is more frequent, and at times homosexuality was used as a metaphor for the perversion of totalitarianism (*Roma, Città Aperta, Germania Anno Zero* both by Roberto Rossellini), but in Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* the oblique allusion to homosexuality is not judgmental. In films made long after the Second World War, such as Ettore Scola's *Una Giornata Particolare*, the homosexual Gabriele is used to illustrate the inhumanity of Fascism and its inherent mendacity.

The portrayal of Fadigati is complex in that Fadigati's very existence is a challenge to patriarchy, especially since Bassani tells us clearly in the beginning of the novel that well-known football players were known to have had relations with Fadigati.²⁴ What, one could argue, could be more subversive of patriarchy than that? A further denunciation of patriarchy is Fadigati's being presented as being perfectly acceptable to the bourgeois Ferrarese in that in every way he not only conforms to their norms, but he sets the standard in terms of elegance and refinement to which many members of the bourgeoisie among his patients aspire. Fadigati's fate is sealed when he exposes his sexuality in a public manner, so as to reveal to the reader the inherent

²³ The fact that Boccaccio back in the 13th century gives us a relatively benign view of homosexuality in the Seventh Day of *Il Decameron* illustrates to what extent attitudes obviously vary from epoch to epoch. Dante arguably gives us a complex but not unsympathetic view of Brunetto Latini (c.1220 – 1294) in Canto XV of *Inferno*.

²⁴ Fascism is also renowned for its glorification of the male body, an aspect of Fascism which is treated with great visual irony in Vittorio De Sica's *Ladri di Biciclette*, for example.

hypocrisy that defines Ferrarese society. What is also revealing is Bassani's gentle and insightful metaphoric descriptions of Fadigati. Bassani has created a character of fiction which is a masterful study of loneliness. Bassani's Fadigati is no less compelling a character than Raskolnikov (*Crime and Punishment*) or Vronsky (*Anna Karenina*), for example. Raskolnikov could be seen as exemplifying the struggle with conscience and Vronsky's tale the range of emotions inherent in love and infidelity. Similarly, the psychological insights Bassani displays go well beyond the immediate needs of the narrative and delve into the realms of the self-hating homosexual paralleled with the notion of the self-hating Jew. Brilliantly nuanced insights oscillate between condemnation and human sympathy, but as a character in his own right Fadigati certainly is essential to the plot, both on a narrative level and as a metaphor.

In a scene towards the end of the novel, we see Fadigati encountering the *io narrante* trying to get rid of an errant, pregnant bitch. The dog behaves in a manner which mirrors Fadigati's own behaviour. The dog does everything in its power to be loved, much like Fadigati has done throughout the novel. By implication Bassani is also saying that the way the Ferrarese Jews ingratiated themselves with Fascism, or at very best tolerated the Fascist regime, is much the same as the way the dog wants to be loved, the way Fadigati wants to be loved, if for nothing else, to ensure survival. Survival at the expense of dignity is a central theme in Bassani, who implies in his other works as well that the cowardice returns to haunt those who do not display courage when circumstances require it. Cowardice ultimately is a form of betrayal; what sees itself as self-preservation ultimately aids and abets evil. While the scene with the bitch is too long to quote at length, the following paragraph captures the essence of the metaphor:

Il dottore si chinò a carezzarla sul capo. In preda a un accesso di autentica passione, la bestia non finiva più di leccargli la mano. Tentò perfino di arrivarli al viso con un fulmineo bacio a tradimento (Bassani, 1983: 100). [The doctor knelt down to stroke her head. In a fit of genuine passion, the creature kept on licking his hands. She tried to reach his face with the sudden ambush of a kiss (McKendrick, 2012: 107).]²⁵

²⁵ It is curious that Weaver uses the words "sudden surprise kiss" when the Italian clearly states "bacio a tradimento", a "kiss of betrayal" which would be much more in keeping for the theme of betrayal that characterises not only *Gli occhiali d'oro* but so much of Bassani's *oeuvre*. However, in McKendrick's translation he uses the word "ambush of a kiss", which more aptly underscores the theme of betrayal in the novel.

That Bassani was aware of the patriarchy of his society is revealed in the following excerpt, and comes from Dr Fadigati, which lends an added irony to the passage:

Ma poi, girando verso Bianca uno sguardo timido, esitante, eppure in qualche modo complice, scontrosamente complice a solidale:

“E lei sia buona signorina”, aggiunge, “sia un po’ più arrendevole. Tocca alla donna, non lo sa?” (Bassani, 1980: 32). [But then, directing a shy, hesitant glance, and yet at the same time complicit, touchily complicit and supportive, towards Bianca:

“And, young woman, you should try to behave yourself too, he added, ‘be a bit more compliant. It’s something expected of women, don’t you know?’”(McKendrick, 2012: 29).]

This scene comes just after Bianca Sgarbi and Nino Bottechiari have had a squabble and Fadigati had witnessed it. Here there is an overt mention of the role women supposedly have to play, and coming from Fadigati it reveals too his own position – always having to use guile and deceit in order to survive and never being allowed to make his intentions, his identity clear. Bassani is drawing a direct parallel between the position of women in society and that of the homosexual man – both exist at the behest of heterosexual men, either as objects of desire in the case of women, or as objects of opprobrium or disdain in the case of homosexuals, hence the sense of solidarity that Bassani describes in this scene. With this short interlude between Bianca Sgarbi and Fadigati one sees too how a comment with a greater resonance is seemingly innocently woven into the text. Again, nothing is superfluous in Bassani’s descriptions; in this scene too we see an awareness on Bassani’s part of the inherent injustice that society requires for it to work according to established and time-honoured norms. Much like women, Jews and homosexuals in Fascist society too are on the margins, or are those who have to endure in order to survive; acceptance is always conditional, never freely granted and rarely conquered. Fadigati had in fact conquered his place in society, but the conditions attached to his conquest, to his acceptance had become unbearable by the time he breaks all the rules and openly cavorts with Deliliers.

A woman, Signora Lavezzoli, is the mouthpiece for Fascist ideology in the novel and this shows another dimension of the work in that Bassani puts the most virulent prejudices into the words he gives to the leading female voice in the novel. Signora Lavezzoli is shown to be completely in

awe of masculinity, from her descriptions of Mussolini to the fact that her status is derived from that of her husband, an ex-MP. She is a victim of patriarchy to the point where she is an active participant in her own subservient rôle in the local Fascist order in that she is an ardent supporter of one of the most overtly patriarchal societies that modernity has given us, namely Fascism. It is a willing subjugation and all the more subversive in that Bassani has a woman be the voice of patriarchy. Signora Lavezzoli, in effect, prostrates herself in the service of patriarchy; by being an ardent Fascist supporter she ensures her acceptance, even when it is made quite clear in the novel that her husband as a defeated socialist is by now nothing but a lukewarm Fascist.

Seen differently, one could also assert that Bassani's novel is misogynistic – in that his portrayal of the female lead is so thoroughly unsympathetic. And, by the same token, one could also assert that all three the novels are inherently misogynistic. While an argument along these lines could be easily developed, one would have to make allowances for too many cases, especially in *Gli occhiali d'oro*, where a misogynistic interpretation of his novels would prove groundless. Both in *Gli occhiali d'oro* and *Radetzkyarsch*, the question of patriarchy is not at the forefront of their narrative endeavours, but that does not diminish the implicit erosion of patriarchy in both novels.

Malaisie by contrast can be read as homoerotic, in that the central relationship or emotional bond in the novel is between two men and the novel is an explicit validation of that relationship. So when considering the question of Modernism and patriarchy, all three novels are Modernist in that they interrogate patriarchy, but without explicitly subverting it. As Eysteinnsson points out “patriarchal social habits” might still be said to be “guiding individual lives”.

2.5 The “Disdain” for Modernity

Another way of approaching the problem of Modernity is, as Julian Nelson sees it in “Modernism and the Technologies of Insight”, where he makes the association between “disdain” and “modernity”, by referring specifically to the works of Thomas Mann:

Mann’s novel does not exhibit the same discursive paradox of a movement built on disdain for the past, but rather a shuffling of the fragments of a nascent modernity with the remnants of a persistent humanist identity premised on nineteenth-century Romantic self-formation, *Kultur* and *Bildung*. [...] Much of middle-class Germany disdained modernity and the democratic institutions of Weimar, which were perceived as something imposed, a product of the hegemony of Anglo-French-American globalization (Nelson, J. in Eysteinson and Liska, 2007: 419).

The disdain referred to above is the disdain, in part, of the past, as Nelson clearly indicates. But Nelson airs the view that technology has been allowed to set an ethical standard; that standard is not longer humanistic; technology in a sense can be seen to be a factor in modernity that exacerbates “ontological homelessness”.²⁶ The extent to which the novels can be seen in this light is not insignificant, and this light is not limited to the Weimar period, nor to the works of Thomas Mann or to German literature: on a more literal level, *Radetzkyarsch* is a clear case of disdain, because post-World War One modernity had arguably given rise to the basest and most unbridled forces of nationalism. Roth couches his disdain in a form that is elaborate and subtle. Rather than inveigh against the forces of the extreme right (as he does in *Das Spinnennetz*, for example), *Radetzkyarsch* takes the form of a nostalgic elegy and eulogy to the past, while expressing a resignation to the fact that the present is inevitably barbaric. Roth’s novel is highly subversive in that what appears on one level as an accessible lamentation for a past order is in fact an invective against the course upon which modernity is set, a path that is privileging the instinctual and the vengeful. It is also an invective against mankind’s inability to respond to its higher self. However elusive that higher self may be, under the Habsburgs at

²⁶ Nelson, 2007: 425, quoting John Frow, 1997: 79-80; *Time and the Commodity Culture – Essays in Cultural Theory and Post-Modernity*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

least, laudably, lip service is paid to the would-be higher self, to an ideal of peaceful co-habitation of ethnically diverse peoples. Read further in this vein, Roth's novel can also appear disingenuous in that his novel is intended as a warning, and yet its focus is retrospective and nostalgic when in fact his gaze is firmly fixed on the future, however doomed. The flight into an apparent nostalgia is but a smokescreen for a much more disturbing view of the future. He feels disdain for modernity, because modernity has brought forth the forces of Nazism (even though National Socialism unleashed its full might seven years after the publication of *Radetzkymarsch*). Fascism in Italy was already in its tenth year at the time of *Radetzkymarsch's* publication and the Depression was steadily nurturing the extremism of both the Left and Right in Germany and therefore there was nothing left that was ideologically appealing in the Roth scheme of things, but a return to a world of order, however rickety that order had been under the Habsburgs. *Radetzkymarsch* is much like an autopsy being performed on a beloved but flawed individual and the causes of the demise are clearly, scientifically presented.

Similarly, *Gli occhiali d'oro* can also be viewed as a disdainful response to what modernity had brought forth. Whereas in *Radetzkymarsch* it is the rise of right-wing extremism (which Roth himself witnessed and which forced his flight from Germany), Bassani experienced Fascism in power first-hand. This was spared Roth by his death a few months before the start of World War II, and hence before the Nazi occupation of France, where Roth had been living. Like Roth, Bassani also retreats into a kind of ideological elitism, perhaps more pronounced in *Il giardino dei Finzi Contini* than in *Radetzkymarsch*. In both *Gli occhiali d'oro* and in *Il giardino dei Finzi Contini* one has the conscious creation of worlds within worlds, the setting apart of the Jewish community from the Fascist *goihim* and within the Jewish community the separation into those who follow the Italian, Spanish or German rites. All this serves to set Bassani's characters apart and to give them, the non-Jewish ones as well, a specific identity and a history as a way of distinguishing them from what was essentially a mass phenomenon, namely Fascism.²⁷ Fadigati

²⁷ Renzo de Felice is one of the first historians to confront post-war Italy with the fact that Fascism was indeed a mass phenomenon that enjoyed wide-scale support, something which many a writer/historian wished to negate, deny?. See *Il fascismo. Le interpretazioni dei contemporanei e degli storici*, 2008. The disenchantment with Fascism took root once the Second World War started and Italy fared badly. However, the conquest of Ethiopia and the

also retreats into his own world – his surgery is described as being a world apart, where artists such as the homosexual Ferrarese artist Filippo De Pisis along with De Chirico were part of the ambience he had created for himself, as were Wagner operas.

Trovava infine un medico bonario e conversevole, che mentre lo introduceva personalmente “ di là” per esminargli la gola, pareva soprattutto ansioso, da quel vero signore che era, di sapere se il suo cliente avesse avuto modo di ascoltare alcune sere prima, al *Comunale* di Bologna, Aureliano Pertile²⁸ nel *Lohengrin*; oppure, che so?, se avesse visto tale De Chirico²⁹ o quel tale “Casorati”³⁰, e se gli fosse piaciuto quel talaltro De Pisis³¹; e faceva poi le più alte meraviglie se il cliente, a quest’ultimo proposito, confessava non soltanto di non conoscere De Pisis, ma di non aver mai saputo prima d’allora che Filippo De Pisis fosse un giovane *molto* promettente pittore ferrarese (Bassani, 10: 1983). [He would find a good-natured and sociable doctor who while personally ushering him ‘in there’ to examine the sore throat, seemed above all anxious to know, like the truly refined gentleman he was, whether his patient had had the opportunity to hear, some evenings before, at Bologna’s Teatre Comunale, Aurelio Pertile in *Lohengrin*; or else, who knows? – if he had looked closely at De Chirico or that little Casorati hung on such-and-such a wall in whichever waiting room, and if the De Pisis had appealed to him; and then he would express profound surprise if his patient, in response, confessed to not knowing who Filippo De Pisis was, let alone that he was a young and *very* promising painter from Ferrara (McKendrick, 2012: 4-5).]

What is most subtle and revealing in this passage is that while Richard Wagner’s works are here represented as a means of conveying the political proximity of German culture, allied as Italy was to Nazi Germany, it also is a reference to the swooning harmonies of Wagner and the tales of unrequited or heroic love contained in his operas. The references to Wagner also have a menacing quality to them inasmuch as they allude to the anti-Semitism attributed to Wagner,

creation of an Italian Empire seemed to have validated, albeit briefly, Italy’s expansionist policies. See Chabod, Federico, *L’Italia contemporanea, 1918-1948*, 1961, 2001, among innumerable studies on Italy in the 20th century. The works of Angelo del Boca in particular focus on the relationship between the Fascist regime and the Italian people and the myths and distortions that have been perpetuated since the fall of Fascism. His *Italiani, Brava Gente?* (2009) is of particular relevance.

²⁸ Aureliano Pertile (1885-1952).

²⁹ Giorgio De Chirico (1888-1978).

³⁰ Felice Casorati (1883-1963).

³¹ Filippo De Pisis (1896-1956). See also Comisso Giovanni, *Il Mio Sodalizio con De Pisis*, Vicenza: Neri Pozza, Editore, 1993.

the alliance between Italy and Germany, over and above the lugubrious sensuality that his harmonies are said to invoke.

This is then subtly contrasted with major figures of Italian visual arts, who were opposed to the triumphalist Futurists who provided much of the would-be ideology and aesthetic of the Fascist “revolution”. De Chirico’s melancholy landscapes and the nostalgic and haunting echoes and reinterpretations of classic Italian art are a far cry, in their static nature, from the frenetic works of Severini, Boccioni, Carrà and the other Futurists artists, precursors and contributors to the Fascist aesthetic. The reference to Casorati betrays Fadigati’s seemingly effortless familiarity, almost intimacy, with the art of his day, to the point where he used the diminutive, namely “Casoratino”, to refer to one of Felice Casorati’s works. Filippo De Pisis was an openly homosexual artist who had to go into exile to Paris. His paintings reflect a radical departure as well from triumphalist art of any kind, preferring still life, scenes from nature, seascapes and self-portraits with indistinct, blurred lines being a hallmark of his style. The fact that Fadigati heaps praise upon De Pisis is almost an “in joke” on the part of Bassani, because he might well have been aware of the documented fact that De Pisis was homosexual. It could be argued that Bassani’s own sexuality is alluded to by his reference to De Pisis. But in this passage Fadigati is also revealing a part of himself, however obliquely, by expressing surprise that the patient might not know who De Pisis was, especially as he was Ferrarese. The fact too, that De Pisis was Ferrarese illustrates the intimacy of the novel, where even the artists on Fadigati’s surgery walls are local, homosexual and suffocated by the claustrophobic provincialism of Ferrara.

What Bassani effectively does by his detailed description of the ambiance of Fadigati’s surgery is to distinguish him from the rest of complacent Ferrarese society, and to show how Fadigati too lives in a world of his own making in order to survive in a society that would shun him – as they did De Pisis – if it knew the truth about his sexuality. Fadigati, for all his outward conformity, indeed the standards of elegance that he set in his attire and in his surgery, masks the subversive nature of his existence. Homosexuality, in that it can be viewed as implicitly subversive, in *Gli occhiali d’oro* serves as a further manifestation of the concentric circles of

exclusion³² and solitude that characterise Bassani's Ferrara. The fact that this pattern of exclusion later manifests itself as persecution of one form or another thus does not come as a surprise. Bassani prepares the ground for the reader for what is to come in that one asks what are the grounds for the exclusion, why is Ferrara so prone to differentiate so resolutely between the different sectors of its community? Given the times, the question thus arises how would the Jews fare in such circumstances? The whole passage in effect illustrates the ambiguity of Fadigati's stance – on the one hand, an admirer of Wagner in that the composer's works putatively reflect Fadigati's own search for love and acceptance, which forever elude him; on the other, we see Fadigati giving tortured expression to his sexuality by adorning his surgery with works not necessarily accepted by officialdom or by his bourgeois clientele. There's a rebellion simmering in Fadigati, that struggles to express itself.

The Holocaust itself thus is seen in part, by Bassani, as an act in keeping with the barbaric vulgarity of Fascism in general, befitting the nature its perpetrators. The simplistic, banal and blatant expediency that characterised Fascism and its view of the world is presented in Bassani's novels in contrast to the world which his *io narrante* inhabits. Bassani's narrator lives in a materially comfortable world, but not opulent, and with values enshrined in "great works" of literature. The frequent references to the arts also provide an additional shield against the crassness of Fascism and the uncouth and reductive worldview they sought to impose on a world, on a civilisation, that had produced much that is of more value than Fascism claims to be. This would seem to be the nature of Bassani's "disdain" of Fascism, of Fascism inasmuch as it is a symptom of modernity, a vulgarised manifestation of modernity. Like Roth, Bassani's return to a kind of imagined golden age is symptomatic too of his disdain of the present, of what is going on around his narrator. Roth's nostalgia, on the other hand, is directed towards a previous epoch because of the order and stability it sought to represent, namely the Habsburg Empire. Bassani's disdain is expressed in more ethereal terms, namely in a yearning for the refinements of literature, of the arts, of consciousness itself that all stand in stark and grim

³² See Schneider, Marilyn, *The Vengeance of the Victim* and various critics including Oddo De Stefanis, who in their elaborate studies of Bassani refer to the various layers of exclusion operating in Bassani's works.

contrast to what his narrators endure: being held hostage – in their consciousness of the world around them – by the unbridled pathology and baseness of modernity in its Fascist incarnation.

Of course, Roth and Bassani reveal much more than mere disdain for the times they lived in, but the word disdain, as intended by Julian Nelson, is appropriate for present purposes in that it refers to a disdain not just for Roth's Central Europe or Bassani's Fascist Italy. It is rather a disdain for the state of civilisation in that the authors find themselves in a state of impasse with modernity itself. The Modernism, as it were, that Roth and Bassani represent, if one reads Modernism as being the "ideology of modernity", is one that eschews the "world as it is", for very cogent reasons. This is in effect then a state of impasse with the world as it is, and certainly with the world as it is likely to be.

This state of impasse with modernity is most spectacularly illustrated in Fauconnier's *Malaisie*: his disdain has taken him right out of Europe, the source, in his view, of all maladies, of all the misdemeanours of which humanity is capable. Where Roth seeks refuge in the Habsburg past and Bassani in aesthetics and political activism, Fauconnier seeks it in primordiality, in what is perceived to be the prelapsarian sensibility of Malaya. He creates an elaborate and mystical world that in large measure is inaccessible to the Western mind. He proposes an alternative way of life, unsullied by the tawdry and expedient conventions that led to the calamity of the First World War which his characters Rolain and Lescale had lived through. Fauconnier justifies his stance through involved Nietzschean musings about the self-fulfilment of the individual, all as part of a complex act of disdain for a supine, middle-class conventionality. The disdain for the illusionary nature of conventions would seem at some levels to align Fauconnier's novel with D'Annunzio's works (who was also much influenced by Nietzsche). Like Roth and Bassani, Fauconnier also resorts to an élitist refuge of sorts. Malaya becomes an escape into a world that can be shaped by the individual imagination, for him a realm that can be mastered through the imagination, not through fact. The illusion of control is maintained, control of the environment and of the self. The character of Rolain epitomises this. Rolain is the implicit ideal that underscores the novel. The "natives" will forever be incomprehensible and unknowable. And it is the "unknowability" of the natives in Malaya that heightens the mystery and the

mystic elements with which Fauconnier wants to endow his reality, unburdened by the illusion that things can be known, by the burden that reality is discernible and understandable. The unknowability of Malaya is almost a comfort to Rolain. It strengthens him in his dominance of his chosen realm. Western notions of empirical knowledge and their concomitant traditions merely serve to validate the West, which he rejects on both a socio-historical as well as on a philosophical level. Of course, the inherent contradiction in Fauconnier's stance is that everything that he is, is Western and only a Westerner would view the East in the way he does, because it is *ipso facto* exotic. Fauconnier's disdain for modernity takes the form of a relatively uncritical and contradictory embracing of the exotic as a nigh desperate response to the crushing futility of Western normativity.

2.6 *Radetzky*marsch, *Gli occhiali d'oro* and *Malaisie* as symptoms of trauma and impasse

Ulrich Baer in his essay "Modernism and Trauma" makes the rather prosaic observation that "the twentieth century is marked by vast, possibly unprecedented disasters. Unlike previous eras, it is also characterized by a novel determination to recollect these disasters" (2007:307).

This assertion by Baer has obvious and immediate resonance for our novels, more so, however, when he examines poetry: "The suggestion that modernist literature is particularly apt for representing traumatic experience has surfaced with special emphasis on critical studies of modern poetry" (*Ibid.*: 307). While we are dealing with prose, Baer's ideas raise the question whether *Radetzky*marsch, *Gli occhiali d'oro* and *Malaisie* are not also examples of trauma? The novels recognise the inevitability of doom and hence can be viewed as novels of *impasse*. In other words, the awareness of the inevitability of doom is arguably equally, or at least to some degree, as traumatic as the trauma itself. Perhaps more accurately, the novels can be viewed as novels of anguish, of the mental torture of living in an age when doom is ever present and any vision for the future is truncated and undermined by social and political forces that the writers have witnessed and from which they can draw their conclusions. Needless to say, they have

limited control over their environments, even though they have some room to manoeuvre as to how to respond to their environments.

In this context Baer makes the following observations about Baudelaire, and Walter Benjamin's engagement with Baudelaire:

Baudelaire's poetry can thus be considered most "modern" where it takes stock of the widening discrepancy between lived reality and our understanding of it. The most extreme cases, to which Baudelaire was attuned and which Benjamin discusses in his study, are the traumatic shocks that occur when what is seen or experienced radically falls outside the accepted parameters of experience. In Benjamin's reading, these parameters were loosened or entirely lost with the onslaught of anonymizing mass existence under the inhospitable conditions of the industrial age [...] Benjamin identifies these conditions quite precisely and names the experience to be a form of psychic trauma (Baer, 2007: 310).

Similarly the three authors' works can be viewed as a response to shock, to trauma – *Radetzkymarsch* being a response not only to a mass society (which is a given by the time Roth wrote), but a response to the demise of a world order and the attendant collapse that came in its wake. Bassani's novelistic cycle *Il romanzo di Ferrara*, which contains *Gli occhiali d'oro*, can also be viewed as a response to the shock, the trauma of Fascism, not only insofar as it affected the Jews of Ferrara, but as it corroded a nation's sense of right and wrong, its ethical awareness. Likewise, Fauconnier's Malayan reverie is a response to shock, to the trauma of the First World War, which in turn is the result of "mass existence" (to use Baer's phrase) in conflict.

It is clear that each of the three novels provides a differing version, a differing response, if one makes the link between Modernism and trauma, as Baer does.

Radetzkymarsch provides the reader with an ever-present sense of doom, disguised as nostalgia, as we see how metaphorically Carl Joseph embodies the crisis of his times, as his future is truncated by the political and social forces of his times, much as was true for Roth himself. He would seem to identify in large measure with his character Carl Joseph, with the rational political and discursive element of the novel being articulated by Graf Chojnicki. The element of trauma is more obvious in Roth's other works, not as metaphorically elaborated, but in *Radetzkymarsch* we see what Baer refers to as the "lasting impact" (Baer, 2007: 311) of

trauma. Although the First World War had ended more than a decade before the writing and publication of *Radetzky*, the tardiness of a fully-fledged literary response to the trauma of that war bears testimony to the duration and depth of that trauma.

Similarly, Bassani's novels are also a response to trauma, namely the Holocaust and Fascism. Bassani presents us with a dilemma: along with authors such as Primo Levi and Paul Celan, who endured and survived the concentration camps and are considered literary exponents of the Holocaust, Bassani can also be seen as such, and has been classified as a writer of the Holocaust. Bassani presents us too with the enduring dilemma of Holocaust survivors, and some would say that Bassani was one of those who "were usurping the victims' cause", to use W.G. Sebald's³³ formulation, discussing Jean Améry's work, (Sebald, 2003: 152). So, while he is associated with the Holocaust, his writing opens up the proverbial can of worms regarding "survivor guilt" in that in another vein his work can be seen as an attempt at assuaging his guilt at having survived, considering how many members of his own family were deported from Ferrara in September 1943. Bassani's *Cinque Storie Ferraresi* engages openly with the plight of the survivor, or the returnee, revealing his awareness of the contradictory nature of his survival: had he not survived he could not have borne witness to the plight of the Ferrarese Jews; having survived, how does he come to terms with survival? It is not far-fetched to see Bassani's writings in this light – literature of assuagement. This view too may be reductive, but not irrelevant to understanding the layered complexity of his work and as Hutchinson points out:

The relationship which both writers, Sebald and Bassani, seek to establish to the realm of the dead, shares a specific political and historical context. In Bassani's novels it is the knowledge of the gathering storm of fascist anti-semitism and its horrors which lends pathos to his recreations of the past, whilst in Sebald's work the protagonists look back from the present to the catastrophic consequences of the war, to the forced emigration that they had to endure (Hutchinson, 2004: 79).

³³ See again Hutchinson, Ben, "Der Erzähler als Schutzengel": W.G. Sebald's Reading of Giorgio Bassani", in *Gegenwartsliteratur*, Vol 3, 2004, and Tübingen: Staufenberg Verlag, Vol. 6, 2007: 69-91.

Hutchinson serves to re-establish the premises of the argument, namely that of literature of impasse, literature written in the knowledge of impending doom, and he further sheds light on the phenomenon as regards Sebald.

Bassani never experienced the death camps, his invective is not limited to Fascism and the disasters that came with it, but more specifically is directed at the complacency, the cowardice, the willingness to compromise with Fascism, which then facilitated the betrayal not only of the liberal-democratic ideals upon which a united Italy came into being 70-odd years earlier, but also of the Jews; at the herding of people into camps, Jews and non-Jews alike.

The fact that Bassani does not limit himself to the betrayal of the Jews is significant in itself, because so much else is also at stake. Once the deportation and persecution of any group is legalised it is in effect a betrayal of all that he, Bassani, held sacred, namely the hegemony of liberal ideals and the democratic state. Bassani's stance also reveals the extraordinary degree of assimilation of Italian Jewry and universalises the unprecedented injustice experienced by the Jews. A central tenet of Bassani's thinking is his abhorrence of victimhood. (Sebald also discusses this question of victimhood in his analysis of Améry (Sebald, 2003: 151).) For Bassani defiance is the most effective response to injustice; and yet his defiant stance is one that can also be said to mask the problematic question of survivor's guilt. What Bassani is also saying is that being Italian is more significant than being Jewish. It was because the Jews were *Italian* that made the injustice perpetrated against them by their own countrymen all the more abhorrent. He refuses to make a distinction between being Jewish and Italian. They are one and the same. Hence the strong theme of betrayal in all his writing, including of course *Gli occhiali d'oro*. It was the passage of the 1938 Race Laws that forced Bassani into a consciousness of his Jewishness, something that hitherto had not been an issue, far away as the Italian Jews were in time and space from the memory of the Russian pogroms and other atavistic episodes in Jewish

history. The history of ghettoisation was in the distant past in Italy, while ghettos were a much more recent phenomenon in Eastern Europe; the *shtetl* was not part of Italian Jewish history.³⁴

As to the question whether Bassani should be considered a Holocaust writer at all, what comes to the fore most prominently in Bassani's works is the sense of profound betrayal, further augmented by the fact that so many Italian Jews – and Ferraresi in particular – were themselves card-carrying members of the Fascist Party.³⁵ The tragedy of the Holocaust is evident, such as illustrated in works such *Una lapide in via Mazzini* and of course in *Il giardino dei Finzi Contini*. That many family members died in the Holocaust does not seem to detract from Bassani's central concern regarding the complicity of Italians and Jews themselves in the tragic events that ensued as from September 1943, when Italy was in a state of civil war and northern Italy run by Mussolini's Italian Social Republic, whose adherents were disparagingly referred to as *repubblichini*, who collaborated with the Nazis in rounding up the Jews, and anti-Fascists. History itself, and Bassani's personal history as an anti-Fascist determined his writing, determined his response to events, much in the same way as these determined Primo Levi's response. Both writers responded to the Holocaust in a way that was concomitant with their personal histories, inevitably, or as their personal histories would allow.

³⁴ See Milano, Attilio, *Storia degli ebrei in Italia*, Torino: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1963. This is a seminal work on the history of the Jews in Italy, tracing their origins in Italy back to Ancient Rome when Judea was part of the Roman Empire.

³⁵ Susan Zuccotti points out: "By the time of the Fascist March on Rome in October 1922 and Mussolini's ascent to the office of prime minister, 746 Jews belonged to the Fascist or the Nationalist party (the two merged in 1923). Over 200 Jews claimed to have participated in the March, and officially received special honorary status to prove it. And, in addition to the activists, many Jewish businessmen, like their non-Jewish counterparts, helped finance the fledgling Fascist movement. Jewish involvement with Italian fascism is not surprising. With the exception of many in Rome, most Italian Jews were solidly middle-class, and by late 1921, Fascism had become a basically middle-class, anti-worker movement. Early revolutionary aspects had declined, leaving as primary goals anti-socialism, union busting, strike breaking, and the restoration of law and order at workers' expense. These objectives pleased both the Jewish and the non-Jewish middle classes [...] If the presence of Jews among the Fascists indicates again the thorough integration of the Jews into Italian society, it also suggests that Mussolini's movement was as free from anti-Semitism as any other political party in Italy. There were, it will be noted, no full Jews who remained in the Nazi party after Hitler came to power." (Zuccotti, 1987: 24-25).

2.6.1 The Ontological Quandary of the Protagonists

Having established that the authors are exponents of an impasse, one has to examine the protagonists of the three texts. Effectively, there are five: Carl Joseph in *Radetzky*, the *io narrante* and Fadigati in *Gli occhiali d'oro*, and Rolain and Lescale in *Malaisie*. It thus requires an over-arching approach to understanding the protagonists, i.e. identifying what they all have in common. It would seem that trauma of varying degrees is central, as is their respective responses to the worlds of which they are a part. What are the responses to trauma? How successful are the responses in terms of the protagonists' own expectations and ideals and to what extent do the protagonists adapt to their circumstances or transcend or indeed shape their circumstances, or at least express the desire to shape their circumstances? These are central questions when looking at the protagonists the authors have created.

Previously, mention had been made of the ontological question and whether this in fact brings the three novels more in line with Modernism, mainly as regards the protagonists of *Malaisie*. But in a more philosophical vein, the protagonists can also be viewed as people adapting to, or not, and to understanding the world of which they are a part.

Using the writings of renowned Italian philosopher and psychiatrist, Umberto Galimberti, as a point of reference in this specific regard one sees:

La tipologia psicologica, come descrizione delle possibili modalità di relazionarsi al mondo, dove le stesse cose assumono un significato differente per chi si rapporta al mondo nella *modalità* (Galimberti's italics) del pensiero, del sentimento, dell'intuizione e della sensazione, diventa un epifenomeno di quel sotteso biologismo, che incapace per definizione di distinguere l'uomo dall'animale, entrambi li accomuna nell'unico destino che è *l'adattamento al mondo* (Galimberti's italics) (Galimberti, Umberto, *Psichiatria e fenomenologia*, 2007: 157). [The psychological typology, as a description of the possible ways of relating to the world, where the same things assume a different meaning for whomever is in a relationship with the world, is in the way they think, they feel, employ intuition and sensations. This becomes an epiphenomenon of that underlying biological nature of species, which because by definition is incapable of distinguishing humans from animals, causes them to share the only destiny there is, i.e. *adaptation to the world* (author's translation).]

Seen thus, it becomes clear how *Gli occhiali d'oro* reflects an adaptation to the world on the part of the protagonist/author. It's an adaptation that relies on various cultural (hence ethical)

elements required to adapt, engage with the world as he finds it. Bassani's trauma is one of the imagination and memory, retrospectively applied. *Gli occhiali d'oro* was written with the knowledge that the Holocaust had taken place. Where the torture and the impasse come into play is in the description of the anticipation of trauma, and the consequent sense of doom and hence of *impasse* on the part of the writer: knowing that trauma is inevitable and living through the anticipation thereof is arguably comparably traumatic, as mentioned, and indeed torturous. *Gli occhiali d'oro* and *Il giardino dei Finzi Contini* exemplify this anguish most astutely in the dissimulation of what would be the obvious, while step-by-step the claustrophobia of doom becomes ever more suffocating.

So wherein does the ontological quandary of the protagonist, the *io narrante*, lie? It lies in perceiving the world as hostile, as inimical to him and his ideals and indeed his survival. Does the protagonist in *Gli occhiali d'oro* adapt to the world as he finds it? No, he adapts to it by challenging the world as he finds it and in challenging the mores inspired by Fascism, for reasons that are not only connected to his position as a Jew living under the Fascist Race Laws of 1938, but also connected to his ideals of individuality and the upholding of the "civilising forces" that he considers to form part of his cultural tradition.

In the case of Carl Joseph, his freedom of action is much more limited. His ways of adapting to the world come across as much more circumscribed by his domestic circumstances and the political order of which he is inevitably a part by being an officer in the Austro-Hungarian cavalry and then the infantry. While Bassani's protagonist has to endure Fascism, Bassani has created a situation whereby his protagonist has the freedom to oppose the Fascist hegemony, as it is manifested in people's attitudes. Exercising this freedom, his protagonist at least is left with choices to make. This is not to deny the oppression inherent in the situation in which Bassani's *io narrante* finds himself, but Carl Joseph's oppression is more insidious. It is more insidious and subtle in that what purports to be a "home", i.e. the political dispensation of which he forms a part – albeit not out of choice. But he does not have the imagination – for the bulk of the novel – to step out of the prescribed models that have been presented to him. He is in effect complicit in his (self-)destruction. His foolhardy, nigh suicidal attempt to get water for

his troops at the end of the novel and his resultant death bespeak of a desperate act, of validating the self at the cost of himself, sacrificing himself for others. It is a moot point whether Carl Joseph sacrifices himself because he knows his existence is not valid in a system that has betrayed him. How can he be a hero for the system, for the political order, if he has, by the end of the novel, seen through its façade?

The only heroism possible is one that leads to self-destruction, i.e. by denying his service to the Habsburg Empire. Why be loyal to a social and political order that has betrayed him? Self-sacrifice is deemed more honourable, although Roth does not reveal this extreme of introspection. Carl Joseph is in effect a martyr, self-styled or not, for the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Bassani's *io narrante* refuses to be a martyr and sets himself in opposition to what he feels is wrong, as evinced by his allying himself with someone whom he does not particularly like, though equally wronged, namely Dr Fadigati. Carl Joseph in *Radetzky* is frog-marched into self-destruction by the political system, which he is honour-bound to uphold because his grandfather was the "Held von Solferino" and service to the Kaiser is deemed the highest honour. However, service to the Kaiser has the effect of being a ruse used to crush Carl Joseph's individuality and any attempts at self-fulfilment.

In *Malaisie* it is as if Rolain is all too aware of the mendacity that lies at the heart of the Western model, and as mentioned, he eschews it entirely, to the point of going to Malaya and creating a mode of existence that suits his temperament. The fragility of his Eden is of course exemplified by the *amok* scene. But the reinvention of the self, that we see in *Malaisie* is also a way of adapting to the world, i.e. by creating a new one, with rules that are not those imposed by the vested interest of a particular, i.e. Western socio-political order, however compromised the plantation-in-Malaya order is with the Western economic order. But, it is clear that in *Malaisie* recovery from trauma explains the ardour with which his protagonist, Rolain, pursues his dream. The novel can be viewed as a description of recovery from trauma: the wilful embrace of the unknowable Malay world. The eccentricities of the two protagonists exemplify this retreat into a self-styled Eden; it is their way of "adapting", to use Galimberti's phraseology:

Nell'esser-spaesato l'uomo custodisce la sua essenza e le possibilità autentiche della sua libertà (Galimberti, 2001:218). [In being out of his realm, man is the guardian of his being and of the authentic possibilities of his freedom (author's translation).]

Both Rolain and Lescale, having survived the First World War, lose themselves in an Eden of their own making, seeking a freedom founded upon a negation of all that is Western, on the rejection of the Western paradigm. The world created in *Malaisie* is the release from trauma, with the protagonists seeing themselves as being emancipated from doom, or at least from a doom that is comprehensible to them. *Malaisie* articulates the joys and adventure of two people who have found a release from the claustrophobia of Europe and its inherent anxieties and its traumas. The trauma of the collective of Europe leads Rolain and Lescale to the exploration of the self, of the jungles of Malaya and of its people, of life as lived as individualistically as possible and where Galimberti's distinction between the animal and the human, between sensation and thought, are blurred. So in each of the three novels we are faced with differing "modalities" of adaptation, differing consciousnesses, so to speak, of coming to terms with the world, of adapting to it or indeed shaping it ontologically, as far as is possible for each of the five protagonists.

2.6.2 The Terror of the Void

While the scope of the novels does not include the trauma of industrialisation and the rise of modernity, the consequences of the effects of modernity as manifested in the First World War underscore the works of the three authors in that they are essentially inter-war novels. The notable departure from this is Bassani in that his work is written with hindsight, whereas Roth and Fauconnier write while immersed in the trauma of the void left by the First World War – a void that required the re-evaluation of the present; a void that required a restoration of meaning in the wake of an event such as the First World War that seemed to devalue human life on a scale hitherto unknown. Fauconnier hints at this void as follows:

« Tu as encore des réticences. » « Tu te lances dans le vide; et puis tu ravales ton fil comme une araignée. » (Fauconnier, 1930: 93) ["Why hesitate?" he said. "you launch into the void, and then you wind your thread again like a spider." (Sutton, 1931: 66).]

With this in mind, one can see (as many an author has) Fascism as a political instrument to restore meaning on a national level; this, while socialism and communism were attempting to do the same on a global level and continued to adhere to their pre-war mission of proletarian revolution.

Fascism, as mentioned previously, can be seen as a feature of modernity, and Bassani's engagement with Fascism is thus also an engagement with the form of modernity that held sway in Italy after the First World War. *Radetzky* and *Malaisie* too are examples of an engagement with post-World War One modernity – Roth engaged with the rise of Nazism and Fauconnier engaged with ideas of a Nietzschean hue that gained further currency in that period. Roth, like Bassani, was obviously anti-Fascist, or more accurately anti-Nazi. Roth lamented the loss of an order, deeply flawed as it was, and he describes those flaws. Bassani laments the loss of the liberal democratic values that pre-date the coming to power of Mussolini in 1922. In *Malaisie* we have the strong Nietzschean elements that reveal a scepticism towards conventional, middle-class definitions of democracy and thinking. Fauconnier could be said to be in tune with many fascistic ideals inasmuch as these reflect Nietzschean ideals to a significant degree. But in Fauconnier's case, his enchantment with Nietzsche was firstly not unique, and the aims of his enchantment with Nietzsche were perhaps more closely allied to the liberation of the individual, of the transcendent ego, of the individual in complete mastery of himself. Rolain is a self-styled "superman of the jungle", as revealed in his conversations with Lescale.

« Je me souvenais très bien, reprit Rolain, de ce petit soldat éploré, révolté, qui se disait indifférent à la mort comme à la vie et qui désirait ardemment mourir et désespérément vivre. Je le gardais au fond de moi, avec quelques autres. Je ne me demandais pas où il était, puisqu'il était là. Quand je t'ai vu vivant hors de moi-même j'ai éprouvé une émotion délicate, mais pas plus délicate que si j'avais appris, à cette minute, que tu étais mort. – Tu es effrayant, m'écriai-je. Il faut n'aimer que soi pour dire de telles choses. »

Il eut un geste découragé.

« N'as-tu pas encore compris, dit-il lentement, que si je vis dans la solitude, c'est qu'au contraire j'aime trop ceux que j'aime? » (Fauconnier, 1930: 94)

["I remember very well," Rolain went on, "the wretched and disgusted little soldier who said he did not mind whether he lived or died; but prayed that he might die, and wanted – didn't he – to live. I kept him deep in my heart, with several others. I did not wonder where he was, since he was there. And when I saw you alive, and outside myself, I felt a thrill, but not more so than if I had been told that instant that you were dead."

"How awful," I said. "A man who can say such things loves no one but himself."

He answered with a shrug of lassitude:

"Don't you understand that if I live alone it is because I am too fond of those I love" (Sutton, 1931: 67).]

This conversation reflects a heroic ideal. It is unconventional. Rolain lives his ideal, which is clearly a response as well to brutal experience, as described in the passage. What Rolain seeks is a kind of consolation, a consolation that he has dressed up as "practical heroism". However, his stance remains a reaction to the world and his novel shows him being consistent with this ideal he has set for himself, the code according to which he chooses to live.

This search for freedom and authenticity which Galimberti refers to earlier, links with the search for truth, when comparing the above with the following observation from Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*. In Fauconnier, as in Nietzsche below, we see the stripping away of convention, for the sake of truth, as well as an unconventional appraisal of the significance attached to life and death:

[...] welchen Sinn hätte unser ganzes Sein, wenn nicht den, dass in uns jener Wille zur Wahrheit sich selbst als Problem zum Bewusstsein gekommen wäre? (Nietzsche, 1921:482). [What meaning would our whole being have if it were not that in us that will to truth has become conscious of itself *as a problem* within us? (Translation by Safranski, Rüdiger, *Nietzsche – A Philosophical Biography*, London, Granta, 2002: 303).]

Gellner too picks up this point when he makes the link between *thinking* one's identity and *living* one's identity. Rolain lives his identity; the *io narrante* in *Gli occhiali d'oro* does too, although it is a more circumscribed identity, and an identity that is endangered in the Fascist state. Carl Joseph, by contrast, is wrapped up in a false, illusory identity, and therein lies his undoing.

Furthermore, Fascism – as a phenomenon of modernity – can be seen as a desperate attempt at imposing an authenticity and by its very imposition negates its own putative mission:

Even today, the very term “fascist modernism” is likely to encounter skepticism and resistance, since it cannot be easily accommodated with an understanding of modernism that stresses the liberating and generally “progressive” tendencies of the movement. However, in recent years not only experts of the Fascist period but also scholars of modernism became increasingly aware that the period of high modernism in the 1920s-1930s cannot adequately be understood without the complex relationship between fascism and modernism (Welge, Jobst. “Fascist Modernism” in *Modernism* Vol. 2, 2007: 547-559).³⁶

Part of the trauma that Modernism reflects undoubtedly must lie in a world confronted by the bewildering “polytheism” that came in the wake of the rise of modernity. What is significant in this for present purposes is the discernible tendency, quest, yearning of the three authors to find something that has not been rendered meaningless by the relativism of the modern era. Benedetto Croce, the giant of Italian liberal philosophy and inevitably central to Bassani’s liberal convictions, along with other philosophers, was keenly aware of the dangers too of false, fraudulent attempts to counter the relativism of the modern era, namely Fascism or for that matter Communism, or what Ernest Gellner would describe as “closed systems” that stifle individual freedom and spontaneity of thought. One can also refer to Karl Popper’s *The Open Society and its Enemies* in this regard. Popper saw the threat of preordained ways of living and thinking as a threat to individuality and who countered rigidly empiricist social formulae espoused by both the Left or the Right.

L’esigenza filosofica del Croce primonovecentesco, quello della fondazione della *Filosofia dello spirito*, era – [...] di restituire universalità al sapere, scongiurando la crisi delle scienze europee che con tramonto del positivismo, aveva caratterizzato il clima in cui era avvenuta la sua formazione, che era riuscita a scavarsi una nicchia di umanesimo nell’imperante frammentazione specialistica che si rifrangeva, nel campo etico, in un politeismo sempre più destabilizzante (Cingari, S., 2003: 22). [The early 20th century need of Croce’s philosophy, that of the *Philosophy of the Spirit*, was to restore universality to knowledge, conjuring up the crisis of European sciences which, with the decline of Positivism, had characterised the climate in which it came into being and which had managed to find for itself a niche of humanism in the overwhelmingly specialist fragmentation in which it had become refracted in the realm of ethics. It turned into a polytheism which had become ever more destabilising. (author’s translation).]

The thinking of Ernest Gellner functions as a key in his analysis of the conflict between liberalism and nationalism. If, as he says, “liberalism is the politics of the universal, then

³⁶ See Ruth Ben-Ghiat: *Fascist Modernities, Italy 1922-1945*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

nationalism is the politics of the specific” (1998: 18) then the three texts and the question of trauma take on a different hue. If liberalism in the broadest sense – such as we find it in *Radetzkyarsch* and *Gli occhiali d’oro* – serves as a bulwark against the specific, against extremisms that claim to preserve the presumed wholesomeness of the nation state and of pre-modern values, then it can also be seen as a worldview that seeks to act as a remedy or panacea against the trauma of modernity and the consequent social pathologies of Nazism and Fascism or whatever other “ism” presents itself as socially regenerative. Significantly, neither Roth nor Bassani are “unspecific” – they are deeply nationalist, especially in Bassani’s case, but it is a nationalism that is liberal in its precepts. Roth’s nationalism, if such we may call it, is more problematic in that what he wants to be nationalist about, no longer exists. The Habsburg Empire was dead, gone and buried in 1918. Therefore his nationalism, of a liberal hue, has to take the form of nostalgia.

While Roth and Bassani’s anxieties and their response to the trauma of modernity are rooted in the European experience, one can better appreciate the significance of Fauconnier’s revolt, as he takes his narrative out of the European milieu. Liberalism, Viennese cosmopolitanism, modernity, or Europe’s self-inflicted trauma are issues he simply does not engage with unless by way of a reaction against them or in the form of a total rejection of them. *Malaisie* is, along with everything else it is, a celebration of individuality and the individual’s ability to shape the world, not merely being shaped by it. In other words, one sees how Carl Joseph is shaped by his world – but does not realise it and his revolt is ultimately doomed. In *Radetzkyarsch* the universality of the symbolism of the Kaiser and the Jew are in effect echoes of the universal. And in the case of the Habsburg Empire, an ideal of universalism was gnawed away by the demands of ethnicity and socialism, simultaneously. While socialism, an aspect of the Habsburg experience described in *Radetzkyarsch*, also claims to be universal, it threatens to join forces with nationalism and therein lies the path to national socialism. It is this fateful combination that by implication lies at the heart of Roth’s sense of doom, of impasse.

Bassani’s protagonist is also shaped by the world, but he is aware of it, and rebels accordingly. The claim to a universalism – conjured up by his liberal worldview – can be said to be naïve, but

in *Gli occhiali d'oro*, especially, it is an ideal that for Bassani best accommodates the modern world, that best addresses the trauma of modernity; Fauconnier's protagonist Rolain is also aware of the danger of being a victim of the world as he had experienced it, and it is amid the epistemological helplessness of the Malay world that he insists in shaping the world as best he can. The forces of unknowability overcome him in the amok scene.

Gellner encapsulates this dichotomy between inward-looking ethnocentricity on the one hand, and cosmopolitanism, with its claims to universality, which is found in socialism and liberalism. The two never meet and the conflict between what Gellner calls the atomistic and the organic views of the world heralded the doom to come; the unbridgeability between the two is the impasse:

The standing of the two philosophic visions is not altogether similar. Their histories, their places in the world, are not fully parallel. The atomistic one was the first to receive deliberate formulation, but not the first to come into existence. Partisans of the organic vision would say that just because it is the primordial and normal form, it needed no articulation. It was at its best when it was free from self-consciousness, when it had no need to reflect on its own existence. Its innocence was its glory, the sign of its primordial and legitimate place in human life. Formulating it and presenting it as a theory may well soil it. Its validity lies beyond argument, arguing its merits only demeans and contradicts it. A real traditionalist does not know that he is one, his tradition is his life and his being: once he knows it as *a* tradition, one among others, or even opposed to reason, he has been corrupted by his knowledge of something else.

The fact that the atomistic view was formulated before ever it was lived, may likewise be a sign of its artificial, indeed pathological character. Live first. Think after: Those who need to think out their identity before living it betray their unfitness to live (Gellner, 1998: 7).

Gellner here strikes at the heart of the debate. The atomistic vision is one akin to the cosmopolitanism referred to previously and readily associated with Viennese liberalism, and by extension, Jewishness. The organic vision is that exemplified by an ethnocentric view of the world. Each of the three novels oscillates between the atomistic vision of the world and the organic vision of it.

Roth is the ultimate *Kosmopolit*, spending much of his life in Viennese and Parisian cafés; a journalist, who is on the outside looking in, a position not unfamiliar to those who in any event stand outside because they are Jewish or are for whatever reason outside the mainstream. He describes the pathology at work in his society, because as a Jew he has no choice but to stand

outside his ethnicity, if being Jewish is indeed deemed an ethnicity, or whether it is deemed a religion. He is not a Czech or a Hungarian, or a German Catholic, but essentially a Galician Jew. As a Jew he is part of something that goes beyond the confines of ethnicity, of the empire, but is instead part of something universal and time honoured, which extends beyond the frontiers of the Habsburg realm. Galicia itself was a construct within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. So, in a sense, *Radetzky* represents the atomistic view, in a position of describing the organic. *Radetzky*'s protagonist Carl Joseph is caught up in an "organic" world – a Slovenian, but part of the nobility that underpins the Habsburg order. He returns to a brief respite of being organic, i.e. Slovenian, before he is sacrificed in the First World War. Carl Joseph is in effect sacrificed to an ideal, that of the Habsburg realm, one of the functions of which was to keep the inevitable conflict at bay. The fact that the Habsburgs precipitated the First World War that was to destroy their empire is the tragic irony of the Habsburgs and becomes Carl Joseph's tragedy.

Bassani, on the other hand, is an "atomist" living in an ethnocentric, i.e. Italian, Fascist context. But while being Italian himself, he espouses the values that go with an atomistic world view, namely liberalism. His liberal Italy had, however, ceased to exist when Fascism held sway. Bassani is a liberal, having to adopt a nigh organic view of the world, once his Jewishness (and bearing in mind that being Jewish in Italy was essentially different to being Jewish in the Austro-Hungarian Empire) becomes the cause of his oppression.

Fauconnier also is an "atomist" (according to the Gellnerian scheme), but Fauconnier is exhausted by the pathological self-consciousness of his culture, of its liberal, Enlightenment culture which failed to prevent the disaster of the First World War. He then seeks solace in the "organic" life as represented by Malaya. Malaya represents a return to an organic view of the world, which is not a false or deceptive organic view of the world such as are the manifestations of an organic view of the world under the guise of Fascism or Nazism. Characters such as Smaïl epitomise the organic unselfconsciousness of being when the *amok* scene unfolds (and in the sensual descriptions of Smaïl). Rolain ultimately has to bear the consequences of living in a world he does not understand.

CHAPTER III: IMPASSE IN THE TEXTS

This chapter comprises a textual analysis of each of the three texts: Henri Fauconnier's Malaisie (1930) Joseph Roth's Radetzkyarsch, (1932) and finally Giorgio Bassani's Gli occhiali d'oro, (1958).

With the theme of impasse central to the discussion, the question that arises, quite obviously, is what does one mean by impasse and how does this impasse manifest itself? Taken further, another question arises, namely, in what terms is one dealing with impasse? The answer would seem to lie in the question of interpretation, in a hermeneutic approach to the texts, and it is to Emilio Betti that one can turn to find an answer to the vexing question of which matrix to adopt when analysing these specific texts.

Naturally, any analysis aspires to a recognisable objectivity and Betti's definition – derived through his prolonged study of jurisprudence and an inherited philosophical tradition – provides a set of criteria that can be adopted – as one can Gellner's views – with which to explore the texts and illustrate the impasse. The impasse can be identified in the experiences of the protagonists in each of the three novels. The impasse is centred on the protagonist(s) – for what one might call an attempt at a harmony with the world and with the self: in short, a consciousness striving for that which may be deemed enduring, amid the turbulent times and settings each novel explores.

In this regard Betti's views have been summarised as follows:³⁷

³⁷ Betti himself authored in German *Die Hermeneutik als Allgemeine Methodik der Geisteswissenschaften*, a stringent synopsis of the central themes of his Italian work, *Teoria generale della interpretazione* (Milano: Giuffrè, 1955), in two volumes of over 1000 pages. Bleicher (1980) has synthesised Betti's ideas based on the German original by Betti. Betti's own German version of pages 53-54 – “Kanon der hermeneutischen Sinnentsprechung (Sinnadäquanz des Verstehens)” and 55-57, “Werkcharakter historischer Lebensformen rollte eine Problematik höhere Stufe auf” have been translated by Bleicher as “The canon of hermeneutical correspondence of meaning (meaning-adequacy in understanding)” and “The character as a product of historical forms of life leads to a problematic of a higher order”, 84-87, respectively, of Bleicher, J. 1980:28.

Spiritual values represent an ideal objectivity that unerringly follows its own lawfulness (Betti, 1967:9). Having referred to the autonomous character of values, Betti is confronted with the task of indicating how consciousness can discover these values. He solves it by stating that 'the ability to recognize values presupposes within the subject, and postulates as an a priori condition of its own possibility, an open-mindedness and receptivity appropriate to them' (Betti, 1967:21), 'value is something absolute that has an ideal existence-in-itself as its essence; something that contains the basis for its own validity; an entity that remains removed from any change and any reduction through subjective arbitrariness – and which nevertheless remains an entity that can be reached by consciousness with the help of a mental structure that transcends the empirical self and incorporates it into a higher cosmos which is shared by those who have acquired the necessary spiritual maturity (Bleicher, 1980:28).

The essential point that Bleicher raises here regarding Betti's approach to text is the idea that consciousness can lead to a recognition of values; the impasse lies – in the present discussion – in the way in which the world, society, the historical moment in the novels impede a recognition of values by the protagonists (*Radetzky*); how events marshal the protagonist's consciousness towards a recognition of values (Bassani); and how the protagonists in *Malaisie* arrive at an embracing of overtly spiritual set of values. In the latter case impasse can be deemed to lie within the inability – in a Western context – of the realisation of spiritual or "transcendent values", as Betti calls them. However, there is in *Malaisie* a recognition that transcendent values can, albeit briefly, be attained. Both protagonists in *Malaisie* consciously explore a spiritual, transcendent realm and have the freedom to do so. *Radetzky* and *Gli occhiali d'oro* provide an example of the non-attainment, or an approximation, of something transcendent, indefinable as that transcendence may be. What the three novels illustrate is the recognition of impasse in *Radetzky*, the challenge to impasse in *Gli occhiali d'oro* and the attempted surmounting of impasse in *Malaisie*.

Thematically, Bassani's and Roth's works are much more of a kind than Fauconnier's *Malaisie*, if for no other reason than that they are both set in Europe and can be viewed as examples of impasse, engaging in the clearly delimited European context of ideological and historical conflict. Roth and Bassani engage with a Europe tearing itself apart, and the doom they perceive and describe is premised on the assumption that Europe is nonetheless salvageable and what Europe represents in terms of the noble ideals enshrined in its civilisation is worth

engaging with. The didactic element inherent in their novels might have some resonance among their readers. Seen together with Fauconnier's *Malaisie* this reading is neither extreme nor far-fetched, because in *Malaisie* one is dealing with a novel that presents the reader with the high complete rejection of Europe, a novel of evasion, of utopian stamp. Yet all three novels share, as has been established, Modernist credentials. Still speaking thematically, one notes a progression of consciousness, but that progression is not chronological, rather it is emblematic and psychological. In this sense, Fauconnier's work can be seen as a novel ahead of its time, whereas Roth's and Bassani's novels are very much imbued with their times in that they function as symbols and symptoms of the historical forces at work in the first half of 20th-century Europe. Their works can be read as being caught in a paradigm that sees Europe and its conflicts and ideals as the absolute measure of things, whereas in *Malaisie* Europe itself is called into question. The geographical distance from "the centre" and the perceived freedom these factors confer are central elements of Fauconnier's novel. *Malaisie* can be viewed (and Malaya itself for Fauconnier) as a kind of emancipation from Europe. However, both novel and author are at the same time rooted in a European consciousness; Malaya merely camouflages a reaction to Europe, a rebellion against what Europe has meant for the author and his protagonists.

Ideals too are present, implicitly in both Bassani's and Roth's work, if only by illustrating the obverse of those ideals. Ultimately, both the first-person narrator in *Gli occhiali d'oro* and Carl Joseph in *Radetzky marsch* grapple with what it means to be an individual given the strictures of their respective societies.³⁸ In *Malaisie*, by contrast, ideals are expressed and illustrated more

³⁸ This concern with the individual trying to lead a worthy noble life amid turbulent times and under "evil" rulers of course has a precedent in the works of the Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus (55 AD-117 AD), and in particular *Book IV* of the *Annals*. In a sense Roth, Bassani and Fauconnier are engaging in an exploration of the individual in a not dissimilar way in that there is the overt engagement with history from a literary perspective. The same is true of countless other authors of course. Tacitus, as an historian, engages with history and comments on the dealings and actions of Augustus and others, evaluating and judging what he describes. He does not content himself with describing what he sees, he interprets as well. In other words, the novels under discussion represent a moral, philosophical engagement with history, with specific events and moments in history. In this sense the authors are writing within a well-established precedent and subsequent trajectory.

overtly as the narrative moves towards the idea of the psychological emancipation of the individual from the restrictions of the self. Hence, each novel represents a response to the impasse of history, of their respective societies, culminating in *Malaisie* as an intentional response to the impasse that the individual can be to himself. The Europe of Fauconnier's time is seen as inimical to the emancipation of the self.

A more appropriate approach is to start by examining *Radetzkmarsch* first, because it conjures up a world further from the present in historical time. Bassani, similarly in terms of in historical time, evokes a world that is closer to the present, whereas Fauconnier's novel in a sense does not present itself as specifically time bound and can therefore be the third text to be examined. Indeed, Fauconnier's novel evokes a kind of timelessness, a present ostensibly unshackled by historical forces. But of course it is unavoidably circumscribed by a period in history.

3.1 *Radetzkmarsch* – impasse as personal tragedy

The plot outline of Roth's best-known novel has been alluded to, but a simple distillation of the essential elements of the novel would be: a main character, Carl Joseph, who since childhood has been imbued with a sense of duty as the scion of a recently ennobled family and carries the burden that would go with that. The young Carl Joseph finds himself having to conform relentlessly to the precepts of his society, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, at first through a military school. He then proceeds to become an officer in the cavalry and is subsequently demoted to the infantry. Throughout the novel we are confronted by the gradual diminution of the individual, as Carl Joseph finds himself subsumed by the demands of his military career to which he is temperamentally unsuited. Through the medium of Carl Joseph's gradual and inexorable demise, Joseph Roth is, in effect, describing the demise of the socio-political order. Carl Joseph, along with other characters, has a metaphorical function as Joseph Roth, in elegiac fashion, describes the inevitable, discernible death throes of a political order that had prevailed for centuries in Central Europe. So on one level Roth is describing the impasse of a given

society, the Habsburg Empire, while on another level he is describing the inexorable demise of his protagonist, Carl Joseph.

But while Roth's gaze is retrospective, it is also an admonition in that the novel's genesis arises out of the keen observation of the forces at work in the Habsburg Empire, forces that will inevitably lead to the dominance of crass, non-dynastic ideologies, of both the Left and the Right. *Radetzky* is a eulogy to an era, to an epoch of European history. His novel is also shaped by a fear for the future, wherein too lies the impasse: looking at the past in a way that portends calamity. It is, however, also thanks to Roth's other works, such as *Das Spinnennetz* and his journalistic writings, that one can discern a continuity in Roth's melancholic vision in *Radetzky*. Roth's transition from socialism to monarchism, from Judaism to a type of Catholicism, is referred to by many critics. That he is a complex writer, a contradictory writer, should not come as a surprise considering his personal biography, growing up in a remote corner of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Galicia, and when considering the fraught times during which he lived. Also geographically, the assertion has been made by more popular historians such as Niall Ferguson³⁹ that conflicts and genocide more readily occur where empires border on one another (the Russian, the German and the Austro-Hungarian, specifically in this case). While this is a generalisation, it helps in understanding the extra-textual factors that contributed to Roth's particular vision. Furthermore, the itinerant nature of Roth's life is reflected in the titles of some of his other works, such as *Juden auf Wanderschaft*, *Die Flucht ohne Ende* and *Hotel Savoy* reflecting a homelessness, a being ill at ease with the world.

A further assumption that a textual analysis has to assume is that the notion of the individual is in itself a valid assumption. From Hamlet, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (one of the central figures of the Italian Humanist tradition) and others, the notion of the individual has been assumed and deemed as a condition worth striving for. But the notion of individuality, while undergoing various permutations in literature in the Christian world view, can also be seen in our age as being eroded by writers from Freud to Foucault, Nietzsche, Derrida and others.

³⁹ See Ferguson, Niall. *The War of the World: History's Age of Hatred*. London: Penguin, 2007.

Unstable as the notion of the individual is, it is often assumed too that the individual is inevitably reduced to a neurotic wreck as the demands of society and late capitalist society, in particular, come into conflict with individual aspirations and the subconscious. Modernism is replete with authors who explore this notion. What an individual is, is a concept one has to take for granted, to some extent, beyond the fact that the individual is a biological unit out of which a certain psychological predisposition can be said to develop. It can also be assumed that the individual is linked to his or her past and his or her future. Alternative arguments are that the individual has always been in crisis and, seen thus, Carl Joseph is no different from any individual in any age. The identity of the individual during the Renaissance was theorised in terms of his or her relationship to the community of which they are a part, no longer in relation to a God, in the Christian tradition, as had been the case in the Middle Ages, for example, when God was the measure of all things. But in the context of the Habsburg Empire one has the residue of the notion of the individual seen in relation to something transcendent, i.e. God, as well as to a hierarchy that sees its existence as a perpetuation of God's will in socio-political terms. The Kaiser in the context of the Habsburg Empire is seen as a terrestrial echo of God's will and the Kaiser's power was vested in the history of the Habsburg Empire and the Kaiser as being the defender of the Faith. These are all factors that modify – and to a certain extent define – the complexity of the notion of individuality and the way in which we can evaluate Carl Joseph's dilemma. The psychological aspects of individuality and hence the psychological impasse that Carl Joseph experiences are manifold.

The question of individuality prompts one to ask how the subjectivity of our characters is portrayed by each of the three authors. Contemporary philosopher, writer and psychologist, Umberto Galimberti, provides a point of departure in this discussion:

Ora, la soggettività non vive il tempo come un essere, ma come un *farsi*, e i momenti intenzionali, costitutivi e strutturali di questo *farsi* non sono le dimensioni temporali (presente, passato e futuro), [...] che sono le *condizioni* [Galimberti's italics] per cui ciascuno è in grado di darsi un presente, un passato e un futuro (Galimberti, 2007: 202). [Now, subjectivity does not experience time as a being, but as a *self-creation*, and the intentional, constitutive and structural moments of this self-creation are not the temporal dimensions, (present, past and future) [...] which [instead] are the *conditions* enabling each one of us to give himself a present, a past and a future. (author's translation).]

As part of a literary interpretation one can view Carl Joseph's position as Galimberti suggests, and try to conjure up his subjectivity. One would have to examine which elements shape his notions of his present, his past and his future.

A cursory look at the context Roth has created for his character has been given. So the next step is to see what Galimberti refers to as *farsi* or self-creation, and it is compelling because it raises the question: what room to manoeuvre has Carl Joseph been given to "farsi", to create himself; in other words to determine the course of his life? This is a complex philosophical question that touches upon Schopenhauer's notion of free will, and the whole idea of whether free will is an illusion or not. But the character Roth has created has, it would appear, a very limited psychological freedom, even though materially he is comfortable and not confronted by a particularly harsh battle for survival. Carl Joseph enjoys a relatively elevated status in society, but a status that has obligations. That these obligations are experienced as unnatural, irksome and confining is illustrated in the novel by the contrasts alluded to between other members of Habsburg society whom Roth presents to us. Onufrij, for example, Carl Joseph's batman, is a peasant and although outwardly seems subjugated in his lowly social status, he is presented as psychologically healthy, to the point of being able to be magnanimous towards Carl Joseph by offering to pay the latter's gambling debts. It can also be said that Onufrij is merely enacting his obligations towards the "gentleman", Carl Joseph, who is Onufrij's social superior and in order for that superiority to be maintained, Onufrij feels obliged to help Carl Joseph, as part of a nigh feudal pact.

The frequent references to the purity of peasant, rural life serve to illustrate the contrived and confining mores that determine the life of the nobility. Carl Joseph is in a sense in the middle of two irreconcilable worlds: one without privilege, but simple in its purity, and another, more complex and sophisticated, which equally does not offer him the possibility of fulfilment. In another way, Roth idealises rural life and rural norms associated with Carl Joseph's Slovenian forebears⁴⁰ and hence it seems that Roth is making a plea for a return to innocence, to a world

⁴⁰ This comes across especially strongly in *Die Kapuzinergruft*.

devoid of the artifice, the rhetoric, that experience and status impose on the individual. Carl Joseph is in a sense delving deeper into “experience” and is increasingly removed from innocence as *Radetzkyarsch* progresses and moves closer to doom and despair. The life he is forced to live increasingly militates against self-fulfilment, let alone self-creation, or the *farsi* that Galimberti refers to. His unhappiness is in a sense created for him. The subjectivity that Galimberti refers to above is in Carl Joseph’s case circumscribed by the needs of others and his own self-destructive ways (drinking, gambling and unsavoury company etc.) of merely responding to the situations in which he finds himself. Illusions of self-fulfilment abound, as we see in his affairs with Frau Slama and Frau von Taußig and the false friendships that cause him to stray from approaching anything like an honest appraisal of his situation. Whatever promises real fulfilment or sincerity is short-lived, as in the early demise of the Jewish military doctor, Dr Demant. The demise of Dr Demant leaves Carl Joseph completely at sea. Dr Demant represents the only figure who is a disinterested party in Carl Joseph’s life. Neither Carl Joseph nor Dr Demant derive any professional or career benefit from knowing one another; on the contrary, the fact that Dr Demant is Jewish makes him susceptible to slurs and Carl Joseph’s association with him is not necessarily therefore to Carl Joseph’s advantage. Furthermore, Dr Demant represents a certain continuity, a paradoxical continuity. The Jews have been loyal to the Emperor, to the imperial house of Habsburg, a stance seen as a guarantee against reprisal from the ethnic minorities of the empire. But Dr Demant is an outsider nonetheless, or is that for that very reason, at a time when ethnic fervour undermines the empire. The Jew as an element of continuity is referred to elsewhere in *Radetzkyarsch*. But when Dr Demant ceases to be part of Carl Joseph’s life an element of constancy is gone and Carl Joseph has to fend for himself, something which he is not particularly adept at doing. The psychological impact of Dr Demant’s demise, adds a further element of impasse in that the very person who might have been an anchor in Carl Joseph’s quest for fulfilment is gone. An important element of transcendence, of which Betti speaks, is now gone. A possibility of arriving at the discovery, or at an affirming experience is denied to Carl Joseph.

Galimberti provides a helpful way of looking not only at Carl Joseph's dilemma, but that of the other characters in Bassani and Fauconnier as well:

È il tempo in cui si esprime la vita e che, in ogni presente esistenziale (*praesentatio*), esprime un passato che trattiene (*retentio*) e un avvenire che proietta (*protentio*) Galimberti, 2007:202). [Time is that within which one expresses life in every existential present (*praesentatio*), expresses a past (*retentio*) that contains and a future (*protentio*) that projects, looks forward (author's translation).]

Carl Joseph's life is delimited for him; his present is straitjacketed by a past that is not of his own making, but one he has inherited, literally and figuratively. He has inherited a status in society, but with it the very obligations and expectations that impair his future.

In *Gli occhiali d'oro* too the notion of an inexorable projection towards a future is identified as inherently fraught (with the first-person narrator being Jewish in Fascist Italy). The present is replete with reference to a past, either a recent past, or an ancient one. This notion of the confluence of the present, past and future then takes on another dimension in *Malaisie*, where the past is all but ignored, or left undescribed, but ever present, with the present and the future melded into one as a means of embracing a kind of transcendence over time and space. As mentioned previously, the lesson that Lescale is learning from Rolain is to overcome the strictures of a Westernised notion of time, and indeed individuality, in order to become, paradoxically an individual more in control of his own destiny. Hence, the question of destiny, of the existential dimension or ontological interaction with the world is central to each of the three novels.

Returning to *Radetzky marsch*, we see the following in an incident in the novel that is replete with the interplay between past and present and Carl Joseph's intermediary role. This interplay between past and present is intrinsic to the novel, as is what this interplay avers about the future:

Aus der Tür des Hotels trat in diesem Augenblick der Portier. Er grüßte den Bezirkshauptmann und en Leutnant mit einem heftigen Schwung der goldbersteßten Mütze und zeigte ein unwilliges Gesicht. Es sah aus, als könnte er im nächsten Augenblick dem Maler Moser Lärm und Aufenthalt und Beleidigung der Gäste von dm Hotel verbieten wollen. Der alte Trotta griff in die Brusttasche, der Maler verstummte. „Kannst du mir aushelfen?“ fragte der Vater. Der Leutnant

sagte: „Ich werde den Herrn Professor ein wenig begleiten. Auf Wiedersehen, Papa!“ Der Bezirkshauptmann lüftete den Halbzylinder und ging ins Hotel. Der Leutnant gab dem Professor einen Schein und folgte dem Vater. Der Maler Moser hob die Mappe auf und entfernte sich mit gemessener Würde.

Schon lag der tiefe Abend in den Straßen, und auch in der Halle des Hotels was es dunkel. Der Bezirkshauptmann saß, den Zimmerschlüssel in der Hand, den Halbzylinder und den Stock neben sich, ein Bestandteil der Dämmerung, im ledernen Sessel. Der Sohn blieb in achtungsvoller Entfernung von ihm stehen, als wollte er die Erledigung der Affäre Moser dienstlich melden. Noch waren die Lampen nicht entzündet. Aus dem dämmernden Schweigen kam die Stimme des Alten: „Wir fahren morgen Nachmittag zwei Uhr fünfzehn.“ „Jawohl Papa“ (Roth, 1932 (1978): 56) [At that instant, the doorman stepped out of the hotel. He greeted the district captain and the lieutenant with a vigorous sweep of his gold-braided cap but showed an angry face. He glared as if about to order the painter Moser to stop loitering, making a noise, and insulting the guests in front of the hotel. Old Trotta reached into his breast pocket; the painter lapsed into silence.

“Can you help me out?” the father asked his son.

The lieutenant said, “I’ll accompany Professor Moser a bit of the way. Goodbye Pápa!”

The district captain raised his silk hat and went into the hotel. The lieutenant handed the professor a banknote and followed his father. Moser the painter picked up his portfolio and retreated with a gravely tottering dignity.

The deep evening had already settled in the streets; the hotel lobby was also dark. The district captain, dimming into the twilight, sat in the leather chair, the room key in his hand, his cane and silk hat at his side. His son halted a respectful distance as if wanting to submit an official report on the resolution of the Moser affair. The lamps were not lit as yet. Out of the twilight silence came the old man’s voice. “We’re leaving tomorrow at two-fifteen.” “Yessir, Papá!” (Neugroschel, 1995: 44-45).]

It is on a first reading a fairly innocuous, random passage from the novel, but replete with symbolism and psychological insights. The “throw-away” observations are anything but, and instead resonate with the confluence of the past and the present, and the fraught nature of any future, as set out in Galimberti’s reading of these (reliant as he is on Heidegger and Husserl) as ontological elements.

In this passage we see that none of its elements is random, incidental, even though the passage itself comes across as being incidental, a bridging passage. But it is in these bridging passages, where events as such are not described, and where Roth contextualises and, for present purposes, illustrates the intertwining of the present containing the past and any notion of future: right from the start this passage illustrates the social context. The status of the

Bezirkshauptmann is immediately referred to and how that status radiates onto the young lieutenant, Carl Joseph. The words “heftigen Schwung” illustrates the respect bestowed upon Carl Joseph’s father, and what he has come to expect. Betrayal is also central in this passage, and again not without irony. It was Moser, the *Bezirkshauptmann*’s childhood friend and the one who painted the *Leitmotif* image in the novel, namely of the *Bezirkshauptmann*’s father, the hero of Solferino. Yet, Moser, who is now being shunned in front of the Viennese hotel, is the one who immortalised the image of the hero of Solferino. The Von Trotta family have been nurturing themselves on this image now for three generations. But now Moser is the one who seeks physical nurturing and he is fobbed off with cash by his erstwhile childhood friend, the *Bezirkshauptmann* himself. Moser has become the embarrassment, the reminder, as he is, of the recent nature of the Von Trotta’s elevation to the nobility. But a further irony lies in the fact that as the father and son Von Trotta perpetrate the betrayal of Moser, they are generationally betrayed by the fact of being elevated to the nobility in that Carl Joseph has to live up to the image of his grandfather, but is significantly psychologically ill-equipped to do so. It is the elevation of the family to the nobility that plunges Carl Joseph into the abyss of mendacity and despair that determines his life, a mendacity that lies at the heart of the Habsburg social order which he is supposed to, and indeed duty-bound, to uphold. Moser is the past, represents the past and it is this past that both father and son are having to deal with in the present and they are doing so in a way that is anything but noble, figuratively speaking. One sees in the passage that Moser knows better and it is left to the reader’s imagination what Moser might feel or think about his erstwhile childhood friend. Why else would Roth go into such detail about the incident with Moser? Roth forces the past on his characters, and shows us how ineptly they deal with the past in the present. Betrayal begets betrayal in that the betrayal perpetrated on Moser in this scene is echoed throughout the novel in the form of the betrayal of any noble ideal. Moser, furthermore, represents a return to authenticity, and significantly he is an artist, and has remained true to his calling and becomes the embodiment of what is indeed noble. Carl Joseph is essentially for the greatest part of the novel shown to be incapable of acting nobly, until the very end, when he realises the mendacious nature of his personal and political existence. Betrayal does not portend well. And, inasmuch as the ethical foundations of the Von

Trottas are compromised by their disavowal of Moser, Roth is introducing a stark ethical element in this seemingly innocuous scene. The Von Trottas carry within them the proverbial seeds of their own demise by simply not acknowledging the truth of their origins, a truth Moser is keenly aware of. The Von Trotta identity is wholly bound to their elevated status in society, but given the socio-political precariousness of the Habsburg establishment, their status can only but be precarious as well. Over and above the socio-political aspect, Carl Joseph's psychological disposition (due to the lack of affection, the rigidity of his upbringing) does not predispose him well to coping with the demands made on him.

However, Roth is not so facile as to be judgmental. The portrait he paints of the *Bezirkshauptmann* in this passage is essentially sympathetic, as is his portrayal of Carl Joseph. Both of them are submerged by the socio-political order, and depend on it, materially and psychologically. They are too submerged in the socio-political order to be able to see it for what it is. Roth does that for the reader. He shows us these characters who clumsily navigate their way through an epoch in history, not knowing that they are its victims, as much as they are the exponents of the prevailing socio-political order. It is Carl Joseph's ineptitude that acts as a catalyst in his father's realisation that the entire façade of the Habsburg Empire is just that, a façade. However, at this point in the novel where the passage is taken from, the characters do not realise how tenuous their socio-political situation is. But Roth, in this passage, through metaphor and symbolism, illustrates the wider picture through the images of the empty and dark streets and the image of the father sitting in a leather chair with his top hat, holding the hotel room key in his hand in a dark hotel foyer. The cardinal words in this passage are "und den Stock neben sich, ein Bestandteil der Dämmerung" [the walking stick next to him, part of his demise" (author's translation).] The published English translation omits to translate this phrase, which consequently does not do Roth justice. The symbolism of the walking stick, and its being an element reflecting the *Bezirkshauptmann's* demise, is a further indication of Roth's broader social and political and hence ontological vision. The individual is caught in a present, burdened (or glorified) by a past with a vision for the future that relies on keeping the past alive

– i.e. an untenable situation. This incident with Moser crystallises the Von Trottas’ inability to perceive the significance of events.

The word “Dämmerung” is used in this passage in its literal sense, but of course it has a resonance that refers to the future as well. Why else would Roth use a word such as this, a word with a rich philosophical tradition behind it, to simply describe the darkness? He is of course describing the “Dämmerung” of a world order, of a family, of a political order, all of which are symbolised in the hapless fate of Carl Joseph. He is left with the task of navigating his way and his personality through the demands made of him. He has to navigate his way through his nature and his past, to arrive at some kind of fulfilment of the self. The elements that promise stability, sincerity and possibly even contentment, all prove to be mendacious (e.g. his affairs and his gambling friends) or short-lived, as is the case with Dr Demant. That Roth holds out the prospect of a wider system of belief – which Carl Joseph fails to appreciate or act upon – is his inclusion of symbolic figures, such as the old Jew whom the Kaiser greets – both symbols of continuity. Other figures include his batman Onufrij, whose humble origins and loyalty predispose him to understand that the young Carl Joseph is unhappy and the victim of others’ charlatanism. Roth gives Graf Chojnicki the task of being political commentator. So the “Dämmerung” referred to in this passage is anything but incidental.

Carl Joseph’s intractable loneliness is alluded to with the words: “Der Sohn blieb in achtungsvoller Entfernung” [His son halted at a respectful distance.] Neugroschel’s translation reads “His” son, whereas the German reads simply “The” son. While the use simply of “der” does not come across as stilted as would the use of “the” in such a context, one could argue that Carl Joseph being the *Bezirkhauptmann*’s son is too obvious, and hence German can simply use the article “der”. But Roth could have used the possessive “sein”. By simply using the definite article, a greater distance between father and son is illustrated, and the use of the possessive would have been incongruous given the level of rigid formality which characterises the father-son relationship.

Also in this passage we see how Carl Joseph, in a seemingly insignificant gesture, offers to accompany Moser some of the way. But it is significant in the wider context in that again it is Carl Joseph who has to step in and be calm or at least ameliorate a situation created by others, in this case by his father. Carl Joseph has to do the decent thing. At this stage of the novel it does not cost him anything, but the passage reflects Carl Joseph's psychological predisposition, namely doing what is expected of him. Carl Joseph keeps the peace or maintains decorum, when decorum has been so thoroughly gutted of meaning by his father's rejection of his erstwhile friend, Moser. Later in the novel we see that this psychological predisposition leads Carl Joseph into situations where doing the "right thing" leads to his demise and ruin, but the psychological predisposition is there already at this early stage of the novel. In other words, the subjugation of the self, albeit unconscious at this stage, to a hierarchy is part of, or even central to, Carl Joseph's ontological experience. This moving passage – however innocuously presented – is poignant and reveals Roth's sympathy for his characters when he writes, for example: "Aus dem dämmernden Schweigen kam die Stimme des Alten: 'Wir fahren morgen nachmittag zwei Uhr fünfzehn.'" [Out of the twilight silence came the old man's voice. "We're leaving tomorrow at two-fifteen."] The hermetically sealed inner worlds of the protagonists is aptly illustrated here, with communication being reduced to settling banal practical matters, but the image of "twilight silence"/"dämmernden Schweigen" is particularly powerful, especially in German, where the word "Schweigen" denotes the wilful silence, whereas the word "silence" in English denotes a lack of human agency. "Tacit twilight" might have come closer to the spirit of the sentence more effectively, even if not wholly accurately. The "Schweigen" refers to the inability of both father and son to transcend the immediate present and recognise a humanity that goes beyond mere duty. Also, the obsession with time in the passage reflects that in the novel as a whole, in that time is exactly what the Habsburg Empire does not have, as the social and historical forces that gnaw away at the edifice of Empire, erode the body politic to which the Von Trotts are inextricably linked. Deviation from this rigour – be it time, be it formalities – cannot be tolerated because to deviate from the form of Empire is potentially subversive. It is Carl Joseph's inability to adhere to the prescriptions of his position which reflects not only the outward precariousness of the Empire, but also the fact that the disease – camouflaged by layer

upon layer of mendacity – lies within the individual. In this sense Roth, as mentioned, easily conforms to a modernist aesthetic.

There are innumerable instances in *Radetzkymarsch* that lend themselves to what one might call a purely and specifically “psychological” reading. However, as is clear, the psychological aspects are inextricably interwoven with the historical, social and political aspects of Carl Joseph’s existence. His maladies, if such one may call them, have their origins not only in his family circumstances, but also in the historical moment. He becomes the symptom of a greater malady. He cannot be “healthy” in a “diseased” society.

The despair and vulnerability of Carl Joseph are powerfully illustrated in his relationship with Dr Demant, the one sincere figure in his life, who obviously also doubles up as a father figure. Significantly, Roth makes Demant Jewish – another symbol of constancy and continuity which, as mentioned previously, occurs frequently in *Radetzkymarsch*: the following scene takes place before Dr Demant is to be challenged in a duel to defend his honour. And Carl Joseph is implicated in the tragic misunderstanding.

Zwischen seinen bebenden Lippen formten sich lautlose Worte, taube Worte, taube Schatten, von tauben Lauten. Plötzlich füllten sich seine Augen mit einem warmen Wasser, und ein Lautes Stöhnen kam aus seiner Brust. Er wollte aufstehen und weglaufen, denn er schämte sich sehr. Ich weine ja! dachte er, ich weine ja! Er fühlte sich ohnmächtig gegenüber der unbegreiflichen Macht, die ihn zwang, zu weinen. Er lieferte sich ihr willig aus. Er ergab sich der Wonne seiner Ohnmacht. Er hörte sein Stöhnen und genoß es, schämte sich und genoß noch seine Scham. Er warf sich dem süßen Schmerz in die Arme und wiederholte sinnlos, unter fortwährendem Schluchzen, ein paarmal hintereinander: „Ich will nicht, daß du stirbst, ich will nicht, daß du stirbst, ich will nicht! Ich will nicht!“ (Roth, 1932: 120-121) [Soundless words formed between his quivering lips, numb words, numb shadows of numb sounds. Suddenly his eyes filled with warm water, and a load moaning came from his chest. He wanted to stand up and run away for he was terribly ashamed. Why, I’m crying! he thought. I’m crying! He felt powerless, immeasurably powerless against the incomprehensible power that forced him to weep. He willingly succumbed. He surrendered to the rapture of his powerlessness. He heard his own moaning and revelled in it; he was ashamed and he even enjoyed his shame. He threw himself into the arms of the sweet grief and kept repeating senselessly, amid constant sobs, “I don’t want you to die, I don’t want you to die, I don’t want you to! I don’t want you to!” (Neugroschel, 1995: 104).]

This scene typifies the underlying anguish and fathomless sadness of the two characters who do manage, despite their difference in age, or indeed because of it, to “find each other”, to

experience unfettered sincerity with no hidden intentions other than emotional comfort. Carl Joseph and Dr Demant are an unlikely pair, one could aver, and yet there's nothing that either party wants from the other, besides a recognition of their shared vulnerability and a recognition of their respective marginalisation. The layers of despair depicted in this scene go beyond the merely historical. But the rôle of historical forces is reinforced. Obviously these forces lie beyond the control of the individual, but these same forces have shaped their unhappiness, over and above the unhappiness each has created for himself. The psychology of defeat, defeat in life, permeate the dialogue between Demant and Carl Joseph. The dialogue is underscored by a profound awareness of futility of their historical situation and hence impasse. They cannot be convinced by the lie upon which the Empire is founded, by the social and political system of which the two are a part. They know it is doomed:

Auf einmal fühlte er wieder Heimweh nach der Kümmerlichkeit seines Lebens [...] und seiner Betrübnis über all diese Schalheit. Durch das Schluchzen und Stöhnen des Leutnants brach gewaltig der schmetternde Ruf dieser lebendigen Erde, und während der Doktor nach einem Wort suchte, um Trotta zu beruhigen, überschwemmte das Mitleid sein Herz, flackerte die Liebe in ihm mit tausend Feuerzeugen auf. Weit hinter ihm lag schon die Gleichgültigkeit, in der er die letzten Tage zugebracht hatte (Roth, 1932: 122). [All at once he again longed for the dreariness of his life [...] and his own sorrow at all this emptiness. Through the lieutenant's sobbing and moaning, the shattering call of this living earth broke violently, and while the doctor cast about for words to calm Trotta, compassion flooded his heart and love flickered in him with a thousand tongues of flame. Far behind him lay his apathy of the past few days (Neugroschel, 1995: 105).]

This scene illustrates the two characters reduced to an ontological purity,⁴¹ as it were – the lies that underpin their surroundings, that maintain their status in this society are all revealed as being just that – lies; the “emptiness” (*Schalheit*) as Roth refers to it. And the only thing that now, as Demant approaches his inevitable death, has any value is that of *being* in its purest form, where his emotions and his tenderness towards Carl Joseph are expressed without thought to rank and the rhetoric of life. The most significant line in the passage is “through the

⁴¹ The term “ontological purity” may be problematic. It is intended here to mean life stripped of its illusions; the recognition that all the social and political embellishments with which their society has imbued life are essentially devoid of meaning. Consequently, their lives as military men – the military being the ultimate manifestation of a political order – are rendered all the more vacuous.

lieutenant's sobbing and moaning, the shattering call of this living earth broke violently...", of the "lebendigen Erde". In other words here we no longer see the world only as one shaped by people and societies and their machinations, but we see here expressed by Roth a vision that shows mankind as a transient phenomenon and whatever illusions men may maintain to impose meaning on their existence, the "living earth" breaks through; a call to honesty, a call to the reassertion of the person behind the masks man has created. It is as if Roth is saying that an anthropocentric view of the world is limited and the cause of much suffering. The layers of lies piled upon life in no way spare humanity from the confrontation with the undeniable truths of life, such as one finds them in this scene above, namely the phenomenon of living a life. With different societies and histories, and with men all vying with each other for the dominance and perpetuation of a particular lie, the suffering thus caused simply multiplies. Carl Joseph has to emancipate himself from the lies that have shaped him, and Dr Demant realises this, as he too has spent a life in the military, drenched in formalities and lies. Added to that is the fact of his Jewishness – which is perceived as problematic in that he belongs to a religious tradition that predates the subsequent elaborate mendacity that lies at the heart of the Habsburg Empire, namely the notion of the Kaiser as protector of the Catholic faith. Jews serve as a reminder of the precariousness of the edifice of Catholic Christian civilisation in whose name the empire was defended against the "infidel" Turk at various stages in the 16th and 17th centuries. Judaism predates Christianity and its attendant rhetoric. But all the elaborate justifications provided by history and ritual cannot stop "the living earth breaking though violently". This is a poetic phrase that at first reading might not seem to make sense, unless one reads it as a poetic and ontological statement that goes beyond the mere recreation by Roth of the Habsburg world. It is Carl Joseph's recognition towards the end of the novel, when he has his small farm, of having to obey the "living earth" and not merely the rituals of his society, that gives him a happiness of sorts, an equilibrium because it's honest, even though that happiness is short-lived.

The Italian critic, Claudio Magris in his seminal work on Roth, first published in 1971, makes the following observation:

Questa scepsi corrosiva è tuttavia, come scrive Roth stesso, disillusione metafisica, “sagezza dell’aldilà”. Roth denuncia la relatività e la falsità dei valori proprio in nome di quei valori assoluti che vede non solo negati ma, cosa ancor più grave, degradati e manipolati, ridotti a strumenti e quindi falsificati. L’ingiustizia e la repressione appaiono tali a Roth alla luce di una prospettiva assoluta (Magris, 1971:38). [This corrosive scepticism is in any event, as Roth himself writes, a metaphysical disillusionment, “a wisdom of the hereafter”. Roth denounces relativity and the falseness of values [propounded] in the very name of those absolute values which he sees as not only being negated, but even worse, degraded and manipulated and reduced to instruments and hence falsified. Injustice and repression appear such to Roth from a perspective of the absolute (author’s translation).]

With Roth’s reference to the “living earth” we thus see as well a reference, as Magris points out above, a frame of reference in *Radetzkymarsch*, which is not confined to the physical world, or the world of men, but hints at a wider metaphysical paradigm, that is not as secular as it might seem, even if it is not overtly religious either. That it is absolutist is clear. Magris succinctly contextualises Roth’s thought when he speaks of Roth’s retrogressive tendency (retrogressive in the sense that he harks back to a bygone era that cannot be reconstituted),

[one that] flourishes to the extent which one opposes, consciously or not, the secularisation, not so much with an absolute [set of] values as much as with a different direction that the process of secularisation takes. One can idealise or even propose as a model a past characterised in reality not by the purity of certain ideals, but by the extent to which they compromise with historical-political forces of a different hue (author’s translation).⁴²

Thus one can discern that Roth not only presents the reader with an ontological perspective, but also a contradictory vision that yearns for an absolute of some kind, but one which he himself seems unable to define. The compromises, as Magris puts it, made necessary by historical and political forces irk Roth and he can identify them. But this does not diminish his empathy with his characters. Indeed, the impasse that he creates relies on the characters being caught in situations which they know are deleterious and mendacious, but in which they are powerless. Roth has an empathy with their powerlessness and restores a sense of dignity to Demant and Carl Joseph in the passage above, in that he shows them to be at least capable of

⁴² Tendenza regressiva che affiora nella misura in cui si contrapone, consapevolmente o no, alla secolarizzazione non tanto un valore assoluto quanto un’altra direzione del processo di secolarizzazione, idealizzando o addirittura proponendo come modello un passato caratterizzato in realtà non già dalla purezza di certi ideali, bensì dalla loro compromissione con forze storiche-politiche di colore diverso (Magris, 1971: 39).

sincere, disinterested emotion and a rational ability to decipher the existential cul-de-sac in which they find themselves. Their courage lies not in denying the futility of their existence, but in confronting it, while knowing that doing so has no reward other than knowing they are not deceiving themselves. Obviously, Demant and Carl Joseph do not articulate this in this way, but that is effectively what Roth presents us with.

We know with hindsight that Roth's vision of doom was prophetic, and it was not long before Roth and his kind, and the Demants, would be referred to in Nazi documentaries as the "ostjüdische Untermenschentum".⁴³

The ontological aspect of *Radetzkymarsch*, often overlooked amid the obvious socio-historical and political aspects of the novel, is ever present. One has for example the following, again as in the previous passage, referring to Carl Joseph's way of interacting with the world, with his existence:

Die Geräusche der Stadt waren nicht laut genug, die pfeifenden Amseln in den Gärten und die trillenden Lerchen in den Lüften zu übertönen. All das schüttete die Welt über den Leutnant Trotta aus. Er saß im Wagen neben seiner Freundin, er liebte sie, und er fuhr, wie ihm schien, durch den ersten guten Tag seines Lebens (Roth, 1932: 226). [The hubbub of the city wasn't loud enough to drown out the whistling blackbirds in the gardens and the trilling larks in the air. The world lavished all these things on Lieutenant Trotta. He sat next to his mistress in the carriage, he loved her, and he was riding through what seemed like the first good day of his life (Neugroschel, 1995: 194-5).]

Here the mistress referred to is Frau von Taußig and we know that this relationship will ruin him and is ultimately one characterised by betrayal, expediency and convenience. However, for this brief moment of happiness that Carl Joseph experiences Neugroschel uses the word "lavishes" to render Roth's "schüttete". In other words, he shows us a Carl Joseph being happy, although the happiness is not only short-lived, but illusory. It is, however, the only happiness that Carl Joseph experiences, even though it's illusory, or indeed precisely because it's illusory. The more profound relationship – if not the most profound and sincere relationship that Carl Joseph

⁴³ See Möller, Felix, *Harlan – Im Schatten von Jud Süß*. Documentary film, 2008. (Edition Salzgeber (Eur)/Zeitgeist (US). In this documentary footage taken from the film *Im Schatten von Jud Süß* makes clear use of the term "ostjüdische Untermenschentum".

experiences – is that which, by this later stage of the novel, he had experienced with the now deceased Demant. “Und es war auch in der Tat, als begänne sein Leben” (Roth, 1932: 226) [and he really felt his life was beginning (Neugroschel, 1995: 195).] There is an inherent and intended irony in this in that Roth has prepared the reader for the serial failure of Carl Joseph to find happiness or at least a semblance thereof. Happiness of course is in itself a fraught term, but integrity, harmony or fulfilment and other equally desirable states also prove illusory. And yet Roth creates moments in which Carl Joseph attains these states momentarily. It is their loss on successive occasions that renders him all the more vulnerable and prone to experience something even worse than the misfortune that went before. His impasse (and that of the political dispensation of which he is an integral part) becomes cumulative, layered and ultimately overwhelming. It leads to the foolhardy attempt to sacrifice himself for others, for the soldiers under his command, at the end of the novel. He reaches his ultimate fulfilment in the denial of self, in his extinction. In other words, Roth illustrates a Carl Joseph who ultimately takes cognisance of his impasse and ends his life in a way that can still be recognised as dignified, if not indeed heroic. The passage above with Frau von Taußig in the carriage is all the more poignant, not only because it is short-lived, but also because it illustrates a Carl Joseph sensible to the world, with the potential and indeed the desire to be more than the sum of his parts. He sees the world, however briefly, as a beneficent place.

One could also look at Carl Joseph, as indeed at any one of the characters in the three novels under discussion, in terms of the unfolding of their lives, as the authors present these to the reader. Again, a kind of phenomenological approach, which Galimberti adopts (borrowing heavily from Heidegger and Husserl) can help in viewing the characters. In his introduction to his study on Heidegger, Charles P. Guignon speaks of Heidegger’s “phenomenology of being in the world” and the “interpretive practices of a particular historical culture” (Guignon, 1993:13). Without going into depth about the vast complexities of Heidegger’s philosophy, the cardinal point for present purposes is to see the protagonists in the three novels in the way in which they interact with the world. Heidegger simply provides a point of departure for character analysis. At another point in his study on Heidegger, overlapping what Galimberti also refers to,

is the idea of the future having priority over the past and present in defining the being of the self. As Guignon puts it further:

[...] what a person is shooting for in life determines both how the past can be encountered as providing assets for the present and how the present can show up as a situation demanding action. But the future has a priority because, insofar as my actions commit me to a range of possible ways of being in the future, their future directedness defines what my life – that is my “being” – is adding up to as a totality, “right up to the end” (Guignon, 1993: 9).

If one examines Carl Joseph in this light again, one has to examine the kind of future he can legitimately envisage for himself. It has been established that he has inherited a past which stifles his present. The present offers but few opportunities for being, for his own sake, not merely being in the service of the state, of his father, as a son. The illusion that he can break the shackles of his past is indulged by his relationships with women, when in fact the truth of his situation comes from unexpected sources of sincere, disinterested affection in the form of Dr Demant, Onufrij and to some extent Count Chojnicki. Carl Joseph’s delayed ability to distinguish between that which is mendacious and that which is truthful is his undoing. His inability to act upon any insight thus derived reflects a lack of courage as does his predisposition to delude himself – a very human trait. But what does that indicate as regards his future? Carl Joseph’s past and present militate against any notion of self-fulfilment, or being in the world – to some extent at least – on his own terms. What assets has the past endowed him with, psychologically, to confront the challenges of the present? With a past, so shaped by socio-historical imperatives, it is only natural that Carl Joseph’s future would similarly be defined by the unfolding of the socio-historical forces at work on him. His “emergence-into-presence” (Guignon, 1993:9) has been traumatic, leaving him vulnerable to deceit and illusion and preventing him from emerging into a future that is not doomed. Carl Joseph’s past condemns him to doom, as he has not the means, imaginatively, psychologically or materially to overcome the burden of his past. His weakness is inherent, and he thus functions as a metaphor for the whole Habsburg Empire. Carl Joseph is thus a universal character in the sense that he symbolises the ills and misfortunes of his times.

Then again, the impasse that Carl Joseph experiences in his youthful, bewildered life is echoed in the political and socio-historical order which he has inherited; or indeed his life echoes this bewilderment, as does the life of his author. Joseph Roth inverts a long-established historiographical tradition. Authors and what they create establish myths about their country, nation or empire that are much more enduring than the formulae that politicians, historians, diplomats and the like try to perpetuate. Roth's novel is *in noce* a distillation of the impasse of the Habsburg Empire, or to put it more specifically, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which lasted from 1867-1918. The dualism inherent in the Austro-Hungarian Empire's Dual Monarchy maintains a fatal compromise. The political Compromise made between Austria's German lands and the Hungarian monarchy was an attempt to fuse the liberalism with the ethnic diversity of the empire, its over-arching, all-embracing ethos which had been set against the ethnic rivalry of those minorities living within the borders of the empire. This compromise, or the Great Compromise of 1867, set in motion a psychological predisposition to containment, a containment that naturally depended on the suppression of ethnic and hence political realities. Ultimately, the model of compromise which the Austro-Hungarian Empire represented was doomed, because its appearance did not reflect its reality, or so one could argue. So too one sees a Carl Joseph torn between the obligations of duty to this doomed political structure and his nature. Doom, impasse are grafted into his very being – he is a reflection, a victim, of the historical impasse. The historical impasse has become a personal impasse:

Historians of empire often provided a set of heroes and myths for the different peoples in their empires to identify with. As they could not establish a national consciousness, they had to build a common, imperial cultural consciousness that would in effect run counter to rising national sentiments (Frank and Hadler, 2011: 7).

We see how in *Radetzky*, Carl Joseph's grandfather is frequently referred to as the "Hero of Solferino". The imperial mythologizing mechanism is part of the personal, and indeed intimate experience of the young Carl Joseph. He is implicitly, explicitly, constantly exhorted to live up to the example of his grandfather. He, like his grandfather, has to deny his Slovenian ancestors and be loyal to the Austro-Hungarian ideal, and the political settlement cobbled together in 1867. And it is the power behind that ideal that elevated the Von Trotta family to

the nobility. The Battle of Solferino in 1859 was itself part of one of the many containment wars that the Habsburgs were involved in during the 19th century. Carl Joseph carries the burden of a generational lie; he is the scion of a lie and has to suffer for it and try as he might, he cannot, until it is too late, do anything about it.

To further elucidate the crushing weight of history that Carl Joseph carries, and the impasse this bestows on him, the historiography relating to the Austro-Hungarian Empire assists the interpretative process:

Quoting Oscar Jàszzi, the Hungarian historian Tibor Frank points out:

In his 1929 *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy*, Jàszzi concluded that in their vast empire the Habsburgs carried out, 'during more than four hundred years, an effort to keep together this variegated mosaic of nations and people and to build up a universal state, a "supernational" monarchy, and to fill it with the feeling of a common solidarity'. Jàszzi added, 'This historical experiment in the society of nations under the patronage of the Habsburgs has proved unsuccessful'. He explained the dissolution of the of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy by a deep moral crisis, which he attributed, among other factors, to an eventuality that 'All nations struggling for equality at the beginning easily become fighters for domination later, and from the oppressed they become the oppressors.' [...] As Jàszzi aptly put it in 1918, 'the inherent logic of the *raison d'être* of the Monarchy is nothing but the co-operation of peoples who alone would be unable to maintain their existence under the dual pressure of the Germans and Eastern Slavs. The main mistake of Jàszzi the political theorist was his conviction that the future of the monarchy as well as that of Europe moved toward integration when in fact it tended towards disintegration (Frank, T., 2011: 49-50).

There is much to ponder in Frank's synopsis of Jàszzi's views. Most notably he illustrates the range of the elaborate subterfuge which history can be. The novelist Roth simply crystallises this dilemma in the character of Carl Joseph. That the Austro-Hungarian experiment might have been a ruse by the nobility, in its intent as well as in its economic basis, is also explored in *Radetzkyarsch*.⁴⁴ Roth at various stages in the novel illustrates the social upheaval, the ethnic rivalries, the unflattering references to Hungarian officers and the like. It also is significant that Jàszzi's history *A Habsburg-Monarchia felbomlása (Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy, 1929,*

⁴⁴ See Frewster, J Colin (2007), "'Es ist eine Lüge!'" Habsburg Potemkin Villages in Joseph Roth's *Radetzkyarsch*, *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies*, vol. 43, no. 3 September, pp. 318-336. In this article Frewster also explores the links between political disillusionment and how this is reflected in Roth's novel.

1971) was published three years before *Radetzkymarsch*. In other words, *Radetzkymarsch* is part of a continuum of thought and debate, indeed a historiographical debate, not only a literary phenomenon. The impasse that Frank refers to, drawing on his predecessors, is reflected as a literary manifestation. The impasse then that Roth represents is one reflecting the impasse of a particular political structure. However, when one reminds oneself that the events that led to the collapse of the Habsburg Empire (or the Austro-Hungarian arrangement, or Compromise of 1867) plunged Europe into the greatest conflict ever witnessed hitherto, then the significance of *Radetzkymarsch* becomes all the more redolent with meaning.

The mechanics of style in *Radetzkymarsch* may be what they are, but equally, it is the novel's confrontation with history that forces one to consider *Radetzkymarsch* not only along aesthetic lines, but also as a historiographical exercise, and valid as such in itself. Its aesthetic merits have ensured its survival, but it is its historiographical significance that assists the hermeneutic process. The impasse that Roth describes is therefore not limited to the character of Carl Joseph, symbolic as he is; rather, Roth is also confronting a historical impasse that is endemic to Western history and the way that historians interpret their national pasts and how this is interpreted by others. The question thus arises: how is Roth different from his contemporaries such as Thomas Mann, for example, whose *Zauberberg* similarly addresses the disease and moral torpor of his times? The answer may lie in the fact that Roth directly addresses a specific political and social order which had endured for centuries – and for five decades in its Austro-Hungarian guise – the demise of which was in effect seismic in its consequences. Few Modernist writers of epic novels – as exemplified by *Radetzkymarsch* – have addressed impasse with such particularity, specificity, as Roth has done. That Roth writes in the midst of a dying age, and indeed after the age has died, reflects a profound sense of impasse, a sense of disquiet that becomes all the more obvious when one views *Radetzkymarsch* in terms of historiography.

Apparent respite is offered by Roth to this impasse by illustrating an alternative, an alternative that cannot be lived out to the full. Roth gives Carl Joseph a respite, via the Graf Chojnicki, who, as mentioned previously, gives Carl Joseph a home once the latter had decided to leave the military:

„Hier werden Sie wohnen!“ sagte Chojnicki.

Es war ein kleines Haus, am Rande des Wäldchens, mit grünen Jalousien, wie sie vor dem Fenster der Bezirkshauptmannschaft angebracht waren. [...] Er was entschlossen, niemanden von seinen Kameraden wiederzusehen. Beim Schein der flackernden Kerze, in seiner hölzernen Stube, schrieb er dem Vater, auf gelblichem, fasrigem Kanzleipapier [...] Er hatte wenig Arbeit. Er trug die Namen der Lohnarbeiter in große, Schwarz-grün gebundene Bücher ein, die Löhne, den Bedarf der Gäste, die bei Chojnicki wohnten. Er addierte die Zahlen, guten Willens, aber falsch berichtete vom Stand des Geflügels, von den Schweinen, von dem Obst [...] er kannte nun die Sprache des Landes. Er verstand einigermaßen, was die Bauern sagten. Er handelte mit den rothaarigen Juden, die schon Holz für den Winter einzukaufen begannen. Er lernte die Unterschiede zwischen dem Wert der Birken, der Fichten, der Tannen, der Eichen, der Linden und des Ahorns kennen. Er knauserte. Genauso wie sein Großvater, der Held von Solferino, er Ritter der Wahrheit, zählte er mit hageren, Fingern harte Silbermünzen, wenn er in die Stadt kam, am Donnerstag zum Schweinemarkt, um Sattel, Kummet,, Joch und Sensen einzukaufen, Schleifsteine, Sicheln, Harken und Samen. Wenn er zufällig einen Offizier vorbeigehen sah, senkte er den Kopf (Roth, 1932: 354-5). [This is where you'll live," said Chojnicki. It was a lodge on the edge of the Little Forest; it had green blinds like those on the windows of the district headquarters. [...]

He was determined not to see any of his fellow officers. In his wooden room, by the glow of the flickering candle, he wrote letters to his father on yellowish, fibrous official stationery [...]

He had little to do. He entered the names of the day labourers into the huge black-and-green ledgers, the salaries, the requirements of Chojnicki's guests. He added up the figures, with good intentions but incorrectly; reported on the state of the poultry, the pigs, the fruit that was sold, or kept [...]

He spoke the local vernacular. He could pick up some of what the peasants said. He dealt with the red-haired Jews, who were already buying wood for the winter. He learned the different values of the birches, pines, firs, oaks, lindens, and maples. He pinched pennies. Just like his grandfather, the Hero of Solferino, the Knight of Truth, he counted out hard silver coins with gaunt, hard fingers whenever he came to town for the Thursday pig market to purchase saddles, horse collars, yokes, and scythes, grindstones, sickles, rakes, and seed. If he spotted an officer walking by, he lowered his head (Neugroschel, 1995: 307-8).]

The significance of this passage and this part of the novel, towards the end, lies in the fact that it is here, at last, that past, present and future come together in their most felicitous form in that Carl Joseph is at last able to accommodate the world in his own terms. This episode in this particular chapter (Part III Chapter 20) is part of a device to illustrate impasse in that Roth presents the reader with the alternative to impasse, i.e. some form of fulfilment. Or to put it in Galimberti's terms as quoted earlier: "le *condizioni* per cui ciascuno è in grado di darsi un presente, un passato e un futuro (Galimberti, 2007: 202 [author's italics]), the *conditions* enabling each one of us to give himself a present, a past and a future (author's translation). Carl

Joseph in the passage above shows the extent to which he has managed to transcend the limitations of his time, his “being-in-the-world”, *Das In-der Welt-sein*, to use Heidegger’s parlance,⁴⁵ if one maintains an ontological approach to what Carl Joseph’s life exemplifies. One might argue that the peace he has found is a result of a reaction against all the misfortune that has befallen him, as one could view his psychological make-up as a misfortune in itself, as is his place in history. The fact remains that Roth has drawn a character that has consciously sought a peace of sorts for himself, and has seen through the mendacity that has hitherto informed, if not deformed, his existence. We see in the passage above how Roth lists the names of trees, symbols of continuity, much like the daily routines of rural life and echoed by the mention of the red-haired Jew – all symbols of continuity in a world that is rapidly losing any sense of continuity (at the time referred to in the novel and at the time of the novel’s writing). The symbols of continuity that Roth draws are more than merely symbols; rather, they embody time-honoured rhythms of life and sustenance, not the fake continuity that is imposed by a particular political order, and a doomed one at that. The Habsburg Empire represents an elaborate rhetoric of life – mankind’s imperative to create an order in the world, to have ideas about the world – an imperative that can only partially reflect and harness the forces that shape any given society, and which as Frank asserts via Jàsz, was doomed anyway.

The homeliness of Carl Joseph’s new life (one knows it will be short-lived, as the greater historical forces intersect and take over and destroy his new-found Eden) reflects a return to the self that never had a chance to develop and represents a return to a “natural” past. The “historical forces” are predetermined and lie in the very make up of the political order which held sway since 1867, forever keeping the menacing forces of nationalism and socialism at bay in the guise of a benign authoritarianism.

The oft-referred-to contradictoriness inherent in Roth (his oscillation between socialism and nostalgia, between his Judaism and Catholicism) seems to find a resolution in this passage

⁴⁵ Heidegger, Martin, *Sein und Zeit*, Max Niemeyer Verlag, Tübingen, 1986, p. 63 (in Macquarrie and Robinson, *Being and Time*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1993: 91).

above in that this return to the self in an honest, rural environment – away from the pressures and chimera of a changing society, of the falsehoods maintained in the military – constitute a kind of idyll. This episode in the novel is a departure from the descriptions of unhappiness in Carl Joseph’s life, of his impasse. The full impact of this chapter relies on the context hitherto established by Roth in the novel. The tragic, and indeed arguably needless, death of Carl Joseph at the end of the novel – and the metaphor for sterility that his father represents and the assassination of the Crown Prince Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo which precipitated World War I – are all the more significant because of this “happy interlude” in Carl Joseph’s life. In this happy interlude he is on his own; he is not reliant on anyone other than Graf Chojnicki, who provides him with the means to live this life by employing him. Roth needs this interlude to show how differently Carl Joseph’s life might have proceeded had the historical forces not finally intervened to destroy this idyll. The allusion to truth, in the reference to the Hero of Solferino as the “Knight of Truth”, is both ironic and also alludes to the psychological truth of Carl Joseph’s existence. It is ironic in that Roth is implicitly posing the question whether the character he has drawn for the reader is in fact truthful and to what extent the portrayal of Carl Joseph can make any claim to a wider truth. Roth is implicitly engaging the question of the attainability of truth, reinforced by the mention of Carl Joseph’s grandfather as the Knight of Truth.

One could aver that Roth is interrogating an ontological question, whether truth in the wider sense is knowable, or whether a transcendent truth is in fact in operation, inaccessible though that truth may be. The whole exegesis of Carl Joseph’s life can thus also be seen as an attempt to engage a question similar to the one that Heidegger proposes in *Sein und Zeit*:

*Wir müssen die Wahrheit voraussetzen, sie muß als Erschlossenheit des Daseins seinem so wie dieses selbst als je meines and dieses sein muß. Das gehört zur wesenhaften Geworfenheit des Daseins in die Welt (Heidegger, 1986:228 ((italics Heidegger’s)). [We must presuppose the truth. Dasein itself, as in each case my Dasein and this Dasein, must be; and in the same way the truth, as Dasein’s disclosedness must be. This belongs to Dasein’s thrownness into the world. [Translation, Macquarrie, J and Robinson, E. *Being and Time*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1993 (1962), p. 271].]*

This episode in *Radetzkymarsch* thus reflects, along with many others, a philosophical dimension in Roth, viewing his main character now as both a victim and a protagonist in his life. There is an interplay largely biased in favour of the idea that Carl Joseph does *not* have control over his own destiny, but is instead the victim of his socio-historical circumstances. However, in the above passage from the novel, Roth veers away from presenting the possibilities in Carl Joseph's life as uniformly unhappy. But Roth's pessimistic vision is maintained by making this period in Carl Joseph's life particularly brief. Ultimately, Carl Joseph remains the victim of socio-historical forces when he is killed in the earliest days of the First World War. Truth – and the contradictory nature of truth – are overriding concerns for Roth, despite its unattainability. The closest one can get to truth, it seems Roth is saying, is the novel form or narrative, as an attempt to understand what is ultimately unknowable. But Roth is alluding here to a transcending truth and it is this belief that would seem to sustain the kaleidoscopic examination of Carl Joseph's character and plight. The copious references in *Radetzkymarsch* to the socio-political dimension of Carl Joseph's life serve to illustrate the factors that shape Carl Joseph. Roth's descriptions of Carl Joseph and his various incarnations through the progress of the novel underscore the interplay between the personal and the political-historical, with the question consistently and implicitly being asked: "how is Carl Joseph going to deal with this challenge?" In other words, how successfully is Carl Joseph living his life and what does this say about his future? In this sense *Radetzkymarsch* reveals itself to be a novel of impasse to the fullest extent in that Roth portrays a person unfit to live in the world as he finds it, and yet he aspires, consciously or otherwise, to a future, while knowing he probably does not have one worth having. The respite offered to Carl Joseph by Graf Chojnicki, the idyll in the woods, is but an interlude illustrating what life might have continued being for Carl Joseph had the historical forces, those elements beyond the meagre control of an individual's life, not intervened to condemn Carl Joseph. The impasse lies in the socio-historical situation that overwhelms the individual, stifling his present and curtailing his future. The past to which Carl Joseph is an heir does not release him to be what he might be; the tentacles of the past do not release their grip on the young lieutenant condemned to act out the consequences of historical forces; history is the puppeteer, Carl Joseph the puppet. The futility of Carl Joseph's existence is paralleled by

the futility of all the attempts described throughout the novel to keep the edifice of empire in place: Carl Joseph's brief life echoes this impasse, an impasse not of Carl Joseph's making – it has been imposed on him by history. Nor has Carl Joseph been psychologically equipped to assert himself in the face of the forces of history.

Radetzky also encapsulates the crisis of Modernism inasmuch as the demise of the Habsburg Empire, as a historical phenomenon, encapsulates the crisis of modernity. A major exponent – or symptom – of this crisis of modernity are the works of Ludwig Wittgenstein, who sought, arguably, as Gellner points out in his various critiques of Wittgenstein (most notably *Language and Solitude*, 1998, and *Words and Things*, 1959, 1979), to create a philosophy that was “devoid of culture” – i.e. a philosophy of language that sought in effect to reduce human experience to that of the individual alone, stripped of his or her cultural milieu. Wittgenstein's philosophy can thus be seen as a socio-historical phenomenon (as Gellner does by implication), as a way of denying the socio-political realities of living in the Habsburg Empire. (Wittgenstein's view has to be taken into account inasmuch as his philosophy represents the apex of a given reaction to the crisis of modernity, and his work is central to Viennese Modernism.) In other words, philosophy is seen as an attempt to deny the inherent complexity, unpredictability and spontaneity of human experience. The Habsburg Empire was a superb example of rival ideologies, ethnic rivalries competing in the same historical and geographical space, thus threatening the survival of the Empire itself. Wittgenstein's philosophy can be seen as a way of denying and hiding away from these insurmountable complexities through the formulation of a worldview that would seek to render these complexities meaningless or irrelevant. It is a moot point whether these complexities can be denied. And Roth's novel is in effect a rebuttal of Wittgenstein's philosophy in that he illustrates amply the complexity inherent in the Habsburg Empire and how these are reflected in one individual, Carl Joseph.

Bearing out this point is Werner Suppanz, who says:

Moreover, the presentation of the literary approach to the Austro-Hungarian ethno-cultural plurality can only be insinuated. For many authors who wrote after 1918, the 'Habsburg myth', Austria-Hungary's multinationalism, was a *topos* that created a counter world to the era of nationalism and national states after 1918. The author, Joseph Roth (1894-1939), stated in 1932

that the Habsburg Empire permitted him to be a patriot and cosmopolitan at the same time. The writer Ödön von Horvath (1901-1939) described his plurinational situation as something we could interpret in the terms of cultural studies and 'hybrid identity' (Suppanz, 2011: 67).

Carl Joseph experiences these myriad forces acting out on him, rendering him but a shadow of these historical forces. For the greater part of the novel he cannot live up to his promise as an individual. Gellner says:

The 'two and only two' idea – the reduction of available alternatives to the choice between individualistic, universalistic, liberal centre and a rival particularistic, communalistic, culture-revering vision – was deeply built into the whole life of the terminal period of the Habsburg Empire. There was no evidence that Wittgenstein was ever consciously interested in social and political questions, that he was preoccupied with issues such as whether a Danusina federation would be preserved, or whether, on the contrary, the rival ethnic cultures of the region should secure their wholly sovereign states, each dedicated to the protection and maintenance of its own national culture. [...] That was the question and its impact on Ludwig Wittgenstein appears to have been – nil (Gellner, 1998:74).

Gellner's contention is that one has to take account of complexities of the world, no matter how uncomfortable and uncongenial they might be. Gellner's stance is based, it would seem, on seeing Wittgenstein's philosophy as a case of wilful naivité – the creation of a system of thought that can allow one to pretend that complexity does not exist and that the world can be reduced to a set of formulae in order to explain the world and its meaning. While Gellner does not suggest that meaning is attainable, denying that there are factors in human experience that cannot merely be reduced to language and to the notion of the "individual *über alles*" does not solve the problem either. In Roth's Carl Joseph the protagonist is someone who lives through the crisis of his times with various degrees of feeble interaction and awareness of what he is living through – but unable to do anything about it or to interrogate his place in the world. Carl Joseph is often resigned to unhappiness. He is unable to see himself "reflected in that world" (Gellner, 1998: 63). Roth engages with the complexity of the world and his novel is in effect a counterfoil to the Wittgenstein view of the world. The impasse that Roth explores lies in that very inability to make sense of the world, in that sense of futility, but it also lies in Roth's perception that cultural, historical, social and political factors do indeed play a part and have a psychological impact on the individual. *Radetzky* is thus an exposition of the crisis, of modernity, of the Habsburg Empire and of the protagonist, Carl Joseph, who experiences the

panoply of precariousness in his own psychological make-up. These factors overwhelm him as they would the prevailing political order of which he is a part. The present is too fraught for there to be a future. And therein too lies the impasse. Gellner's critique is not, moreover, limited to the context of the Habsburg Empire. His notion of liberalism can be applied to the defiant liberalism we find in *Gli occhiali d'oro*.

3.2 Bassani – Defying impasse

Übrigens sind die Italiener in der Behandlung der Judenfrage außerordentlich lax. Sie nehmen die italienischer Juden sowohl in Tunis wie in besetzten Frankreich in Schutz und dulden durchaus nicht, daß sie zur Arbeit eingesetzt oder zum Tragen eines Judensterns gezwungen werden. Man kann hier wieder einmal sehen, daß der Faschismus doch nicht so recht in die Tiefe zu gehen wagt, sondern in wichtigen Problemen an der Oberfläche haften bleibt. Die Judenfrage macht uns überhaupt sehr viel zu schaffen. Überall finden die Juden, auch bei unseren Verbündeten, noch Hilfsmanschaften, ein Beweis dafür, daß sie selbst im Achsenlager noch eine bedeutsame Rolle spielen (*Goebbels Tagebücher*, herausgegeben von Louis. P. Lochner, Zürich: Atlantis Verlag, 1948, pp. 222-3).

[The Italians are extremely lax in the treatment of the Jews. They protect the Italian Jews both in Tunis and in occupied France and won't permit their being drafted for work or compelled to wear the Star of David. This shows once again that Fascism does not really dare to get down to fundamentals, but is very superficial regarding most important problems. The Jewish question is causing a lot of trouble. Everywhere, even among our allies, the Jews have friends to help them, which is a proof that they are still playing an important role even in the Axis camp (*The Goebbels Diaries 1942-1943*, ed. Louis P. Lochner, Garden City, NY, 1948, p. 241, 13 December 1942 as quoted in Jonathan Steinberg, *All or Nothing – The Axis and the Holocaust 1941-1943*, Routledge, London and New York, 1990, p. 86 and in *The Goebbels Diaries*, London: Hamish Hamilton, p.181.]

While much has been said thus far about the particular situation of Jews in Fascist Italy, the above quote from *The Goebbels Diaries* does put the Italian experience in some perspective. The contradictory nature of the Fascists' attitude to the Jews does not, however, diminish the intensity of the experience of the 1938 Race Laws on Bassani's writing. However, a distinction must also be made between Italian attitudes to Jews in the different countries (notably Greece, the Balkans – Croatia and Slovenia in particular – and France) occupied by Italy during World War II until the collapse of Fascism in July 1943. It is from September 1943 that Italy is effectively under German domination, from Rome northwards, and hence subject to the full

impact of the Holocaust. Northern Italy was administered by a German puppet regime, the so-called Republic of Salò, or the Italian Social Republic (the RSI, Repubblica Sociale Italiana). While *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* deals with Ferrara post-September 1943 as well as before, *Gli occhiali d'oro* serves partially as a preamble to *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* and illustrates the impact of the Race Laws of 1938. Assisting the Germans in the round-up of Ferrara's Jews were the *repubblichini*, i.e. those Fascists still loyal to the deposed Mussolini (subsequently ensconced in Salò on the shores of Lake Garda) and who believed Italy's interests were best served by siding with the Germans, in that part of Italy not under effective Allied control. These *repubblichini* and their German allies are also referred to in the literature dealing with the period as the *Nazifascisti*. So while Italy's relatively lenient attitudes to Jews outside Italy may have been determined by the need to maintain some form of sovereignty, as Steinberg⁴⁶ suggests, *vis-à-vis* the Germans, inside Italy collaboration between Germans and *repubblichini* did give effective force to the Holocaust, albeit on a scale that pales when compared to Poland, the Ukraine, Russia and Hungary and elsewhere. According to Susan Zuccotti,⁴⁷ 15 percent of Italy's Jews were killed, and she gives cogent reasons why this was so:

The Holocaust began much later in Italy than in most other European countries, so that Jews should have been aware of the danger and quick to flee. In Rome, the danger period from September 1943 to June 1944 lasted only nine months; in most of central Italy, it existed until April 1945. A maximum of twenty months, yet 15 per cent of Italy's Jews were destroyed. [...] In Italy, those factors determined that 38,400 Jews would survive while more than 6,800 would die. [...] The responses of many Italian non-Jews, in the absence of support from their government, were decent and courageous (Zuccotti, 1987: xvii-xviii).

The point that Zuccotti makes about the "absence of support from their government" might also be due to the fact that the concept of Italian government was essentially a contradiction in terms in that Italy was effectively in a state of civil war, and so which government would she be referring to? The government in Rome after July 1944 under Marshall Badoglio or the Mussolini puppet republic at Salò? While Steinberg cites many examples of determined efforts by Italian

⁴⁶ Steinberg, Jonathan, *All or Nothing – The Axis and the Holocaust 1941-1943*, London, New York: Routledge, 1990.

⁴⁷ Zuccotti, Susan, *The Italians and the Holocaust – Persecution, Rescue and Survival*, London: Peter Halban, 1987.

authorities not to hand over Jews to the Germans in the areas the Italians controlled outside Italy, the fact remains that in those parts of Italy administered from Salò, the Germans had a free hand, as it were, as regards the Jews and were well served by the *repubblichini*. Ferrara fell under Salò and Ferrara was itself the centre of bitter strife between anti-Fascists or partisans, and *repubblichini*. Bassani himself was imprisoned as a partisan and subsequently escaped to Rome. So the *Romanzo di Ferrara*, including *Gli occhiali d'oro*, is to be read as a heartfelt account of the vicissitudes of Ferrara during Fascism, during the war and of its aftermath.

As the focus now falls on *Gli occhiali d'oro* it is clear how Bassani's novel functions as an acute distillation of a series of feelings, interwoven with politics, history and ethics.

One of the assumptions thus far has been the notion that a truth of some kind has been able to be distilled in *Radetzky*. One has to assume that the very notion of truth can also be viewed as a human construct in itself. That the truth is elusive is a cliché, but in *Gli occhiali d'oro* we see that it is both elusive and allusive, with the engagement with truth being deftly camouflaged throughout his novella, *Gli occhiali d'oro*.

The first element that distinguishes the Bassani novella from *Radetzky* is the first-person narrator, or the *io narrante*. Whereas in *Radetzky* we have the author on the outside looking in using the third-person narrator, in *Gli occhiali d'oro*, the third person is camouflaged by the use of a first-person narrator. Memory and the painstakingly detailed accounts of past events lend veracity to the account of the Jewish student and the homosexual doctor.

Much has been written about Bassani, though not that much about *Gli occhiali d'oro*, eclipsed as it has been by his later novel, *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini*. But when compared to *Radetzky*, in a sense the "issues" are much more accessible than they are in *Radetzky* in that the strictures experienced by the two protagonists are much more overtly represented. Carl Joseph's oppression is obfuscated by the elegiac quality of Roth's novel and the need Roth feels to give the reader a broad sweep of a time and his conforming much more to the *Bildungsroman* tradition. In *Gli occhiali d'oro* time is more narrowly represented and clearly delineated, although both Roth and Bassani share a comparable

political and socio-historical awareness. References to historical events are more cursory in *Radetzkymarsch*, whereas in *Gli occhiali d'oro* they are specific. However, the major distinction one can draw between the *io narrante* in *Gli occhiali d'oro* and in *Radetzkymarsch* is the level of self-awareness given by the respective authors to their main characters. This in itself is not too surprising in that there is much to suggest that Bassani's novella may be to a large extent autobiographical. In Roth we know for example that he was not a member of the nobility, unlike his protagonist, for a start, but grew up in Galicia, on the eastern frontiers of the empire. In Bassani, his work is intimately interwoven with the city of Ferrara and his own experience of the city in which he grew up. (He was, however, born in Bologna.)

What the two novels share is a consciousness of death and doom. Both novels deal with relatively young men emerging into consciousness. Carl Joseph is not overtly oppressed, as is the Jewish student in *Gli occhiali d'oro*. But in both cases we see the emergence of an ethical awareness, slow and painful in the case of Carl Joseph, acute and relatively immediate in *Gli occhiali d'oro*, and in immediate consequence of the circumstances and events he has to face and the choices he has to make.

Wo der Tod nahe scheint büßt das Leben seinen Reiz ein, vor allem dann wenn es sich um ein schleichendes, ein unbestimmtes Ende handelt. Verfall und drohende Katastrophe bringen womöglich unterschiedliche Lebensstile hervor (Müller-Funk, Wolfgang, 1989: 101) [Where death seems closer, life sacrifices its allure, especially when one is dealing with a lingering, undefined ending. Decay and looming catastrophe bring forth, possibly, differing ways of life (author's translation).]

In this quote Müller-Funk is commenting on *Radetzkymarsch* and Roth in general, but he touches on a theme that is central to both novels, namely death and doom that shape the protagonists' behaviour in both novels. It is, as Müller-Funk says, especially in the case of Carl Joseph, that one is dealing with a meandering, barely defined decay. Carl Joseph's endless compromises with ideals, with life as it is presented can be juxtaposed with the *io narrante's* stance in *Gli occhiali d'oro*. By contrast, an obvious urgency becomes apparent in the Bassani novella, an urgency that takes on another form and is expressed in lingering fashion in Roth's novel. In *Gli occhiali d'oro*, for all its narrative filigree, the choices that the narrator has to make emerge rapidly in distilled form.

Mirna Cicioni in her remarkably concise appraisal of *Gli occhiali d'oro* makes the following concluding remarks about the novel:

It would be simplistic to view, as most critics have done, the novel merely as a literary-moral reflection on the oppression of minorities by the 'Fascist majority' or as an expression of what Giusi Oddo De Stefanis calls 'coscienza razziale'. In *Gli occhiali d'oro* 'minority' and 'majority' are shifting concepts. At different times, the (heterosexual) Jews and the (Gentile) homosexuals are 'insiders' – part of the Fascist regime, conniving with it helping to create its norms – and 'outsiders', labelled in terms of their difference. Through a constant dialectical process between 'insiderdom' and 'outsiderdom', which calls attention to whatever is unspoken and/or contradictory, within discourses, the novel encourages reflection on the political reasons for the absence of shared discourses (Cicioni, M., 1986:101-115).

These political elements – as in the discourses to which Cicioni refers – underscore the impasse in *Gli occhiali d'oro*. Bassani's novel is overtly political and illustrates where the personal becomes political. Where there is a personal impasse it is because there is ultimately a political impasse. However, Cicioni obviously places the emphasis differently as regards what she considers vital elements of the novel. If one looks at *Gli occhiali d'oro* in a manner similar to the way one has looked at *Radetzky marsch*, one finds obvious similarities such as the fact that one is dealing with individuals harnessed by a political milieu not of their making, but one which determines the outcome of their lives and of their choices. Compelling are the choices made, the responses to the political, socio-historical milieux. One notes, for example, a greater acuity of observation that Bassani gives his first-person narrator, an acuity that Roth bestows on the third-person narrator.

However, if one initially merely looks at *Gli occhiali d'oro* in terms of being a text that is a response to the world, to "being-in-the-world", one notes for a start a heightened degree of self-awareness that Bassani has bestowed on his character. The political awareness of the author is presented on the first page of the novel, with clear references to the political turmoil of post-World War I Italy. Deftly, the other protagonist, Dr Fadigati, is introduced on the same page. Hence, immediately the personal and the political are juxtaposed. The respectable Dr Fadigati is seen in a political context and set apart from it. Immediately the demise of Dr Fadigati is referred to, as are precise geographical references to the city of Ferrara. Time, space

and characters being introduced with such immediacy plunges the reader into a world of turmoil and tragedy. The reader is “primed” from the very first page.

Fu nel '19, subito dopo l'altra guerra. Per ragioni d'età, io che scrivo non ho da offrire una immagine piuttosto vaga e confusa dell'epoca (Bassani, 1983: 7) [It was in 1919, just after the other war. Because of my age, I who write this can only offer a rather vague and confused picture of that period (McKendrick, 2012: 1).]

This sentence from the first page of the novel is of cardinal importance to an understanding of the novel in its entirety. In these two sentences lies a disguised disingenuousness on the part of the author in that he appears to be saying that he does not remember anything clearly, and yet throughout the novel he provides the reader with the most seemingly accurate account of the past. Like Roth, Bassani is looking at the past, but Bassani does so from the vantage point of the doom having happened, with the war and the attendant Holocaust having happened. His memory would seem to be anything but “vague and confused”. Bassani also introduces the fact that he is the first-person narrator, lending a further level of authenticity and immediacy to the text as well as, paradoxically, contrivance, because the extent to which the novella is autobiographical will always be in dispute. However, Marilena Renda's magisterial study on Bassani explains this dissimulation between the protagonists and the author as follows:

La volontà dello scrittore di tornare a distanza di decenni sulla prima giovinezza denota la necessità di ripensare e rielaborare, da parte sua, circostanze ed eventi destinati a rivelarsi decisive nella sua formazione. [...] Bassani sceglie di raccontare questo processo di esclusione e di dicentrimento da sé, dal proprio ambiente e dalle proprie certezze, attraverso la lente di un *alter-ego*: una prospettiva personale mediante la quale i turbamenti del singolo possano rimandare, per sinecdoche, alle inquietudini e alle ambiguità dell'intera cittadinanza. Questo personaggio, narratore intra-diegetico e costante punto focale del discorso, è ovviamente una controfigura dell'autore; e tuttavia egli è anche “altro” rispetto al “narratore” empirico Giorgio Bassani: il quale ovviamente, a differenza del suo personaggio, è a conoscenza dei successivi fatti storici (Renda, 2010: 84-85). [The desire of the author to go back decades later to his early youth is indicative of the need to rethink and to re-elaborate, for his part the circumstances and the events which were decisive in his make-up. [...] Bassani chooses to recount this process of exclusion and de-centring, alienation from the self, from his own environment, and from his own certainties, through the lens of an *alter ego*: a personal perspective through which the anguish of the individual may be projected, by synecdoche, on to the concerns and on to the ambiguity of the citizenry as a whole. This character, this intra-diegetic narrator and constant focal point of the discourse is obviously a counter-figure; and in any case he is also the “other” with regards to the “empirical narrator” Giorgio Bassani: who obviously, as distinct from his character, is familiar with subsequent historic facts (author's translation).]

There is a progression in the whole of Bassani's *œuvre* as regards the extent to which his novels and short stories concern themselves with time and overcoming time. Bassani's works are – as Renda points out – a coming-to-terms with himself, with the interplay between the personal and the historic is always present, each implicating the other (Renda, 2010: 85). Renda also points out a subtlety in Bassani as regards his Jewishness, an observation which is pertinent to *Gli occhiali d'oro* in no small measure:

[...] come si è visto Bassani si difende *dalla identificazione di se stesso come ebreo* proprio perché percepisce l'identità ebraica come un ostacolo alla possibilità di rispondere con forza alla gravità degli eventi storici. In sostanza lo scrittore interiorizza e fa propria l'immagine dell'ebreo "imbelle", mite e studioso, che tanta parte storicamente ha avuto nella dialettica inferiorità/superiorità tra ebrei e non ebrei [Italics Renda's] (Renda, 2010: 137). [As one has seen, Bassani defends himself *from identifying himself as Jewish* for the very reason that he perceives Jewish identity as an obstacle in responding with force to the gravity of historical events. Essentially the writer has internalised, and made his own, the image of the "cowardly", meek and studious type, who has historically generally lived the dialectic of inferiority/superiority between Jew and non- Jew (author's translation).]

This is a cardinal point Renda makes here because we see in *Gli occhiali d'oro* that the author's Jewishness only becomes an issue later in the novel, having placed the emphasis on Fadigati for the first few chapters. It is only when the plot develops and the parallels between Fadigati's exclusion and the narrator's exclusion end and then intersect, that the nexus of the novel is formed. Renda's observation also anticipates the defiance inherent in *Gli occhiali d'oro* and in *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* and the narrator's/Bassani's determination to indeed respond to the historic moment and not to be supine while evil triumphs around him. In other words, the *io narrante's* expression of disgust at Fadigati for acquiescing to continual humiliation just so as to be accepted. This acquiescence is a trait that Bassani, by implication and explicitly, attributes to the Jews (such as his father) as well as to non-Jews, who have allowed evil to triumph. The way in which Bassani chooses the form that his Jewishness takes underscores the tradition of assimilation enjoyed by Italian Jews: what matters is not so much whether one is Jewish or not, but whether one tolerates injustice in one's midst or not; it is not a Jewish question so much as it is a human question.

Gabriele Waste places the emphasis slightly differently as regards the Jewishness in *Gli occhiali d'oro*:

[...] der Übergang von der ‚metaphorischen‘ Ferne zur metonymischen‘ Nähe. Entlang dieser semiotischen Linie, die durch *Gli occhiali d'oro* entsteht, ist nämlich eine einschneidende Änderung des realhistorischen Hintergrunds zu beobachten: die Ära der Assimilation der Juden weicht einer progressiven Dissimulation. Dadurch wird die bisher unsichtbare Eigenart des Judentums erstmals in ihrer Kohärenz sichtbar (Waste, 2003: 110). [...]the crossover from “metaphorical” distance to the metonymic proximity. Along these semiotic lines that come into being through *Gli occhiali d'oro* there is a decisive change discernible in the historical background: the era of assimilation of the Jews gives way to a progressive dissimulation. In this way the hitherto invisible uniqueness of being Jewish becomes visible for the first time in its coherence (author’s translation).]

While Waste above finesses the complexity of *Gli occhiali d'oro* by abstracting the question of Jewishness in terms of the assimilation of the Jews (viewing the phenomenon of Ferrarese Jews from the outside looking in), Renda instead places the emphasis more firmly on the significance of what being Jewish meant for Bassani. But in her study on Bassani Waste places appropriate emphasis on the influence the liberal philosopher Benedetto Croce had on Bassani, and how this influence is discernible in the interplay between Bassani’s empirical view of life and Bassani’s style. Bassani’s fastidiousness in the description of time, space, colours – i.e. that which is readily observable – is part of his need to be as “objective” as possible. He does not indulge in the realm of the unknowable, such as trying to speculate as to why Fadigati is the way he is by delving into Fadigati’s psyche, or for that matter doing the same with regards to the *io narrante*. Instead, Bassani shows the reader the manifestations of what his characters do – their deeds, their responses to the world, to people and to themselves. In paraphrasing Waste, one could say that she is suggesting that for Bassani, actions reflect an “interiority” in any event and it would therefore be superfluous or futile to try and speculate as to the motives of what his characters do. It carries more weight to judge characters – people – by their actions, their acts of commission, and their sins of omission.

Waste says for example:

Was Bassani [...] rekonstruieren möchte, ist nicht eine fiktionale Vergangenheit im Sinne Prousts, sondern vielmehr die Distanz zwischen fiktionaler Vergangenheit und aktueller empirischer Gegenwart (Waste, 2003: 17). [What Bassani would like to reconstruct is not a

fictional past in a Proustian sense, but rather the reconstruction of the distance between fictional past and actual, empirical present (author's translation).]

Waste goes on to say:

Bassani's Bestreben, eine Verbindung zwischen seinem fiktionalen und seinem empirischen Ich herzustellen, vermag schließlich auch das sogar mehrmalige Umschreiben des *Romanzo di Ferrara* [...] Objektivität ist also für Bassani gleichbedeutend mit ‚historischer‘, d.h. räumlich-zeitlicher Einbettung des Ichs und dessen fiktionaler Projektionen (Waste, 2003:19). [Bassani strives to create a link between his fictional and empirical self, and brings about indeed the frequent rewriting of the *Romanzo di Ferrara*. Therefore for Bassani “objectivity” is equivalent to “historical”, i.e. the spatial-temporal “embeddedness” of the self and its fictional projection (author's translation).]

The cardinal point Waste makes is that:

Diese Orientierung an der Empirie bzw. der eigenen Lebenswelt erklärt auch warum Bassani sein fiktionales Universum auf seine Lebenszeit und seine Heimatstadt einschränkt (Waste, 2003: 16). [This empirical stance, or, his own life explains as well why Bassani limits his fictional universe to his own lifetime and to his home town (author's translation).]

Waste also makes the point that Bassani shows a certain reserve towards experimental psychology, and that this distinguishes him from those writers whom he considered to be his immediate predecessors (Waste, 2003: 16). Further on she also makes the point that “[...] die Zukunft keinen Platz findet” (Waste, 2003: 18) [...] there's no place for the future] in his novels, because he limits himself to the past, to the present and his own lifetime, i.e. that which is verifiable. But this observation by Waste also underscores the sense of impasse, the lack of a future vision in *Gli occhiali d'oro* which in turn raises a moot point: is the lack of a future vision entirely ascribable to Bassani's quest for objectivity – and hence his limiting himself to spatial and temporal fixedness – or, is the quest for objectivity a consequence of the historical events he witnessed and lived through, namely the Holocaust? This question is unanswerable, but the fact remains, Bassani's fiction generally is an elaborate coming to terms with the past, and as such, the quest for objectivity is a more reliable attribute than psychological speculation. Put differently, psychological speculation would put the author, Bassani, in a “posizione conoscitiva”, that is, in a “position of knowing”, and that would be contrary to his Crocean convictions if the position of knowing is based on speculation, such as might be the case in trying to decipher a character's psyche imaginatively. What is observable is much more useful

and convincing than any “knowledge” that might be conferred through psychological speculation. That is not to say that Bassani’s fiction is devoid of psychological insight, anything but, yet the way to arrive at that insight is by keen observation of that which is discernible, and through description and often elaborate metaphor and the resonance of that which is described.

So when Renda mentions the citizenry, and the way Bassani projects his own concerns onto society, i.e. on to Ferrara – i.e. onto that which is observable and knowable – she would seem to concur with Waste’s observation even though her emphasis and approach to Bassani’s texts is more reliant on her own observations and critique than on outside sources. The influence of Croce and Italian liberalism on Bassani – an aspect which Waste emphasises – thus sheds light on his style.

Bassani’s *œuvre* is a way of coming to terms with himself and his coming of age, and coming to terms with the world, with his “being” in the world. He projects his interior concerns outside of himself, in Renda’s view. This raises the question: Is the projection of the interior self onto the outside world a quest to avoid the pitfalls of subjectivity, or is the quest for objectivity, which Waste refers to, merely a way of coming to terms with subjectivity and all that Being in the World meant for Bassani? Does the quest for objectivity in *Gli occhiali d’oro* merely serve to mask, or to express, his subjectivity, or indeed is it an aesthetic tool which he has mastered? Again, these contrasting interpretations, though not mutually exclusive, shed light on the complexity of Bassani’s *oeuvre* and neither interpretation diminishes the force of Bassani’s writing.

However, it would be erroneous to view each of Bassani’s novels only in terms of a progression towards an amplification of the historical significance of Italy during the Second World War, or of an indictment of Fascist Italy, as one might have expected after the publication of *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini*. Instead, as Renda points out, Bassani’s 1964 novel, *Dietro la porta* (*Behind the Door*) is set in the autumn of 1929 and the summer of 1930, i.e. during Fascism, but well before the drama of the Race Laws, Second World War, German occupation, civil war and defeat. *Gli*

occhiali d'oro, by contrast to *Dietro la porta*, was published in 1958, is set in 1938. So with *Dietro la porta*, one has a novel published later, but dealing with a period earlier in the author's life, his early adolescence, i.e. almost a decade before the events described in *Gli occhiali d'oro* (Bassani was born in 1916). The point is that in *Dietro la porta*, according to Renda, the author "presents himself in the vestments of 'confessor'" ("Lo scrittore si presenta infatti nelle vesti di 'confessore'" Renda, 2010: 113). In other words, he reveals the narrator and no longer places the emphasis so much on a character outside of himself, but presents the reader with a closer proximity to the narrator. Or, put differently, Bassani's need to dissimulate is diminished in the last novel. This point is significant, because it serves to contextualise *Gli occhiali d'oro* and *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini*. The role of the narrator in *Dietro la porta* is not so camouflaged by history; the novel more closely resembles the life of the author:

Se nota predominante de *Gli occhiali d'oro* era l'elegia per un destino d'esclusione, in *Dietro la porta* prevale piuttosto la tendenza all'analisi introspettiva e all'individuazione dei segni precoci, nella personalità del protagonista e *io narrante*, di una sorte di ripiegamento e rifiuto della realtà (Renda, 2010:114). [If the predominant note of the *Gli occhiali d'oro* was the elegy of a destiny of exclusion, then in *Dietro la porta* the tendency to introspective analysis predominates, towards identifying the early signs in the personality of the protagonist and the first-person narrator of a kind of withdrawal and a rejection of reality (author's translation).]

In other words, as he grew as a writer, Bassani could be said to be distancing himself – however gently – from a rigidly objective view, allowing himself to become closer to his narrator. Whereas in *Gli occhiali d'oro* and *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* history itself is a protagonist, in *Dietro la porta*, the convenience of history, or more precisely, historically verifiable events, is less pronounced. The drama in the novel is of an individual growing up, not of the impact of history on the individual and the latter's response to history. In *Gli occhiali d'oro* the narrator-protagonist is what he is, and yet the "groundwork" for his character has, as it were, been laid after the fact, i.e. in 1964. So one finds an older Bassani looking back even further, into the past, to arrive at a more limpid reflection of the self.

One notes throughout *Gli occhiali d'oro* the precise street names, what clothes were being worn, what cars were being driven and the like. The meticulous recreation of the past has a function, namely as if to say, "If I can remember x, y or z in such detail, i.e. the colour of the

shirt worn twenty years previously, then everything else I say is true". So, far from being mere indulgence on the part of Bassani, the meticulous recreation of the past also serves to help the reader relive the past the way the narrator relives it, with detail lending veracity to his account. The re-evocation of the past has a socio-political and historical function, both in terms of the time in which the *Gli occhiali d'oro* is set around 1938 and in terms of the times in which it appeared, in 1958. Also, as Waste points out, the reason for the meticulous attention to detail is to establish empirical credentials, as it were. The impasse that bedevils the narrator is thus amply described and bears out Betti's contention that when it comes to interpreting a text, the intention of the author (Bassani) must be given greater consideration. ("Betti acknowledges more fully the role and character of the object of interpretation as well" Noakes, 1982:35-37).

Gli occhiali d'oro is suffused with an historical awareness and, as mentioned previously – and by a host of critics – Ferrara is the centre of Bassani's ontological consciousness, a metaphor for a particular mentality. It is as if Ferrara provides him with the crucible in which he stirs all the psychological, socio-political and historical elements of his narrative. Dr Fadigati, the homosexual doctor, is a phenomenon. But as the novel progresses the narrator realises that he cannot be content with seeing Fadigati merely as a phenomenon, but rather as part of a more complex set of circumstances.

As regards Fadigati's homosexuality, Waste makes the following observation:

Der Erzähler enthält sich in seinen Ausführungen jeglichen moralischen Urteils über die Homosexualität. Es geht ihm nicht darum, ein Verhalten anzuprangern oder dessen Abweichung von der gesellschaftlichen Normen zu kritisieren, sondern vielmehr um das Los des Außenseiters überhaupt.

Der Homosexuelle wird jedoch nicht als Opfer von Zwängen, seien sie psychologischer oder sozialer Art, dargestellt. Sein Schicksal erscheint im Vergleich zu dem des Juden als freigestellt. Diesen Faktor der ‚Freiwilligkeit‘ verdeutlicht das metaphorische Symbol der Brille mit dem Goldrand, die Dr. Fadigati gewöhnlich trägt (Waste, 203: 111). [The narrator desists from any moral judgment in his actions concerning homosexuality. For him it's not about denouncing a form of behaviour or to criticise its deviation from societal norms, but instead it's much more about the fate of the outsider. However, the homosexual is not portrayed as being the victim of urges, be they psychological or social in origin. His destiny comes across – as compared to that of the Jews – as being a matter of free choice. This "voluntary" factor clarifies the metaphorical symbol of the gold-rimmed spectacles that Fadigati usually wears (author's translation).]

Waste introduces a controversial element to the discussion regarding the parallels between the Jewish first-person narrator and Fadigati by suggesting that homosexuality can be viewed as a voluntary condition. She does, however, state in a footnote that there's nothing to suggest that Bassani saw homosexuality as "voluntary". Like the wearing of gold-rimmed spectacles might metaphorically suggest a willingness to see the world in a given way, Waste also suggests that the Jews were the victims of a governmental decree. Waste does not mention that homosexuals were also victims of state persecution⁴⁸ in being sent into forced exile and subject to severer measures than were political prisoners. In the light of Goretti and Giartosio's research (see footnote below) it cannot be assumed that Fadigati was unaware of the dangers that he courted simply by being homosexual and indeed the Riccione scene with Deliliers underscores this. The parallels between being Jewish and Fadigati's homosexuality work in the novel precisely because there cannot be degrees of persecution. They are both outsiders, each for a different set of reasons. The form that the persecution takes might be different (depending on the times and a host of other factors), but the fact thereof remains essentially the same. Mention has previously been made of the extremely patriarchal nature of Fascism, a reality that predates the Race Laws of 1938.

The 1938 Race Laws act as a catalyst in the first-person narrator's taking a stance. Fadigati had no stance to take other than being discreet, besides which taking a stance on sexuality is a relatively recent development on a societal level, whereas taking a stance on a question of religious affiliation has a long, documented history. But significantly, Bassani's resistance, his defiance and that of his narrator, are not because he is oppressed for being Jewish, but also because he is anti-Fascist. The anti-Semitic legislation only serves to make him aware that he is oppressed on yet another level, over and above the oppression that the Fascist state had

⁴⁸ See Goretti, Gianfranco, Giartosio, Tommaso, *La città e l'isola – omosessuali al confino nell'Italia fascista*, Roma: Donizelli, 2006. Goretti and Giartosio point out that the definition of what constitutes a homosexual varied widely from location to location, northern and southern Italy, and a lot depended upon the local authorities' views on the matter, "passive" homosexuality generally being viewed as a worse vice than being the "active" partner. The authors cite Catania, in Sicily as having been particularly affected by anti-homosexual measures, whether that was due to the authorities' stance or the higher incidence of homosexuality being a moot point.

imposed on the populace at large. The *io narrante* can no longer be indifferent to the phenomenon of Dr Fadigati because the narrator sees the parallels between his own situation as a Jew and Dr Fadigati's as a homosexual. The marginalisation of the two main characters runs as parallel narrative strands until the historical forces cause the two parallel lines to intersect. Ferrara is the place where the phenomena of racial prejudice, bourgeois conformity and political oppression occur, and intersect, with the Adriatic seaside resort of Riccione merely being a locus for the transfer of the Ferrarese mentality.

One can take any number of extracts from the novel and find the same subtle, nuanced narrative that gently eases the reader into the reality of late-1930s Ferrara. The novel is, usefully, divided by Cicione⁴⁹ into acts, with Act 1 being Chapters 1-3, Act 2 Chapters 4-7, the third Act Chapters 8-12, Act 4 Chapters 13-16 and the epilogue being the last two chapters. The novel's craftsman-like construction simply put, introduces Fadigati, his aberration, Ferrarese society's reaction to his homosexuality, the Race Laws and the demise of Fadigati.

A significant passage in "Act 1" is the following:

Verso le tre, le quattro di notte, dalle persiane dall'appartamento di Fadigati filtrava quasi sempre un poco di luce. Nel silenzio del vicolo, interrotto soltanto dagli strani sospiri dei gufi appollaiati lassù in alto lungo i vertiginosi, appena visibili cornicioni del duomo, volavano fiochi brandelli di musiche celestiali, Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Wagner: Wagner soprattutto forse perché la musica wagneriana era la più indicata a evocare determinate atmosfere. L'idea che la guardia Manservigi, o l'usciera Trapolini, o l'ex calciatore Baùsi, fossero in quello stesso momento ospite del dottore, non poteva venire accolta dall'ultimo nottambulo, di transito a quell'ora per via Gorgadello, altro che a cuor leggero (Bassani, 1983: 21). [Around three, four o' clock in the morning, filtering from the shutters of Dr Fadigati's flat, there was always a small glow of light. In the silence of the alley, interrupted only by the raucous wheeze of the owls that nested far up there along the Duomo's dizzying, barely visible entablature, there would fly faint tatters of celestial music Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Wagner: Wagner the most of all, perhaps because Wagnerian music was the most apt to evoke a certain atmosphere. The idea that the traffic policeman Manservigi, or the doorkeeper Trapolini, or the ex-footballer Baùsi should at that very moment be guests of the doctor was unlikely, except as a passing joke, to cross the mind of the last night-walker, on his way at that hour down Via Gorgadello (McKendrick, 2012: 20).]

⁴⁹ Cicioni, Mirna, "Insiders and Outsiders: Discourses of Oppression in Gorgio Bassani's *Gli occhiali d'oro*"; *Italian Studies*, Volume 41, Number 1, 1986, pp. 101-115(15).

This passage sets the tone for the whole novel, containing as it does references to the cultural milieu and its attendant political implications with the reference to Wagner. By mentioning Wagner, Bassani is alluding to the influence of Wagner and German mythology and the anti-Semitism implied in the aesthetic represented by Wagner. Also implicit is the association between Wagner and Nietzsche, the latter often reductively linked with National Socialism. So, in a nuanced manner, Bassani is alluding to the morbid decadence which is often associated with Wagner's music, with all the associations of inevitable tragedy that characterise Wagner's operas.⁵⁰ This passage is also significant for the overt allusion to Fadigati's homosexuality, and the kind of surreptitious, covert homosexuality that Fadigati is portrayed as either preferring or being condemned to live. The social milieu is further hinted at by Bassani's suggestion that the people with whom Fadigati spends his nights are people of a lower social standing, i.e. relationships borne possibly out of despair rather than a relationship between equals. This underscores the covert nature of the relationships that Fadigati either chooses or is condemned to having. Fadigati's elevated status may play a role one must assume, either because as an older man his financial position makes him attractive, while at the same time it is hardly is an ennobling factor. Nor can one view Fadigati's homosexuality from a post-Stonewall⁵¹ point of view. The way of life that Fadigati lives is portrayed as being very much of its time and again Bassani's obliquely empirical way of describing Fadigati's milieu and activities gives his portrait of Fadigati a high measure of believability. What makes this passage particularly evocative *is* the oblique tone that Bassani adopts, with the phrasing being such that only a late-night pedestrian of light heart might guess what is going on in Fadigati's apartment. Bassani has found a wonderfully surreptitious way of giving expression to something surreptitious: the

⁵⁰ Earlier in the same chapter Bassani overtly refers to the tragic nature of Wagner's music, as perceived by Fadigati: ("Wagner: soltanto il nome si sentivano sprofondare in un oceano di tristezza!") (Bassani, 1983:18) [Wagner! The very name plunged them into an ocean of gloom [...]] (Weaver: 1972: 95).] Weaver's translation perhaps conveys the lugubriousness attributed to Wagner more effectively than does McKendrick, who uses the word "sadness" instead of "gloom".

⁵¹ Stonewall here refers to the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York, when sexual minorities challenged the authorities. The event can be seen as the beginning of the gay rights movement.

mode of expression echoes what is expressed and this is a feature of the entire novel. The desolation and eerie solitude of late-night Ferrara is evoked with the image of the owl and the barely visible cornices of the cathedral, in the same way that Fadigati's proclivities are equally barely visible or acknowledged. One notes again the accuracy of the descriptions – the cornices of Ferrara cathedral – being as it is at the centre of the town and known to all its citizens – are features that are verifiable, as are foggy November nights, street names and the like. A public building such as Ferrara's cathedral echoes the public figure that Fadigati has been described as being. Fadigati is well known among the well-to-do Ferrarese bourgeoisie, but his private life remains in the realm of malicious speculation or secretive.

Fadigati's rarefied world is illustrated by the image of music wafting through the empty streets, and the "dim glow of light", which all allude to the secretiveness of Fadigati's existence and the ethereal idealism that often accompanies a highly aestheticised sexuality. This aestheticised sexuality is, one could argue, often a way of obscuring a homosexual way of life, of someone at odds with normative heterosexuality. Aberration becomes more acceptable if it is cloaked in refinement, especially in oppressive circumstances. Bassani's portrayal of Fadigati is astute and non-judgmental, and seems almost empathetic, even though the *io narrante* does not profess to like him particularly. Bassani's portrayal of Fadigati is a study in loneliness and one might even speculate that Fadigati embodies "internalised self-hatred". But what Bassani is essentially doing in this passage is to set Fadigati apart from the rest of society, and phenomenologically or ontologically speaking, we see a Fadigati living his life on terms that are determined by society, or of his living his life in the best way he can. He is financially well off, and it is likely that his elevated social and economic position buys him his freedom from overt rejection and hostility. In this way Bassani is pointing a finger also at the hypocrisy of Ferrarese society: Fadigati may be what he is as long as it is hidden and not publicly displayed and as long as he conforms, outwardly at least, to the norms established by the society on which he depends for his profession. Secrecy is central to Fadigati's survival. It is later in the novel, when he transgresses this fundamental law of his survival, that things go awry and he becomes irredeemable and his demise certain. The question Bassani is also asking implicitly is whether the compromise

Fadigati makes with his society is a reflection on Fadigati or on his society. It would be too modern, too current to condemn Fadigati from the vantage point of the present. Fadigati's compromise is essential to his survival, not a matter of choice. He understands the conditions of his acceptance. His survival is conditional; while he conforms he survives.

As Cicioni also suggests, the first-person narrator himself is part of normative heterosexuality. The Jewish first-person narrator starts off being completely accepted and it does not occur to him – until the passage of the Race Laws – that he might find himself in a situation comparable to that of Fadigati.

In an earlier chapter of the novella Bassani alludes to and even parodies quite succinctly normative heterosexuality when he writes:

Se ne sussurava fra pazienti, a poltrone accostate, nelle salette medesime dell'ambulatorio di via Gorgadello, in attesa che l'ignaro dottore si affacciasse dalla porticina riservata alle sue periodiche apparizioni, e invitasse a passare "di là". Se ne accennava più tardi a cena, fra mogli e mariti, badando che la figliolanza, col naso nella minestra le orecchie dritte, non riuscisse a indovinare a chi ci si riferiva. E ancora più tardi, a letto – ma qui parlando senza ritegno -, l'argomento aveva abitualmente già invaso cinque o dieci minuti di quelle care mezz'ore, sacre alle confidenze e agli sbadigli sempre più prolungati, che precedono di norma lo scambio dei baci e dei "buona notte" coniugali (Bassani, 1983: 13-14). [This view was whispered between patients on adjacent armchairs in those same waiting rooms in the Via Gorgadello clinic, as they waited for the unsuspecting doctor to show his face in the little doorway reserved for his periodic appearances, and to invite one of them 'to come through'. It was referred to later at supper by husbands and wives, taking care that their children with their noses in the soup and their ears pricked up, should be unable to guess what they were speaking of. And later on too, in bed – but here speaking quite openly – the topic had often engrossed five or ten minutes of those precious half-hours sacred to confidences and ever-more lengthy yawns, which normally precede the exchange of kisses and conjugal 'goodnights' (McKendrick, 2012: 9).]

This is one of the most succinct descriptions of what one might call normative heterosexuality. The passage illustrates an effortless complacency, smugness that encapsulates the attitudes, in Bassani's view, that determined not only the attitude of the Ferrarese bourgeoisie to Fadigati, but implicitly the passage also serves as an indictment of a middle class that lived quite happily with Fascism. The attitudes displayed also determined the fate of Fadigati. What appals Bassani is, as mentioned previously, the facility with which Italy, and the middle class in particular, had turned its back on the liberal and democratic values which lay at the foundation, *inter alia*, of

the *Risorgimento*. Yet now, Italians – and indeed Ferrarese Jews – have embraced Fascism with equanimity. While the above passage could be read in isolation from the Fascist reality in which it is placed, Bassani places it at the beginning of the novel in preparation for the dénouement, in preparation for the consequences that the ethical pusillanimity herald.

In this passage Bassani describes the would-be married couple as a phenomenon, in a sense devoid of context. As the context is developed in the course of the novella, the reader is left to see how this attitude is playing itself out, with self-interest and conformity being the only universally understood values; the hypocrisy that has to sustain this attitude to the political and social dimensions of Ferrarese life is aptly described in this and other incidents. Self-interest and conformity do not allow for the Fadigatis of this world. Bassani says as much at the beginning of this chapter:

Non c'è nulla più dell'onesta pretesa di mantenere distinto nella propria vita ciò che è pubblico da ciò che è privato, che ecciti l'interesse indiscreto delle piccole società perbene (Bassani, 1983: 11). [Nothing so excites an indiscreet interest among the small circle of respectable society as that rightful impulse to keep the private and the public separate in one's life (Mckendrick, 2012: 88).]

The Italian word *perbenismo* describes exactly the complacent, unthinking attitude, which, as in the case of the Ferrara described by Bassani, easily collapses into cowardice and compromise as long as conformity and material well-being are ensured and maintained. Acting on principle is alien, even though lip service might be paid to an ideal of behaviour and principle. The most wicked acts can always be justified in terms of the need to maintain a status quo; the status quo is sacrosanct, no matter how sullied it has become through compromise with the Fascists.⁵² So allowing a Fadigati to live in one's midst is acceptable as long as he conforms and does not cause a scandal (*non dà scandalo*). It is this attitude which is the target of Bassani's invective. And the invective is not, in Bassani's case, born out of idle indulgence, but from his own personal experience, as his letters, his previous novels and his well-documented biography

⁵² Another Bassani novella, *La Lunga Notte del '43*, also part of the also part of the *Romanzo di Ferrara* cycle illustrates this point most aptly.

attest. We know that he did experience imprisonment, political activism for his political ideals, over and above the danger of being Jewish in Fascist Italy.

However, the portrayal of Fadigati is complex: he is central to the narrative and also an essential narrative device for Bassani. For a start, Fadigati's social isolation and psychological predisposition are deftly portrayed by Bassani illustrating Fadigati's social ineptness, his overt solicitousness of company and his obsequious behaviour. Fadigati wants to be appreciated and recognised and to belong, but goes about it in a way that is guaranteed to deliver the unintended opposite. Long before the full social impact of Fadigati's homosexuality is explored, Bassani illustrates Fadigati's ineptitude in the following passage, already referred to previously, in part:

Ogni tanto viaggiava, o per dirla con le sue stesse parole, si concedeva “qualche evasione”: a Venezia per la Biennale, a Firenze per il Maggio. Ebbene, adesso che la gente sapeva, poteva succedere di incontrarlo in treno a notte alta, come toccò nell'inverno del '34 a una piccola comitiva cittadina recatasi al *Berta* di Firenze per una partita di calcio, senza che nessuno si permettesse i maliziosi “Guarda chi si vede!” sempre di rigore tra ferraresi non appena ci si trovi fuori dall'angusto territorio compreso fra gli argini paralleli di Reno e Po. Dopo che lo ebbero invitato, tutti premurosi ad accomodarsi nel loro scompartimento, i nostri bravi sportivi, che certo non erano musicomani (Wagner: soltanto al nome si sentivano sprofondare in un oceano di tristezza!), stettero lì buoni buoni ad ascoltare un infervorato resoconto di Fadigati a proposito del *Tristano* che Bruno Walter aveva diretto quello stesso pomeriggio al *Comunale* fiorentino. Fadigati parlò della musica del *Tristano* della mirabile interpretazione che il “maestro germanico” ne aveva dato, e in particolare del secondo atto dell'opera, il quale disse – “non è che un lungo lamento d'amore”. [...] Fadigati socchiudeva le palpebre dietro le lenti, sorridendo rapito. E gli altri lo lasciavano parlare, non fiataivano. Si limitavano a scambiarsi qualche allibita occhiata di soppiatto (Bassani, 1983: 18-19). [Every now and then he would travel, or to use his words, he would permit himself 'truancy': to Venice for the Biennale, to the Maggio concert hall in Florence. Well then, now that people knew, it might fall out that one met him on a train late at night, as happened in the winter of 1934 to a small gathering of townfolk who had gone to the Berta Stadium for a football match, without anyone maliciously exclaiming 'Look who it isn't!' as was the fashion among Ferraresi as soon as they found themselves outside the territories hemmed in by the parallel banks of the Rhine and the Po. After they had invited him, with great solicitude, to have a seat in their compartment, our good sporty types, who were far from being music lovers (the very name of Wagner made them plunge into an ocean of sadness!), sat there good as gold listening to Fadigati's impassioned accounts of Tristan which Bruno Walter had directed that very afternoon in Florence's Teatro Comunale. Fadigati spoke of the music of *Tristan*, of the admirable interpretation that the 'Teutonic maestro' had given it, and in particular of the opera's second Act, which – he declared – 'was nothing but a long lament for love'. Holding forth about the little bench completely encircled by a rose bush's flowering boughs, and thus clearly symbolic of the bridal chamber, on which Tristan and Isolde

sing for three quarters of an hour running before plunging themselves, enthralled, into a night of voluptuousness eternal as Death itself, Fadigati half closed his eyes behind his glasses, and smiled ecstatically. And the others let him talk without breathing a word. They limited themselves to exchanging the occasional secret look of dismay (McKendrick, 2012: 15).]

The dismayed looks illustrate the social and psychological chasm between Fadigati and his would-be interlocutors. The sports fans let Fadigati be, they tolerate him, but certainly cannot share his enthusiasm for Wagner. Fadigati is too out of kilter with his social environment to realise that he has set himself up for ridicule, thus making his alienation all the more hermetic and absolute.

Later in the passage mention is also made of the “ewige Nacht”, not insignificant when considering the tenor of the novel and the history that was about to unfold, and that lies at the heart of the sense of impasse and doom that pervades Bassani’s sensibility. However, the significance of this passage is manifold and hence quoted at length. For a start we see how Bassani shows Fadigati to be completely out of tune with his environment, paradoxically because in the next paragraph Bassani writes:

Ma era Fadigati medesimo, con la sua condotta ineccepibile, a favorire intorno a sé un così largo spirito di tolleranza (Bassani, 1983: 19). [Yet it was Fadigati himself, with his unimpeachable behaviour, who fostered around himself such a spirit of tolerance (McKendrick, 2012: 15).]

On more than one occasion in the novel Fadigati seems oblivious to his circumstances, holed up in his solitude, loneliness and exclusion. He lives in a world of fantasy, in the lugubrious world of Wagner. The reference to the “maestro germanico”, Bruno Walter, reflects of course Fascist parlance for the Italians’ German ally, using the mythological term for German, whereas “tedeschi” would be the more day-to-day term used to refer to Germans. The word “germanico” is thus loaded with political significance. Bassani’s reference to Wagner and what his music implies, serving the purpose of illustrating a mythological and cultural exclusivity of the German people, does not bode well for Jews and indeed does not bode well for anybody of Bassani’s political persuasion. Italians, much like any informed person in Europe at the time, would have known about the persecution of the Jews in Germany after the Nazis came to power on 30 January 1933. The references to Wagner allude to the instinctive unease which Jews elsewhere in Europe must have felt, but particularly so in Italy, with Italy being bound by

the “Pact of Steel” with Nazi Germany. We see how this seemingly nonchalant reference to Wagner is effectively a way of preparing the reader for the anti-Semitism that is to follow. (Bassani does not have Fadigati in raptures about Schubert or any other significant composer). The added layer is of course that the Wagner reference comes from Fadigati himself – the music that he adores is the music that bespeaks exclusion and exclusivity, not inclusivity. And yet, the pain of love, – a *Leitmotif* in any number of operas – is something which Fadigati must feel, and one can assume, often unrequited love. So Fadigati’s vulnerability is well illustrated in both the above passages. In the first we see how insensible he is to the people by whom he is surrounded – the average football player is hardly likely to be a devotee of Wagner, at least not in Bassani’s estimation. Yet this kind of social common sense is absent in Fadigati. It can also be said that the references, more than once in the novella, to football players, and arguably young men of lower social status, hint again at Fadigati’s elaborate subterfuge and alienation.

Again Bassani is suggesting a lot by this mere observation. Fadigati talks about Wagner to a coterie of football players. It is an incongruous situation that is being described: an older, professional man deluding himself that he might have something in common with people so obviously not part of his milieu, on the surface. But they are part of his interior world. Bassani would not be so bold, given Waste’s observations, to speculate what is going on in Fadigati’s mind. But Fadigati does speak to football players about Wagner, that much one knows. The “why” is left dangling and it is left to the reader to speculate. But on another level, Bassani is preparing the reader for the most unlikely rapport in the novel, namely Fadigati’s fatal relationship with Deliliers, a boxer, who comes from, arguably, the same class as the football players. It is not far fetched to assume that Fadigati, as a homosexual, would be attracted by young football players. But Bassani does not feel the need to spell it out. The fact of this attraction is there for all to see. Fadigati’s deeds, his comportment are all the reader needs in order to infer that this forced camaraderie with footballers in which Fadigati indulges does not bode well for him. It reveals his predisposition. He does not seek out the friendship of like-minded people (with the exception of the *io narrante*, but for different reasons), such as musicians, or artists. Fadigati strives for the unattainable. He sets himself up for failure, and his

loneliness is so far progressed that he is insensible to the kind of people with whom he is sharing his interior world and Wagner. Psychological insight then in *Gli occhiali d'oro* is here inferred; it is not spelt out because the character is *intuited* through his behaviour.

Waste puts this quite succinctly when she says:

Ein weiterer Faktor, der gewöhnlich mit dem visuellen Bild assoziiert wird, ist die Vieldeutigkeit (Waste, 2003:21). [Another factor that is usually associated with the visual image is the plurality of meaning (author's translation).]

In other words, we have an image of Fadigati derived from empirical observation of him by the author, and that image has to be interpreted. The image of the footballers on the train tells the story about Fadigati's way of being homosexual, what he presumably finds attractive or at least engaging (regardless of whether this is reciprocated); it tells the reader that he is alienated and acutely lonely, as judged by his social awkwardness and it prepares the ground for the relationship with Deliliers. When Deliliers appears on the scene, the reader is surprised and not surprised. After Deliliers' blatantly insulting attitude to Fadigati on one of the trips to Bologna on the train, it seems unthinkable that there could be intimacy between Fadigati and Deliliers. Yet when Deliliers becomes Fadigati's presumptive lover it is in keeping with Fadigati's taste, and indeed Deliliers's exploitative nature. But what is also revealed is the unscrupulousness, the rank exploitative nature of the working-class young man Deliliers, who will exploit Fadigati for his own ends, no matter how the relationship is viewed by society at large. The relationship also makes sense on a broader front in that someone who is living in difficult circumstances is arguably more inclined to view human relationships as a means to material gain, overtly as a resource, than someone who is financially independent or cared for. Bassani has told the reader that Deliliers has no father and is impecunious. Fadigati's trump card is that he has money. But this is a fraudulent consolation, as people would associate with him for his money, not for who he is. All this is implied and one can only but speculate as to how Fadigati's psyche operates. Bassani will not spell it out, but will portray in minute detail, sufficiently so, for the reader to get the wider picture.

In the next passage quoted above we note that Fadigati is *tolerated*. He is *allowed* to be eccentric because he does not transgress or reveal himself. The terms tolerance or assimilation are central to Bassani in that to be tolerated or assimilated does *not* mean being accepted. At this early stage of the novella, the significance of tolerance is hinted at, but not fully developed. The significance of being tolerated – as opposed to being accepted – will become clearer as the novella progresses, and as the narrator begins to see parallels between Fadigati’s situation and his treatment at the hand of the conformist Ferrarese and his own situation as a Jew, after the passage of the Race Laws. So the significance of the Wagner reference is all too clear, and is Bassani’s way of hinting at the disaster, *post factum*, that was to befall Europe, Italy and Ferrara’s Jews in particular.

Another aspect is the fact that Fadigati’s “impeccable conduct” was his self-defence, making himself liked, or tolerated. Bassani is in effect saying that the Jews too were tolerated as long as their behaviour was similarly impeccable. In other words, as long as one conformed and did not accentuate the differences, as long as one compromised, as long as one did the bidding of the majority. One could speculate that this is a lesson Fadigati had ingrained in him, but which the narrator only realises when he as a Jew feels threatened and excluded. He sees Fadigati throughout the novel ingratiating himself with the students who do the regular commute from Ferrara to Bologna. He subtly despises Fadigati for being so obsequious, for so desperately wanting to be liked, for buying ice creams, and for allowing himself to be made a fool of. The question that is implicit in the accurate descriptions of Fadigati’s behaviour is: “aren’t the Jews behaving similarly?” Are the Jews, especially those who joined the Fascist party, simply conforming to save their own skins, and in the process sacrificing the principles they stand for as Italians? And, by extension, what is the dignity in that? In *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* and in *Gli occhiali d’oro* reference is made to the fact that the narrator’s father joined the Fascist party. So, included in the narration is again a classic tension between father and son. The son does not understand that compromise may be necessary for survival, and therefore acts in defiance of the cause that he sees as ethically unacceptable. Is Bassani not implying that principle is sacrificed on the altar of expedience? Or that principle, rigidly applied, is the luxury

of the young? Clearly, the questions of compromise and principle are central preoccupations of Bassani and we see him illustrate this with his narrator emerging, as mentioned before, into an ethical awareness of the world around him. In *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* the conflict between father and son, on the question of adhering to Fascism or not, is an open conflict. In *Gli occhiali d'oro* it is hinted at. Bassani allows the inimitable Signora Lavezzoli to be the clarion for Fascism, not the narrator's father, whom Bassani allows to have a measure of sympathy for Fadigati. So in *Gli occhiali d'oro* he tempers the generational conflict, which is an open conflict in *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini*.

Returning to the Wagner passage above, the words "a long lament of love" are mentioned, and arguably Bassani is also alluding to the novella as being also about love, or specifically the distortion thereof. (The débâcle of Fadigati's affair with Delilieri illustrates this all too well, as will be seen below). Betrayal is equally a form of distortion. Those who were trusted turn out to be untrustworthy. This is seen in the juxtaposition of Fadigati and Delilieri, the Jews of Ferrara and their non-Jewish neighbours. It is therefore not insignificant that immediately after the Wagner passage Bassani refers to the "ewige Nacht", not only in the opera, but in terms of what was awaiting Ferrara, what was awaiting Fadigati, what was awaiting Ferrara's Jews, what was awaiting Europe. We see how Bassani intertwines the personal and the political, the anecdotal with the historical. Seemingly casual references are anything but casual, but are in fact deft references to the greater picture of a political conflict and impasse. Phenomena, to return to the ontological aspects referred to earlier, are not merely phenomena, but have a much wider echo and reverberate into the realm of the socio-political, the historical and indeed the psychological and existential.

There are many moments in Bassani's narrative that crystallise the above aspects, and some passages such as the following illustrate how deeply embedded the metaphors in his text can be:

Anche allora, prima del rimodernamento del '40, la Pasticceria Majani era una delle maggiori di Bologna. Consisteva di una enorme semibuia, dal cui soffitto, altissimo e tenebroso, pendeva un solo, gigantesco lampadario di vetro Murano. Dal diametro di due o tre metri, raffigurava una rosa. Lo gremivano in gran quantità certe piccole lampadine impolverate dalle quali pioveva in

basso una luce straordinariamente debole (Bassani, 1983:46). [Even then, before the modernization of 1940, the Pasticceria Majano⁵³ [sic] was one of the biggest pastry shops in Bologna. It consisted of an enormous, dimly lit hall, from whose high and shadowy ceiling hung a solitary, gigantic chandelier of Murano glass. Two or three metres in diameter, it represented a rose. It was crowded with a vast quantity of little dusty light bulbs from which an extraordinarily dingy light rained down (McKendrick, 2012:45).]

This seemingly innocuous description of a Bologna pastry shop is not superfluous as it hints at what is about to occur in the following chapter, the Riccione chapter, and lead towards the dramatic climax of *Gli occhiali d'oro*. The passage arguably also alludes to an absolutist notion in Bassani's thinking – i.e. that there is an overarching sense of right and wrong (in Bassani's case his belief, referred to previously, in the values enshrined in the liberalism of Benedetto Croce) that cannot, aesthetically, be articulated in too obvious a manner. The high ceiling and the image of the chandelier are obviously visual metaphors for the human quest for a sense of values at a time when so much of what the author holds sacrosanct is being undermined and discarded. Bassani says the chandelier is crammed with a huge quantity of “dusty little bulbs” – here clearly a metaphor for all that which obscures the “light” of reason (reference has been made to Bassani's rationalist, liberal, empirical view of the world). Hope, amid the cavernous darkness which beset Bassani's world in 1938, shines through feebly with the words “an extraordinarily dingy light rained down”. The metaphorical intention of the passage would seem to be clear with the word “extraordinary”. How can light – in this context – be described as *extraordinarily dingy*, other than when it has a metaphorical intention? In a more predictable fashion, Bassani speaks of the “modernization in 1940”, which again alludes to the presumed accuracy of his memory, and also alludes vaguely to the modernisation that Fascism claimed for itself, borrowing heavily as it did, aesthetically and ideologically from Futurism. The image of a rose shaped chandelier (echoing the rose motif in cathedral windows) in “an enormous half-dark room” is quite a clear metaphor for the light of reason at a time of unreason and how faintly that light of reason, and of the higher self, is able to be recognised. Immediately afterwards Bassani moves to the human aspect, back to the narrative flow and back to Fadigati. The café is named, the time and space are meticulously recalled – empirical observation is used

⁵³ The original reads Pasticceria Majani, not Majano.

to say something which is beyond the immediate narrative: a statement about the state of the world in which the *io narrante*/Bassani find themselves and the spiritual darkness, doom and impasse that the various characters are living through and will have to face in an even more immediate and menacing form.

Eccetto Delilieri, che subito ci salutò alzando di lontano il braccio in un gesto amichevole, da principio non ravvisammo tra i presenti nessun'altra persona di conoscenza [...] scorgemmo confuso nel gruppo un signore attempato che sedeva accanto a Delilieri volgendo le spalle all'ingresso. Stava lì, col cappello in testa, le mani raccolte sul pomo del bastone e senza prendere niente. Aspettava. [...] Come un padre dal cuore tenero, il quale abbia acconsentito a pagare il gelato a un branco di figli e nipotini turbolenti, e attenda in silenzio, un po' vergognoso, che i cari marmocchi abbiano finito di leccare e succhiare a loro piacere, per poi, portarseli a casa...Quel signore era il dottor Fadigati, naturalmente (Bassani, 1983: 46-7). [Except for Delilieri, who immediately greeted us from the distance by raising his arm in friendly wave. To begin with we couldn't make out among the company anyone else that we recognized. [...] we discerned, half-hidden within the group, an older gentleman sitting next to Delilieri with his back to the entrance. He was there, wearing his hat, his hands linked over the handle of his cane, without eating anything. [...] He was just waiting. Like a tender-hearted father, who had agreed to pay for ice creams for a noisy herd of sons and nephews and who waits in silence, a little ashamed of himself, until the darling kids have finished licking and sucking to their hearts' content, to ferry them all home.

That gentleman was obviously Fadigati (McKendrick, 2012: 46).]

The salient points in this passage are of course the references to Delilieri, whom the reader now knows is seeing Fadigati separately from the other students who take the regular commute to and from Bologna. Delilieri has shown himself to be disdainful in his attitude to Fadigati, making off-colour references to Fadigati's sexuality. Delilieri can also be seen as a metaphor for the selfishness, self-seeking nature of unbridled narcissism, often associated with a D'Annunzian view of life, which, reductively speaking, sees the individual's pleasure as an absolute. More broadly speaking Delilieri can be seen as a metaphor for Nazism and Fascism. That would make Fadigati a symbol either for Italy, or the Jews. Fadigati becomes a symbol for the lack of resistance against the forces of evil in the world – or more specifically, that of making compromises with evil for perceived short-term gain.

Defly, Bassani shows us a Fadigati waiting: one word in Italian, namely *aspettava*, in the imperfect tense – he was waiting. Like the Jews, Fadigati is waiting, mesmerised by the snake

Deliliers who is going to devour him, sooner or later, much like the Jews of Ferrara, who simply wait, even though they know (or might deny knowing) that they are in the midst of fatal evil. The idea of compromise with what is wrong, for the sake of expediency, is illustrated through the characterisation of Deliliers and Fadigati. Fadigati indulges the evil Deliliers, because he needs him and Fadigati is thus primed, as it were, for his own demise. He indulges the very thing that will be his undoing, much like the Jews, in Bassani's view, who compromise with Fascism because they see an advantage, albeit temporary and cowardly, in buying time for themselves or surviving, but at the price of principle: supping with the devil comes at a price.

On a simple human level Fadigati's desperation is illustrated in this passage in that he is so much of an outcast that he consorts with his executioner. Fadigati's wealth makes him an attractive target for Deliliers. Bassani has by this stage already made reference to Deliliers's straitened economic circumstances and Deliliers takes advantage of Fadigati for purely economic reasons. But Fadigati does nothing; he meekly awaits his doom; in fact he solicits doom and Bassani's implicit question is: is that not what the Jews are doing as well? While it can be argued that Fadigati also experiences a frisson at Deliliers's rakish vitality and youth, it all comes at a high, fatal price. Arguably it is a self-destructive tendency that motivates him to come out into the open with Deliliers, knowing full well what the consequences might be. But again, it's not Bassani's intention to speculate; he lets the actions speak for themselves and, as the story unfolds, the probable psychological truth emerges. Bassani's concern at this stage of the novel is to prepare the reader for the coming doom, but in Chapter 7 he is merely preparing the reader for what is to come and gives a more detailed and penetrating insight into Fadigati's psyche as an outcast, the implication being further that all outcasts compromise in order to survive. They might survive, but at a price that renders them sullied and morally tainted. They cannot win.

As in *Radetzky*, is one not also dealing in *Gli occhiali d'oro* with the battle between innocence and experience? The narrator wants to maintain the purity of his ideals, while seeing his ideals being trampled on all around him, be it by Deliliers, Fadigati or the Fascist state.

Bassani also casts Fadigati in the rôle of “tender-hearted” father. A father is exactly of course what Fadigati is not. The students on the train journey are substitute, *ersatz* children and Deliliers is like an *ersatz* son, one could argue. Fadigati’s profession would also indicate a sublimated parenting of sorts and one might argue that Fadigati’s homosexuality is also symbol for a world order gone wrong. While these may all be pertinent observations, Bassani’s focus is to portray Fadigati and Deliliers symbolically and metaphorically. The allusions to doom, to the wider socio-historical context are encapsulated in the Fadigati-Deliliers relationship, with its attendant abuse and despair, with its compromise and cowardice, and ultimately with its fathomless cruelty.

On another level, the “rhetoric of civilisation”,⁵⁴ the layers of mendacity obscure and overlay the underlying truth of Fadigati’s relationship to Deliliers. The rhetoric of civilisation can merely be read as all that with which human existence is modelled to make the individual function in society. What Fadigati does, by inviting scandal, is to rupture the rhetoric of civilisation that society imposes. More specifically, Fadigati represents the rupture of the self-sanctifying bourgeois norms that lie at the heart of his exclusion and which come to a head in the chapters devoted to the dramatic climax of the novella and subsequently to Fadigati’s demise.

The Riccione chapters (Chapters 8-10 in particular) are significant in that Bassani uses them to give full weight to the mentality which nurtured Fascism and vice versa. The most significant new character which Bassani introduces is Signora Lavezzoli, the archetypical Fascist, who makes her prejudice towards Fadigati quite obvious. She feels free to express her sarcasm and opprobrium of Fadigati and Deliliers who are now vacationing together in Riccione in full view of the Ferrarese, who go to Riccione every summer. Once Signora Lavezzoli has dealt with Fadigati, her attention turns to the Jews.

⁵⁴ For a more detailed explanation of the term see Michelstaedter, Carlo, *La Persuasione e la Rettorica*, Milano: Adelphi, 1982; *Persuasion and Rhetoric*, trans. W. Snyman and G. Stellardi, Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2007.

However, the encounter between Fadigati and the narrator's parents is also significant, for it hints for the first time at the marginalisation of Fadigati and the Jewish parents. Bassani uses a technique of circling around a subject, and then, having prepared the reader for what is to come, he targets the core of his concerns, namely the ethical dimension, or even the nature, of being. So, for example, Bassani provides the following:

Spiegò quindi a mio padre e a mia madre, ai quali non aveva mai raccontato dei nostri periodici incontri sull'accelerato mattutino delle sei e cinquanta, come negli ultimi mesi ci fossimo fatti "ottima compagnia". Si esprimeva con disinvoltura mondana. Non gli pareva vero, lo si capiva benissimo, di ritrovarsi lì, con noi, perfino coi temuti Lavezzoli, restituito al suo ambiente, riaccettato dalla società di persone colte e ben educate a cui aveva sempre appartenuto. "Aah!", faceva di continuo, allargando il petto ad accogliere la brezza marina. Era chiaro che si sentiva felice, libero, e insieme penetrato di gratitudine nei confronti di tutti coloro che gli permettevano di sentirsi così (Bassani, 1983: 56). [He then explained to my mother and father, whom I had never told of our regular meetings on the six-fifty express train, or how in the last three months we had become 'such good friends'. He spoke with worldly negligence. It hardly seemed possible to him, one could see why, to find himself here with us, next to the feared Lavezzolis even, suddenly restored to *his* set, brought back into the polite and cultured fold to which he had always belonged. 'Ah' he kept sighing, broadening his chest to gather in the morning breeze. It was evident he felt happy, free, at the same time, and brimming with gratitude towards all of us for allowing him to feel this way (McKendrick, 2012: 56-7).]

The significance of this passage lies in the "finding of each other" between the homosexual Fadigati and the Jewish parents of the narrator. Bassani puts the emphasis on the cultivated nature of both his narrator's parents and Fadigati, illustrating the contrast between the three of them and Signora Lavezzoli. One can sense the beginnings of the shared marginalisation that both Dr Fadigati and the Jews of Ferrara are beginning to experience. But as one has come to expect from Bassani, this subtle interaction serves the purpose of accustoming the reader to the idea of an "us" and "them" situation – those who favour the status quo and those who are about to become its victims, or already are, as is the case at this stage of the novel with Fadigati. It is in this passage that the worlds of Fadigati and the Jews begin to intersect. The commonality between Fadigati and the narrator comes later, but it is in this passage that the beginnings of a commonality are hinted at. One notes in the passage the sense of relief that Fadigati experiences, his sense of not feeling judged. And that even though it is known to the narrator's parents what has been happening at Riccione, namely that Fadigati has been consorting openly with Deliliers. One of the significant elements in the Riccione episode is that

Fadigati's behaviour amounts to social suicide, a harbinger of his suicide that takes place at the end of the novella. Why does he choose to expose his homosexuality in front of the very people whom he must have known would despise him for it? Or could it be that his social ineptness (referred to earlier) made him oblivious to the likely social consequences of his relationship – if that is what it was – with Delilieri? Delilieri is simply intent on exploiting Fadigati for material gain, thus adding another layer to Fadigati's destruction. Fadigati is financially ruined by Delilieri because of the Riccione episode. Subsequently, upon Fadigati's return to Ferrara, we learn that Fadigati's medical practice is no longer viable as none of his former clients frequent his surgery any longer. So the consequences of Riccione are dire for Fadigati and the above passage illustrates one of the few moments when he feels truly at ease with the world and most notably he feels this in the company of those who themselves are gradually being marginalised as well. Fadigati is like a lamb being taken to the slaughter, but he himself is instrumental in his own demise; he cannot recognise, or refuses to recognise, the hostility towards him. Is it society's fault that the likes of Fadigati may not survive, or is it Fadigati's fault? This is the implicit question which Bassani asks later, and extrapolates the question to include the Jews. What is the nature of society? Do we adapt to what is wrong, or do we compromise and survive? This is the core of Bassani's ethical discourse in the *Gli occhiali d'oro*. In this light Fadigati's position is emblematic for the dilemma of Ferrara's Jews. And the central question that thus arises is whether the Jews are behaving like Fadigati, or if not, what is the most dignified way to deport oneself? Are they compromising and ingratiating themselves with the known enemy, as Fadigati has done with Delilieri? The narrator's father, we are told, joined the Fascist party soon after the establishment of Fascism.

Romantico, patriota, politicamente ingenuo e inesperto come tanti altri ebrei italiani della sua generazione, anche mio padre, tornando dal fronte nel '19, aveva preso la tessera del Fascio. Era stato dunque fascista fin dalla "prima ora", e tale in fondo era rimasto nonostante la sua mitezza ed onestà. Ma da quando Mussolini, dopo le prime baruffe dei primi tempi, aveva cominciato ad intendersela con Hitler, era diventato inquieto (Bassani, 1983: 59). [Romantic, patriotic, politically naïve and inexperienced like so many Jews of his generation, my father, returning from the Front in 1919, had also enrolled in the Fascist Party. He had been a Fascist from the 'very beginning', and at heart remained one despite his meekness and his honesty. But since Mussolini, after the early scuffles, had begun to reach an agreement with Hitler, my father started to feel uneasy (McKendrick, 2012: 60).]

If Fascism is inherently an evil force, compromising with Fascism can only lead to betrayal, and specifically to the Race Laws of 1938. Similarly, if Fadigati compromises his dignity with a known evil character such as Delilieri, is it surprising that he is humiliated and betrayed by Delilieri? Hardly. Bassani's technique is then to bestow Fadigati with emblematic significance, in terms of the wider social, political, historical, ethical and existential ramifications of the novella.

The counterfoil to Fadigati and the Jewish members of society is Signora Lavezzoli. Bassani refers to her on various occasions. His narrator's reaction to her views is expressed as follows:

Ci ero venuto con i miei genitori e coi soliti Lavezzoli, avvocato e consorte. Tuttora stanco del tennis, non mi andava di ballare. Ascoltavo in silenzio la signora Lavezzoli, la quale, sebbene certo non ignorasse quanto la cosa potesse ferirci, si era messa a discorrere con pretese di "obbiettività" della Germania hitleriana, sostenendo che bisognava finalmente decidersi a riconoscerne "l'innegabile grandezza" (Bassani, 1983: 66). [I had gone there with my parents and with the ubiquitous Lavezzolis, lawyer and his wife. Still tired after tennis, I did not feel like dancing. I listened in silence to Signora Lavezzoli who, though she was certainly not unaware of how much it could offend us, had begun to hold forth, proclaiming her "objectivity" on the subject of Hitler's Germany, arguing that one finally had to accept and recognize its "undeniable greatness" (McKendrick, 2012: 68).]

In this passage it is clear that the beginnings of betrayal are all too evident as the narrator observes the world around him and has to take the barbs from Signora Lavezzoli. The narrator speaks of playing tennis, not being keen on dancing and all of this at the seaside hotel. A seamless integration into society is echoed here, amid the most obtuse comments. Signora Lavezzoli places herself in the role of being omniscient, a representative of the knowable, of certainty, while underneath the surface – the space that the narrator occupies – another truth emerges that is filled with doom. The doom, the impasse, the untenability of the narrator's situation becomes increasingly clear to him. He is approaching the moment of choice, where he has to decide on which side he stands. In many respects the choices have already been made for him, because he is a Jew. But for his father's generation, as seen in the previous quote, there was room to entertain the illusion that Fascism might indeed be harmless. The younger generation of the narrator finds the world prepared for him, in which he finds himself, to be untenable, ethically unconscionable and threatening.

The next crucial stage in the development of the narrator's ethical awareness is when Deliliers suggests to the narrator that they go to Rimini to consort with some girls from Parma. He says:

Deliliers non mi aveva mai dimostrato né molta simpatia né vera considerazione, e adesso mi chiedeva, quasi mi supplicava, di accompagnarlo a donne. Davvero strano. [...] "Va' la, patàca! Borbottai alla romagnola, già deciso di rimanere. E poco più tardi, sulla spiaggia, scorgendo di lontano il dottore sotto l'ombrellone, abbandonato a una solitudine che mi parve di colpo immensa, immedicabile, mi sentii intimamente ripagato della rinuncia. Io almeno non lo avevo fatto fesso. Anziché associarmi a chi lo tradiva e lo sfruttava, avevo saputo resistere, conservargli [Fadigati] un minimo di rispetto.

Un attimo prima che raggiungessi l'ombrellone, Fadigati si voltò.

"Ah, è lei", disse, ma senza sorpresa. "È gentile da parte sua venire a farmi visita." (Bassani, 1983: 70-1). [Deliliers had never shown me much friendliness or real consideration and now he was asking, almost begging, me to go out with him on an amorous excursion. Strange indeed. [...] Vài la, patàca! I grumbled in Romagnolo dialect, having already decided not to go. And a little later, on the beach, making out the doctor under his umbrella in the distance, abandoned to a solitude that suddenly struck me as unbounded, irremediable, I felt a great inner relief at having renounced the trip. At least I hadn't treated him as a dupe. Rather than assisting someone keen to betray and exploit him, I had had the strength to resist, and had showed him at least a minimum of respect.

A moment before I reached the umbrella, Fadigati turned round. "Ah, it's you", he said, without surprise. "It's kind of you to pay me a visit" (Mckendrick, 2012: 72-3).]

This is a crucial episode in the novella, where the narrator decides not go with Deliliers to Rimini and to stay at Riccione. Here he acts on his convictions and shows empathy for a person whom he does not particularly like or, if anything, dislikes. But with the background of the episode with Signora Lavezzoli and seeing in Deliliers a parallel with Lavezzoli, and in Deliliers's preparedness to cheat on Fadigati and to make a fool of him, the narrator decides to side with Fadigati, again a recognition of their shared marginalisation. The pleasant conversation Fadigati has with the narrator's parents shows that the marginalisation which had hitherto been more general has now become articulated and shared on a more intimate level. The narrator has made his choice; he has taken a moral stance and made an ethically defensible choice. One does not side with what is wrong, but acts on principle. The empathy he feels for Fadigati is, however, an empathy for his own situation, even though it is not expressed as baldly as that. The empathy for the self is alluded to and in fact is tantamount already at this stage to defiance. The narrator spends time with an ageing homosexual doctor, from whom he has

nothing to gain, rather than spend time with Deliliers and the girls from Parma, knowing that doing the latter would make him complicit in undermining Fadigati, would make him complicit in his own demise by identifying with the kind of unthinking group mentality that would with equal insouciance as easily marginalise Fadigati as they would the Jews. Further on we see as well where the paths of Fadigati and the narrator diverge: while Fadigati is largely complicit in his own demise, the narrator refuses to be complicit in his own demise. The narrator is consistent and true to himself and his ideals. While the sympathy he shows at this stage towards Fadigati is heartfelt, he recognises that betrayal is in the air, whether it be against Fadigati, or against the Jews, as exemplified by the utterances of Signora Lavezzoli. The incidents at Riccione act as a catalyst and force the narrator to find out for himself what his stance is. This particular incident confirms the narrator's belief in a rational, liberal, ethical approach to life, and determines his way of "being in the world", to use Heidegger's concept referred to previously.

This incident, innocuous as it may initially seem, is a crucial moment in the novella, where the narrator no longer merely acts as an acute observer, but acts, intervenes, as an ethically aware human being.

Chapter 12 opens with a sense of foreboding, as the holidaymakers start leaving Riccione to return to Ferrara.

Come spesso accade sull'Adriatico, ai primi di settembre la stagione di colpo mutò. Piovve un giorno soltanto, il 31 agosto. Ma il bel tempo dell'indomani non ingannò nessuno. Il mare era inquieto e verde, d'un verde vegetale; il cielo d'una trasparenza esagerata, da pietra preziosa. Nel tepore stesso dell'aria si era insinuata una piccola persistente punta di freddo (Bassani, 1983: 76). [As often happens on the Adriatic coast, in the first days of September the season suddenly changed. It rained only one day, the 31st of August. But the beautiful weather of the following day fooled no one. The sea was restless and green, the green of vegetation; the sky had the exaggerated translucency of a precious stone. Even the lukewarm air bore within itself a small persistent hint of cold (McKendrick, 2012: 79).]

The function of the weather metaphor is quite obvious here at the beginning of the chapter, preparing the reader to face the consequences, as the characters do, of the events that have taken place at Riccione, with Deliliers having physically attacked Fadigati. In this chapter we see

Fadigati with a swollen upper lip and broken spectacles. The broken spectacles are an obvious symbolic reference to the fact that his spectacles gave him away when he went to the cinema. They twinkled in the darkened cinema, as he accommodated himself among the soldiers. The spectacles are now broken, now that he has revealed himself. Fadigati recounts to the narrator the events of the previous evening and that Deliliers went off with the car, with Fadigati's money, and left him stranded.

Naïvely, the narrator asks him:

“Perché non lo denuncia?”, buttai lì, freddamente.

Mi fissò anche lui.

“Denunciarlo!”, borbottò sorpreso.

Nei suoi occhi balenò a un tratto un lampo di scherno.

“Denunciarlo?” ripeté, e mi guardava come si guarda un estraneo un po' ridicolo. “Ma le pare possibile?” (Bassani, 1983: 81). [“Why not report him to the police?” I suggested, coldly.

He stared back at me.

“Report him!” he stammered in surprise.

In his eyes, there suddenly gleamed a flash of scorn.

“Report him?” he repeated, and looked at me as one looks at a clueless, slightly ridiculous stranger. “Do you even think that's a possibility?” (Mckendrick, 2012: 85).]

This scene is very telling for two reasons. Primarily it illustrates in the broader sweep of the discussion the extent to which the narrator is impeded by outside factors from reaching a fulfilment of some kind: To use Bleicher's terms:

[...] an entity that remains removed from any change and any reduction through subjective arbitrariness – and which nevertheless remains an entity that can be reached by consciousness with the help of a mental structure that transcends the empirical self (Bleicher: 1980: 28).

The outside world is again shown to have an impact on the inner consciousness of the individual, coercing the *io narrante* into an impasse. What is significant in this passage, however, is that the *io narrante* realises the extent to which he himself has internalised the outside world to the extent of being absolutely insensitive to the situation in which Fadigati finds himself. Firstly, the naiveté of the narrator is revealed. He has failed to fully identify with, or understand, the legal dimension of Fadigati's existence. It is well documented that

homosexuals were routinely derided in Fascist Italy and sent into exile.⁵⁵ So the narrator does not understand that he has committed a grave *faux pas*, revealing his own ignorance and at the same time amplifying Fadigati's sense of complete isolation. Here, the very person who should understand Fadigati's dilemma, where the law of the land is also against him, does not understand him. The knife is thrust in deeper and Fadigati's sense of betrayal is all the more acute. But it will not be long before the narrator himself experiences the same rank insensitivity at the hands of his best friend, the gentile Nino Bottechiari who has decided to make a career for himself in the Fascist party:

"Come no. Non vedo perché non dovresti aspirare a far carriera nel Partito, o attraverso il Partito. Se io fossi nei tuoi panni...se, voglio dire, studiassi legge come te...non esiterei un istante".

Avevo avuto cura di non lasciar trapelare nulla di ciò che avevo dentro. Nino schiarì l'espressione del viso. Accese una sigaretta. La mia obbiettività, il mio disinteresse, lo avevano palesemente colpito (Bassani, 1983: 95).

["Of course I do. I don't see why you shouldn't aspire to have a career in the Party, or through the Party. If I were in your shoes... I mean, if I were studying Law like you...I wouldn't hesitate for a moment".

I had taken care not to let anything of what I felt show through. The expression of Nino's face cleared. He lit a cigarette. My objectivity, my disinterestedness had evidently impressed him (McKendrick, 2012: 100).]

Here we see how the narrator is wounded by the fact that his best friend, after a long discourse about how anti-Semitism could never take root in Italy and how one must try and change things from within the Fascist party, is actually considering a career in the Party. Nino does not begin to realise how the narrator must feel that his friend has decided to consort with the enemy. The narrator dissimulates his true feelings, but Bassani makes it clear that the narrator is deeply wounded. He even goes so far as to make Nino feel good about his decision. Such is the alienation that the narrator feels that he has outwardly become indifferent to the pain that is being inflicted upon him by the society of which he and his forebears have been a part for centuries. The supposition can be made that the strength to take the barbs and the gradual

⁵⁵ See again Goretti, Gianfranco, Tommaso Giartosio. *La città e l'isola – omosessuali al confine nell'Italia fascista*, Roma: Donizelli, 2006 among various publications that deal with the enforced exile of homosexuals during Fascism.

anti-Semitism he sees manifest around him derives from a heightened sense of self. This causes the narrator to confide to the reader the following when a newspaper seller shouts out the following headlines:

“Prossimi provvedimenti del Gran Consiglio contro i *abrei!*”, berciava indifferente con la sua voce cavernosa.

E mentre Nino, pieno di disagio taceva, io sentivo nascere dentro me stesso con indicibile ripugnanza l'antico, atavico odio dell'ebreo nei confronti di tutto ciò che fosse cristiano, cattolico, insomma *goi*. *Goi, goim*: che vergogna, che umiliazione, che ribrezzo, a esprimersi così! Eppure riuscivo già – mi dicevo -: diventato simile a un qualsiasi ebreo dell'Europa orientale che non fosse mai vissuto fuori del proprio ghetto (Bassani, 1983: 91). [‘Latest measures of the Great Council taken against the *Jows!*’ his cavernous voice hurled out with indifference.

And while Nino remained in a most uneasy silence, I felt in me, with inexpressible repugnance, the first inklings of the Jew's ancient, atavistic hatred for everything that was Christian, Catholic, in a word *goyische*. *Goy, goyim*: what a sense of shame, what a humiliation, what a loathsome falling off: to think in these terms. And yet I had already managed this – I told myself – become exactly like any Jew whatsoever from Eastern Europe who had never lived outside his own ghetto (McKendrick, 2012: 96).]

While this passage is for the most part self-explanatory, it clearly illustrates the intensity of feelings being provoked by the political situation, and the impending doom suffusing the atmosphere in Ferrara, upon the narrator's return after Riccione. The narrator's disdain is even more apparent when Nino says:

“Tutto finirà nella solita bolle di sapone”. Si può essere più goffi, più insensibile, più ottusamente *goim* di così? (Bassani, 1983: 92) [“It will all burst like a soap bubble in the end.” Could it be any clumsier, more insensitive, more obtusely *goyische* than that? (McKendrick, 2012: 97).]

However, the above interlocution with Nino is preceded by the following, before the narrator meets up with Nino, but after the narrator's return from Riccione, when visiting the Jewish cemetery of Ferrara. It is here that one sees the narrator reclaiming his identity, both as a Jew and as an Italian, the two being so thoroughly intertwined that the spirit of anti-Semitism now reigning causes the narrator to return to his Jewish culture, a return to something certainly more enduring than the nation-state of Italy and more enduring than the current Fascist political dispensation. If we take Waste's view of Bassani, we see that the empiricism in Bassani's approach embraces aspects that are emotional in origin, insofar as a sense of belonging is an emotional issue. In addition one notes the historical precision, the sense of

detail and how the physical environment indeed buttresses and alludes to a deepened sense of identity, a complex identity at that, because now it has been put in question, been challenged. Circumstances have forced the narrator to question and to seek answers, and he finds his answers in a physical, verifiable environment, which in turn echoes an emotional environment. We see here too the gradual re-emergence into the consciousness of which Bleicher and Betti speak, a consciousness that offers some hope of an absolute.

Guardavo al campo sottostante, in cui erano sepolti i nostri morti. Fra le rare lapidi, piccoli per la distanza, vedevo aggirarsi un uomo e una donna, entrambi di mezza età: [...] Giravano fra le tombe con cautela e distacco da ospiti, da estranei. Quand'ecco, guardando a loro e al vasto paesaggio urbano che mi si mostrava di lassù in tutta la sua estensione, mi sentii d'un tratto penetrare da una gran dolcezza, da una pace e da una gratitudine tenerissime. Il sole al tramonto, forando una scura coltre di nuvole basse sull'orizzonte, illuminava vivamente ogni cosa: il cimitero ebraico ai miei piedi, l'abside del campanile della chiesa di San Cristoforo poco più il là, e sullo sfondo, alte sopra la bruna distesa dei tetti, le lontane moli del castello Estense e del duomo. Mi era bastato recuperare l'antico volto materno della mia città, riaverlo ancora una volta tutto per me, perché quell'atroce senso di esclusione che mi aveva tormentato nei giorni scorsi cadesse all'istante. Il futuro di persecuzioni e di massacri che forse ci attendeva (fin da bambino ne avevo continuamente sentito parlare come un'eventualità per noi ebrei sempre possibile), non mi faceva più paura.

E poi, chissà? – mi ripetevo, tornando verso casa -. Chi poteva leggere nel futuro?

Ma ogni mia speranza e illusione durarono molto poco (Bassani, 1983: 84). [I looked at the cemetery below, in which our dead were buried. Among the occasional gravestones, made small by the distance, I saw a man and a woman, both middle-aged walking about: [...] They were passing between the tombs with the care and detachment of guests, of foreigners. Then suddenly, watching them and at the vast urban landscape which displayed itself to me at that height in all its breadth, I was struck by a great sweetness⁵⁶, by a feeling of peace and the tenderest gratitude. The setting sun, cleaving through a dark cope of cloud that lay low on the horizon, vividly lit up everything: the Jewish cemetery at my feet, the apse and the bell tower of the church of San Cristoforo only a little further on, and in the background, high above the vista of brown roofs, the distant bulk of the Estense Castle and the Duomo. It was enough for me to

⁵⁶ The use by both the Weaver translation and the McKendrick one of the word "sweetness" is unfortunate in that it does not render the full literary significance of the Italian word "dolcezza". Words have a history, a tradition, and the poetic history of the word "dolcezza" goes back to before Dante, who uses the term in his poetic infatuation with Beatrice; the word "dolce" also has Petrarchan echoes. Both the Dantean and Petrarchan uses of the word "dolcezza" evoke images in Italian literature of spiritual upliftment, the embracing of life, most famously in Dante's *Vita Nuova*. The word "sweetness" in English is by comparison prosaic. The word "harmony" might have been a better choice, rather than the literal meaning of "dolcezza" which does mean sweetness, but does the emotions evoked in this passage no justice.

recover the ancient, maternal visage of my home town, to reclaim it once again all for myself, for that atrocious feeling of exclusion that had tormented me in the last days to fall away instantly. The future of persecutions and massacres that perhaps awaited us – since childhood I had heard them spoken of as an always possible eventuality for us Jews – no longer made me afraid.

And then, who knows? – I repeated to myself, returning towards home – Who can tell what the future holds?

But all those hopes and illusions I had would not last long (McKendrick, 2012: 88-9).]

This passage is significant for a number of reasons, and hence it is quoted at length. We know for a start that what happens subsequently with Nino Bottecchiari confirms the idea that hope and illusions are short-lived. But in the above passage we have one of the few moments in the novella where the narrator is at peace with himself. His survey of the city, the continuity of life and death (this scene, occurring as it does at the Jewish cemetery of Ferrara) and the co-existence of Jews and non-Jews in Ferrara are a source of comfort to the narrator. The possibility of persecutions and massacres, while he tells the reader that these were inscribed into his consciousness since childhood (and atavistically), point to a future of doom. But that prospect does not frighten him. In this passage we have the seeds of defiance that Bassani the man and the narrator adopt. It is here that he gathers the strength, the moral courage to confront the future, uncertain and precarious as he knows it is likely to be. The narrator has taken this occasion, with this evocative description, to gather up his identity, to come to terms with his place in the world. The past, the present and the future are all encapsulated in this scene – in the manner of Heidegger, essentially. (This scene corresponds in significance with the period in *Radetzky* when Carl Joseph returns to his short-lived rural idyll.) We have the individual apprising himself of the full significance of *Being-in-the-World* and he derives comfort from the re-establishment of his identity. Pride in his city, a sense of belonging suffuse the scene, rendering the imminent betrayal all the more poignant and wounding. The forces of history overtake the narrator and Bassani, but this scene stands out as a superb example of an existential engagement with the world, a fully conscious reflection on the significance of Being. The narrator speaks of the atrocious sense of exclusion, which he has already seen in operation *vis-à-vis* Fadigati. It is in this scene of self-reflection that we can understand how the narrator

makes the psychological transition from understanding Fadigati's exclusion to his own exclusion as a Jew. The events at Riccione have acted as a catalyst. The narrator now realises the full import of his time in history. This he does by reflecting on the past and embracing life with a courage derived from this heightened sense of self and the birth of an ethical consciousness that takes into account the contradictions and opposing forces at work in the narrator's existence.

Subsequent to the scenes with Nino, after which the narrator has an even more acute sense of his place, or non-place, in the world, or a conditional place in the world after the passage of the Race Laws, there are a few scenes which merit further investigation.

3.2.1 Tragic dénouement: Human nature as the battleground of Utopia

Chapters 15-18 are short chapters, but each functions as a self-contained vignette of tragedy. In Chapter 15 we see the narrator meeting up with Fadigati again, in Ferrara, in November after the disastrous summer in Riccione. The symbolism is obvious. But the significance of this chapter lies in the fact that the need for narration has now passed and it is the most overtly psychological of all the chapters thus far. Added to this, this chapter is an extended metaphor revolving around a dog, a bitch, who follows Fadigati around when the narrator meets up with Fadigati again. The dog functions as a symbol for Fadigati himself. For example:

Di nuovo la cagna si appiattì ventre a terra a qualche centimetro dai piedi di Fadigati: "Picchiami, uccidimi pure, se vuoi!", sembrava a voler dire. "È giusto, e poi mi piace!" (Bassani, 1983: 100). [Once more, the dog flattened herself with her belly on the ground a few inches from Fadigati's feet. "Beat me, kill me if you want!" – she seemed to be saying. "It's only right, and besides, I like it!" (McKendrick, 2012: 106).]

The psychological insight here is again symbolically portrayed. The scene takes place near a brothel, late at night, with Fadigati wandering around aimlessly through Ferrara shrouded in mist. The metaphor at work here is, simply put, that the dog behaves like Fadigati, who is all too keen to submit to the will of society, whose self-hatred is so advanced that he is resigned to it. Whether the self-hatred is self-induced or whether he is a victim of his society is an

imponderable; but the way Bassani portrays him is as someone who fatalistically accepts his lot, who has compromised his dignity to the point of oblivion and utter self-denial. All of this is compounded by the fact that he is running out of money, is described as haggard and thin, and one for whom life has been divested of all meaning. It is at this point in the novella that the narrator decides that while he has much in common with Fadigati, he will not share his fate. It is as if the narrator is saying that both he and Fadigati might both be marginalised by the Ferrarese, by the invertebrate expediency of their fellow citizens, but that does not mean that one has to respond to oppression and marginalisation in the same way.

The heart of Bassani's liberalism comes into play here, if one assumes that at the heart of liberalism lies the idea of free choice. Fadigati has the choice to navigate through his oppression in a certain way, a way that the narrator rejects. There is no blanket consensus on how one has to respond to oppression and marginalisation. *Gli occhiali d'oro's* narrator takes up this choice, over and above making an ethical statement. The narrator makes a statement of defiance, in defence of his free choice to reject the ideology that would want to marginalise and persecute him as a Jew. If one takes as a point of departure that utopia is a contradiction in terms in that in the very pursuit of a utopia a dystopia almost inevitably comes into being, then Fascism (or Communism for that matter) is a prime example. Utopias (paradoxically meaning places that do not exist) would be such places where communal values are shared, where individuality, in the modern sense would not be tolerated. To paraphrase Gellner ("Pariah Liberalism" in Gellner, 1998: 35): the Jews (in the Habsburg Empire and for different reasons in Fascist Italy) acquired a pariah status because they were not part of a geographically confined and defined ethnic minority as were the Hungarians, the Czechs or any variety of ethnic minorities. They represented a kind of cosmopolitanism which was grafted onto the Habsburg Empire. In Italy the presumed cosmopolitanism of the Jews was deemed incompatible with the new Italy that the Fascists envisaged, at least so one could argue. However, the story of the Jews in Italy had a different trajectory. Anti-Semitism under Fascism was largely a devious political expedient devised by the Fascists (opposition to the Race Laws came from some figures in the Fascist hierarchy itself) to ingratiate itself with Nazi Germany. For the "utopia" of a Fascist Italy to

come about, anti-Semitism was deemed a convenient tool. The inherent contradiction in this stance was the fact that many Jews themselves were Fascists and shared in, and felt part of, the new Italy for reasons varying from expedience to an understandable fear of Communism. For utopias to exist, a kind of “closed system” needs to be perpetuated, be that system Fascism, Nazism, Communism, Islamic fundamentalism or whatever, according to Gellner: in other words, a system that seeks conformity and discourages independent critical thought. Inasmuch as Bassani was a liberal, he could not identify with Fascism and the closed and censorious system that it was. He was on the outside, not only as a Jew, but as a liberal. Fadigati was on the outside because his way of being did not conform to the prevailing ethos that Fascism sought to instil and perpetuate. So it is in this sense that the words “utopia” and “dystopia” help to unravel the *io narrante*'s dilemma. Is he a Jew or an Italian? Why can they not be one and the same thing? Are they not in any event one and the same thing? Any purported all-embracing system of thought militates against spontaneous free thinking and is by extension anti-modern, even though such a system might have all the trappings of modernity, such as Fascism and Communism had. The underlying motivations for Fascism, i.e. nationalism, and Communism, i.e. internationalism, were at the heart of a battle of ideas that had raged since the French Revolution. The *io narrante* in *Gli occhiali d'oro* is, as mentioned previously, the heir of the Enlightenment tradition, and relies on the empirical tradition that that tradition enshrined. At this point in the novel the narrator is faced with a choice: either he has to come to terms with his fellow outsider, someone who has adopted resignation to his fate as his way of being, or he must eschew him and all that he represents. The narrator cannot adopt Fadigati's stance, embodying, as the *io narrante* does, a time-honoured conflict of ideas and approaches to Being-in-the-world.

Gellner says, for example:

When a minority is an object of discrimination and contempt, this is most frequently explained and justified by attributing some moral inferiority to the group in question. [...] Alternatively, it may be, as it were, enforced or imposed, by a kind of circular self-confirming procedure. [...] It is difficult to escape the consequences of social stereotyping, and determined attempts to do so quite often lead only to a strengthened imposition of the initial attribution (1998:100).

There are two points here which Gellner makes which apply to the position of the narrator: his refusal to accept his destiny as imposed by the Fascists means that he refuses to fall into the “circular self-confirming procedure” which Gellner speaks of. He is not going to be part of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Fadigati, on the other hand, opts to be just that. Secondly, one person’s or society’s utopia is another’s dystopia. Bassani’s narrator has another utopia in mind, a very personal one and one which relies on individual engagement with the world, not on preconceived, mindless conformity. The narrator’s defiance is based on this premise. Fadigati’s lack of resistance shows a resignation to defeat as if to say that being homosexual, or being for its own sake, is not worthy of defiance as homosexuality does not have a religious or political community or a legitimacy which can sustain it in adversity. Of the two, Fadigati’s isolation is more complete, more hermetic than is that of the Jewish narrator. The latter has, albeit notionally, the knowledge that he is part of a long, self-sustaining tradition. This is something Fadigati does not have in any comparable measure.

The Fascist idea of an Italian utopia (based on the notion of the revival of the Roman Empire) carried with it its own impasse because of the contradiction inherent in the search for a utopia in that civil liberties were eroded. If one recognises that the 20th century had witnessed the near destruction of the world in pursuit of utopias, then Fascism was one among many attempts at utopia. Ferrara encapsulates a kind of bourgeois utopia within a state that also saw itself as a utopia on a national scale. Ferrara was a utopia on a civic scale and Fadigati and the narrator do not conform to the precepts of either the civic or the national utopia. Both characters exemplify the obverse of a utopia in that Fascism was for them a dystopia. This ultimately proved to be true for the whole of Ferrara and for Italian society as the Second World War led to Italy’s defeat and the collapse of Fascism. Michael Ignatieff points out in his classic biography of philosopher Isaiah Berlin that, in his view, for Berlin,

[...] a liberal does not believe in a hierarchy of inner selves (higher, lower, true, false) or believe that there can ever be a political solution to the experience of inner human division. Human beings are what they are, and a liberal politics deals only with what human beings say they want. Their preferences can be argued with and persuasion is possible, but coercion – in the name of what they might prefer, if they could only see it more clearly – is always illegitimate (Ignatieff, 1998: 226).

Over and above the penetrating psychological insight that Bassani displays in the above scene with the dog and Fadigati, he subsequently reveals his firm belief in an individualistic liberalism of the kind as outlined by Ignatieff above:

“La guardi”, diceva intanto Fadigati, indicandomela.

“Forse bisognerebbe essere così, sapere accettare la propria natura. D’altra parte, come si fa? È possibile pagare un prezzo simile? Nell’uomo c’è molto della bestia, eppure può, l’uomo, arrendersi? Ammettere di essere una bestia, e soltanto una bestia?”

Scoppiai in una gran risata.

“Oh, no, dissi. “Sarebbe come dire: può un italiano, un cittadino italiano, ammettere di essere un ebreo, e soltanto un ebreo?”

Mi guardò umiliato.

Comprendo cosa vuol dire”, disse poi. “In questi giorni, mi creda, ho pensato tante volte a lei e ai suoi. Però, mi permetta di dirglielo, se io fossi in lei...”

“Che cosa dovrei fare?”, lo interruppi con impeto.

“Accettare di essere quello che sono? O meglio adattarmi ad essere quello che gli altri vogliono che io sia?”

“Non so perché non dovrebbe”, ribatté dolcemente.

“Caro amico, se essere quello che è la rende tanto più umano (non si troverebbe qui in mia compagnia, altrimenti!), perché rifiuta, perché si ribella? Il mio caso è diverso, l’opposto esatto del suo. [...] Tacqui. Pensavo a Deliliers e Fadigati: uno carnefice, l’altro vittima. La vittima al solito perdonava, consentiva al carnefice. Ma io no, su di me Fadigati si illudeva. All’odio non sarei mai riuscito a rispondere altro che con l’odio (Bassani, 1983: 100-1). [‘Will you look at her!, said Fadigati, pointing.

“Perhaps one ought to be like that, able to accept one’s own nature. But on the other hand how does one accomplish that, able to accept one’s own nature. Isn’t the price too high? There’s a great deal of the animal in all men, and yet can we give in to it? Admit to being an animal, and only an animal?”

I broke into loud laughter.

“Oh, no,” I said, ‘It would be like asking: can an Italian, an Italian citizen, admit to being a Jew, and only a Jew?’

He gave me a humiliated look.

“I understand what you’re saying,” he replied after a while. ‘In these times, believe me, I’ve many times thought about you, and your family. But, allow me to tell you that if I were in your ...”

“What should I do?” I interrupted him heatedly.

“Accept that I am what I am? Or would it be better to mould myself into what others want me to be?”

“I don’t see why you shouldn’t,” he replied quietly. “My dear friend, if being what you are makes you so much more human – you wouldn’t be here keeping me company otherwise! – why reject it, why rebel against? My situation is different, the exact opposite of yours. [...]” I kept silent. I thought of Deliliers and Fadigati, one, an executioner; the other the victim. The victim as usual, forgave, and gave his consent to the executioner. But not me: Fadigati was wrong about me. To hatred I could never respond in any other way than with hatred (McKendrick, 2012: 107-8).]

This encounter with Fadigati represents the apex of the philosophical, socio-historical themes of the novella. It is here that we see the attitude of Fadigati, being prepared to submit to the powers that be in a society that has rejected him, and the crucial sentence is of course the one where he questions why one should not adapt and why should one rebel. What Bassani is saying in the light of Fadigati’s suicide is “Look what happened to Fadigati”? He obliterated himself. The narrator, as a Jew and equally marginalised, does not see why he should obliterate himself merely for the sake of conforming to the norms of a pusillanimous, cowardly and hypocritical society. The liberal Bassani has the narrator assert his choice. Bassani presents us with two ways of approaching victimhood, and one can clearly discern that Bassani is in favour of the stance adopted by his narrator: discrimination and oppression are best responded to by defiance as opposed to resignation. Accommodating oppression perpetuates oppression; defying it, challenges it.

While it is true, that as a Jew, the narrator has the support of a community, a religion, a tradition and is therefore not isolated as is Fadigati, who has no support mechanism other than his friendship with the young Jew. But besides this, the narrator lives according to liberal values, which are in themselves complex and often contradictory. One is not given any set of values according to which Fadigati operates and the reader is simply induced to feel a reluctant pity for Fadigati.

But on a broader level, we are dealing in *Gli occhiali d’oro* with one of the great socio-political projects of the 20th century, namely Fascism – an “intellectual project”, to use Ignatieff’s term, that like other ideologies of the 20th century was utopian. What Bassani is portraying is two

individuals living in a society imbued with the political manifestation of an intellectual project, albeit it a more flexible, indeed flimsy, ideology when compared to other intellectual projects of the time, such as Communism and Nazism. Utopias – as mentioned before – arguably create dystopias and *Gli occhiali d'oro* is one among many novels that dispel the notion of utopia and illustrate the effects of systems that wish to create and perpetuate would-be utopias. The narrator and Fadigati illustrate the dystopia at its most intimate and personal. Jews and homosexuals do not belong in the Fascist utopia. What sets Bassani apart in this novella is his insistence on defiance – the liberal who takes a stance based on individual choice, on not accepting, with resignation, the dominant ideology of his times, albeit a perilous stance to adopt. Fadigati prefers to adopt an expedient approach, or is forced to. He behaves like the dog. He and the dog mirror each other and the narrator's disdain for the dog is a thinly veiled disdain for Fadigati and the latter's stance for the very reason that Fadigati's choice, to be the victim, is a choice the narrator cannot submit to. The vehemence of his disdain for the dog derives arguably from the fact that the stance that Fadigati represents is a stance that the narrator could well have adopted, as indeed many Jews did: lambs to the slaughter. Bassani uses the image of the executioner to illustrate the point that survival for short-term gain does not reflect the highest of ideals, whereas defiance in the face of what is palpably wrong, in his view, is the only stance that can ensure dignity, even if not survival. By having Fadigati commit suicide, Bassani is also showing that Fadigati's approach, the self-destructive approach, has become a self-fulfilling prophecy and leads inevitably to oblivion and surrender to the coercion at work in the society in which he lives. The narrator refuses to be party to something that is coercive and destructive, be it on the part of society or in terms of Fadigati's response to his situation. He chooses defiance as his mode of defence.

The novel ends with the words "Fadigati is dead" and the reader is left to ponder the resonance of Fadigati's life, but also to imagine the outcome of the narrator's life, and whether his stance will bear fruit.

The themes of *Gli occhiali d'oro* are amplified in *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini*. In *Gli occhiali d'oro* Fadigati, narratively speaking, acts as a foil for a certain type of behaviour, i.e. the idea that the

behavioural attitude of many Jews was similar to that of Fadigati. In *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* the question of Jewishness is closer to the centre of the novel. Denial of doom, as practised by the Finzi-Contini family, leads to their demise, while the narrator follows through in *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* on the defiant stance adopted in *Gli occhiali d'oro*.

Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini is also an elaborate metaphor for a kind of utopia in the midst of an obvious dystopia. The Finzi-Contini family have the wealth to protect themselves from anti-Semitism, but it can only be a temporary respite from the forces of history. In both *Gli occhiali d'oro* and in *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* we are reminded of the fragility of an enlightened (literally and figuratively) view of the world. The symbolic use made of light throughout *Gli occhiali d'oro* hints at this. Light often “glimmers”, or is “faint” or barely shines through the mist, keeping complete darkness at bay. In *Gli occhiali d'oro* he engages clearly with the question of human nature – Fadigati and Deliliers both being thoroughly developed as characters – and the circumstances in which human nature has to operate. The utopia that Signora Lavezzoli, for example, thinks she is a part of, i.e. Mussolini’s Italy, is shown to be as false as she herself is. Fadigati is true to his nature, as Deliliers is, and while human nature is what it is, any notion of utopia is meaningless and mendacious. It is the rational, empirical and principled approach to the world, in “being in the world” that the narrator adopts in *Gli occhiali d'oro*, a conviction that places a premium on individual responsibility and which encapsulates Bassani’s stance, speaking through his narrator. The narrator, we are led to believe at the end of the novella, will exercise a choice; Fadigati’s choice is one determined by any number of factors, but self-assertion and exercising his right to be what he is, is an option not open to him in the Ferrara of the late 1930s. Deliliers chose, by foul means, to escape to Paris. He exercised his choice and acted according to his nature. The narrator at least has a little more room to manoeuvre before he makes a decision to accept the impasse in which he finds himself, or to defy it. The narrator’s utopia is found within himself, and does not rely on the trappings of a given socio-political order which is inimical to his personal convictions.

3.3 Malaya – Exploring utopia; living a contradiction

When the head-hunters were troublesome in the old days he set out to chastise them with a thrill of pride in his own behaviour (Maugham 2000:60).

The search for a place of perfection lies at the heart of the present discussion. It is this search – and, more specifically – the frustrated search for a perfect world, and the belief that at least a better world can exist – that lie at the heart of the notion of literature of impasse, however well founded the sense of doom may be.

Simply put, Roth presents us with an obvious dystopia, a place filled with illusions, social unrest, imminent war and an unhappy individual who has to navigate his way through the myriad delusions that present themselves as true and eternally valid. The price of this dystopia is paid for by the individual, by the main protagonist, Carl Joseph. Roth, the author, feels that he is living in a dystopia (in an era of competing utopias – Fascism and Communism), and looks to another dystopia as being less deleterious than the one he is living through at the time of writing. So in *Radetzky* we are dealing with a double dystopia, in a sense – a disenchantment nurtured by a previous disenchantment.

Not unlike Roth, Bassani has a vision of something absolute. There is a perfection worth striving for, worth living for, even if it is limited to the realm of the individual. A transcendent set of values is striven for, implicit but not articulated as such. Bassani's narrator has to live through what purports to be a utopia of sorts, namely Fascist Italy. The narrator questions this attempt at utopia for the simple reason that it precludes, indeed threatens his survival, because his narrator is a Jew and the particular version of utopia he endures chooses to persecute Jews and homosexuals.

In Fauconnier's *Malaisie*, we see not so much a utopia as such, but a reaction against the dystopia that Europe had become for the author:

Non, je ne m'étonnais plus de vivre dans un autre monde qui était devenu le mien bien plus que l'Europe (Fauconnier, Bernard, 2003: 68). [No, I wasn't surprised to be living in another world, that had become mine, much more so than Europe (author's translation).]

Malaisie is as much about the First World War as it is about Malaya in that *Malaisie* is an obvious reaction to the cataclysmic dystopia of the First World War:

La guerre ne se raconte pas, dit mon père, elle se vit jusqu'à la mort pour la plupart. Blessés dans leur chair ou dans leur âme, ceux qui survivent, ne peuvent oublier les instants de souffrance dégradante qu'ils ont subis. Certains les rabâchent toute leur vie à la grande exaspération de leurs proches, enfants et petits-enfants, d'autres se taisent pour la vie mais en rêvent toutes les nuits d'atroces cauchemars. Le subconscient ne les lâche pas et les torture. Je fus de ceux-là. [...] Je l'ai seulement évoquée au début et à la fin de "Visions", et une fois au commencement de "*Malaisie*" pour introduire l'histoire (Fauconnier, B., 2003: 113). [One doesn't talk about the war, my father said; for the most part one lives it until death. Wounded in their flesh and in their soul, those who survive, cannot forget the moments of degrading suffering that they endured. Of course it gnaws at them for their entire lives, to the exasperation of those close to them, their children and grandchildren, others keep quiet about it but they dream about it every night in dreadful nightmares. The subconscious does not cease to torture them. I was among those. [...] I only mentioned the war at the beginning and at the end of *Visions* and once at the beginning of *Malaisie* to introduce the story (author's translation).]

The world that Fauconnier evokes rekindles a long tradition of exoticism in French literature, which Henri Fauconnier (as recounted to his son, Bernard) alludes to when recalling his experience of Malaya: "Je commençais à m'habituer à l'exotisme, à mieux le percevoir, les yeux moins écarquillés" (Fauconnier, B., 2003:68). [I started to become accustomed to exoticism, to see it better, less wide-eyed (author's translation).]

A world is created in *Malaisie* devoid of traditional Western models (other than the colonial one) in the midst of an alien culture and where essentially an attempt at total freedom from the strictures of Europe and its *Angst* is explored. It is a conventional utopia, one which also unravels, and is consciously pursued as such.

A most comprehensive definition and description of the novel is provided by literary historian Robert Aldrich.⁵⁷ Aldrich has chosen to highlight the homoerotic elements of the novel in his

⁵⁷ "The *Soul of Malaya* was the work of another Frenchman, Henri Fauconnier, a pioneer rubber planter in the British colony. His only novel won the prestigious Goncourt Prize in 1930 and was translated into English the following year. The book tells the story of two men who first meet in the trenches during the First World War. Rolain, like the author, is a planter in Malaya, and the unnamed narrator goes to Asia during the 1920s. By chance,

summary of the novel, and while this element may be deemed remarkable for its time⁵⁸ (though it is not really), the novel has a wider significance as a philosophical novel and as a modernist exploration of colonialism.

Malaisie grapples with the themes of impasse and doom in a way that sheds light on the previous two works as well as having an internal dynamic that is often quite original. On one level it would seem that Fauconnier shares much with Victor Segalen (1878-1919) in the way he views the exotic – i.e. not merely as a place to marvel at, but as a place to inhabit, much like Segalen did in Tahiti. In the introduction to his *A Lapse of Memory*, the following is written:

L'exotisme n'est donc pas une adaptation; n'est donc pas la compréhension parfaite d'un hors soi-même qu'on étreindrait en soi, mais la perception aiguë et immédiate d'une incompréhensibilité éternelle.

[...] exoticism is not the perfect understanding of something outside oneself that one would seek to clasp within one, but on the contrary, a sharp, instantaneous perception of infinite

he meets up with Rolain, who hires him to run his estate. Rolain, a solitary philosophical character, admits, 'I don't live quite like everybody else', and admits that he might be mad, 'if madness consists of acting differently to other people'. Unmarried, his only companion is a loyal Malay servant, Smail. The novel hints that the two may be sexually intimate. Rolain states that 'I don't see any difference between loving a dog, a mother, a friend, or a mistress.' He expresses admiration for Tiresias, man and woman in turn; he cites Theocritus, author of homoerotic verses; he complains about 'the European mania for confusing love and lechery'. He advises his young European protégé to abandon social conventions and jettison the notion of evil. The narrator meanwhile finds a concubine, but refers to her off-handedly as his plaything, and develops a closer relationship with Smail's brother Ngah, whom he hires as his servant. The narrator is also clearly attracted to Rolain, though whether as father figure, close friend, spiritual guide or something else remains unclear. Rolain stays distant and mysterious, but grows fond enough of the narrator to present him with the deed to his estate."

"The Europeans and their servants go for a holiday trip to the seashore. They bathe and sunbake, Smail and Ngah wrestle on the beach, they stroll around in happy nudity. A British District Officer arrives and breaks the spell. 'You're playing at Eden,' he remarks, 'When I am married I shall regard your conduct here as shocking. An Eden without an Eve or a serpent is truly shocking.'"

⁵⁸ In terms of the first half of the 20th century, one only need to think of writers such as John Henry Mackay (1864-1933) who published *inter alia*, *Der Puppenjunge (The Hustler)* in 1926, André Gide (1869-1951), *Corydon* (1920), *L'Immoraliste* (1902) and *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß* (1906) by Robert Musil (1880-1942), to mention but a few examples. It is the colonial setting of *Malaisie* which, combined overtly the notions of imperialism and homoeroticism, that lends itself to the type of analysis which Aldrich specialises in in his work entitled *Colonialism and Homosexuality*.

incomprehensibility (Segalen, V. *Proxénètes de la sensation du divers*, 1908: 38) as quoted in *A Lapse of Memory*, trans. Rosemary Arnoux, Brisbane, 1995:19).

A central element underlying Fauconnier's text is the notion of unknowability or incomprehensibility, as understood by Segalen.

Roth and Bassani's texts are rooted in the tradition that things are in fact knowable. Roth is descriptive and psychologically imaginative, Bassani being more empirical in his style and approach, but like Roth loads his words so that they have a resonance in the wider socio-historical situation. Fauconnier by contrast seems to resign himself, willingly, to embracing what, for him as a Westerner, will be forever incomprehensible, unknowable, with the text frequently devoted to philosophical speculation and descriptions which underscore his philosophy. The state of ignorance is embraced because it is a release from the burden of knowledge, the burden of history and the responsibility that goes with it and the obligation to be part of a system with its attendant politics and legacies. The psychological vortices into which the protagonists of *Radetzky* and *Gli occhiali d'oro* enter, or are forced to enter, are due to the social structures which engendered them and from which they are alienated. For Fauconnier it would seem that he has solved the disjuncture between utopia and dystopia: he has simply moved away from Europe and the structures it has created to dominate the world in its image.

The crushing, even if delicately expressed, self-consciousness which characterises Roth's and Bassani's writing is essentially inward looking. Writing varies from being a defence against the world, an escape from the world to an engagement with the world as it is. Fauconnier's way of "Being in the World" is to come to terms with its unknowability and in this way find a modicum of escape which holds the promise of happiness. The fact that his ways are unconventional is of little concern to him. A life open with endless possibilities of "Being in the World" is the way his protagonist Rolain chooses to approach and experience the immediacy of life, not dissimilar to Robert Musil's *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß*, where immediacy and the knowability of life are central themes, and also set in a decaying empire. For Fauconnier's Rolain, any hint of

entrapment, be it marriage,⁵⁹ or government, is an anathema as is any manifestation of Western arrogance, derived from the assumption that the world is indeed knowable.

As a narrative structure, *Malaisie* is not as deftly crafted as Bassani's novella or Roth's novel. *Malaisie*, as mentioned before is driven by ideas, philosophical musings, not plot. In a yet to be published article, Frances Maughan-Browne makes the following observation relating to the Nietzschean aspects of the novel:

It would seem that in *The Soul of Malaya* the two Frenchmen fall into the category of "awaiting the revitalization of primitive gender energy", because they are actively discarding bourgeois values. The "misogynist scapegoating of European women" is conspicuously absent from *The Soul of Malaya* – in fact European women are absent altogether. It has been argued that what Rolain embodies and what Lescale is trying to understand is the spirit of the Dionysian – the pure active: this is quite different from the concept of "primitive gender energy" (Maughan-Browne, F., 2005: unpublished).

The primitive "gender energy" she refers to here is a concept taken from Holden and Ruppel's *Imperial Desire – Dissident Sexualities and Colonial Literature*:

Such relationships between the colonizer and the not-yet-colonized cannot be simply regarded as "queer": they may, indeed, represent a longing for a nostalgically conceived heteronormative "real masculine" preserved in the raw in a natural state on the frontier. Much writing of the New Imperialism mourns the passing of such a stage and indulges in misogynist scapegoating of European women in the colonies as enforcers of respectable bourgeois, and debilitating, morality. The binarism of gender, however, clearly does not map easily onto that of colonization: the colonized may be either hypermasculine, or feminized, while the colonizer may either be a protector of bourgeois virtue or a seeker awaiting the revitalization of primitive gender energy (Holden and Ruppel, 2003: xi)

The points raised above are helpful in placing *Malaisie*, for the present purposes, as a sample of ways of "Being in the World", as a response to the impasse, as an alternative to the dystopias

⁵⁹ Bernard Fauconnier recounts his father's cavalier attitude to marital fidelity – while being married to Bernard's mother and frequently leaving the family behind in Europe while in Malaya: « -Bon, dis-je, les planteur pouvaient donc s'offrir n'importe quelle femme en toute tranquillité. Tu as dû user de cette prerogative. »

- Si tu veux. Mais les femmes Malaises ne me plaisaient pas. Trop maigres, trop chiffonnées, trop asiatiques.

-Alors su t'es mis la ceinture...

- Pas de tout! Je vais te dire...Seules les femmes hindoues sont belles, clanches, ambrées, satinées et soignées [...] (Fauconnier, B., 2003:91). [Well, I said, the planters can avail themselves of any woman in all tranquility. You should make use of this prerogative." "If you want. But I don't like Malay women. They're too thin, too wrinkled, too Asian." "So put on your belt". -Not at all! I tell you. Only the Hindu women are beautiful, amber, satin-like and well treated. (author's translation).]

discussed previously. One is presented here with a more immediate rejection of the world, while at the same time the conscious recreation of an alternative. Roth and Bassani obliquely suggest an alternative, whereas Fauconnier presents the alternative overtly and immediately. The space for the creation of an alternative space of being or “topology” is not offered in either *Radetzkymarsch* or in *Gli occhiali d’oro*. Fauconnier is intent on illustrating not only with the conscious rejection of the “old world” that Europe represents, but also with the creation of a new one where he deems his protagonists can live in a way better suited to their nature, unencumbered by the mendacity that pervades the Western mode of life. *Malaisie* is most self-consciously a rejection of the modern world, or the world that has become such. It rejects any kind of philosophical system that attempts to justify or engage with Europe as it is. *Malaisie* is beyond the liberalism of *Gli occhiali d’oro*, it is beyond the pessimism of Roth in its dealing with a situation of impasse. It can be viewed, simplistically, as a hedonistic novel, sharing with *Gli occhiali d’oro* at least, the notion of individualism, an individualism infinitely more untrammelled than that which we find in *Gli occhiali d’oro*. Aphorisms, also in the form of *pantuns*, abound in the novel: fragments of wisdom conceived in reaction to an untenable Western culture and born out of the free exploration of the self. The transition from *Radetzkymarsch*, through *Gli occhiali d’oro* to Fauconnier thus represents a transition of individual consciousness, a transition in ways of “Being in the World”. How rooted *Malaisie* is in a viable *modus vivendi* is debatable; but that it is rooted in history, of that there is little doubt. The novel represents an attempt at transforming reality in order to make it liveable, in order to shake off the shackles of that which is deemed to impede human self-realisation. While the novel may be deemed hedonistic in many respects, it’s not a novel that advocates an irresponsible, facile cynicism or the pursuit of pleasure for its own sake, or a restless procession of satisfaction of desire: it has an ethical core which is illustrated by the interaction between Rolain and Lescale. Lescale is the one floundering amid the certitude that Rolain exudes, his notion of the loss of the individual in order to become an individual, freed from one illusion, only perhaps to replace it with another illusion. The mystery of nature provides one such illusion and its seductive power is omnipresent:

Cette jungle vit, respire, ronronne. On la sent pénétrée d'un bonheur trop profond pour n'être pas semblable à l'indifférence.

Elle m'accueillait comme une fourmi, elle m'absorbait comme une goutte de pluie. J'étais en elle et je la sentais inaccessible, je la contemplais sans la comprendre. Au delà de l'étroit cercle d'arbres qui limitait ma vision commençait le domaine immense du mystère, et même autour de moi, dans le jeu des ombres et des coulées de soleil, dans le froissement de palmes et le battement de feuilles qui nul vent ne touche, dans une sorte d'agitation sourde aussi subtile que la circulation du sang sous la peau, je découvrais des mirages plus troublants que ceux du désert et sentais le frôlement de puissances inconnues (Fauconnier, Henri, 1930: 24-5). [That jungle lives and breathes and murmurs, soaked in a happiness so deep that it wears the guise of indifference.

Ant-like I stood in all that vastness; it seemed to absorb me as though I had been a raindrop. I was in it and I felt its remoteness, I observed but I did not understand. Beyond the narrow circle of trees that barred my vision began the vast domain of mystery, and even around me in the play of the shadow and the shafts of sunlight, among the shivering palm fronds and the rustle of the foliage that no wind can reach, in the dim agitation that encompassed me as subtle as the blood beneath the skin, I discovered stranger mirages than those of the desert and felt the faint pressure of unknown forces (Sutton, 1931: 15-16).]

Looking at the above passage from an ontological point of view, we can see the individual embracing the would-be wonder of the world, describing himself as being consumed like an ant by the forest, standing in a world he does not understand. He has a vision of the self, in respect of the other two texts, that moves away from the self, not being anthropocentric, on one level, and yet on another level *Malaisie* is supremely concerned with the question of how the individual must find a place in the world. The existential and the ethical become synonymous in Fauconnier's text, and consciously so. This explains in part why plot development is secondary when compared to *Radetzky* and *Gli occhiali d'oro*, where the ethical and existential are woven in through a narrative. In *Malaisie* the narrative seems incidental by comparison, with the emphasis being more upon how the protagonists interact and respond to the world and letting the world enlighten them rather than upon an imposition of their views on the world. This gradual awareness forms the prelude to Lescale's "learning curve", as Rolain inducts him into the mystery and indeed the reassurance of unknowability, and the vanity of all that is human. However, it soon becomes clear in the novel that *Malaisie* has an overwhelming didactic quality to it, revolving around the relationship between Rolain and Lescale. Rolain in effect places himself in the position of all-knowing teacher, trying to disabuse Lescale of his

conventional, bourgeois convictions. Lescale is an eager pupil, wanting to emancipate himself from the mental conventions which inhibit him and which harbour mendacity.

The above passage is very evocative, and by introducing phrases such as “soaked in a happiness” one can clearly see what the author’s central concerns are, right at the initial stages of the novel, namely “happiness”: in other words all that which is not associated with the cultural straightjacket of Europe. There’s a naïve quality to the writing, something akin to post-adolescent juvenilia, which in turn is immediately overturned into an exploration of universal philosophical concerns. The words “I observed, but I did not understand” echo a theme throughout the novel, that of the uncomprehending Westerner, who assumes knowledge that he does not have. Put differently, the Westerner assumes a cloak of misery which he need not bear.

The question then inevitably arises what kind of definition one can arrive at for the nebulous term “happiness”. Does it mean living a life of pleasure or virtue? It would seem that in Fauconnier’s terms it would be a combination of both, only that his sense of virtue does not rely on its opposite.

The question that arises from this, without going back to ancient Greek definitions of *eudaimonia*, is that happiness is after all reliant on a certain set of material, political and social circumstances that may be deemed to be essential for happiness to be possible at all. Of course, what is deemed happiness is also a culturally circumscribed idea, and what Fauconnier presents the reader with is a radical questioning of the validity of the would-be Western model of happiness, fulfilment or whatever one may choose to call it. Bearing in mind the Modernist precepts of Fauconnier’s novel, it is necessary to concentrate instead on the world he creates for the reader and the models of “living in the world” that he has created for the reader.

What is significant in this passage is the contemplation of the vastness of the jungle, and its attendant metaphor, and then the recognition of this vastness immediately becomes internalised and intimate:

Rolain s'était arrêté lui aussi, et silencieusement se tenait derrière moi comme s'il eût craint que sa vue me fût une distraction. Il savait que j'aurais préféré être seul. Je voulus le remercier de m'avoir compris et appuyai ma main à son bras.

Ce qui gêne dans la présence d'un être humain, c'est qu'elle vous fait éprouver qu'il est impossible et nécessaire d'exprimer ce que l'on ressent. Je pensais que ce geste me dispenserait de rien dire. Mais je m'aperçus qu'il exprimait plus que des mots. Je faisais semblant de regarder la jungle et ne regardais plus que dans le fond trouble de moi-même. Je ne savais comment retirer ma main. Il fallait rompre par une diversion le charme qui l'attachait (Fauconnier, 1930: 25-6). [Rolain too had stopped and stood silently behind me as though he feared to intrude. He knew that I would have liked to be alone. I wanted to thank him for having understood, and I laid a hand upon his arm.]

The presence of another human being can be so irksome because it impels one to say what cannot be expressed. I thought this gesture would save me from speaking; but I felt that it was more significant than words. I still pretended to be looking at the jungle when I was but looking at the confusion in my soul. I did not know how to withdraw my hand. I must find some means to break the spell (Sutton, 1931: 16).]

This stark transition from the vastness of creation outside the individual to the universe at work within the individual in a sense prepares the reader for what is to come, for the interaction of the world outside the individual is reflected in the vastness inside the individual. This is one of the most intimate scenes in the novel; others are overtly sensual, while here there is an intense intimacy, all the more intense because of the delicate nature of the intimacy and the moment when it occurs. It is all the more effective because of the juxtaposition of the endless horizons being aligned with the endless horizons *within* the individual. As an example of Being in the World in the sense that Heidegger uses the word, here in this passage we have a superb example of just that: "I still pretended to be looking at the jungle when I was but looking at the confusion in my soul" ("je faisais semblant de regarder la jungle et ne regardais plus que dans le fond trouble de moi-même"). One has here the individual consciously living, not merely reacting to a set of circumstances, or bullied into a position by a readily identifiable set of circumstances. On another level, Fauconnier's text provides another set of problems, in that whereas the Roth and Bassani texts are beset with metaphors, in *Malaisie* the metaphors at work are often disarmed by the temptation to read the text literally, not metaphorically. Also Fauconnier's text presents a challenge because of its setting and the difficulty it presents in terms of contextualisation, which of course is dependent upon the reader:

Contexts are external to the text. A text can therefore never provide the integral key to its own sense, that is, all the contexts sufficient and necessary to its own reading for two reasons: First, any text is historical, which means it is surrounded by a constantly changing universe of contexts; second, any individual reader is the unstable holder of contexts that are not only different from reader to reader, but also themselves constantly changing. So from both sides, the possible infinity of contexts breaks the well-defined limits established by the literality (or materiality) of the text (Stellardi, 2000:53).

Fauconnier presents this problem more acutely than the Roth and Bassani texts in that the context is derived from a very specific set of socio-historical circumstances not as familiar perhaps as the contexts of Roth and Bassani might be to what one might imagine to be the case with a Western reader. The reaction to *Malaisie* in South East Asian critical literature elicits overtly political responses because of the very nature of the novel, i.e. one that can be accurately described as being philosophical, colonialist as well as modernist:

Eurocentricism in western discourse makes it difficult to offer counter-discourses to relativise colonialist texts; it is present in the most vociferous critic of Imperialism (Yahya, 2003: 208).

That Fauconnier was critical of imperialism there can be little doubt, even though he benefited from it. But the context of his novel underscores the classic colonialist nature of his writing, of the assumptions at work in his text. Nor is there any doubt that he loved Malaya, for the escape it provided, but also for the prospect of self-fulfilment that it offered:

[...] paradoxalement je bûchais dur au paradis terrestre... Ah, que faisais-je de ces journées à la fois monotones et merveilleuses? (Fauconnier, B., 2003:62). [...paradoxically I slogged away in an earthly paradise... Ah, what was I to do with these days, monotonous and wonderful at the same time (author's translation).]

In this quote, *inter alia*, Fauconnier, as he recounted to his son, Bernard, clearly seems intent on wanting to seduce the reader into sharing his vision of the world. He wants to share his *Weltanschauung* with the use of evocative descriptions that do not merely serve to entrance the reader, but to add validity to his underlying claim that what lies outside Europe is closer to the *eudaimonia*, the notion that the search for truth and for happiness go hand in hand. Malaya thus becomes the place to find truth, and hence the place where happiness is possible, attainable, where fulfilment resides. The concept of *eudaimonia* also embraces the notion of mystery, of happiness and of truth residing in our accepting how little we know, that there is a limit to what the human being can know. A Westerner's blithe equating of technical know-how

with knowledge is undermined in *Malaisie*, as is the notion that rationality – as Kant suggested long before – can provide the key to solving humanity’s problems. The mystery of life is much greater than is imaginable, Fauconnier implies, when he has Lescale say the following upon the latter’s first night in the House of Palms:

Je me sentais en sécurité, et pourtant j’éprouvais une sorte de trouble qui me rappelait l’émotion des enfants jouant à cache-cache dans les coins sombres. Me souvenant de certaines paroles de Rolain sur l’attrait de ce qui est mystérieux, et me disais en m’endormant : On croirait qu’il est venu habiter ici pour s’amuser à se faire peur...(Fauconnier, H., 1930: 30). [I felt no alarm and yet I was aware of a sense of uneasiness that children feel when playing hide-and-seek in dark corners. Remembering certain words of Rolain on the lure of mystery, I said to myself as I fell asleep: One might almost suppose that he has come to live here to enjoy the sensation of fear (Sutton, 1931: 19).]

The awareness of the unknowable is buttressed by these musings of Lescale, as fear is associated with what is unknown. The image of children playing hide-and-seek further underscores the notion of a world to be discovered as children do. But more than that, what Fauconnier is preparing the reader for is the age-old struggle between innocence and experience, in the Blakean sense. The description of fear, of the unknown, is the flip side of the search for innocence, something hard to attain when experience has sullied innocence. Hence a reading of Fauconnier makes more sense when seeing the novel through the prism of this eternal battle, that of retaining innocence, or at least striving for it, because one knows what its obverse is, namely a surfeit of experience, such as one knows Rolain and Lescale had both had in the trenches of the Western Front.

Fear lends an intensity to Lescale’s experience – an emotion incongruous one might think in this Eden-like environment. It is fear engendered by not knowing and realising that one does not know. Certainties evaporate and the novel proceeds with Rolain stripping away all the certainties that Lescale has hitherto considered inviolate.

Lescale is ripped out of his certainties, but for Rolain the loss of fear reflects a harmony with the world he has created for himself. He says he fears elephants less than he does harmless human beings; he proffers a spiritual strength that allows him to maintain an innocence and has the benefit of experience. This sets him apart. Rolain is not cynical or resigned, but strives to live

life with an intensity, and an immediacy, that Lescale finds admirable and baffling at the same time.

“The lure of mystery” is key to the above passage in that mystery is elevated to a fascination, the ready engagement with what cannot be known. In Fauconnier’s other major work, *Visions*, this theme of the jungle almost seems to act as a panacea and reinforces the function of the jungle as a place of refuge from what is knowable⁶⁰.

Dans ton parc zoologique au fond de la jungle, toi, tu n’as pas pu te rendre compte de ce qui se passait chez les hommes (Fauconnier, 1938: 153). [In your zoological garden in the depths of the jungle, you aren’t able to take cognisance of what was happening among men (author’s translation).]

The idea that mystery is alluring is of course not in itself new. But in the context of the utopian world that Fauconnier has created, mystery is an essential ingredient. Empirical knowledge as a goal, as something worth striving for, is juxtaposed with the ennoblement of knowledge of the self, of the “soul”, namely of not necessarily trying to understand subjectivity, but the acknowledgement that it exists as a phenomenon within everyone.

Besides the jungle and the metaphor of mystery that it embodies, the ideal, the utopian is manifested in *Malaisie* in more overtly sensual ways and in ways that undermine normative heterosexuality that in turn obviously also undermine Western industrial modernity:

⁶⁰ It is worth reading Sir Hugh Clifford in this regard, for whom the Malayan jungle also had an enduring allure, albeit for different reasons and with a different emphasis. Like Fauconnier, Clifford also engages with the locals, is enchanted by the difference between him and them. See in particular *Journal of a Mission to Pahang January 15 to April 11, 1887; An Expedition to Trengganu and Kelantan 1895* and *In Court and Kampung*, works which illustrate a deep and hitherto unsurpassed Western engagement with Malaya and its peoples, over and above the works of Sir Frank Swettenham. Amid many other colonial texts, the enchantment and monotony of a planter’s life have also been echoed in much more recent publications, namely John Dodd’s *A Company of Planters – Confessions of a Colonial Planter in 1950s Malaya*, Monsoon, Singapore, 2007 and in Boris Hembry’s *Malayan Spymaster – Memoirs of a Rubber Planter, Bandit Fighter and Spy*, Singapore: Monsoon, 2011. In other words, the allure of plantation life and the opportunity for freedom it supposedly offers has continued long after the demise of colonial rule in 1957. Somerset Maugham’s seminal evocation of plantation life has a different purpose than mere enchantment, but forms an indispensable contribution to the “genre”. More recently, this enchantment with the jungle has also been conveyed by Tan Twan Eng’s *The Garden of Evening Mists*, London: Myrmidon, 2012.

Un jeune Malais, torse et jambes nus, avec un sarong de soie moiré autour des reins, vint à l'appel de Rolain. Il avait encore la bonne figure ronde, qui s'ouvre à vous par de grands yeux naïfs, des gosses qu'on voit courir tout nus sous les cocotiers des kampongs.

“Smail, tu vas nous préparer le bain, les vêtements du soir, et un bon poulet au kari.” (Fauconnier, 28: 28). [A young Malay, with bare chest and legs and a silk sarong swathed about his hips, appeared in answer to Rolain's call. He still had the candid eyes and jolly round face of the small boys who gambol naked under the coconut trees in the kampongs.

“Get a bath ready Smail, put out some evening clothes and curry us a chicken” (Sutton, 1931:18).]

Amid the luxuriant descriptions of the jungle and the carefree way of life described, counterposed with the notion of fear, one has this evocation of innocence, this description which is essentially, albeit subtly, subversive of Western norms.⁶¹

Smail represents the “unencumbered” Malay individual, and with Rolain, similarly, there seems to be the same bid for innocence and incorruptibility, because the very notion of corruptibility is part of the Western paradigm, from which he seeks escape. In *Malaisie* Fauconnier strips away conventional truths, seeking forever an underlying truth, devoid of the Western rhetoric that has been imposed on life. He can only live this fantasy in his House of Palms and we sense Lescale's awe at the courage of Rolain's unconventionality.

The question arises too whether this “lure of mystery” referred to previously is nothing other than nihilism dressed up as utopia. Much of what would be conventionally deemed nihilist (the conscious critique of Western bourgeois conventions with their Christian underpinning, for example) is not nihilist in *Malaisie*. The overriding thrust of the novel is essentially a sincere search for something akin to truth and puts forward a highly ethical paradigm within its own terms. Fauconnier, akin to Nietzsche, would like to live life without the illusions perpetuated by the culture that unleashed the First World War. For Lescale this is difficult and liberating at the

⁶¹ Diana Knight makes similar observations regarding Roland Barthes (1915-1980) and his idea of a “happy sexuality”, which he explored in Romania, Morocco and Japan. Knight discusses Barthes ideas of a sexuality unencumbered by any notion of transgression or any Western paradigm. See “Barthes and Orientalism” in *New Literary History*, Vol.24, No 3, 1993, pp. 617-633.

same time. The description of the Malay Smail fits into this world-view. Smail is a mystery in himself; he is a product of the mysterious jungle, the human crystallisation of mystery and thus evocative of the unknown, i.e. of a truth that might very well be indiscernible to the limited human mind.

While it is not the purpose of this investigation to examine the infinite debate on truth, one can discern in *Malaisie* a preoccupation with the question and one only needs to examine the conflicting meanings that Nietzsche, for example, attributes to the concept of truth (*Nietzsches Werke*, Alfred Kröner Verlag, Leipzig, 1926: 386-392) to see the scope of but one philosopher's significant contribution. However, there is much in Fauconnier that would seem to be influenced by Nietzsche, and especially Fauconnier's scepticism of empirical truth and logic. One of Nietzsche's assertions regarding truth (which appears in Volume XVI) and which corresponds to Fauconnier's attempt at emancipating himself from the certainty of truth is the following:

Die Welt die uns etwas angeht, ist falsch, d.h. ist kein Thatbestand, sondern eine Ausdichtung und Rundung über einer mageren Summe von Beobachtungen; sie ist „im Flusse“, als etwas Werdendes, als eine sich immer neu verschiebende Falschheit, die sich niemals der Wahrheit nähert: denn – es giebt keine „Wahrheit“ (Nietzsche, F.1926, Vol. XVI: 100). [The world that concerns us, is a falsehood, that is to say, it is not a fact, but rather a poetic exercise and a summary about a leaner sum of observations which are “in flux”, something becoming, rather than a newly transposed falsehood, which never comes close to the truth: because, there is no such thing as “truth” (authors' translation).]

Indeed, Fauconnier – and his protagonist Rolain – become more intelligible when viewed through the prism of Nietzsche. While the Nietzschean aspects in *Malaisie* fall beyond the purview of this investigation, one cannot dismiss the continuity in a branch of European philosophy that Fauconnier's novel represents.

Knowledge, empirical objectifying knowledge, is a way of organising the world, a form of adaptation for human beings to continue being on the earth, as Nietzsche would suggest. But knowledge and truth do not necessarily coalesce and this awareness also suffuses the novel. The technique used by Fauconnier often resembles the kind of dialogue – such as in Plato's *Symposium* – in the conversations between Rolain and Lescale, with Rolain the teacher and

Lescale the eager pupil. They strive to arrive at truth through this dialogue, underscored by the exotic environment which in turn lends credence to Rolain's convictions.

The obsessional jungle metaphor in the novel continues in an overtly philosophical vein and with a strong Nietzschean echo:

Warum kämpfen die Bäume eines Urwaldes mit einander? Um „Glück?“ – Um Macht!
(Nietzsche, 1926: XVI, 164). [Why do the trees of a jungle fight with each other? For “happiness”? For Power!] (author's translation).]

While this supposed power of trees is seen one way in Nietzsche, either as an aphorism or even sarcastically, the echo of power, mystery and the lack of “coincidence” of truth and knowledge are equally present in *Malaisie*. For Smail the power of the spirits, in the trees, is real and true.⁶² He has a wisdom of sorts, revealed in the way he views Rolain's meanderings in the jungle. Smail recounts to Lescale his (Smail's) understanding of Rolain's attempt to investigate the spirit world; in other words, Rolain's attempt to understand the unknowable, or at least to acknowledge the unknowable. Lescale is the witness to this attempt and Fauconnier has created this dialogue which follows so as to have the theme of knowledge vs. truth explored in

⁶² See reference to Octave Mannoni which follows hereafter. The following observation by Mannoni is not without relevance to *Malaisie* and especially to this encounter between Westerner and the Malayan, between a mythical spirit world and the “all-knowing” Westerner, in this case, Lescale, whose faith in empirical knowledge is challenged in the context of Malaya:

In ourselves, however, more important than this moral pantheon, this mythology of authorities, is the continuous, barely conscious debate with which the Ego negotiates with the Super-ego and the Ideal its chances of existence. It begins with a guilty desire or an agonizing longing to escape from autonomous authority by seeking refuge in some higher authority, and this flight has given our civilization its distinctly evolutionary character. The theme is familiar enough in *mythical form*, and the story of little Tom Thumb can be found even in Malaya. But only the West has the courage to live out its myths. The story of Tom Thumb has been lived out to the letter. For instance, by Decartes, who deliberately courted abandonment, invented a device for not losing himself in the forest of doubt, triumphed over the terrors of malevolent authority (his particular ogre is called Evil Genius), and found in God the higher authority, who delegated to him his freedom and independence – just as Tom Thumb became grown-up through the protection of a king, with whose assistance he was able to forget his father the woodcutter. We all know how difficult the road is: it is paved with anguish; it leads man not only to liberty but also to misery – Western man that is, of whom Dr André Berge said in a striking phrase which sums up the whole situation, that he tries clumsily to behave like a grown-up without always being ready for the orphaned state [Mannoni's italics].

a way that is aesthetically coherent, and which emerges, as it were, naturally in the novel. (This encounter between Lescale and Smail also underscores Mannoni's observations in footnote 62).

Smaïl sait adapter son langage à mon ignorance. Il emploie le malais petit-nègre à l'usage des blancs, et ce qu'il peut me dire me fait désirer qu'il puisse m'en dire davantage.

Pour la première fois j'ai plaisir à causer avec un indigène. Car chez ce singulier peuple il semble qu'il n'y ait pas de classes sociales ; Smaïl, fils de paysans, pourrait être un fils de rajah. Je le fais asseoir près de moi. Je l'interroge sur lui-même, sur Rolain.

« Que fait-il, seul dans la jungle ?

- Il ne fait rien. Il regarde tout. Quand je suis avec lui, quelquefois il me parle. Mais je crois qu'il parle surtout avec les esprits. Il n'a pas peur des esprits.

- Tu en as peur, toi ?

- Il y en a beaucoup dans la jungle, dit Smaïl très bas, – plus que les moustiques. Il y en a dans tous les arbres. Avec un autre Tuan, je ne voudrais habiter ici. «

Il se rapproche de moi, me touche le genou.

« Que le Tuan me pardonne si je lui demande cela: il faut dire au Tuan Rolain de ne pas aller toujours dans la jungle, de ne pas y rester si tard. Regarde, le ciel est jaune... »

Toute la jungle baigne dans une lueur dorée.

« Ce jaune, ça les réveille. Ils cherchent partout. Leur foie est acide. Ils veulent faire du mal à ceux qui sont seuls... Ah! Tuan, mon foie, à moi, est tout fondu... » (Fauconnier, 1930 :103-104).

[Smail knew how to adapt his language to my ignorance. He used pidgin Malay of the white man, and what he was able to tell me made me wish that he could tell me more.

For the first time I enjoyed talking to a native. This strange people seem to know no social distinctions; Smail, the son of peasants, might well be the son of a rajah. I made him sit down beside me; and I asked him about himself, and Rolain.

“What does he do in the jungle all alone?”

He does nothing. He just looks about him.

When I am with him he sometimes talks to me. But I think he mostly talks to the spirits. He is not afraid of the spirits.”

“Are you afraid of them?”

“There are many of them in the jungle,” said Smail, in a very low tone; “more spirits than mosquitoes. There are some in every tree. I would not live here with any other Tuan.”

He came up to me and touched my knee.

“The Tuan will pardon me if I ask him to tell Tuan Rolain not to be always going into the jungle, and not to stay there so late. Look, the sky is yellow...”

The whole jungle was bathed in golden light.

“That yellow awakens them. They are on the look-out. Their liver is acid, and they will harm anyone they find alone.... Ah, Tuan, my own liver is all melted...” (Sutton, 1990:74-75).]

Rolain's is a quest for knowledge, a quest to arrive at a truth that underlies the surface and thus gives him real power. The utopia that Fauconnier presents is but a playing field for Rolain's exercise of power, not necessarily over Lescale – which he has anyway – but a quest for power

over the self, over the environment which inasmuch as it is unknowable, represents the truth of the human condition. Nietzsche would put it thus and sheds light on how one can read Rolain's philosophical discourses in *Malaisie*:

[...] so hatte der Mensch, das Thier-Mensch bisher keinen Sinn. Sein Dasein auf Erde enthielt kein Ziel; „wozu Mensch überhaupt?“ – war eine Frage ohne Antwort; der Wille für Mensch und Erde fehlte; hinter jedem grossen Menschen-Schicksale klang als Refrain ein noch grösseres „Umsonst!“ Das eben bedeutet das asketische Ideal, dass Etwas fehlte, daß eine ungeheuere Lücke den Menschen umstand, – er wusste selbst nicht zu rechtfertigen, zu erklären, zu bejahen, er litt am Problems eines Sinns (Nietzsche. 1926: VII, 482).[So Man, the animal-man, had no sense to his life. His being on earth contained no goal; “Why is man here at all?” was a question without answer; the will for man and earth was missing; behind every grand human destiny the refrain was an even bigger “for nothing!” That then means the ascetic idea, that something was missing, that man was surrounded by an enormous emptiness – he could not justify himself, explain or affirm himself and suffered from the problem of meaning (author's translation).]

Fauconnier also portrays his character Rolain as conforming to the Nietzschean ideal in that he eschews a conventional commitment such as marriage would exemplify:

Welcher grosse Philosoph war bisher verheirathet? Heraklit, Plato, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, Schopenhauer – sie waren es nicht; mehr noch, man kann sie sich nicht einmal denken als verheirathet. Ein verheiratheter Philosoph gehört in die Komödie [...] (Nietzsche, 1926: VII, 412) [Which great philosopher has hitherto been married? Heraclitus, Plato, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, Schopenhauer – they were not; nor can one even imagine them being married. A married philosopher belongs in comedy (author's translation).]

Sensuality is closer to the truth than marriage is, and hence the detailed and evocative description of the Malay Smail makes sense and has a wider resonance beyond the merely physical. Hence sensuality is not linked to any Western notion of transgression.

Rolain's search for truth, his ascetic (relatively speaking) mode of life and his denial of conventional pleasures or attitudes make him into a kind of Nietzschean ideal.

The endless yet vivid and evocative descriptions of sensuality, colour and sensory experiences cannot be taken at face value. The elaborate Nietzschean metaphor at work in the novel reflects Fauconnier's vision of Being in the World. And this reminds the reader of how notionally differently Carl Joseph in *Radetzky Marsch*, the *io narrante* in *Gli occhiali d'oro*, and now Rolain in *Malaisie* reflect three radically different ways of Being-in-the-World and reflect differing frames of reference. One notes too a gradual progression of consciousness that goes

from the overwhelming dominance of a collective suppressing a consciousness (Carl Joseph), through to an individual discovering his consciousness as in *Gli occhiali d'oro* to the celebration of a would-be unencumbered consciousness in Rolain. It is indeed as John Usher points out: “[...] the true centre of the fiction lies in the study of consciousness of the individual, adrift in a tide of time” (Usher, 2009: 59).

Consciousness is revealed in the way Lescale responds to Palaniaï, an engagement with the people of Malaya, and a description not dissimilar to that of Smail:

Palaniaï passait presque chaque jour, la tête chargée des objets qu'elle venait d'acheter au village, régime de bananes, écuelle ou bouteille, les bras ballants, les yeux baissés. Elle ne semblait rien voir, et entrait au moindre signe.

J'aimais à caresser longuement ses beaux bras, et cette ceinture de peau brune que laisse à nu, entre les banches et les seins, le costume des femme hindoues. Je m'étonnais du contraste entre la couleur chaude de la peau et son contact frais. Elle se laissait flatter comme un pouliche docile et levait vers moi des grands yeux profonds et vides. N'ayant aucune pudeur, elle n'était aucunement impudique, Elle me prodiguait avec simplicité un plaisir plein d'innocence. Une femme n'est qu'une friandise, sucrée ou acidulée, et plus ou moins bien présentée. Le bonbon de choix que m'offrait la *Malaisie* de la part de l'Inde ressemblait à ces chocolats roulés dans des papillotes multicolores et qui contiennent une liqueur douceuse (Fauconnier, 1930: 64). [Palaniai passed by nearly every day, her head piled with what she had just been buying in the village, hands of bananas, bowls or bottles, her arms swinging and her eyes downcast. She seemed to see nothing, and came in at the faintest sign.]

I loved fondling her shapely arms, and that girdle of brown skin left bare between the hips and breasts by the dress of Hindu women. I was astonished by the contrast between the warm colour of the skin and its freshness to the touch. She let herself be stroked like a docile filly, and looked up at me with great and deep empty eyes. Having no modesty, she is in no sense immodest. Her simplicity brought me much deep and innocent joy. A woman is no more than a delicacy, sweet or sour, and more or less well got up. The choice sweetmeat that Malaya offered me, on behalf of India, resembled one of those chocolates wrapped in variegated paper and filled with sugary liqueur (Sutton, 1931:44-5).]

In this passage again there is the allure of mystery. Mystery in this context would be the incomprehensibility of innocence, which for the protagonists, and for Fauconnier, seems to lie in the absence of decadence and betrayal that Fauconnier would associate with his own worn-out culture, filled with wanton cruelty – bearing in mind that *Malaisie* is a novel born in reaction to the First World War. The mystery expressed is similar to that of Smaïl and of the jungle. While the objectification of Smaïl and Palaniaï is clear enough in the above passages, the

fact remains that the two people act as symbols of purity, simplicity and of easy uncomplicated sensuality not cluttered by the entrapments of religious discourses on physicality, of that great regulator of Western mores, Christianity and its attendant cultural strictures. It is clear that it is this which attracts Lescale in the above passage – a tangible release from the strictures of his own culture.

Power relations are clearly in Lescale's favour – people become compared to sweets, like fruit to be picked from trees, and animals. Is Malaya viewed as one vast brothel for the pleasure of the white man? While this passage contains within it power dynamics that favour the Westerner, especially as one knows that Palaniaï is married, in this passage value is again attached to simplicity, a longing for innocence which is – albeit problematically – ascribed to the Malay world. And while there are power dynamics at work in this passage, Palaniaï is described in a way that is fully appreciative of what is knowable in her, even if that is limited to the physical, which it is not: the description of her is evocative, filled with a respectful admiration, but underscored by the fact she will never be understood. Malaya thus represents not only a geographic mystery, but this mystery is carried over into the people.

As to the power relations, one can see that the Nietzschean notion of power is also not limited to the sexual domain:

Heureux d'avoir enfin un royaume à gouverner seul, j'avais hâte de révéler mes petits talents et d'appliquer mes petits théories. Tout nouveau Directeur de plantation se plaît à démolir les institutions les plus chères à son prédécesseur. Il faut montrer qu'on peut faire mieux que lui. Ses méthodes étaient mauvaises. Ses favoris tombent en disgrâce (Fauconnier, 1930: 47). [Glad as I was to have a kingdom to govern, I made haste to display my little talents and apply my little theories. Every new manager delights in demolishing his predecessor's pet institutions. It is essential to show that one can do better than he. His methods were bad. His favourites are disgraced (Sutton, 1931: 31-2).]⁶³

⁶³ This observation by Lescale as to his new found status is corroborated by other accounts:

Discipline on the Sapong Estate was strictly enforced, following the Dutch rather than British custom: 'If you were asked to the manager's house you have to take your hat off and stand outside. You always have to address him as "Sir" and he was a little king on his own (*Tales from the South China Seas – Images of the British in South-East Asia in the Twentieth Century*, Ed. Charles Allen, London: Futura Publications, 1983: 92).

Even on a literal level we see this notion of power being alluded to in a way that shows the other ways that Lescale is gradually becoming aware of not only controlling his new domain, but he himself gradually has become a domain which he conquers. The narrative structure is consistent in that what happens in the material aspects of life, as presented in the novel, is echoed in the philosophical aspects of the novel as well. The literal exercise of power, with Lescale having his own plantation, also translates into a power over the self, but one cannot ignore the historical aspect either, and what Rolain and Lescale represent in their “domain”. For a further elucidation of this aspect we have to turn to another part of the world which puts the phenomenon of Rolain and Lescale into a wider perspective, and explains, at least in part, their inability ultimately to understand their environment, in the light of subsequent events in the novel. In describing the phenomenon of French colonialism in Madagascar, Octave Mannoni makes the following observation that applies to any number of colonial situations and one can recognise Rolain and Lescale quite readily:

Baffled by the mixture of success and failure they have met to understand natives' behaviour, Europeans have resorted, in their bewilderment, to one of two extreme and opposite attitudes, and these attitudes still prevail. Some simply give up the attempt to interpret and declare that thought is incommunicable. They draw a hard-and-fast demarcation line between the civilized and the non-civilized, and on the basis of some vague notion of racial inequality they conclude that the non-civilized are non-civilizable. The others, on the other hand, assume that all men are equally endowed with reason, and refuse to see differences which a less abstract psychology would immediately have brought to light. This attitude is undoubtedly more liberal at the outset, but it leads to an equal, if not greater misunderstanding in the end, for when at length these people come up against real differences, they see them as offences against reason and feel an indignant urge to correct them in the name of common sense. Though this urge may remain moderate and humane enough in its expression, it is fundamentally a product of blindness and fanaticism. To use the language of psychology, the first group project upon the colonial peoples the obscurities of their own unconscious – obscurities they would rather not penetrate – and their interpretation of the natives' behaviour is repressed because it is associated with the dangers and temptations represented by the 'instincts' (Mannoni, 2005: 19).

The first question that arises is the extent to which the protagonists of *Malaisie* are indeed definable in the terms that Mannoni sets out. This is where the contrast between Rolain and Lescale is most significant in that Rolain has shown a willingness to “penetrate his own consciousness” and hence he is not a “European” in the sense that Mannoni uses the term. Lescale is at the beginning stages of questioning his own consciousness, thanks to Rolain. The

descriptions, however, of the colonized conform in the novel in many ways to Mannoni's description of how colonized people are viewed. Palaniaï and Smail are seen for what they are *to Europeans* and it is a moot question if they can be seen in any other way, as they are given a very limited voice to speak for themselves. And besides, could a Westerner convincingly be Malay? That is, unless we see the dramatic *amok* scene at the end of the novel as an example of Smail's frustration at being stifled in his inability to be himself, to express himself, at always being an object of a European's wants, needs and desires. In this sense the *amok* scene amounts to an admission in Mannonian terms of an ultimate failure. The two protagonists are not cruel, but the power structures they represent and embody are economic and likely to be disempowering of the "colonized".⁶⁴ One has seen the way the European 'instincts' as Mannoni calls them, have held sway over the protagonists of *Malaisie* and how often fear is referred to in the novel, especially by Lescale – fear of the unknown and the unknowable. Fauconnier contrasts Rolain's attitude of omniscience with Lescale's naïveté, yet it is through Lescale's learning process that the reader is taken on a voyage of discovery.

A telling passage in the light of the Mannoni passage above is the following. At first Palaniaï is described as a statuette and, inveighing against the loneliness of plantation life, Lescale then complains about how unsatisfactory Palaniaï is as a companion:

Palaniaï... Un bibelot, une statuette. Oui, elle fait bien, sur des draps blancs. Petite Vénus au négatif. Eh bien, quand je la vois venir, tortillant sa croupe comme un chien content, le visage plein de honte, le cœur plein d'orgueil, ah ! je la chasse : va-t'en, petite bête (Fauconnier, 1930: 132). ["Palaniaï?... a plaything, a statuette. Yes, she looks well against the white sheets; a small negative Venus. Well, then I see her coming for all the world like a dog wagging its tail, shamefaced but full of self-conceit, Ah! I feel I could boot her out, the little beast... (Sutton, 1931: 101).]

⁶⁴ The literary works of Sir Hugh Clifford (1866-1941), however, illustrate, albeit in a contradictory and contested way, the power structures indigenous to Malaya which were operating to disempower the peasantry who were defenceless against the often tyrannical rule of the sultans in pre-British Malaya, before the notion of equality before the law was introduced by the British colonial authorities. While it is not within the purview of this study to make a comparative analysis of the underlying philosophies and policies of French and British colonialism, besides ample documentation, it stands to reason that the approaches of imperial powers to their respective empires was closely linked to the institutions, traditions and attitudes dominant in the mother countries.

Lescale then recounts his disenchantment with Ha Hek, his Chinese manservant:

« Et Ha hek! C'est Ha Hek surtout qui écope. Il est si correct! Et ce sourire chinois, ce sourire de lune, ce sourire homogène, oui, d'autant plus homogène qu'il est composé d'obséquiosité, d'astuce et de mépris... Il n'a encore reçu qu'un poulet rôti dans se sourire, mai je n'ai pas de revolver. Vois tu, c'est son existence même que je lui reproche plus que ses défauts. [...] et ce porc dont il me gave pour faire sa contrebande d'opium...

- Comment cela?

- Oui, quand il va à la ville il rapporte des tubes pleins d'opium dans la viande de porc. Il sait bien que les policiers malais n'y toucheront pas, ces bons musulmans (Fauconnier, 1930: 132-3). [“And Ha Hek! It's Ha Hek above all that riles me beyond endurance. He is so correct! And that Chinese smile, that eternal moon smile, compounded of servility, astuteness, and contempt. I have only thrown a roast chicken at that smile as yet, – I haven't got a revolver. You understand, it's his very existence rather than his faults that I can't forgive [...] and the pork with which he stuffs me in order to smuggle his opium...

“How do you mean?”

“Yes, when he goes to town he brings back tubes of opium concealed in pork; he knows very well that the Malay police, being good Moslems, won't touch it (Sutton: 1931: 101-2).”⁶⁵

⁶⁵ *Chandu* is the term used in Malaya (Malaysia) for opium and according to Sir Frank Swettenham, cited here below, *chandu* was the name given to opium once it had been prepared into a form ready for the smoking. Lescale's account in the novel is further corroborated in the following passage:

The chandu was no longer packed in bamboo leaves or paper, but was distributed in small metal tubes, mostly containing the usual two hoons, each bearing a coded identification of the state to which it has been issued and the date.[...] From 1934 onwards the government in British Malaya were committed to the eradication of opium smoking in the peninsula. (Mackay, Derek, *Eastern Customs – The Customs Service in British Malaya and the Opium Trade*, The Radcliffe Press, London, New York, 2005, p.138 et seq.).

The protection of the opium trade from India to China, a trade which had been used to finance the British East India Company's tea purchases, was a major reason for the initial British occupation of Penang island, in northwest Malaya at the end of the 18th century. (See Cowan, C.D., *Nineteenth Century Malaya –The Origins of British Control*, London: Oxford University Press, 1962: p.4 et seq.). See also *Malaysia – Selected Historical Readings*, compiled by Bastin, J. and Winks, R.W., Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1966 and Swettenham Frank, *British Malaya*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1948, (Facsimile reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1975), pp. 253-255. See also Mills, L.A. “British Malaya 1824-67”, *Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Selangor: (MBRAS) Reprint No. 22, 1961, 2003. A foundational text for this period and one that sheds light on the Malaya of Fauconnier is Butcher, John, G., *The British in Malaya 1880-1941*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979. The problem of opium in Malay was particularly acute due to the high demand for the drug from the Chinese population. In the state of Pahang, where *Malaisie* is set, the problem was diffuse, and specific reference to the use of opium in Pahang can be found in Thio, E, *British Policy in the Malay Peninsula 1880-1910*, Singapore and

We thus see a disenchantment creeping in with the exotic; it is no longer that innocent. The relationship has become practical and the validity of the Malay adventure for Lescale seems to be more reliant on the emotional bond with Rolain or with the other Malay males. Mannoni's observation, however, seems to apply to this rather more banal aspect of Lescale's existence in Malaya.

But subsequently the intensity of the experience, and what is rendered possible simply by not being in Europe, is illustrated in the following passage:

Pourtant j'avais rêvé une vie aventureuse. La première fois que tu m'as parlé de la Malaisie...

Tu étais en pleine aventure – et déçu. Maintenant tu crois avoir épuisé la Malaisie. Quelle folie! Nul pays ne déçoit, qu'on explore en profondeur. La satiété est une maladie de touriste. Il faut savoir tourner la page. Le monde, vois-tu, le moindre coin du monde, est un livre de Mille et une Nuits, et mille et une signifie qu'on ne s'arrêtera pas à mille, ni à cent mille... il y aura toujours une unité à mettre au bout de l'infini. Ne sens-tu pas que la Malaisie, tu l'ignores encore?

Oui, je l'ignore, dis-je, et c'est peut-être justement cela qui m'a troublé. L'autre nuit, quand nous parlions des esprits des morts, elle m'est apparue dans un mystère intact, quelque chose d'insondable [...] (Fauconnier, 1930: 136-7). [And yet I had dreamed of an adventurous life. The first time you talked to me about Malaya..."]

"Yes, you were out for adventure – and you were disappointed. Now you think you have exhausted Malaya. Nonsense. No country can be disappointing if you explore the depths of it. Satiety is the disease of the tourist. You must know how to turn over the page. The world,

Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1969, (p. 77 et seq.). From Thio's study one can see that from early on the problem of opium (*chandu*) in Malaya – including Pahang – was virtually endemic. Bernard Fauconnier in his biography of his father indicates that Fauconnier himself made use of opium, albeit in moderation.

The question of opium aside, the significance of Malaya is not merely that it was viewed by Fauconnier as an exotic milieu, but was – in Fauconnier's time there and earlier had been – pivotal to the maintenance of British commercial hegemony in the Far East, pitted as it had been against Dutch and French commercial interests. Thus for Fauconnier's purposes Malaya represents a hope for a return to authenticity and to an innocence, albeit contrived. The strategic and commercial significance of Malaya was what enabled Fauconnier to make a good living there for an extended period and Malaya is the inspiration of the novel as well as its distance from Europe and the latter's attendant problems. The social relations and characters described in the novel thus arise from an historically verifiable situation which Fauconnier uses as a platform for his philosophical inquiry in narrative form. Fauconnier was, despite the above, not disingenuous in his portrayal of Malay – as the reference to opium implies.

even the smallest corner of it, is a Book of the Thousand and One Nights, which means that it won't stop at a thousand, nor at a hundred thousand... There will always be a unit to add to the infinite. Surely you must feel that you don't yet know Malaya."

"I know I don't," I said; "and that's perhaps just what has upset me. The other night when we were talking about the spirits of the dead, I suddenly saw the place as a mystery untouched, unfathomable [...]"(Sutton, 1931: 104-5).]

In other words, we see here the underlying theme, not of a utopia as such, but Malaya as a space where a re-enchantment with the world can take place, with all its attendant dangers and frustrations and the prescribed ways of being that Europe, in Fauconnier's view, imposes on the individual. Being in the World according to the prescriptions derived from an oppressive culture is clearly not a *being* that Rolain can contemplate. He claims to have won a freedom for himself in the idyll that is his Malaya. Seen thus, many of his other observations and utterances make sense and give the novel its cohesion, tenuous as that may be on a purely narrative level.

Upon ascending a rock, Rolain says:

D'ici nous voyons notre passé et notre avenir, disait Rolain. Les semaines que nous allons vivre, les voici; ce fleuve qui nous conduira vers ces plages, ces plages sans fin, ligne blanche au bord d'un océan vide.

Nous n'en voyons que le décor, pensais je... Pourquoi Rolain, alors que le corps a des yeux par devant pour voir où il va, notre esprit a-t-il ses yeux par derrière? Le destin nous conduit dans un dos-à-dos, une voiture d'où on ne voit les choses qu'après qu'elles sont passées [...] L'humanité est un explorateur qui avance à reculons (Fauconnier, 1930: 154-5). ["From here we can see our past and our future," said Rolain. "The coming weeks are here before us: the river that will bear us to those shores – a white line edging an empty ocean." We only saw the setting, I thought...". How is it, Rolain, that though the body has eyes in front to see the way, our consciousness has its eyes behind? [...] Humanity is an explorer who advances backwards" (Sutton, 1931: 119).]

Amid the philosophical musings, the pre-Sartrean exultations of freedom which abound in the novel, we see a gradual move towards a catharsis, not only a sensual catharsis but an existential one. A celebration of life ensues, an idyll of incomprehensibility which culminates in the *amok* scene towards the end of *Malaisie*.

However, one can also look at *Malaisie* in the following terms:

The new tropical colonies, the latest in a long line of last frontiers, presented both a special resource for white male self-fashioning and its testing ground. (Anderson, W., "The Trespass

Speaks: White Masculinity and Colonial Breakdown,” in *American Historical Review* 102(5) (1997): 1343-1370.

The question that thus arises is whether Fauconnier’s novel is a tour de force of a Western pathology that, as Anderson would suggest, can develop in colonial contexts? Or is *Malaisie* a conscious reaction against a Western mode of life? Does Fauconnier’s novel indeed amount to being a conscious philosophical system, absorbing and expressing as it does a host of ideas that went before him and which were to follow? The idyllic world he portrays and the role-model Rolain represents, with its homoerotic undertones, do suggest both lines of thought, even though one can detect in *Malaisie* an awareness that the idyll might in fact be just that, namely an idyll, a utopia, in the original sense of being a “non-place”, a “nowhere”.

When Lescale says, referring to Rolain, “Avec lui, j’irais n’importe où...(Fauconnier, 1930: 157). [With him I knew I would go anywhere...(Sutton, 1931: 121)] this is meant in a philosophical sense as well as in a literal sense. Life is lived as a voyage, with an emotional force that drives this abandonment of all that would be deemed essential in the bourgeois, Western context. The tropics bestow license, but whether this can be deemed necessarily to be a pathology, as Anderson suggests, is a moot point.

A deft summary of *Malaisie* is found in the following, published in a study entitled “Turning Eastward: Vladimir Tretchikoff’s Orient”.

Henri Fauconnier, the French colonist and plantation owner writing in the late 1920s, makes repeated qualifications regarding the efficacy of reason in the East. This view can be seen as merely stereotypical and as reaffirming the continued currency of the West as virile and the East as passive, and yet, when probed more deeply, one discovers another world-view that is irreducible to the pejorative readings of the instrumental and positivistic Western mind. In *Malaisie* (translated as *The Soul of Malaya*), winner of the Prix Goncourt in 1930, Fauconnier unerringly evokes the magical or inexplicable. The ‘soul’ of Malaya, he proposes, defies rational containment: We should do no more than interpret the thoughts that hover in the air about us. That is what the Malays do. Malayan spirits are dumb: but the Malays understand them (Jamal, A., quoting from Fauconnier), 2011:52).⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Jamal is quoting here from the 2003 English edition, published by Archipelago Press, Singapore, and refers to page 13 of this edition. The reference to *Malaisie (Soul of Malaya)* is occurs in a chapter entitled “Turning Eastward: Vladimir Tretchikoff’s Orient” in a study entitled *Tretchikoff, the People’s Painter*, edited by Andrew Lamprechts, Cape Town: Jonathan Ball, 2011: 52.

Does Fauconnier's rejection of rationality amount to a pathology, or is it a plea for a more humane world where the individual is not constantly reacting to the demands of an industrialised society? One is aware of Fauconnier's own particular circumstances and the inherent contradiction of his existence, namely that of depending on the plantation system – a major part of the Western dominated economies in South East Asia.

One has seen evidence in Fauconnier's text that it goes beyond the idea of Malaya defying "rational containment". The novel cannot be read without taking cognisance of the French exoticist traditions, nor of the Nietzschean elements that echo a fraught nihilism. The novel does have a philosophical dimension that allows for a reading of the novel as a phenomenological or an ontological exercise and simultaneously an affirmation of life, a re-enchantment with life. Nihilism is too fraught a concept to be helpful, unless one sees the nihilist elements in the novel as a rejection merely of the forms of life, rituals and the *formamentis* that Western culture could be said to impose on the individual. The unbridled individualism to which *Malaisie* attests straddles various philosophical genres and avenues and echoes the salient features of Viennese Modernism as discussed in the previous chapter.

Returning to the text itself, an examination again reveals a complex interaction with the world, of individuals caught between what they are and what they want to be; suspended between their past and the present, but which leaves the future unconfrosted except as seeing it as an impasse, but an evocative one, one which relativises the individual into something merely part of a cosmos:

Si maintenant je mourais, pensais-je, il n'y aurait pas de différence, je continuerais à nager dans un univers où des millions de mondes naissent et meurent... (Fauconnier: 1930: 171-2). [If I were to die now, I thought, it would make no difference, I should still be swimming in a universe where millions of worlds are born and die... (Sutton, 1931: 133).]

This passage comes at the culmination of many events recounted in the novel, of many introspective, pensive moments where Lescale tries to grapple with the implications of Rolain's words.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Lescale goes on to say:

One sees the entry into a realm of the ethereal, of total escape from the world and its ills and an immersion into a realm that bespeaks a total freedom, unchained by any constraint. The certainty of past and present have become blurred by now in the novel, and the future is of little concern – the individual has become such, paradoxically, by the denial of individuality. This plea for a fuller life, a celebration of life seems to refute much of the lugubrious nature that characterises the modernist discourse. But in its exultation of life, Fauconnier’s novel is clearly a rebellion against all that which modernity has caused humanity to suffer⁶⁸.

Sous le ciel sans voûte, néant blanc d’où ruisselait de l’incandescence, toutes choses devenaient fluides. Éblouissement, évanouissement... On ne vit plus dans la réalité, à peine dans l’illusion, on va se résorber en lumière comme ce monde pâle qui s’évapore, comme tous ces mirages autour de soi (Fauconnier, 1930:173) [Under the vaultless sky, white void that flooded us with blazing light, all things become fluid. Dazzlement – ecstasy... We lived no longer in reality, hardly even in illusion, we were reabsorbed into light like this pallid world that dissolves vapour, like mirages that encompass us (Sutton, 1931:133).]

⁶⁸ The following succinctly illustrates this point:

L’envahissement par tous les pores de tant de chaleur, de tant de lumière, qui d’abord ne laisse qu’une impression de fatigue, c’est de la force que s’infuse. Bienfaisant accablement, d’où l’on sort pour vivre une vie multipliée. Car la peau besoin de respirer, de boire, de voir, d’entendre. En Europe le vêtement s’est substitué à la peau, les sensations n’arrivent qu’à travers des couches de laine, on a des sens de mouton. Ici le moindre souffle, le moindre rayon, sont reçu par tous les sens à la fois. Cela caresse un épiderme chatouilleux comme celui d’un cheval de race. Par la nudité on appartient aux éléments.

« La tristesse de l’Europe n’est pas apparente pour qui ne l’a jamais quittée, disait Rolain, ou pour qui n’y est pas revenu après un long voyage. C’est une contrée où je ne pourrais plus vivre, un contrée inhumaine, car on n’y voit pas d’êtres humains, seulement des marionnettes. Cela manque de grâce. Il n’y a de beau, là-bas, que les paysages vides. Alors on peut être ému, comme devant la jungle ou le désert. Main qu’un homme passé, et on n’a plus qu’à s’enfuir” (Fauconnier, 1930: 178) [The absorption of so much heat and light through all the pores, which at first leaves only an impression of fatigue, is an infusion of strength: a beneficent exhaustion from which one emerges to live a fuller life. For the skin must breathe, drink, see and hear. In Europe clothes take the place of the skin, and sensations reach us through thickness of wool; we have the sensibility of sheep. Here the slightest breath, the faintest flicker, are received by all the senses at once. Nakedness brings kinship with the elements.

“The melancholy of Europe is not seen by those who have never left it,” said Rolain; “nor by any who have not come back there after a long time away. It is a country in which I could no longer live; it is inhabited, not by human beings, but by marionettes. Utterly devoid of charm. There is nothing to admire but empty landscape. That, indeed, can be as moving as the jungle or the desert; but at the sight of a human being one must fly” (Sutton, 1931:137-8).]

The plea for a return to nature, for an idyll and its obvious view of Europe as the root of all that renders humanity unhappy takes the reader into a realm of awareness that is clearly reactionary, on the one hand, but also – by illustrating the opposite of what Europe had come to mean for the writer – the critique of Europe is ever present. *Malaisie* is thus as much about Europe and its ills as it is about trying to find innocence in the jungles and beaches of Malaya. Musings about the nature of life, about Being in the World are layered one on top of another throughout the novel, and Rolain’s observations at times seem contradictory. While on the one hand, as in the passage quoted here below, there is the exultation of freedom, and innocence, soon thereafter, enigmatically, Fauconnier unravels Rolain’s assertions by saying: “Pour jouir de la magie du monde il faut une âme plus complexe, des sens moins innocents [...]” (Fauconnier, 1930: 181). [To enjoy the magic of the world one needs a more complex soul, and less innocent senses... (Sutton, 1931:139).]

This would seem contradictory, but Fauconnier attributes these words to Lescale, as if trying to provide a contrast to Rolain’s reverie. Whatever the interplay between the two protagonists, it remains true that the exploration of the soul, the exploration of Being lies at the heart of the novel in an unbridled and virtually uncircumscribed context. While *Malaisie* is placed within the context of colonial Malaya, it does not contain references to specific historical events as we have in *Radetzky marsch* or in *Gli occhiali d’oro*. This can be seen as an attempt to de-historicise the human experience, the human condition, as much as is possible, while retaining enough of a context to lend credibility to the philosophical convictions and the characters in the novel.

Amid scenes of naked boys, Smail and Ngah, wrestling on the beach and La Roque, the District Officer intervening in the would-be libertine beach scene, Lescale makes the following observation:

Comment n’avais-je pas pensé qu’en effet ce fruit, qui contient la science du bien et du mal, c’était la morale? On croit toujours qu’un mythe est incompréhensible. Mais il n’y a pas de définition plus claire que celle-là (Fauconnier, 1930: 184) [How was it I never realised that the fabled fruit, which contained the knowledge of good and evil, was morality? One always believes that a myth is incomprehensible. But no definition could be clearer (Sutton, 1931: 142).]

Here one sees Fauconnier attacking the very basis of the Western, Judeo-Christian tradition, and the monotheism that lies at the heart of Western civilisation and its attendant dolorous history, of which modernity is part. Fauconnier's invective against modernity goes beyond the modernity of which he is a part. By now standing outside, as much as he can he gives free reign to a pre-Christian world, a pre-lapsarian world which he has found in Malaya. Morality, as he says here, is the mental rigour that has led his Europe to triumph and to have faith in knowledge, in the alleged capacity to know truth as such. The crisis of knowledge and certainty, of which *Malaisie* is an exploration, is resolved for Fauconnier in the world of myth, in the world of the senses. Rolain and Lescale have found a resolution to their respective inner antagonisms in the "enabling environment" that Malaya is for them, an environment that allows them to "refashion" (to use Anderson's term) the self. The refashioning of the self as seen in *Malaisie* reflects a consciousness, a consciousness born out of opposition to something, and that something is the Western mode of thought, that has caused suffering in the protagonists.

Unlike Roth and Bassani, Fauconnier stands completely outside his cultural milieu, while trying, however, to be part of it. Roth and Bassani stand outside their respective milieux, but their protagonists operate within it. Fauconnier's is the most explicit attempt – not necessarily the most successful or aesthetically successful – among the three novels under discussion to decipher the question of "il nostro stare al mondo" (as the philosopher Salvatore Natoli puts it, 1996:7), "our being in the world", in "Heideggerian" terms. The fact that Fauconnier is determined to uproot the discussion, the question of being, from a familiar, Western environment and violates a conventionally accepted moral milieu, is in keeping with the premises of his novel: to present a world that is patently non-Western, but one which challenges the conventional Western mind (Lescale) to explore a deeper sense of being. This aspect seems less urgent in *Radetzky* and *Gli occhiali d'oro*, but in their cases they address the question of Being in a predictable Western environment, with its attendant reliance on historical context.

For Roth and Bassani the Western model is still salvageable, whereas in *Malaisie*, the salvageability or not of what for convenience sake one can call the “Western model” is not a concern. Rolain sums up this attitude in the following:

Toute contrée où l’homme ne peut pas vivre nu en toutes saisons est condamnée au travail, à la guerre, à la morale (Fauconnier, 1930: 186). [Every land in which man cannot live naked all the year round is condemned to work and war and morality (Sutton, 1931: 143).]

Clearly, in *Malaisie*, as in *Radetzky* and *Gli occhiali d’oro*, the worlds they create, the ethical awareness that they explore obviously have a moral dimension. Fauconnier could be accused of being nihilist (in the most conventional meaning of the word), wilfully naïve, but his “project of inquiry”, which each of the novels is, is also a quest for a truth, albeit a truth couched in a muddle of metaphors and aphorisms.

A clear ontological, phenomenological consideration is found in the following passage in which Fauconnier expresses the thoughts of Lescale:

Il a fallu, pour que j’existe, un concours miraculeux de hasards favorables. Hasard effrayant de la conception qui a donné la vie à chacun de mes ancêtres, hasard qui la lui ont conservée jusqu’à l’âge adulte. Un microbe de plus, et je ne serais pas né. Un autre serait né, qui me ressemblerait moins qu’un frère, auquel manquerait, à partir de ce microbe, la moitié de mon arbre généalogique, la moitié des cases de mon cerveau, mais possédant peut-être, à la place, la semence du génie ou du crime (Fauconnier, 1930: 193-4:). [The creation of me called for a miraculous conjunction of chances: the dreadful hazard of conception that gave life to each of my forebears and more hazards that preserved them until maturity. One microbe more, and I should not have been born. Another, more alien than a brother would have come into existence, who in virtue of that microbe, would lack half of my genealogy, half of the cells in my brain, but would possibly possess, in their place, the seed of genius or crime (Sutton, 1931: 149).]

One sees in this extract Fauconnier’s phenomenological and ontological preoccupation; his quest, his grappling for a truth behind the haphazardness of existence. The impasse, in part, in *Malaisie* lies in two aspects, namely the inability to arrive at a successful resolution of the problem he articulates above, albeit it a rather obvious preoccupation. But the second aspect of impasse that we find in this consideration quoted above is that the question of a viable future for his protagonists has straddled into the realm of the unknowable and effectively amounts to a resignation to the sensual, to the joyous, i.e. into a realm of permanent irresolution of the

Problematik that his novel represents. It is in the amok scene where Fauconnier comes back to a confrontation with the limitations of a joyous sensuality that pervades so much of the novel.

The climax of the confrontation with the truth of the situation in which Lescale and Rolain find themselves is introduced by Fauconnier as follows:

Le geste, comme disait Rolain, qui porte une certitude...Mais pouvais-je deviner quel serait le sien à l'heure fatidique? (Fauconnier, 1930: 283). [The deed, as Rolain had said, that carried uncertainty.... But could I guess what his would be at the fated hour? (Sutton, 1931: 223).]

Fauconnier is saying that action, a deed, is that which represents certainty, however misguided it might be: L'homme accueille le mystère, qui l'épouvante, mais appelle le miracle et met sa foi dans l'absurde (Fauconnier, 1930: 282). [Man loves the thrill of mystery, but cries aloud for miracles and puts his faith in the absurd (Sutton, 1931: 222).]

It would seem that all the philosophical musings in the novel culminate in an act of mystery, in Smail's spirit being taken from him as Pa Daoud suggests. Smail comes to embody the mystery, the unintelligibility of Malaya, and becomes a symbol for unknowability. The disappearance of the *kris*⁶⁹ alerts Lescale and Rolain to the danger of the situation. The *kris* is also a weapon of ritual significance, and here symbolises very effectively the resurgence of a self-awareness on the part of Smail:

The *kris* or *keris* [in Bahasa Malayu, often the first syllable is omitted] has been defined thus: "The *keris* is known to everyone as the national weapon of the Malaysian peoples. It has substantial claims to being the most sanguinary weapon in history. Sixty years before the Portuguese poet

⁶⁹ "Keris blades vary considerably in shape and size. Original *keris majapahit* blades are only six or seven inches long and must have been almost useless for fighting. Yet one would have thought that if they were used only as charms there must have been a still earlier *keris* of proper utilitarian value for their efficacy to be recognized.[...] the rapier-like *keris panjang* of Sumatra and the sword-like *keris sundang* of the Celebes, adaptations of the normal *keris* for special purposes, are sometimes over two feet long from handle to tip. If extremes like these are excluded the length of the normal *keris* blade may be taken as twelve to sixteen inches" (Hill, A.H. "Keris and other Malay Weapons" in *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume XXIX, part 4, 1956, (1970): p. 7-98. What Smail is rebelling against need not be read only as a rebellion against the colonialism and the impact of modernity in Malaya, but against many forms of oppression and enslavement. Sir Hugh Clifford's "Rival Systems and the Malay Peoples" in *The North American Review*, Vol. 177, No. 562 (Sept., 1903), pp. 399-409 sheds much light on the oppressive mechanisms inherent in the social and political organisation of the Malaya Sultanates.

[Camõens] sang the praises of empire building under the Banner of the Seven Castles his fellow countryman Tomé Pires had written in more objective vein:

[...] it is not a lie that they are so preposterous that they sometimes kill themselves with a kris if anything displeases them, and they sometimes kill their husbands; and it is custom in Java for a woman to be searched before she goes to her husband, for they carry secret crises. This is the custom among nobles.

Smail goes into a murderous rage with the *kris* – an act, a certainty, in Fauconnier's terms, that he describes thus:

Cette frénésie qu'on appelle amok, ne serait-ce pas la revanche, l'évasion dans la révolte d'une âme trop sensible à la suggestion, humiliée de se savoir esclave, et qui, à la fin, s'est contractée en elle-même, accumulant tant de forces qu'il suffit d'un prétexte futile pour que tout éclate? Cette frénésie n'est pas de la folie, c'est un délire lucide, qui sait utiliser toutes les ressources de la ruse. Smail a préparé son coup (Fauconnier, 1930:288). [The frenzy that is called *amok* may well be a revenge, a self-liberation through revolt; a soul too sensitive to suggestion, humiliated by its own conscious enslavement, at last turns upon itself, and accumulates so much energy that only the faintest pretext is needed to release it. What follows is not madness, it is a lucid frenzy that can utilise all the resources of guile. Smail had laid his plan (Sutton, 1931: 226-7).]

Here the East and the West come together in a sense, in that Smail's revolt, Fauconnier tells us, is lucid, has an internal logic. It is mysterious in that it is not a rational response to a given situation, but through the amok dénouement of the novel Fauconnier is acknowledging the effective slavery that the sensitive Smail has felt; *Malaisie* here ceases to be a mere tour de force of exoticist literature, but rather an engagement with the effects of the encounter of modernity on a Malay individual, on the Malay people. The impasse is complete. The rage that ensues is directed not at Europeans, but at Rajah Long and eventually we see Smail disappearing into the jungle, the "boundless" jungle, thus keeping alive the metaphor of the jungle as the locus of eternal mystery, of refuge. The enigmatic death scene at the end of the novel, the dream-like interplay between life and death is rendered understandable with the words:

Ne disait-il pas que nous ne tenons à la vie que par habitude, comme un chien attaché à sa niche, s'y attaché? (Fauconnier, 1930: 309). [Had he not himself said that we cling to our life from habit, just like a dog grows to love his kennel? (Sutton, 1931: 244).]⁷⁰

⁷⁰ This notion of life lived as a habit, out of fear of dying, is more expansively elaborated upon by many philosophers, inter alia by Carlo Michelstaedter (1887-1910) in *La Persuasione e la Rettorica*, Milano: Adelphi, 1982

The enigmatic ending of the novel illustrates an impasse, namely the affirmation of the unknowability of existence, its ineluctable unknowability. However, the unknowability does not diminish an enchantment with which the protagonists engage with their existence, even though their lives are at an impasse, even though the Western culture which they represent is at an impasse. The experience of existence in its immediacy would seem to be Fauconnier's way of deciphering existence. The mere fact that Fauconnier's world and his goals are not immediately discernible in a conventional mode renders the novel reflective of an impasse. The metaphor of a personal life and that of an entire civilisation is maintained in the dénouement as is the endowment of existence with an on-going mystery. The resolution Fauconnier finds is one in which fear of death is attenuated and diminished.

Malaisie thus represents an expanded awareness on an existential plain and represents a radical shift in consciousness *vis-à-vis* the other two novels under discussion, which hint at unknowability, but retain a belief in the comprehensibility of existence.

What Fauconnier has done in *Malaisie* is to grapple, as have myriad authors, with philosophical convictions in narrative form. His novel represents an attempt to come to terms with mystery and finds an absolute in unknowability, without relinquishing an ethical engagement with life. Similarly to Fauconnier, philosophers such as Ernest Gellner, Karl Popper as well as Nietzsche have also grappled with the limits of human mastery and systems that want to be totalising, that deprive existence of its spontaneity and immediacy. Gellner and Popper in particular challenge all-encompassing views of life that result in conformity inherent in systems of thought that lay claim to an absolute truth and in turn lead to political and social tyranny – as is particularly apparent in *Radetzky marsch* and *Gli occhiali d'oro*. Fauconnier represents a departure from the engagement with systems of thought and their social and political consequences and says at one stage in the *amok* chapter:

(1913). Fauconnier here is not being particularly original, but this sentence here also serves to underscore – in brief – a general philosophical conviction that pervades *Malaisie*.

Ah! Une fois dans la vie, se révolter contre tout ce qui est fort, organisé, auguste, contre les civilisations et les morales. Comme Smaïl. Ce serait beau, cela, ce serait amusant...(Fauconnier, 1930: 308). [Oh to revolt for once against power, against everything organised and imposing, against civilisation and morality! Like Smaïl. That would be exhilarating (Sutton, 1931: 243).]

Malaisie can thus be seen as an exposition of existence, as something to be explored in all its immediacy. But for brief spells, an enchantment with life eludes Carl Joseph in *Radetzky*; an enchantment for which defiance opens the door in *Gli occhiali d'oro*, but a re-enchantment which Fauconnier openly celebrates. The sense of doom is there in all three novels, but the open-endedness, the sense of infinite possibilities, without prescription, Western prescription, is most expansively expressed in *Malaisie*.

Thus one sees the notion of impasse further illustrated in *Malaisie*: the forms of conditioning that impede spiritual growth, as Bleicher interprets Emilio Betti, are evident in *Radetzky* and *Gli occhiali d'oro*, and in *Malaisie* one sees, among much else, a further level of impediment – just as the Westerners deem themselves aspiring to be liberated, or indeed liberated, the reader encounters another level of intrusion in the case of Smaïl's amok scene. The spiritual world of which Smaïl is a part enslaves him in a way that Lescale and Rolain will never fully grasp. The impasse of which Roth and Bassani's works are examples is an impasse that is historically and socially imposed. In Fauconnier's work there is the conscious notion of liberation from the arbitrariness of history's whims and social norms. These notions are undermined by the revelation of a Malay reality that is happily ignorant of the Westerner's concerns.

That said, all three novels aspire to something absolute that has an "ideal existence-in-itself" (Bleicher, 1980:28). The question thus arises is: how do each of the three novels arrive at a "value", and what is that "value"? How do each of the novels illustrate and arrive at "a consciousness with the help of a mental structure that transcends the empirical self and incorporates it into a higher cosmos"? (Bleicher, 1980: 28; Betti, 1955: 23).

The answer may lie in the fact that while the novels are Modernist, what one is in fact talking about is a process of secularisation. Or, to be more specific, the arrival at value, at spiritual

value, without recourse to anything obviously transcendent. While Modernism may be conveniently equated with secularisation, each of the novels represents a quest for an enduring sense of value. Part of the mechanism that each novel adopts is the stripping away of mendacity, the revelation of mendacity and the acknowledgement that the personal has a political dimension and vice versa. It is this aspect of impasse, i.e. the challenge to impasse that each novel represents, that will be explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV: THE PERSONAL AND THE POLITICAL – SECULARISATION, BETRAYAL AND MENDACITY IN *RADETZKYMARSCH*, *GLI OCCHIALI D’ORO* AND *MALAISIE*

This chapter will view the three novels under discussion from the perspective that each of the three novels represents a struggle with secularisation; each novel represents the attempt by the protagonists to fashion a world for themselves, an ethical universe which attenuates (or not, as the case may be) the sense of impasse that has given rise to the anguish that the protagonists face.

If one takes the word ‘impasse’ to retain its more conventional meaning, namely not to know where one is going, or “a place from which there is not outlet” (Chamber’s Etymological Dictionary, Edited by A.M. Macdonald, Edinburgh: 1956), then one can see how this applies – in varying degrees – to the three novels. What is significant is *how* the impasse is negotiated, and this entails taking cognisance of the various forms that the impasse takes – psychological, socio-historical and political. These factors have an obvious impact on the protagonists, and it is thus in their response to the impasse that the nature of the protagonists is revealed. What is also significant is the degree to which the protagonists are shown by the authors to be *aware* of the fact of their impasse. How do the authors use their protagonists to explore the impasse which they themselves perceive?

Aesthetically, as novelists the authors need to create a plausible setting: Roth sets himself up as a kind of forensic pathologist conducting an autopsy of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His novel is an attempt to identify the causes of the patient’s demise. His retrospective view is conditioned by the precarious situation he found himself in as a Jew and a democrat in a Europe during the ascendancy of Nazism. There is a sense of foreboding in his novel, rendered through the elaborate metaphor of the life of Carl Joseph. Demise suffuses the novel as the reader accompanies Carl Joseph in his agonising psychological odyssey towards self-awareness

and his own demise. We see how Carl Joseph is fatally ill-equipped by history and his social standing to be successful as a human being. The psychological fragility that Carl Joseph displays throughout the novel is a consequence of the historical and social context into which he was born. With *Radetzky*, as in *Gli occhiali d'oro*, there are specific historical indicators. In *Radetzky* frequent references are made to ethnic variety among the officer corps. The façade of unity was perpetuated by not only Carl Joseph's father, but also in the army itself. Frequent as well are the references to how empty the rituals are. All that Austria-Hungary had become was but a cosmetic exercise, the fractures in the body politic already evident in the very force that was supposed to symbolise unity, namely the military. The assassination of the heir to the throne is a most significant historical reference, in that it heralded the definitive demise of the empire and unleashed World War One.

Bassani makes more frequent use of historical indicators to anchor his novel: references to the assassination of Dollfuß⁷¹, the Austrian chancellor, the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and naturally the promulgation of the Race Laws in 1938. Added to this one also has Bassani's acute descriptions of Ferrara and of his characters, which help to transport the reader into his world.

In *Malaisie* the creation of a plausible setting relies on the author creating a familiarity with colonial Malaya for the reader – very much as both Roth and Bassani do in Austria-Hungary and Fascist Italy, respectively. With Fauconnier, however, the question arises as to the extent to which he adheres to an exoticist trope or not. While it has been established that Fauconnier uses Malaya to anchor his novel and give space for his philosophical reflections, Forsdick gives a perspective which applies to all three novels, inasmuch as they are 1930s novels, let alone Modernist.

If one were to take a diachronic approach to 1930s travel writing and attempt to situate it in a wider context of twentieth-century exoticism, the privileged status of this corpus of text is immediately apparent. It was produced in the decade leading up to the watershed of the Second World War and accordingly predates (whilst simultaneously heralding) the effects of post-war cultural shifts: the rapid modernization of France; the equally rapid decline of Empire; and the growing awareness of the changing nature and implications of travel. This decade represents,

⁷¹ Engelbert Dollfuß: (4 October 1892 – 25 July 1934), Austrian chancellor from 1932 until his assassination.

therefore, a key period before the rapid changes brought about by the war and by the effects of its aftermath – the principal among these being the sudden reconfiguration of relations between Europe and its others, particularly in the light of the severing of direct colonial links and the forging of new patterns of cultural interrelations that either undermined or refuted Western hegemony (Forsdick, C., “Sa(l)vaging Exoticism” in *Cultural Encounters – European Travel Writing in the 1930s*, 2002:31-32).

While, obviously, the aspects of travel writing do not pertain to Bassani and Roth, much else that Forsdick mentions above does. He also helps to contextualise *Malaisie*. Also, the sense of impasse that has been identified in all three novels takes on a peculiar, and indeed less obvious, appearance in *Malaisie*. It can be argued that the impasse in *Malaisie* is derived from the fact that Empire was nearing its demise in the 1930s in the Far East, as illustrated by the *amok* scene and the collapse of the jungle idyll. However, it is also true that the demise of Empire was not that obvious in the early 1930s, almost certainly not overtly so in Malaya as it had been in India, for example, by this stage. The “Europe fatigue” which pervades *Malaisie* does place the novel well within Forsdick’s purview, especially when he says:

The 1930s in particular have become a privileged moment for considerations of this [travel writing] body of texts, for this decade witnessed rapidly multiplied contact between Europe and elsewhere before the post-war collapse of colonial dependency. This contact resulted not only from new opportunities for travel and a new means of transferring information (like the radio), both of which favoured the emergence of fresh genres such as *reportage* and new literary characters such as Tintin; but also, – if travel writing is to be understood in a much wider sense as travel literature – from a crisis in European civilization which caused many intellectuals and authors to travel elsewhere. Such expansion and reassessment of the potential of the journey beyond the geographical boundaries of Europe occurred against the backdrop of a series of threats to the field of travel itself: the failure of the colonial system; growing intimations of the rise of globalization; and a vehement anti-exoticism which meant that a hitherto staple element of travel writing was undergoing radical change (Forsdick, 2002: 29-30).

This passage again helps to illustrate the extent to which *Malaisie* veers towards a kind of “Tintinesque” genre, except for the very salient fact that unlike Tintin, Fauconnier does not just travel to exotic destinations, as it were, he chooses to live in one, as an act of defiance, as an act of recuperation from the ills that Europe had inflicted on his main characters Rolain and Lescale. Pertinent to the discussion on Fauconnier is the following passage by Forsdick where he says:

Whereas in contemporary critical currency, the term [exoticism] has almost universally pejorative overtones and is restricted by its coupling to colonial discourse, close analysis reveals a need for more attenuated understandings which, avoiding pan-European generalizations, explore specific cultural traditions and not only encompass reflexivity but also propose a potential challenge to the reductive overtones implied above (Forsdick, 2002: 31).

Quite so indeed. This is exactly where Fauconnier provides a challenge, because he is not an exoticist for its own sake; his exoticism needs, as Forsdick suggests, an “attenuated” reading and Fauconnier does explore “specific cultural traditions” and is not merely being “reflexive”, to use Forsdick’s term. Fauconnier’s characters do engage with the local Malays; they are not there as mere witnesses to the shenanigans of the Europeans, although some have disputed this.

Malaysian critic Zawiah Yahya explores this very issue in her *Resisting Colonialist Discourse* and accuses both Somerset Maugham and Henri Fauconnier thus:

“[...] both writers had dealt with a very narrow segment of Malayan life – Maugham, the visitor concerned with the British in their clubs and bungalows; Fouconnier [sic], the French planter’s assistant turning Malays into Rousseau-style noble savages” (*Books and Bookmen*, XI: 1965: 80), Yahya, Z. *Resisting Colonialist Discourse*, 2003: 162).

Yahya goes on to accuse Burgess of being as guilty as Maugham of being “blinded by grandiose illusions of British supremacy”, referring to Somerset Maugham as follows: “illusions of British supremacy that Somerset Maugham, looking out of his bungalow window at the vast rubber plantations, had taken as a matter of course” (Yahya, 2003: 162). One may take issue with Yahya on this, as her view of Somerset Maugham is somewhat reductive, but she raises an important point, albeit tinged with tendentiousness. The question that arises is whether Fauconnier is guilty of the same assumptions that she attributes to Burgess and Maugham. One would aver not to the same degree, as Malaya seems to have had a more of spiritual-philosophical function for him, as previously stated, convinced as Fauconnier was of the “invalidity” of Europe. Fauconnier’s characters are recovering from the anguish that Europe had inflicted on them. Fauconnier may subliminally take European supremacy as a given, but not overtly, as Yahya says of Maugham and Burgess. The use to which Fauconnier puts Malaya is largely personal, as he sees it as a place of recuperation from Europe, of being able to start life

anew on a clean slate. In Yahya's terms, it would still be the colonialist's gaze, but bearing in mind Fauconnier's evocative descriptions of Malaya and its jungles and people, one can see that Fauconnier's characters seek solace in the proverbial "other" that Malaya represents; they are not there to parade their "superiority". The European impasse with itself which characterises the novels of Roth and Bassani, is the very same impasse that Fauconnier's characters seem to have avoided by exploring their individuality in relatively unbridled a fashion in Malaya. In this sense they have escaped the European impasse, unaware though Fauconnier's characters inevitably are of the demise of the colonial enterprise that was to come in the wake of World War Two, to which Forsdick refers.

The dénouement in *Radetzky marsch* is slow and consistent; in *Gli occhiali d'oro* it is accompanied by a realisation of choice, of the realisation of an ethical stance. In both these novels one is dealing with an *Auseinandersetzung* with the authors' respective societies and the historical moment. In *Malaisie* it is also a "coming to terms with" Europe, but at a distance; it's not only a reaction against the immediacy of Malay society or the British colonial planter society, but a fraught attempt at emancipation from Europe's ills, and an attempt at an essentialist view of the world, an attempt at living a "dehistoricised" life. This is of course in marked contrast to the other two novels, which are suffused with an historical awareness. But it is the very attempt at dehistoricisation that reveals an acute historical awareness, of a continuity which has proven itself to the characters to be treacherous, mendacious, and hence the striving in Fauconnier's novel for the essential, for that which is not mendacious. *Malaisie* is in turn a search for a truth that is arrived at through secular means, while giving full vent to elements that are not rational – irrationality arrived at by rational means.

In broad terms, the premise upon which the present chapter is based is that ever since Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 1781) – from which time some scholars would say modernity began – Western man has had to grapple with finding an alternative to an ecclesiastic, or a Bible-based, ethical system. If one takes the Latin origin of the word 'modern' then one has *modernus* – *modo* (according to the Chambers Etymological Dictionary) meaning "just now", the ablative of *modus*. That said, one has to recognise that modernity took on

different forms in the different spheres of life and at different stages of Western self-awareness. Niccolò Machiavelli is deemed to be the father modern politics in that he does not refer to anything transcendent in his appraisal of the way societies organise themselves politically, but rather to as things are, so to speak. The critic Marshall Berman (1982:17) makes the point that modernity can be traced back to the 18th-century French Enlightenment, and bringing his notion up to date, i.e. to our times, Berman says something that has a particular resonance for Roth, Bassani and Fauconnier: “we find ourselves in the midst of a modern age that has lost touch with the roots of its own modernity” (Berman, 1982:17). Berman points out that it was Rousseau who first coined the word “moderniste”; Kant gives a rigour to the Enlightenment in his critique of rationalism and empiricism, both of which he feels give a one-sided view of human knowledge, according to Stephen Körner⁷², Gellner’s reading of Kant is more closely related to the texts under discussion, and in particular to Roth and Bassani:

So the Cartesian twist in philosophy inevitably led to the solitude of what Kant called the Transcendental Ego. The social mobility of a market society and the partial, incomplete dissolution of a system of ranks, which emancipates those who had previously been pariahs but does not allow them to feel at home in their new world, leads to the solitude of the Viennese Jew. What happens when the Transcendental Ego is a Viennese Jew, or a Viennese Jew is the Transcendental Ego? (Gellner, 1998: 45).

Gellner here is referring to the core of secularisation and the innate modernist dilemma of finding a compass when, as Berman says, the roots of modernity are no longer discernible. That modernity and secularisation are closely linked is obvious. Modernity was accompanied by secularisation in the political and social spheres, accompanied by seismic changes in the economic and technological spheres, all of which led to a profound realignment of the way Western man began to view himself and his world.

The three novels reveal themselves – through the way they address the moral impasse – as being symptomatic of their specific time in history, of the specific impasse in history. The novels have a pertinence to our present age, despite the fact that the external features

⁷² Körner, Stephen in *The Concise Encyclopedia of Western Philosophy and Philosophers*, Edited by J.O. Urmsion, London: Hutchinson, 1976, pp. 145-152.

(political hegemonies and social structures and mores in which they were written) have changed radically since they were written.

To arrive at a workable definition of secularism, one has to turn to Kant's articulation of the role of Reason in arriving at a secular morality and why this represents a watershed in Western thought. The question of when the modern era started is obviously a vexed one. For some scholars modernity can even be traced back to before the Renaissance, with the secularism found in Dante (Erich Auerbach, *Dante: Poet of the Secular World*, for example). If one views the rise of the British Empire as having ushered in the modern world, as some scholars do, then Frank McLynn's *1759 – The Year Britain Became Master of the World* is a significant text, among many similarly conceived studies. Others again would see that in the realm of science Galileo Galilei, Copernicus and others can be viewed as having laid the foundations for humanity to come to terms with a world without the solace of some transcendent view of life. William Connelly's unravelling of Kant's views encapsulates Kant's ideas on the need for this exploration:

[...] most contemporary secularists attempt to secure the Kantian effect by Kantian and/or non-Kantian means. This implicates them in [...] (a) the intrusion of ecclesiastical theology into public life; (b) the academic and public legitimacy of non-theistic, non-Kantian philosophies; (c) the exploration of the visceral register of thinking and intersubjectivity; (d) the admiration of creativity in thinking; (e) the related appreciation of the politics of becoming by which the new comes into being from below the operative register of justice and representational discourse; and (f) the productive involvement with experimental practices of micropolitics and self-artistry. These interceded interventions are pursued in the name of protecting the authority of deliberative argument in the secular and public sphere, that is of securing the Kantian effect (Connelly, 1999: 33).

This, what Connelly calls the "Kantian effect", has many implications for the analysis of the novels in terms of the extent to which they reflect and are symptomatic of a fraught process of secularisation. Kant refers at various points in *The Critique of Pure Reason* to the inclination towards experiencing "happiness" under the various conditions under which he deems this possible, for example in Chapter II of the *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*. While it is predictable to want to coalesce modernity with secularisation, one could define the interaction between the two as modernity being the way the world comes to terms with

secularisation. Secularisation has been accompanied by the effects and consequences of the emancipation from ecclesiastical thinking, the demise of transcendental thought and the persistent residue of the latter in political and social institutions.

In each of the three novels one is dealing with the political and social implications of secularisation and/or a response to secularisation. Secularisation in the novels appears to lead to a non-uniform or indeed fractured response to moral and ethical questions. In other words, the protagonists are caught in a dilemma where they have to fashion the world they encounter in a way that allows them to attain some form of fulfilment, happiness, or some assertion of individuality in the world and the power that goes with that, let alone the ability to survive. Some of the protagonists have to find this sense of self in a world that militates against them. Carl Joseph fails to assert himself successfully, while the *io narrante* in *Gli occhiali d'oro* and Rolain and Lescale in *Malaisie* have found to some extent the ability to fashion a world through their own initiative, even though that triumph be temporary, or a mere reaction to the world. In *Gli occhiali d'oro* the *io narrante* navigates his way through a hostile world and what he achieves on an individual level is at most an awareness that the world around him is mendacious and treacherous, and that he has to adopt a stance against it. He adopts a stance, but he does not necessarily adapt to the world. His awareness and self-awareness alone augur well for him in that he strives to fulfil his human potential and to live in a world that reflects at least some of the ideals he holds dear. The events and personalities he encounters are grafted onto his consciousness, shaped as it is by his liberal, Jewish inheritance. While liberalism can presuppose a non-theistic view of the world, it need not necessarily exclude the ritual of religion. The fact of the protagonist's Jewishness acquires a significance because of the Race Laws. Jewishness also carries a social classification, that in Italian history is often associated with liberalism and its secularist *forma mentis*.⁷³

⁷³ Liberalism was of course at loggerheads with Fascism, and has a complex history with Fascism, one which lies beyond the scope of this study. It is helpful though to bear in mind that Fascism was, besides being a reaction against Bolshevism, also hostile to what it saw as the pusillanimous nature of Italian liberalism and parliamentary democracy and to the erstwhile liberal prime minister Giovanni Giolitti, who took Italy into World War One in

The portrayal of Carl Joseph in *Radetzky* shows us that Roth's intention was not merely to leave posterity an historical novel. The characterisation of Carl Joseph is too complex for *Radetzky* to be reduced to being an historical novel in the first-level meaning of the term. The secularisation that informs Bassani's novel, along with its rational, empirical sense of ethics, is in contrast with Carl Joseph's world which is oppressive in a manner that reflects his psychological vulnerability. Roth, unlike Bassani, largely divests his protagonist of a sense of awareness of his situation and hence his early demise and ostensibly fruitless existence. Carl Joseph's suffering comes across as almost unwitting, inured as he is to subjecting himself to the will of others, due no doubt to his rigid upbringing, devoid of any tenderness or choice. Carl Joseph's life is determined by the political exigencies of the Habsburg Empire; he is at the bottom of the higher echelons of that part of the society that depends for its existence on the maintenance of the precarious and fragile political order. The political has become personal; they are practically one and the same, with the attendant high cost in terms of the attainment of any kind of self-fulfilment.

In the context of the Habsburg Empire, secularisation was a particularly fraught process because the political and social structures hailed from a pre-industrial age, while the beginnings of an industrial age and the nationalist pressures were on the rise and eroding the political edifice which for the greater part of the 19th century (since 1848) had been trying to extinguish the revolutionary fires that sprang up at regular intervals – this over and above trying to defend its interests in the face of the newly formed German empire and the pressure cooker that was the Russian Empire. In Roth's novel the social and nationalist tensions are alluded to, form the background of the novel, albeit obliquely, as the different parts of the empire were at different stages of secularisation.

It is also in this regard that the Jews of the empire illustrate, encapsulate and crystallise the dilemma of the empire in that they adhere to a religion, i.e. they are non-secular, although the

1915. With liberalism's failure in the turbulent wake of World War One, Fascism can be viewed as having provided the only viable alternative to the collapse of the post-war Italian state.

urbanised Jews represent the high point of secularism with the liberal convictions that are associated with secularism.

In *Radetzky* a tension between pure secularism and the transcendental is evinced by Roth's oscillation between Judaism and Catholicism, i.e. a preoccupation with religion. Pondering this, Roth says the following in a letter to his friend, Stefan Zweig, a writer with whom he had an uncanny affinity:

Ich bin nicht mit Ihnen einverstanden, wenn Sie sagen, daß die Juden nicht an ein Jenseits glauben" (Roth, Zweig, 2011: 7). [I don't agree with you when you say the Jews don't believe in a hereafter (author's translation).]

In the Habsburg Empire the Jews are not viewed as a nation (albeit true that Theodor Herzl, the founder of Zionism, was a Budapest Jew, and it is significant that Zionism emerged from the Habsburg milieu), not geographically circumscribed and therefore at odds with the anti-liberal, anti-Habsburg forces arrayed against the establishment. Gellner articulates this dilemma most aptly in a chapter from *Language and Solitude* aptly entitled "Crisis in Kakania" (a term taken from Musil) by saying:

The pariah-liberals had little hope from the irredentist nationalists and their return to the village green, and the fetishism of the peasant culture from which they themselves were inevitably excluded. A few determined pariahs might be accepted into the pseudo-*Gemeinschaft* of the Ruritarians, but when the newly independent kingdom of Ruritania (a bit later, the Socialist People's Republic of Ruritania, and a bit later still, the Federal Republic of Ruritania) proclaimed and above all practised the principle of Ruritania for the Ruritarians, the prospect for the average pariah was none too bright.

If only the Empire could be maintained, things would be different. The Empire had lost its erstwhile religious zeal, in fact it hardly took its religion very seriously any longer, and, instead, was addicted to a national style of *Gemütlichkeit*, *Schlamperei* und *Schweinerei* [literally 'geniality, slovenliness and like a pigsty'.] No danger there. And the Empire had at most only rather loose links to any one ethnic group, even though the monarch might prefer one language over others; he was not fanatical about it.

The Empire failed to satisfy the ethnics. It wasn't so much that it was rigid and unwilling to accommodate itself to their requirements: on the contrary, many of them did exceedingly well. It was rather that, given the complexity of the ethnic map, and the distribution of the ethnic groups both on the map and in the social structure, there was simply no way of satisfying them all (Gellner, 1998: 33-34).

It is in this context that Carl Joseph has to navigate his way, find meaning, in an environment imbued with cynical resignation and of frustrated ideals. Secularisation comes across as what one might call a default position, rather thoughtlessly arrived at, determined by the intractability of the socio-political context. This is the fraught nature of secularisation as illustrated in *Radetzkmarsch* also in that the Habsburg enterprise is at odds with a secularising world in that it was a political system that had as its very *raison d'être* the notion of the emperor being the defender of the faith. As Gellner points out above, religion was a ritualised adjunct to life. This myth of the emperor as the defender of the faith is perpetuated for political reasons, for social reasons, but it is the almost mythical status that the emperor enjoys and which Carl Joseph has been imbued with since childhood. Carl Joseph is left having to experience this contradiction and sacrifice his life for this idea, for a moment in history when the contradictions of the foundations of the Habsburg Empire prove themselves unsustainable with the advent of the First World War. The contradiction – i.e. between Carl Joseph and the world in which he finds himself – cannot be sustained when what Malcolm Spencer calls the “disorienting vortex of modernity”⁷⁴ begins to impinge on Carl Joseph’s psyche – with modernity’s conflicting claimants to legitimacy, namely socialism, nationalism and the liberalism of the empire forming part of his experience of the world.

It is important to remember that the characterisation of Carl Joseph is primarily a reflection of the impasse in which Roth finds himself. In a letter to Zweig, dated 8 April 1933, Roth writes the following:

Aber es ist ganz finster – in der Welt und auch für uns, Individuen.

Wir haben Alle die Welt Überschätzt: selbst ich, der ich zum absoluten Pessimist gehöre.

Die Welt ist sehr, sehr dumm, bestialisch. Ein Ochsenstall ist klüger.

Alles: Humanität, Zivilisation, Europa, selbst der Katholizismus: ein Ochsenstall ist noch klüger (Roth-Zweig, 2011: 101) [But it is all quite gloomy – in the world, and also for us, individuals. The world is very, very stupid, bestial. A cowshed is cleverer.

⁷⁴ See Spencer, Malcolm, *In the Shadow of Empire – Austrian Experiences of Modernity in the writings of Musil, Roth and Bachmann*, Rochester, New York: Camden, 2008, p. 48.

Everything: humanity, civilisation, Europe, even the Catholic church: a cowshed is still cleverer (author's translation).]

In the same letter Roth expresses his yearning for the Habsburgs thus:

Ich bin ein alter österreichischer Offizier. Ich liebe Österreich. Ich halte es für feige, jetzt nicht zu sagen, daß es Zeit ist, sich nach den Habsburgern zu sehnen.

Ich will die Monarchie wieder haben und ich will es sagen (Roth-Zweig, 2011: 102). [I am an erstwhile Austrian officer. I love Austria. I think it's cowardly not to say that it is time to yearn for the Habsburgs.

I want the monarchy and I want to say it (author's translation).]

Even though these letters were written after the publication of *Radetzkymarsch*, they revisit many of the themes intrinsic to the novel.

Earlier, in a letter dated mid-February, 1933, weeks after Hitler came to power, Roth's pessimism, his perception of impasse, is declared to Zweig, as follows:

Inzwischen wird es Ihnen klar sein, daß wir großen Katastrophen zutreiben. Abgesehen von den privaten – unsere literarische und materielle Existenz ist ja vernichtet – führt das Ganze zum neuen Krieg. Ich gebe keinen Heller mehr für unser Leben. Es ist gelungen, die Barbarei regieren zu lassen. Machen Sie sich keine Illusionen. Die Hölle regiert (Roth-Zweig, 2011: 91). [In the meantime it will have become clear to you that we are drifting towards huge catastrophes. Besides the private sphere – our literary and material existence has of course been destroyed – everything is leading to a new war. I don't give a farthing more for our lives. Barbarism has succeeded in being allowed to rule. Have no illusions. Hell is in charge (author's translation).]

To Roth it would seem that the rise of secularisation is inevitably equated with a rise in despair, in barbarism, and refuge is sought in nostalgia and also expressed in the vocabulary he uses, such as the word *Hölle*, above. The world as he finds it is a Hell, and he extrapolates his personal experience of life into the wider socio-political impasse that is his 1930s Europe. The unattainability of a yearned for *Geborgenheit*, a psychological safe haven, seems to have been the driving force behind so much of his writing, alternated often with sheer rage at the world. Roth's search is one for certainty, for hope, while being fully aware of the impossibility of attaining it. This is his impasse, historical, social and political, and an impasse that has become so internalised as to completely determine his psychological response to the world. His

character reflects this anguish, as Brandscome notes in “Symbolik in *Radetzky*” (Brandscome, 1996: 96-110) referred to earlier.

That the notion of secularism is grafted on the Judeo-Christian tradition is obvious, being *inter alia* a reaction against the political hegemony of an ecclesiastic tradition. What one is seeking is essentially an ethical stance on the part of the protagonists in the novels that would point to a way of overcoming impasse, or where the protagonists reveal themselves to be the hapless victims of impasse.

The character of Fadigati in *Gli occhiali d'oro* represents the ultimate victim of impasse, and is highly significant in that he presents the portrayal of the *io narrante* with a counterfoil. Fadigati succumbs to the impasse, he lives his doom; indeed his behaviour exacerbates it in what one could describe as a self-destructive, self-inflicted drive towards his doom, reflecting the doom, the impasse that the passage of the Race Laws heralded. The parallels between the *io narrante* and Fadigati are sustained throughout Bassani's novel, until the crucial moment in the dénouement of the novel, when the *io narrante* decides, aware as he is of the parallels in their destinies, not to follow Fadigati in his resignation to doom, nor to be overcome by the inherent impasse in their respective situations.

But before starting to unravel Connelly's far-reaching assertions earlier in this chapter, and his “Kantian effect”, we see that Connelly also draws on John Caputo's synthesis of Nietzsche's *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. While Connelly does not fully agree with Caputo's reading of Nietzsche, some salient points emerge that also provide a workable paradigm with which to approach Roth, Bassani and Fauconnier's works. The extent to which the personal slips into the political, as Roth himself notes in the quoted letter to Zweig, and vice versa, is a central concern of this chapter, and Caputo's analysis traces some of the essential elements one can identify in Bassani, for example, especially as it relates to impasse.

A central notion that Caputo refers to, drawing on Nietzsche, is the significance given to suffering and what Connelly terms “suffering secularism”. This term “suffering secularism” can

be read as the awareness on the part of the individual that there is no consolation for one's suffering, one's impasse, other than that which the individual conjures up for himself or herself.

For some of the most difficult cases arise when people suffer from injuries imposed by institutionalised identities, principles, and cultural understandings; when those who suffer are not entirely helpless but are defined as threatening, contagious, or dangerous to the self-assurance of hegemonic constituencies; and then the sufferers honour *sources* of ethics inconsonant or disturbing to these constituencies. And this suffering, too, invades the flesh. It engenders fatigue; makes people perish; it drives them over the edge. To simplify obligation in a political era of pessimism, Caputo has quietly emptied ethics of its political dimension (Connelly, 1999: 50-51, quoted from Caputo, 1993: 158).

One notes that Caputo gives a central authority to the notion of suffering; for him it is a given. If one accepts his definition, it is clear to see that his paradigm is applicable to the characters in *Gli occhiali d'oro*, and in *Radetzky*, and even to *Malaisie's* protagonists. Central to all three novels is the notion of destiny, which dovetails with the notion of suffering. Suffering itself, along with national identities, is bound together in that national identities are often a response to perceived past sufferings and are forged thereby. The same could be said to be true of individual identities. This line of argument leads Connelly to place the emphasis on the notion of the "ethics of becoming" and the "historical becoming of secularisation" (Connelly, 1999: 70). In other words, he places the emphasis on the idea that ethical truth is not static, but rather that it is a process of becoming, or what he terms the "*ethical* tension between being and becoming" (Connelly, 1999: 71). This idea implies destiny, and so too the awareness of destiny.

Returning to the quotation above, and Connelly's reference to "injuries imposed by institutionalised identities", one sees how the socio-historical and political circumstances of the protagonists in each of the novels, (in other words their respective destinies) shape and determine the choices they make. The way the protagonists respond to these circumstances – their destinies – is what engages each of the three authors. Each of the characters is forced into a situation of having to respond, and each response has an ethical dimension.

One could therefore say that Carl Joseph fails to respond adequately to his destiny, to the demands of his time in history. But at the same time Roth gives the reader an elaborately

discursive description as to why and how Carl Joseph was the hapless victim of his station in life, with its demands that ran against Carl Joseph's nature. Peter Branscombe in his article "Symbolik in *Radetzkmarsch*",⁷⁵ points out that Roth draws an analogy between the assassination of the Crown Prince as the harbinger of disaster that the assassination turned out to be, and Carl Joseph's death (much as Bassani's portrayal of Fadigati is a harbinger of disaster, as mentioned above). Just as the crown prince Ferdinand's death in Sarajevo heralded the death of the Austro-Hungarian empire, so too Carl Joseph's death brought to an end the Von Trotta line, recently ennobled, the very existence of which was unsuited to the demands of the socio-political realities of the Habsburg Empire. This was Carl Joseph's destiny, which he could not fight. Carl Joseph, in other words, succumbs to his destiny, victim as he is of the "injuries imposed by institutionalised identities".

Bassani does not allow his *io narrante* the same fate. Fascist Italy also had "institutionalised identities" and the passage of the 1938 Race Laws was a brutal manifestation of this, along with the attendant anti-Semitic campaign. Bassani's *io narrante* in *Gli occhiali d'oro* is *consciously* at odds with his environment, because his Italianness, his suitability to being Italian, his right to be considered an Italian – and simply to be – are all called into question by the Race Laws. For his ethical survival he draws on the liberal traditions of his home, but can the liberal ethos transcend the very immediate sense of exclusion and danger he feels? If, as Connelly points out "[...] nationhood is founded on shared memories of sacrifice and common will in the present..." (Connelly, 1999: 75), then is Bassani's protagonist a Jew or an Italian? This question is posed in the novel. The political has become personal, and the personal political. The individual cannot stand outside the political discourse of his time. While Roth purposefully creates a protagonist who is unaware, and merely suffers, Bassani's protagonist is aware that he is suffering, and does not accept the conditions that have imposed that suffering. The awareness that one is suffering is an awareness of the conditions of one's life and the extent to which it falls short of

⁷⁵ Branscombe, Peter. "Symbolik in Redetzkmarsch." *Joseph Roth – Der Sieg über die Zeit: Londoner Symposium*, Stillmark, Alexander, (ed)., Stuttgart: Verlag Hans-Dieter Heinz Akademischer Verlag, 1996: 96-110.

an ideal; the corollary of this is to *question* what the causes are of this suffering, and what the premises are upon which the cause of suffering is based.

In *Gli occhiali d'oro* the causes are primarily the way Ferrarese society sees itself, and its adherence to a political system, Fascism, which the author finds inimical to the fulfilment of the self, over and above the fact that Fascism had seemingly arbitrarily adopted anti-Semitism as national policy. One can also argue that Bassani's attitude was determined by the anti-Semitism which, in turn, caused him to question the values of Ferrarese society. He realised that once the Race Laws were passed, he could no longer be passive, unlike Fadigati. Fadigati has resigned himself to his fate, to the notion of destiny; the *io narrante* does not. He sees in Fadigati the option of becoming a victim and drowning in the quagmire of self-pity, of allowing a sense of victimhood to dominate his choices. Fadigati is the *io narrante's* counterfoil, and Bassani juxtaposes the two figures – it would seem – for that very reason, namely to illustrate the aspect of choice, of the individual taking responsibility for what happens to him. Bassani is not denying the aspect of destiny, but nor does he allow his younger protagonist to succumb to destiny either. While it is true that Fadigati, in the novel, does not have any support mechanism, unlike the Jews who form a strong and visible community, it is also true that many Jews did nothing to avoid their fate at the hands of the *Nazifascisti*. Obviously, Bassani had the wisdom of hindsight and does not completely condemn his fellow Jews. However, as is clear from the tense relationship between the son and the father – which is taken further in *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* which also has an *io narrante* – that a generational battle ensues, where the son admonishes the father for being complacent and for having made a fatal compromise with the Fascists, to the point of his being a card-carrying member of the party. Fadigati's tragedy, on the other hand, is more intimate, more irreversible, be it because he is older and cannot make a change in his life, or be it because his life was in any event embedded in the bourgeois norms of Ferrarese society, yet all the while he was a living betrayal of those very same norms by the mere fact of his homosexuality. Bassani, having written of the events described in *Gli occhiali d'oro*, relies on a detailed re-evocation of the past. He does not feel implicated in the past, a past he had no choice but to experience. It is clear – *inter alia* – from

the encounter with Nino Bottechiari, his friend who joins the Fascists – that Bassani himself could not associate with the Fascists, and this distinguishes him from another contemporary Curzio Malaparte, author of *La Pelle*, (*The Skin*) and *Kaputt*, amongst other important works of Italian war-time and post-war literature, who in the words of Charles Burdett used memory as “a means of assuming a series of identities which absolve the writer from any responsibility” (Burdett, Charles, 1999: 113). One can see from looking at Malaparte, for example, how fraught the context was into which Bassani’s novels entered. Bassani could have relied on the assumption that as a Jew he was *ipso facto* absolved of responsibility for the excesses of Fascism or for being an “also ran”. However, it is clear from the generational conflict and the documented evidence, especially concerning Ferrara, how many Jews were Fascists. It also opens the question whether – with the stance that Bassani adopts by the end of the 1950s when *Gli occhiali d’oro* appeared – he was writing primarily as an Italian, or a Jew. Who is betraying whom? Where does the mendacity lie? By being loyal to his Jewish roots, was Bassani in effect betraying his patriotism as an Italian? By claiming his innate Italianness, would Bassani have been disloyal to his Jewishness? This was the dilemma that Fascism had placed him in, and which, as an Italian, he addresses in *Gli occhiali d’oro*. Being a Jew as well as an Italian (and a former partisan) gave Bassani the moral high-ground, as it were, when *Gli occhiali d’oro* appeared in 1958. His juxtaposition of the *io narrante* with Fadigati, remains, however, a literary device that serves to make the moral high-ground Bassani adopts less obvious, while camouflaging the moralistic or even judgmental tone that filters through the novel. At the same time, Bassani implicitly condemns the self-righteous attitude of the Ferraresi. The cause of suffering in Bassani’s novel is Fascism, which in turn relies for its existence on the avidity, opportunism and moral vacuousness of its supporters: Fascism appeals to their short-term self-interest, not to their sense of right and wrong; expediency takes the ascendant over principle.

He puts this questioning in the words and actions of his *io narrante*, and in Fadigati; Fauconnier puts this question of the cause of suffering in the words of his two protagonists Rolain and Lescale, while Roth does this by using the third-person narrator.

If, as Connelly suggests, “nationhood is founded on shared memories of sacrifice and common will in the present”, then the Austro-Hungarian Empire presents a problem, because the Habsburg Empire consisted of a number of “nations” or ethnic minorities, and the idea of nation was a very contested one in that it challenged the empire in every sphere of life. If one takes as a given that, among many other definitions, the Habsburg Empire was regarded as a political entity held together by an idea, then that idea poses a series of problems as far as the main protagonist, Carl Joseph, is concerned. He lives the conflict of the political impasse that the Habsburg Empire was, namely a highly contested and precarious political arrangement that was deemed necessary for the balance of power in Europe, and an entity that had dominated Europe since 1618. In Carl Joseph’s very make-up – as the descendant of Slovenian peasants – he was expected to uphold the rituals and norms of a German-speaking nobility. Where Bassani’s *io narrante* in *Gli occhiali d’oro* is a Jew in 1938 Fascist Italy, i.e. an outsider, so too Carl Joseph is an outsider, ill-equipped to deal with the demands of his family’s recent ennoblement. His father, the *Bezirkshauptmann*, with all the zeal of a convert, embraces the role of being a district officer, and emulates the Kaiser where and when he can. Ritual becomes the substance of an empire based on appearances, hence devoid of substance of meaning. In this way then too Roth’s novel is among many dealing with the Austro-Hungarian epoch that conform to the following definition:

These frequently metaphoric and always rhetorical conclusions of the tragic-elegiac narratives represented the last steps in the formation of the collective memory. This fusion of emotion and worldview should have been the beginning of the activation of the arena of collective memory and thus the texts should have indirectly affected the public life of post-1920 Austria and the view of history acceptable to society. As we know, however, the great majority of Austrians after the war [i.e. The First World War] was looking forward to the Anschluss and was not willing to look back to the k.u.k. era (Romsics, 2006: 48)⁷⁶.

⁷⁶ Romsics, Gergely, *Myth and Remembrance – The Dissolution of the Habsburg Empire in the Memoir Literature of the Austro-Hungarian Political Elite*, Budapest, New York: Center for Hungarian Studies and Publications Inc., Institute of Habsburg History, 2006. Romsics makes a contestable and a problematical statement here in assuming that most Austrians after 1920 were in favour of the *Anschluss*. Evidence may suggest many Austrians were in favour thereof, at a later stage, but Romsics is looking back at history with hindsight, in that in 1920s Austria, who could have foreseen the 1938 *Anschluss* with Nazi Germany? Even though the undercurrents might have been there, there were too many major intervening events to make this point entirely plausible. That said, Romsics’s assertion in his study is a comment on the attitudes of a certain sector or class of society, and inasmuch as Hungary

There is the view that the *Bezirkshauptmann* and Carl Joseph are symbolic representations of the empire:

Es ist ein etablierter Gemeinplatz der Forschung zum *Radetzkmarsch*, darauf hinzuweisen, wie sehr der Bezirkshauptmann Franz von Trotta sein Aussehen und Verhalten dem seines Kaisers anpaßt. [...] Auch einige andere Eigenschaften teilt Carl Joseph mit dem Kronprinzen: er ist zum Leidwesen seines Vaters kein guter Reiter (Margetts, John, 1996: 82.) [It is an commonplace observation norm in the research on *Radetzkmarsch* to point out how much the Bezirkshauptmann Franz von Trotta models his appearance and behaviour on that of the Emperor. Carl Joseph also shares other characteristics with the Crown Prince: to the chagrin of his father he is not a good horseman (author's translation).]

What Margetts points out here illustrates the profound betrayal that Carl Joseph experiences and underscores the degree to which he was left powerless in the face of the overwhelming, indeed crushing expectations that were foisted on the young man to conform to a hegemonic

was often blamed for the dissolution of the Empire, Romsics goes to great lengths to examine the complexity of the dissolution of the Empire and examines too the contradictory strands of thought that pervaded narratives trying to come to terms with the shock of the end of the political entity and the *faux* or otherwise, stability that the Habsburg Empire represented. The phenomenon of the Habsburg Empire calls into question the very idea of nation, and the function and desirability of nationhood, when considering the instability that nationalism brought in the wake of its dissolution; that there was nostalgia, as we see in Roth, is understandable in that an element of stability and continuity had disappeared from the map of Europe, to be replaced by various nationalisms unbridled in their ambitions. What is valuable in Romsics's study is that as a historiographical work *Myth and Remembrance* sheds light on the fraught nature of the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire, and the discussion around it, and that each of the nations within the empire experienced dissolution differently. Citing various causes for the break-up of the empire, not least of which was the First World War itself, Romsics also airs the flawed diplomatic and military handling of the crisis which ensued not only after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo on 28 July 1914 but also at the end of the First World War. Hungary's role as representing the other major ethnic group besides the Austro-Germans in the empire is also discussed, the view often being held, especially by Czechs and Poles, and socialists, that the Habsburg Empire, or the Dual Monarchy which had existed since 1867, was an arrangement which essentially suited only the elites of Austrian and Magyar society. In various passages in *Radetzkmarsch* reference is made to the strident attitude of the Hungarian officers, who represented a Hungary that enjoyed all the benefits of the Dual Monarchy, but were also extremely nationalist and were viewed as oppressors of the minorities and the lower classes inhabiting their lands. With this presumed Hungarian "double agenda", the Hungarians were viewed by some writers as the cause for the demise of the Habsburg Empire because of the tensions they fostered. It is to be remembered that the Jews, straddling the various ethnic group and class structures of the empire, were thus viewed with suspicion, also because they were not geographically confined to specific areas of the empire, and some sources suggest that the rapid rise of middle-class Jews stifled the natural and gradual social upliftment of ethnic Magyars. Joseph Roth's oscillation between Judaism and Catholicism echoes too the dichotomy inherent in the empire between an overarching liberalism and nationalist sectarianism, or peculiarism. This dichotomy is well elucidated in Gellner's works, particularly his *Language and Solitude* (1998) referred to previously.

order that left little room for individuality, let alone aspirations of happiness. Carl Joseph is betrayed by the lie that rests at the foundations of the Habsburg enterprise. There is a logical link between betrayal and mendacity. Mendacity is symptomatic of betrayal, and indeed vice versa. What is worse, for Carl Joseph, he lives his life as an obligation; he is obliged to live a lie. As John Caputo says: "Obligation is [...] a matter of being claimed, in which something has a hold on us, something that is older than us, that has us before we have it" (Caputo, John, 1993: 31). And it is against this sense of obligation that Carl Joseph has to fight, except that he is not equipped either to conform fully, or to defy the obligation imposed on him by his society. And that society's history is a leaden weight. Carl Joseph lives his life in tortured, hovering frustration until Graf Chojnicki recognises his plight and gives him the chance to leave the military. Carl Joseph has been betrayed not only by the mendacity as such, but also betrays himself in that he cannot – until much later in the novel – recognise the mendacity for what it is. The lie of the Habsburg political edifice is echoed in his life, and therein lies Carl Joseph's tragedy, and Margetts clearly demonstrates the parallels in the situation of Carl Joseph and that of the empire itself. Carl Joseph is, like any character in any number of novels, caught between what is evil and noble, between what is good for him, as an individual, and what is bad for him. What Roth paints for the reader is a character of immeasurable misery, tempered by the fact that the character is not aware of how miserable his existence is. Or his awareness is blunted by excessive drinking and illusory love. As Caputo says: "We are not 'beyond' (*jenseits*) Good and Evil, but stuck in between (*zwischen*) them, being unable to get as far as either one" (Caputo, 1993: 33). While Caputo questions – not unique in itself – the premises upon which people ascertain what is good and bad, what he says helps to a degree in assessing Carl Joseph's dilemma, and indeed the dilemma of all the characters in each of the three novels under discussion. In Caputo's terms, Carl Joseph cannot but be compromised because the political edifice of which he is a part – not through his own choice – compromises him fatally and this is his undoing: one cannot be good when all around you is bad and nefarious, or so the argument would go. The question that arises is: can the individual in some way transcend the precepts of his or her society to arrive at a sense of right and wrong or self-worth, or indeed simply a sense of self, that is not entirely determined by society or wrought in reaction to society? Even a

reaction to society can be deemed more worthy than simple conformity for survival's sake, as would be the case with Carl Joseph, who for the most part conforms, unquestioningly. In this sense he has an affinity with Fadigati in *Gli occhiali d'oro*, who conforms for survival's sake, but who like Carl Joseph, has to confront the fact that conformity can be fatal, when that conformity is pursued merely for the sake of a presumed survival and does not engage with the "emotional reality" of the individual. The reader of *Radetzkyarsch* knows that the emotional reality of Carl Joseph's life is one of perennial sadness, frustration and disillusionment. One knows this to be true to a large extent of Fadigati, who experiences betrayal by the society to which he conforms, when the truth of his "emotional reality" is exposed for all to see. Both Fadigati and Carl Joseph conform in a way, under duress, but are ultimately betrayed, not only by their respective societies, but also by their respective "emotional truths," by what they are, by their psychological make-up. The truth of their being has to be confronted, cannot be swept under the carpet indefinitely. While Carl Joseph is given a brief respite by his author, when he leaves the military, when he relinquishes the mendacity of the military, Fadigati, by contrast, has become a parody of himself, so isolated is he in his conformity to an indifferent society that he has compromised his very being; Bassani gives this character no respite, in that the character who might have given him respite, namely Deliliers, is predictably treacherous, as treacherous as the Fascist political order of which they are both a part. But the author Bassani reserves an element of philosophical respite for his *io narrante*. The *io narrante* does not conform and has to recognise the solitary nature of adhering to a set of values that are not those of the majority. In this regard his Jewishness becomes a moot point. The values were there, whether they be derived from his liberal Jewish upbringing or not, Bassani implies that a transcendent, or at least individualistic set of values operates in his *io narrante* who in effect represents a kind of narrative "escape hatch" from the doom of the prevailing Fascist order. Carl Joseph's portrayal is in marked contrast to that of the *io narrante* in *Gli occhiali d'oro* in which the omnipresence of "evil" (in Caputo's terms) does not inhibit the assertion of the self. Margetts's assertion below underscores Carl Joseph's hopelessness and his entrapment. Bassani's *io narrante* could also be entrapped, but that is a function Bassani reserves for Fadigati.

Er fühlt in sich eine permanente Angst. Die Unsicherheit, die Carl Joseph aufgrund seiner Kindheit und späteren Erziehung erlebt, führt bei ihm zu einem ständigen Gefühl der Schuld und der Angst, [...] Carl Joseph wird nicht wie Kronprinz Rudolf behaupten: “Es hat noch keine Frau gegeben, die mir widerstanden hätte.” Carl Joseph hat Probleme mit Frauen, aber er ist wie der Kronprinz ständig auf der Suche nach der verlorengegangenen Mutter – daher bei ihm das wiederkehrende Muster von Liebschaften mit mütterlichen Frauen. Allerdings, wenn er betrunken ist, ist er entschlossen, sich nicht zu verlieben (Margetts, 1996: 82-85). [He feels himself to be in a state of constant anxiety. The uncertainty that Carl Joseph experiences as a result of his childhood and later education, leads in his case to a constant feeling of guilt and fear [...] Carl Joseph will not, like Crown Prince Rudolf declare: “There has never been a woman who couldn’t resist me.” Carl Joseph does have problems with women, but like the Crown Prince he is constantly looking for a lost mother – hence the recurring pattern of love affairs with maternal women. To be sure, when he is drunk he is determined not to fall in love (translation author’s)]⁷⁷

Whether intentionally or not, and considering the psycho-sexual implications of Carl Joseph’s dilemma, it is worth noting that Vienna hosted a convention of the World League for Sexual Reform in 1930 and one of the delegates, Dr Felix Kanitz,

[...] questioned the pattern of adult domination over children and counselled solidarity. [...] He outlined three rights that children should enjoy. The first was the right not to be born until their parents (or their community) could secure their physical and cultural needs. Second, he demanded what was necessary to meet children’s developmental needs: “the *right* to nourishment, clothes, education, play and joy!” The final right of children he delineated was “the right of children to be taken seriously, which included their emotions, hopes, and fears. It was within the third category that Kanitz introduced the problem of sexual education for children. He argued that that the lack of trust between children and parents had painful results, for the child and for society at large:

This lack of serious consideration of children, this lack of attention to the child personality, bears the greatest responsibility for the wretched *sexual education* of the present day. (McEwen, Britta, 2012:187).⁷⁸

From this approach, contemporaneous to the writing of *Radetzkymarsch*, one can see, if nothing else, that all the elements that Kanitz referred to back in 1930 were distinctly absent in the portrayal Roth gives us of Carl Joseph’s upbringing, and therefore Margetts’s assertions

⁷⁷ John Margetts, “Die Vorstellung von Männlichkeit in Joseph Roth’s *Radetzkymarsch*”, in *Joseph Roth – Der Sieg über die Zeit: Londoner Symposium*, Alexander Stillmark (ed.): Stuttgart: Verlag Hans-Dieter Heinz Akademischer Verlag, 1996: 79 et seq.

⁷⁸ McEwan, Britta, *Sexual Knowledge – Feeling, Fact and Social Reform in Vienna, 1900-1934*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012.

regarding Carl Joseph's relationships seems well founded. Thus, sexual awareness, not to be conflated with any notion of happiness necessarily, or specifically the lack of sexual awareness, would seem to have a political dimension too in Roth's novel. When all subjects of a given socio-political order have to subsume themselves to a given hierarchy, sexual and/or psychological fulfilment can suffer. When the renowned psychologist, Wilhelm Reich spoke at the same WLSR convention in Vienna, "he claimed, fully 50 per cent of the men and 70 per cent of the women showed evidence of sexual neuroses", as pointed out in McEwan's study on matters sexual in Vienna from 1900-1934. However, lest one should equate sexual repression too readily with political repression, Reich also advocated at the same conference following of the example of the Soviet Union, where since the advent of communism, divorce and abortion had been legalised (McEwan, 2012: 186). It would, however, remain a cogent assumption that there can be a correlation between sexual neuroses and political authoritarianism, or instability (with authoritarianism often being a corollary to underlying political instability and vice versa). It is when Carl Joseph sheds the military, and with it any aspirations of domestic, uxorious bliss, that he experiences his short-lived happiness towards the end of the novel.

In this light, then, one could also assert that what Roth, more obviously, is engaging in is the yearning for a stability, for a return to a perceived stability. The instability which Carl Joseph represents is an instability echoed on the socio-historical level, an instability which he has internalised. Social stability varies (as Gellner emphasises (<http://www.dspace.cam.ac.uk/handle/1810/31290> video) with some societies being more stable than others, or are either stable or instable at different times. (This echoes Connelly's idea of societies "becoming", and an awareness of the world being an evolutionary process). Roth's *Radetzky* is unavoidably a reaction, in narrative form – against the consequent instability that arose after a period of would-be, *faux* stability, which the Habsburg Empire represents. Roth is clearly aware that even the period of would-be stability, i.e. before the First World War, was itself a precarious, illusory stability, which relied heavily on ritual to maintain its legitimacy, both social and political, and that this ritual belied the vacuousness of the Habsburg Empire.

This notion of stability, and more specifically the *assumption* of stability prior to the period of instability, is what *Radetzkymarsch* and, to some extent, Bassani implicitly explore.

4.1 Psychological impasse

Essentially what is at issue in all three writers' works is the extent to which each of the works represents a successful accommodation with the world as it is. While obviously this is a statement that needs elucidation, and returning to Viennese Modernism, one has to acknowledge the indisputable role of Sigmund Freud, inasmuch as he represents an attempt to provide a secularised way of coming to terms with the world, i.e. a system that is not religious or with any claims to transcendence.

One can examine each of the protagonists, five spread over all three novels, to see how they function as characters coming to terms with themselves and the world and their role in the world.

It has been established that Carl Joseph represents, along with Fadigati, the least "successful" – even though arguably the most honest and unmediated – of all the protagonists. By "successful" one is suggesting the ability to adapt to the demands of modernity, the moral and ethical demands of modernity.

Gellner addresses the problem of ethics, modernity and the role of psychology in the establishment of a secular morality:

The Freudian solution to the inverse-Platonic problem, to the eliciting of an ethic from our psychic nature in a naturalist age, has two incarnations: one doctrinal, theoretical, verbal, which doesn't matter too much (unless of course someone indulges in heresy); and the practical, applied, real one, which is the only one mediated concretely in the contact between guardian and analysand. Each of these concrete incarnations of the truth is individual and idiosyncratic, and adjusted to the special circumstances of the seeker after guidance. Hence there is no need for coherence from case to case. The ethical revelation is, in all its details, adjustable and adjusted to the requirements of each customer, and presumably each individual salesman.

Thus, and thus only, has Nietzsche's problem – how to extract a new ethic from nature, from a more realistic understanding of our psyche – been solved. The transvaluation of values, virtually unmarketable when Nietzsche first launched it upon the world in an impersonal and general form, is now made to measure for individual customers. Analysis is the bespoke transvaluation of values. The demand for it is brisk (Gellner, 2003:127).

Gellner here opens the discussion regarding the central question of modernity, and this relates wholly to the question of impasse. The impasse is not only a sense of doom regarding the impending catastrophe that the three authors, Roth, Bassani and Fauconnier, perceive. The impasse lies in the very nature of modern man, recently emerged from a transcendental or religious apprehension of the world, having to make the transition, to a new, even if often delusional or at best evanescent, morality or a reliable ethical system. This transition can be identified in all-encompassing systems of thought or ideologies, including communism, Fascism and various religions. As Macfarlane points out, in his analysis of Gellner's thinking in this regard, "openness is bought at the price of social and moral inconsistency," (Hall and Jarvie, 1996: 209), and therein lies another manifestation of impasse. If one wants an openness in society, free from "closed systems", a precariousness ensues, which not all individuals or societies are able to accommodate with an equal or comparable measure of success. The authors' protagonists could be said to be victims of this state of suspension between what is deemed transcendent – and its pre-established ethical framework – and what is not transcendent, and hence the need to carve out an ethical system – which – Gellner would call, as he does above, "from nature".

Gellner's biographer states that for Gellner:

The world needed to be understood, and our available options within it made plain, in order to allow to the best chances of human decency to prevail. The lack of this commitment in others could make him very irritable (Hall, 2010: 100).

The significance of this passage lies in the identification on the part of Hall, *in noce*, of a central tenet of Gellner's thinking that informs and inspires the bulk of his work and renders his goals most simply. And this is the criterion with which we can assess the authors in question. As mentioned earlier in this exploration, the question of human happiness, despite the naïve connotations that the term may have, is a central question as far as the three authors under

discussion are concerned. Reference had been made earlier to Kant in this regard as a measure in assessing the characters in the three novels and their respective milieux:

Happiness is the satisfaction of all our desires (**extensively**, in regard to their manifoldness; **intensively**, in regard to their degree, **and also protensively**, in regard to their duration). The practical law, derived from the motive of **happiness**, I call pragmatic (that is the rule of prudence); but the practical law, if there is such a law, which has no other motive but the **worthiness to be happy**, I call moral law (law of morality). The former advises us as to what we have to do if we wish to attain happiness; the latter dictates how we ought to conduct ourselves in order to become worthy of happiness. The former is founded on empirical principles, for I cannot know, except by experience, what desires there are which are to be satisfied, nor what the natural causes are which are capable of satisfying them. The latter takes no account of desires and the natural means of satisfying them, and regards only the freedom of a rational being in general and the natural means of satisfying them, and regards only the freedom of a rational being in general and the necessary conditions under which alone this freedom can harmonize with the distribution of happiness that is made in accordance with principles (Kant, 1781; *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. by Marcus Weigelt, based on the translation of Max Müller, 2007: 686).

It is clear from the above in Kant's delineation of what constitutes happiness that one has a measure according to which it is possible to assess the degree to which each of the main characters is able to fulfil the above criteria. This central question – inasmuch as the formal application of psychology (or religion for that matter) is associated with the quest for happiness or fulfilment – is entirely pertinent because it forms a basis upon which the five protagonists are in harmony with the world in which they find themselves.

To appreciate the resonance, of the idea of happiness and its application to the authors under discussion, one can turn to Gellner to see how he refashions some of Kant's ideas in a more modern context:

[...] It can be called the 'theory of dual citizenship'. Each and every one of us, as objects within nature, is subject to its laws; and at the same time, as moral and responsible agents, we are exempt from them and subject to a different set of self-imposed laws. Kant knew that the two visions were mutually incompatible, and thought that we were simply doomed to live with this bi-focal vision. All we could do was to understand its sources and learn to live with the resulting conceptual astigmatism. We could learn to live with this (once we understood the situation and its inescapability by reading his books): to expect to be positively comfortable with it would be asking too much (2003: 118).

Put more simply, what Gellner is saying, via Kant, is that mankind is caught between what it is and what it would like to be; whereas with religion or whatever other mechanism there be to try and unite these to opposites, reason has to be deployed to come to terms with what Gellner calls this “bifocal vision”. The same dualism we find amply expressed in Robert Musil’s *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß*, inter alia, where the adolescent is not satisfied with the way the world is presented to him and struggles to find a rational and fool-proof way of explaining to himself his being in this world. He is not satisfied with conventional explanations of how the individual works, how society works and how the individual fits into the world, and seeks solace in the purity of mathematics, i.e. in the application of Reason. All the while Törleß has to struggle with what he is psychologically and sensually – aspects of his being which defy cerebrally arrived at explanations. Gellner explains this dilemma as follows:

In a way, this was also one of the last great formulations of the beast/angel view of man, but formulated against the background of a naturalistic vision of the entire observable world, so that his world could contain only beasts (or machines, which in this context came to the same thing). The angel remained and was driven to the very edge of the world, or just beyond, and was made responsible for cognition and our sense of morality. The angel could never be directly observed, but could be inferred from the fact that certain beasts, namely ourselves, possess the twin (and for him, closely related) capacities for attaining knowledge and for feeling moral obligation). The angel was the necessary presupposition of knowledge and for feeling morality in the world. As such he was allowed to remain, but on condition that he was never visible in the world. We know him by his fruits, and *only* by his fruits. We can never meet him face to face. [...] The fact that we recognise and respect both of these, shows that the ghost-angel is operating within us (Gellner, 2003: 102).

Gellner’s elliptical and metaphorical approach to the problem of ethics and morality – and how this affects a sense of well-being – provides this analysis with a paradigm according to which one can assess the protagonists in the three novels; in other words, how do they each feature on the continuum of “angel” vs. “beast”. Put differently, are the protagonists in any way attuned and enabled to function in society, which construct Gellner calls “ever based on sustained cognitive growth”, or are they rooted too deeply in a naturalistic world? Whatever the case may be, each of the five characters is either forced to construct a new world, without the solace of transcendence, or is forced to find false solace. Gellner’s term – the “transvaluation of values” – shows how vast are the options open to the protagonists. Thus, the question arises: how “successful” are the protagonists in chiselling out a value system adequate

to the demands of the lives constructed for them by their authors, of the worlds they have to inhabit?

It is easy to see that Carl Joseph is less successful in recognising the duality, nor does he ever manage to assess his situation within the wider context in which he lives, except towards the end. But, neither does Carl Joseph become totally suicidal, although his foolhardy act that causes his death at the end of the novel poses that possibility. But he is killed by history and by his personal history – he does not literally bring about his death by his own hand.

Bassani's *io narrante* recognises that there is a duality within himself and the society of which he is a part, and the pronounced use of rationality in assessing the world around him – a rationality tempering a deeply emotional response to the world – testifies to this. Fauconnier's two characters behave as if they have found a resolution to the duality of the angel vs. the beast, and it remains a moot point whether they have found the resolution or not. In their own terms they do indeed approach a resolution, however idealistically, and however artificial.

Put differently still, what Gellner is in effect saying is that the search for a universal truth is elusive, but that that does not mean that it should not be sought. Rather than a universal truth, a system of values that could be deemed to be universally valid is what is sought, albeit never found. As mentioned previously, Gellner is not content with resolving the problem by relapsing into an accommodation with the world through relativism, through a facile approach of saying that "all is relative". After a long discourse on Gellner's work *Legitimation of Belief* (referred to also by Hall, Gellner's biographer), Hall suggests that Gellner concludes his refutation of relativism as a means for finding meaning, or as a cognitive accommodation with the world, in the following terms: "Even if relativism remained unrefuted in some other sense, nonetheless as a recipe it is empty and worthless (Gellner, 1974: 50)".

What is sought is something that transcends cultural specifics. In other words, ethics and morality, while influenced by culture, should not be seen merely as the products of culture. It is in this light, then, that one can further view the five protagonists of the three novels and establish what the cultural determinants are that prescribe the value system operating in each

novel. One can ascertain the degree to which in each novel the protagonists adhere to the cultural determinants of their place in history and/or strive for that which may transcend the moment in history: to use Gellner's phraseology: to what extent do they respond to the beast (i.e. that which is immediately apparent to the protagonist as prescribed by the cultural milieu) and to the angel (i.e. that which the protagonist may strive towards to liberate himself from the strictures of history)?

It is significant too that all five protagonists are male and the corollary of this is that it is only in *Radetzkyarsch* that relationships with women are seriously interwoven with the plot. In *Malaisie* relationships with women seem essentially peripheral to the self-exploration at work in the protagonists. For example in a thesis on Malay women Vicki Denese Crinis maintains that "the reality of women's lives continued to be obscured through the conflation of cultural structures, market forces, and national development after Independence" (Crinis, 2004: iii). She goes on to point out that "Fauconnier's work [...] exoticises the Malay terrain and exoticises its immigrant labour force" (Crinis, 2004:83). In a similar vein Shanthini Pillai points out in *Reclaiming Place and Space*, in a chapter entitled "Manichean Edgings – the Discursive Profiteering of the Malayan Planter in Henri Fauconnier's *The Soul of Malaya*" (Bangi, 2003: 98 et seq.), that "the body of the Malay does not serve his purpose for it does not take place on the feeder belt of the imperial economic enterprise" (Pillai, 2003: 107). Further on, she points out that one of the *pantuns* used frequently in the novel serves to accentuate "the figure of the colonial as the redeeming custodian of the native self, in the drama of the imperial rescue mission, to save the natives from themselves" (Pillai, 2003: 112). So, in this context, one can but imagine that the sexual liaison between Lescale and Palanai cannot be very different in its import. Indeed as Crinis succinctly points out: "*The Soul of Malaya* is a strong example of how women were represented under the male gaze of the 'exotic' and the 'erotic' rather than workers" (Crinis, 2004: 112). In this Crinis diverges from her earlier emphasis as seeing the women primarily as plantation workers. However, she makes the cogent assertion that the dalliance between Palanai and Lescale serves merely to obfuscate the sexual nature of the relationship between Rolain and Lescale:

There were no women in the plot except for Lescale's sexual conquest, Palanai, the gardener's wife. [...] Palanai is not the subject in the text; her body is a trinket, and the men who play with it are the 'real' subjects in the plot. The women's body is in the text as a ploy to distract us from the men's relationships, to make Lescale appear heterosexual and to offset the male homosexuality (Crisis, 2004: 112-113).

Crisis has a point here and underscores her view by quoting one of the canonical historians of British Malaya, John Butcher, who asserts that according to his informants, about two-thirds of European men in Malaya at the time were said to have had relationships with Asian men. However, this can only be speculative. What Crisis's and Pillai's observations do, however, is to point out that the women in *Malaisie* find themselves in a role that is peripheral both in terms of the colonial enterprise, or as commodities, or as a decoy in order to dissimulate the homoerotic undertones in *Malaisie*. This aspect has also been referred to in Chapter II.

In *Gli occhiali d'oro*, as discussed, with the homosexuality of Fadigati, identity plays a parallel role to that of Jewishness. Both elements are subversive of the Fascist regime and the bourgeois norms that sustained it, and the only overtly strong female figure is notorious Signora Lavezzoli.

4.2 Carl Joseph in *Radetzky*

Familiar as the context of *Radetzky* now is, Carl Joseph, in the terms set up above, is caught in exactly the kind of beast-vs.-angel dilemma that Gellner evokes. It is the meticulous description of his state of mind throughout Roth's novel which makes him an easily identifiable, discernible character. The novel is about Carl Joseph, and much else. Besides being taken on a journey through the demise of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the reader follows him through a series of turbulent psychological impasses.

Carl Joseph reacts to circumstances; he cannot formulate for himself an independent stance *vis-à-vis* his socio-historical situation. A revealing passage in *Radetzky* accurately describes how much at sea Carl Joseph is, and how vulnerable he is to be seduced by all that he is not. In his relationship with Frau Taußig, just as an example, one sees Roth exploring the psychological

make up of his protagonist, showing the reader how weak and confused and vulnerable he is. Out of this state, Carl Joseph is more likely to follow the route of the “beast”, and it is only much later that he is able to emancipate himself from his illusions, to aspire to the “angel”, when it is too late:

Und es war auch in der Tat, als begänne sein Leben. Er lernte Wein trinken, wie er an der Grenze den “Neunziggrädigen” getrunken hatte. Er aß mit der Frau in jenem berühmten Speisehaus, dessen Wirtin würdig war wie eine Kaiserin. [...] Ja so begann das, was er “das Leben” nannte und was zu jener Zeit vielleicht auch das Leben war: die Fahrt im glatten Wagen zwischen den dichten Gerüchen des gereiften Frühlings, an der Seite einer Frau, von der man geliebt wurde. [...] Er erinnerte sich, daß er fast sein ganzes Leben traurig gewesen war, scheu, man konnte schon sagen verbittert. Aber so, wie er sich jetzt zu erkennen glaubte, begriff er nicht mehr, warum er traurig, scheu und verbittert gewesen war. [...] War er eifersüchtig? Gewiß, er war eifersüchtig! Und auch ohnmächtig, wie ihm gleich darauf einfiel. [...] Ja er war ein kleiner, armer Leutnant, mit fünfzig Kroner monatlicher Rente vom Vater und er hatte Schulden...(Roth, 1932: 226-227). [And he really felt his life was beginning. He learned how to drink wine, just as he had drunk the 180 Proof in the borderland. He and the woman dined in that renowned restaurant whose proprietress was as dignified as an empress. [...] Yes, thus began what he called “life” and what may have been life at that time: driving in a smooth carriage amid the dense perfumes of mellow spring, next to a woman who loved you. [...] He remembered that most of his life he had been sad, shy, one could say bitter. Yet now, thinking he knew himself, he could not understand why he had been sad, shy and bitter. [...] Was he jealous? Of course he was jealous! And also powerless, as he promptly realised. Yes, he was a poor little lieutenant with fifty crowns a month from his father, and he had debts... (Neugroschel, 1995: 195-196).]

We see in this passage Carl Joseph still seeking affirmation in his life through means that will prove to be mendacious. He is too unprepared to even begin to assert a moral conscience or to lead a life that is not merely determined by the need to resolve a psychological impasse. Here one has Roth telling the reader that Carl Joseph is unaware of his dolorous situation and that in effect he had become bitter and resentful, but gnawingly so, not comprehending the reason why he felt these emotions. Roth’s text has many examples of how Carl Joseph is left to nurse the injuries inflicted on him on his own. When he wins at cards, he is told by a senior officer to stop gambling. Carl Joseph obeys, but is angry at having obeyed while he was on a winning streak. And gambling in any event has a symbolic meaning, of the determinants of life being completely determined by chance. In other words, he is even forbidden from exploring chance.

Similarly, he resents Frau Taußig, who ventures the opinion that he does not seem like a person likely to win at cards:

„Du siehst nicht aus wie einer, der Glück im Spiel hat!“ Er war gekränkt. Sofort faßte ihn die Begierde, zu beweisen, daß er Glück habe, überall (Roth, 1932: 228). [“You don’t look like a man’s who’s lucky at cards.” He was offended. He instantly wanted to prove that he was lucky – everywhere! Neugroschel, 1995: 196].]

Roth’s descriptions here are not purely coincidental, or unintentional. He emphasises how fragile and ill-equipped Carl Joseph is. And, if simple incidents such as described provoke feelings of inadequacy and bitterness, how much more inadequate is he in the light of being an officer in the rickety political dispensation that was the Habsburg Empire in its later years? The whole gambling metaphor illustrates what Carl Joseph’s frame of reference has to be – he has no other reliable frame of reference. All the others either have proved or are going to prove mendacious, fraudulent: his affair with Frau Taußig is in itself a deception. He is in effect her toy-boy, and she proves to have been flagrantly unfaithful to Carl Joseph, with someone whom Carl Joseph considered a friend, the Count Chojnicki. Later of course Chojnicki does give Carl Joseph a “hand up” by allowing him to live on his land, and allowing him a respite from army life until the war starts. But it is betrayal nonetheless when Chojnicki consorts with Frau Taußig and Carl Joseph’s humiliation is further amplified when he has to accept charity from the very man who had been courting Frau Taußig for years. Carl Joseph still had not understood the material basis of would-be love relationships, and that Count Chojnicki could effortlessly give Frau Taußig what she aspired to, namely money and position. All Carl Joseph can give is a youthful body and blind loyalty. And it is this youthful body and loyalty that are sacrificed in the war, except that the emotional over-commitment to Frau Taußig on Carl Joseph’s part also reveals an imbalance due, so Roth would have us understand, to the lack of any emotional warmth when Carl Joseph was growing up, except perhaps from the old retainer, Jacques.

Carl Joseph is not equipped to emerge from the “immanence” of his place in the world, from the circumstances, both material and psychological that have determined his destiny. All the less likely is it that he can forge a transition from “beast to angel”, to use Gellner’s nomenclature for the “dual citizenship” of being. Carl Joseph strives for release from the

burden of his existence through an over-emphasis on the rôle of love. He is so attuned to seeking solace and meaning outside of himself that that which is potentially inside of himself is at the mercy of outside forces and is never sufficiently developed to enable him to protect himself, let alone striving successfully towards the “angel” of morality. He is too constrained by his circumstances, his place in society and his psychological make-up to begin to aspire towards anything outside of himself. All he can do is obey his instincts, his needs and his superiors. Respite is offered to him, however. He has examples of something transcendent, such as the relatively selfless friendship with Dr Demant and his ardent belief in the emperor. But his belief in the validity of the empire is part of the oppressive mechanism at work, is part of the mendacious edifice that oppresses him, unaware as he is of his oppression, until the relationship with Frau Taußig goes awry or when he is accused of a dalliance with Dr Demant’s wife. So multifaceted is his impasse – social, historical and psychological – that it is in effect a veritable maze through which he has to navigate. Yet Carl Joseph is “everyman” – there are thousands like him, imbued subliminally with a sense of futility, because they are part of a greater political edifice that is itself mendacious and fraudulent and not *nachvollziehbar*, i.e. unworkable. And this, paradoxically, is the reason why the lie of the political dispensation of which Carl Joseph is a part is all the more oppressive – because it has to be; if it were not a lie, elaborate mechanisms such as parades and empty hierarchies would not be necessary. He suffers for the lies of others and in effect becomes part of their lie. He is forced into a life of mendaciousness, to maintain the mendaciousness of the given political order, a set-up that seems to have little substance in its claims, but is the only mechanism available; the alternatives have not been worked out yet: the First World War was to do that.

In none of the three novels under discussion can one say that their authors suffer from an “emptiness of intent,” as Alain de Botton, (*The Guardian*, 20th January 2012) refers to authorship. And in Roth’s case it is clear that he has intentionally portrayed Carl Joseph as a relatively unconscious martyr to the cause and society of the Habsburg Empire. Confusion, as De Botton argues in speaking about the visual arts, is not a necessary corollary of “aesthetic emotion”; mayhem for its own sake is not a feature in any of the three novels – there is a clear

purpose conveyed through the trials and growing self-awareness on the part of the protagonists. Even a novel such as Musil's *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß*, which has the word "confusion" in its German title, belies the fact that there is a coherent philosophical intent and a structure at work in the tradition of the *Bildungsroman*. So too, in different ways, the three novels function as a *Bildungsroman*. However, *Radetzky* cannot be limited by that definition, nor can the other two. There is a progression of consciousness on the part of the five protagonists – even in Fadigati, in *Gli occhiali d'oro* despite his suicide.

The redeeming factor in *Radetzky*, amid the nostalgic, pessimistic tone of the novel, reveals an awareness on the part of Carl Joseph, of the need to emancipate the self, and to strive for a state – whether in the political sense or psychologically – where "decency can prevail". Gellner speaks of "sustained cognitive growth" which is a step towards the "angel" of a secular morality. In other words, in each of the three novels there is an appeal to a higher order that is not tangible. But it is its configuration in the minds of the protagonists that drives the narrative in each of the three novels. However, the naturalist assumptions of Western thought form the "beast" which dominates in most spheres of life. But this is not what the authors aspire to in their narrative design. Put differently, Carl Joseph's world is an acceptance of the status quo and an often blithe, unquestioning acceptance of the power of transcendent value systems and their accompanying political apparatus, the Catholic Church. We see Carl Joseph emerge, belatedly, from a naturalist towards a cognitive state, from the "beast" to the "angel", until finally he is consumed by the beast, becomes a victim of the beast, as the forces of history overwhelm him.

4.3 The *io narrante* and Fadigati in *Gli occhiali d'oro*

In *Gli occhiali d'oro* both the "beast" and the "angel" fight it out with one another. Initially the emphasis falls on the first character, Dr Fadigati, presented via the first-person narrator. One could be forgiven for thinking the novel is only about Fadigati, so detailed and lengthy is the description of him until it becomes clear that Bassani has created two parallel characters,

whose lives seem so unrelated to each other at the beginning, but become inextricably intertwined, as established previously. The novel represents various conflicts: firstly, the homosexual Dr Fadigati is at variance with the society in which he lives and on which he depends for his livelihood. As long as he is discreet about his sexuality, he survives. Secondly, the Jewish first-person narrator is a well-integrated member of society, until the passage of the Race Laws in 1938. As the novel unfurls the reader sees Fadigati deciding to jettison his discretion and to make a public display of his relationship with the hustler, Deliliers. This coincides with the promulgation of the Race Laws, and both the Jewish *io narrante* and Dr Fadigati find themselves in the same boat, as it were. They are both marginalised, albeit for entirely different reasons.

Unlike Carl Joseph, the *io narrante* – who is arguably roughly the same age as Roth’s Carl Joseph – is a keen observer of the world around him. He is discovering how the world works, whereas in the case of Carl Joseph one is struck by the naiveté with which he enters socially and emotionally perilous situations, such as his relationship with Frau Slama. Bassani’s *io narrante* also has putatively autobiographical elements to it, whereas Carl Joseph is more of an invention, even though Roth served in the Austro-Hungarian military in the First World War. Furthermore, when examining the applicability of Gellner’s “bi-focal” moral vision, or what he terms the “dual citizenship”, i.e. the naturalistic world-view vs. the cognitive one, Bassani’s novel represents a compelling problem. For a start his protagonist cannot take comfort in the validity of the social structure of which he is an intrinsic part, even though his Jewish forebears have lived in Ferrara for centuries. And yet, he the *io narrante* is forced to make a distinction between a “naturalistic” moral universe represented by his Jewish religion, which cohabits with a cognitive approach to the world, and that which has been bestowed on him by his liberal upbringing. Both these central aspects of the *io narrante*’s character are at odds with the Fascist milieu and state. Dr Fadigati is similarly bound by a naturalistic morality, presumably because he does not fit into the group, but Bassani does endow him with an awareness as well of the precariousness of his situation. Connelly, as cited above, best describes a situation which could apply to both Fadigati and the *io narrante* when he writes:

For some of the most difficult cases arise when people suffer from injuries imposed by institutionalised identities, principles, and cultural understandings; when those who suffer are not entirely helpless but are defined as threatening, contagious, or dangerous to the self-assurance of hegemonic constituencies; (Connelly, 1999: 50-51).

What is furthermore pertinent is that the psychological impasse that Fadigati suffers from is so acute that he cannot begin to assess the world cognitively in such a way as to protect himself and flourish. His need for acceptance – amply illustrated throughout the novel – from the very people who hold him in disdain marks not only his inadequacy, but illustrates a crisis of secular morality: Fadigati is ill-equipped to forge a *modus vivendi* in the circumstances in which he finds himself, or which he created by “going public” with his relationship with Deliliers. He does not have the ability to arrive at what Gellner calls a “transvaluation of values”. In this way he shares more with Carl Joseph than he does with the other protagonist in *Gli occhiali d’oro*, the *io narrante*. The *io narrante* has the advantage over Fadigati in that he embodies a “transvaluation of values” having both a formal religion at his disposal as well as a secular-rationalist heritage which he can draw upon as well. Fadigati has neither. All he has is a psychological need and is desperate for approval to the point where he sups with the devil, Deliliers, who is a conman, by Gellner’s definition, in that he engineers “the victim’s hopes and fears [to] work for him” (Gellner, 2003: 60). Deliliers plays with Fadigati, for his own ends. And yet, bearing in mind Fadigati’s need for approval, why does he throw caution to the wind by exposing the relationship with Deliliers during the Riccione seaside holiday?

It seems that the pressure of conforming to a norm and general despair become so acute that he throws it all away, knowing all the while what the consequences would be. It is a death wish, in short. In other words, Fadigati’s yearning for approval is so acute that ultimately it causes his demise. He needs personal affirmation so desperately that he even seeks it from someone palpably inimical. It is this need which imprisons him, and Bassani’s insight into his character is revealed throughout the novel, as Fadigati becomes the *Leitmotif* for a misguided despair that can find no solace or redemption of any kind, rendering his suicide unsurprising. In other words, Fadigati’s homosexuality causes a personal situation of impasse to which he reacts by closing off all other avenues of personal fulfilment. At the time this means living a social lie to protect a

personal truth. His reaction does not free him from the impasse but creates instead a “double impasse”. Fadigati, similarly to Carl Joseph, maintains a mendacity in order to survive; the symbolism of the broken eyeglasses when Delilieri and Fadigati have their fall-out highlights the fractured reality that Fadigati lives, and the fractured reality of Ferrarese society during Fascism.

However, the *io narrante* that Bassani has created – and has inherited from his liberal Jewish traditions – does possess the wherewithal to observe and learn lessons from what he has observed. The *io narrante* enjoys “sustained cognitive growth” (Gellner, 2003: 103) and it is this cognitive growth which enables him to take a stance, to defy what is wrong in his society and the political dispensation in which he was born. As such the *io narrante* is the perfect counterfoil to Fadigati, who is effectively portrayed as being a creature – albeit refined and intelligent – merely living in response to a series of psychological needs. The *io narrante* is, by being contrasted to Fadigati so consistently, shown to be a master at a secular morality. The added paradox of course is that his heritage is not only secular; his cognitive search for the “angel” of morality is grafted onto a religious heritage, and hence amounts to a “transvaluation of values”. Hence it is in this sense that the creation of Fadigati can be said to function as a narrative device on the part of Bassani to illustrate in the *io narrante* a fully emancipated individual, who embodies a range of values and can understand the reality that he is in opposition to the world around him and decides to live out that opposition. (This parallels Bassani’s own resistance to Fascism, for which he was imprisoned but subsequently escaped). Fadigati, by contrast, resigns himself, at first stoically, to the enmity of society, but he cannot sustain the stoicism and collapses into a pathetic parody of himself and of his class. In creating two such contrasting characters one can see in Bassani’s novel again a “beast”/“angel” dichotomy, to adopt Gellnerian terms. The *io narrante* strives for the “angel”, albeit it never able to be directly observed. But he knows it’s there – the angel that is the “necessary presupposition of knowledge and morality in the world”. Fadigati is condemned to live the life of the beast, even more so than Carl Joseph, in that he is hidebound by his society and behaves for the most part in a way that would suggest he thinks that society matters, that society is *ipso*

facto valid, just because it exists and inevitably he is enslaved by the need for approval. The fact that society is ill-disposed to him nurtures his profound self-hatred and psychologically prepares him for suicide. Fadigati is hidebound by the limitations of his psychological make-up in a way that militates against his ever seeking in any way to make cognitive headway. Defeatism characterises Fadigati, a defeatism which the *io narrante* despises in Fadigati, because it is exactly the same kind of defeatism that characterises the attitude of so many of his co-religionists. Written with hindsight, Bassani tells the reader by implication that it was this attitude of defeatism that prepared the way for worse to come.

Taken one step further, when it is said that literature is a means for trying to understand the world, what Bassani is doing is ultimately trying to understand the Holocaust, what caused it to happen in the first place. It was part of the world that he came to know and it remains the most brutal manifestation of what modernity has come to mean. Deftly, Bassani uses the homosexual doctor to illustrate his point more aptly, at times metaphorically: it would not do to lambaste Jews directly. It is more effective to lambaste a figure such as Fadigati in order to make a statement about the Jews' responsibility for their fate, or indeed anyone's.

In this sense too Bassani's novel is about the possibility of finding the "angel" of morality, at least momentarily, holding sway over the "beast", of cognition triumphing over naturalism.

The significance of *Gli occhiali d'oro* also lies in its attempt to grapple in literary terms with the Holocaust in a way which one could argue is much more effective than any number of novels which attempt to address an event which, besides defying adequate literary rendition, was a watershed in modernity, in Western man's history with himself. This is because Bassani does not attempt to describe the indescribable. He knows that cannot be done. But what he can do is explore the mentality which made the Holocaust possible. Herein lies the triumph of Bassani's novel. The Holocaust was the triumph of the "beast", of naturalism. Bassani's novel is an attempt to reach out to the "angel", to cognition. Herein lies the impasse, of being aware of the infinity of despair and trying to grapple cognitively with what was happening around him, trying to adhere to a set of norms that did not cave in under the pressure of "naturalism", to

recognise a set of precepts as being transcendent. Bassani first has to define the impasse (as we see it manifested in the characters of Fadigati, Deliliers, Lavezzoli and Bottechiari) in order to counter it through his *io narrante*. This inevitably is a solitary exercise.

4.4 The Allure of Escape: *Malaisie*

With Henri Fauconnier, as mentioned previously, we enter a different world, though one in which two protagonists, Rolain and Lescale, are at different stages of emancipation in their quest to find some sort of liberty from the strictures of their native European culture and its corrosive effects on their respective psyches. The psychological impasse which bedevils Fadigati in *Gli occhiali d'oro* (i.e. the “beast” in Gellner’s terms) gives way to the cognitive experience that the *io narrante* explores and represents. Carl Joseph, as discussed, is almost entirely trapped in the naturalistic moral world view. Rolain and Lescale on the other hand, have both eschewed the naturalistic, home-grown morality of their origins because it has been profoundly damaging and treacherous to them. The form that this damage took was their respective experience of the First World War, in the aftermath of which they seek solace in the happily indifferent jungles of Malaya:

Cette jungle vit, respire, ronronne. On la sent pénétrée d’un bonheur trop profond pour n’être pas semblable à l’indifférence (Fauconnier, 1930: 24-25). [That jungle lives and breathes and murmurs, soaked in a happiness so deep that it wears the guise of indifference (Sutton, 1931: 15).]

The reference to “happiness” indicates this clearly as a goal, a space of liberation and fulfilment. One is immediately introduced to the idea that Malaya offers something that Europe cannot, a respite from the latter’s madness and woes. What lies at the heart of Rolain’s and Lescale’s quest is their cognition and their desire to lead a life governed by their own moral vision – not an inherited, received one.

Taken further, Rolain’s and Lescale’s rebellion against their European origins (even if not their cultural one) amounts to an ontological confrontation. Rolain has come much farther than

Lescale in trying to reconcile the “beast” with the “angel”, in trying to fuse the naturalistic elements with the cognitive.

Nul pays ne déçoit, qu'on explore en profondeur. La satiété est une maladie de touriste. Il faut savoir tourner la page. Le monde, vois-tu, le moindre coin du monde, est un livre des Mille et une Nuit, et mille et une signifie qu'on ne s'arrêtera pas à mille, ni à cent mille... Il y aura toujours une unité à mettre au bout de l'infini. Ne sense-tu pas que la *Malaisie*, tu l'ignores encore ? (Fauconnier, 1930 :136-137).

[No country can be disappointing if you explore the depths of it. Satiety is the disease of the tourist. You must know how to turn over the page. The world, even the smallest corner of it, is a Book of the Thousand and One Nights, which means that it won't stop at a thousand, not at a hundred thousand....There will always be a unit to add to the infinite. Surely you must feel that you don't yet know Malaya (Sutton, 1931:105).]

One sees in the above excerpt the reaching out for a high mystical view of the world, a view of the world that would can be seen as an attempt to reconcile naturalism and cognition, that wants to reconcile the astigmatism to which Gellner refers to below:

Kant's astigmatic or double status theory is extremely uncomfortable, mainly because with each single man, there simply doesn't seem to be room for two such contradictory beings (Gellner, 2003:102).

Whereas in *Radetzky* and *Gli occhiali d'oro*, these two “contradictory beings” – i.e. the elements of naturalism vs. cognition, the “beast” vs. the “angel” – are distinct, in *Malaisie* there is the conscious striving for the reconciliation between the two – the Dionysian and Apollonian, to use Nietzsche's phraseology. Rolain acts as the midwife of Lescale's growth “into consciousness”, into an awareness of the limitations of the “embourgeoisement” which had been their undoing back in Europe and which, in Rolain's view, was ultimately limiting and toxic. Rolain is constantly trying to fuse the physical with the spiritual, does not see a contradiction between the two realms, all the while undermining Lescale's attempts at trying to cling onto the psychological habits he has inherited from his culture. The setting for such a transformation, where it can best be illustrated, is in an environment alien to both Fauconnier's protagonists in that there is no surrounding manifestation of a European set of values, other than the local British planters' club. While it could be asserted that Rolain's and Lescale's imagined idyll was a response to the impasse of colonialism, this can be contested in that it is unlikely that they perceived

colonialism – which made their lives possible in Malaya – as particularly problematic or contestable. The concerns that Fauconnier bestows on them are of an essentially intimate and philosophical nature, and neither Rolain or Lescale interrogate their presence as Europeans in an alien land, because they see the alien land as their salvation. There seems little awareness on the part of Fauconnier’s characters of the political implications of colonialism, when compared to what can be discerned in Sir Hugh Clifford’s writing, in which he reveals an awareness of his position as colonial master and does indeed interrogate the political dimension of the British presence in Malaya. Fauconnier is more concerned with what can be gleaned culturally and psychologically from the Malayan adventure. Malaya is seen thus as a release from impasse, from the maze, and indeed Malaya temporarily lives up to Rolain’s and Lescale’s expectations.

The two planters in *Malaisie* are on a quest for self-fulfilment. Even the technological and scientific advances of the West, and in their case the commercial advantage that the West holds for them, do not dissuade them from the quest to explore, not just the jungle, but an epistemological jungle, namely the Unconscious.

In a chapter entitled “The Embourgeoisement of the Psyche” (Gellner, 2003: 120) we can again discern a confluence of concerns in what Fauconnier was exploring in the 1930s and Gellner’s decades later.

Ceux qui croient renaître devraient se suicider à l’apogée de leur existence.

– On ignore, dit Rolain, quand on l’a atteinte. On se voit toujours plus sage qu’hier, et les vieillards gâteux font des remontrances aux adolescents. Ça ne prouve rien. La fatigue est une condition de l’entraînement. Mais pourquoi se placer toujours au point de vue de l’individu? L’individu ne vaut pas même la peine de se tuer. Il n’est qu’une fermentation qui gonfle et retombe. Cette bataille d’infusoires est par elle même sans intérêt. Espérons seulement que le vin sera bon.

– Oui, dis-je, pour les délices des anges, je connais ça. C’est la doctrine du renoncement à soi-même (Fauconnier, 1930:135). [Those who believe they will be born again ought to commit suicide at the culmination point of their existence.]

[We never know when we have reached it, said Rolain. “We always see ourselves wiser than the day before, and inane old gentlemen are found lecturing their juniors. That proves nothing. Fatigue is a condition of training. But why always look at matters from the individual’s point of

view? It is hardly worth an individual's while to kill himself. He is no more than a fermentation that swells and bursts. The battle of the infusoria is without intrinsic interest. Let us but hope that the wine will be good."

"Yes," said I, "for the delectation of angels; I know that story. It's the doctrine of self-renunciation" (Sutton, 1931: 103-104).]

One can see in the above that Fauconnier has a disdain for conventional modes of being; he is overtly philosophical and is in effect expressing a revulsion towards the "embourgeoisement of the psyche". Even the notion of knowledge being passed on from one generation to the next is called into doubt; he expresses a profound epistemological doubt, in that knowledge itself becomes but a tool of a bourgeois value system. In this sense *Malaisie* is much more radical than many a critic acknowledges, (Pillai, in particular), preferring to concentrate on the "orientalist" interpretations of his text, namely that of seeing his text more readily as an example of the self versus the proverbial "other". By the same token, Fauconnier's philosophical musings, expressed through Rolain, can also be said to be a luxury afforded him by the privileged status he enjoys as a European rubber planter in a British colony. That does not, however, detract from the validity of his philosophical concerns. More fundamentally, the idea of self-renunciation, while it may lack credibility given the material circumstances which Fauconnier describes, is the antithesis of the conventionality associated with the middle classes, where wealth is often used to assess human value. (It is true that Rolain hands over his estate to Lescale, and whether this is an act of self-renunciation is a moot point. However, the gesture is made). Furthermore, the notion of individuality is allowed to flourish in *Malaisie*, and is part of a European tradition (as opposed to a generally held view that in other societies, or cultures, individuality as such does not enjoy a high premium). However, in the passage above Fauconnier casts doubt upon yet another pillar of Western normative thinking, namely individuality. So one can see that there is a coalescence in thought between Fauconnier and Gellner's notion of the "transvaluation of values". Fauconnier casts doubt upon the Western value system in that it is a product of its history, seeking as he does, a system of values that would transcend culturally and historically determined values. The problem is whether such a view is tenable, but this aspect is beyond the scope of this study; suffice it to say that the basis of Western

modes of thought is interrogated and contested, and indeed this contestation is echoed in writers such as Gellner. Gellner draws from Nietzsche the idea of the “transvaluation of values” in an attempt to undermine what he deems the fraudulent Platonic tradition. The Platonic presumption, according to Gellner’s interpretation of Nietzsche, was that nature had

[...] a human hierarchy projected on to it, [and] may feed back to Plato and other credulous humans the answers they want to hear and which they suggested to it... But nature, seen as a unitary and all-embracing system, does not preach anything (Gellner, 2003: 125).

This is quite how Fauconnier views nature, views the moral and psychic universe. He sees the jungle as a metaphor for nature, in a very elemental way, obviously, but also as a metaphor for the unknowability of the Unconscious, inasmuch as the Unconscious is part of nature, something that has nothing to do with the rhetoric that humanity imposes on nature in an attempt to civilise nature and to arrogate knowledge thereof unto itself. This line of reasoning lies at the heart of both Gellner’s invective against the psychoanalytic movement and at the core of Fauconnier’s invective against all that Western man presumes to know. Western man purportedly causes suffering and unhappiness by what he claims to know and consequently what he imposes on his fellows. This inevitably mendacious imposition is what Fauconnier rejects and inveighs against. There is little solace in this approach, no “bourgeois” solace or validation arising out of the conformity and *faux* security that the Western mindset, suffused with Platonism, would assume to proffer.

Of the two planters in *Malaisie*, Rolain especially, is the “no-longer-fooled” individual, who realises in a manner pre-empting Gellner that “nature is mute” (Gellner, 2003: 125). Inevitably, Rolain has to come to terms with the Unconscious, with the jungle that is Malaya and its peoples and the unknowability of things. With psychoanalysis and its notion of the knowability of the Unconscious, the epistemological presumption is maintained, while at the same time presenting itself as a cure for modern man’s existential discomfort in the type of society he has

engendered. Fauconnier rejects such assumptions, as he does Western artifice in all its guises.

This we see from the various excerpts that illustrate this, the following is particularly apt:

– Mais que demandes-tu de plus ? Seulement une mémoire ? L’instinct est cette mémoire, qui ne retient que l’essentiel. Regrettes-tu de ne plus te souvenir de tes premiers biberons ? Pourtant, il y a vingt ans à peine, ils remplissaient ta vie. Tes grands désirs actuels ne sont aussi que tâtonnements de mains d’enfant. Renoncer à soi-même, ce n’est pas comprimer désirs et passions, c’est consentir à s’éparpiller, mais utiliser sa cohésion provisoire : obéir à l’instinct avec un détachement plein de complaisance, libérer toutes ses âmes pour que leur rencontre soit féconde. L’ascète est *celui qui s’exerce*, non celui qui s’étouffe.

– Cette morale n’est pas bonne pour tout le monde.

– Nulle morale n’est bonne pour tout le monde. C’est à toi que je parle. Je vois ce qui te torture, – c’est le remords.

– Le remords ?

– C’est le remorde de ce que tu n’as pas fait, le seul qui ne pardonne pas. Ton désir d’action ? Dépit. Dépit de sentir que tu piétines sur place. Mais ce n’est pas ton corps qui a besoin d’action. Tu viens d’avouer que tu le fatiguais sans profit.

– Pourtant j’avais rêvé une vie aventureuse. La premières fois que tu m’as parlé de la *Malaisie*...

– Tu étais en pleine aventure – et déçu, Maintenant tu crois avoir épuisé la *Malaisie*. Quelle folie! Fauconnier, 1930 :135-137). [...] “But what more do you want? Merely a memory? Instinct is just a memory, that only retains the essential. Are you sorry you can’t remember your first feeding bottles? And yet, scarcely twenty years ago, they filled your life. Your deep desires of today, they too are bit the groping of childish fingers. Self-renunciation is not the suppression of desires or passions. It means willingness to be reduced to elements, but at the same time to use our temporary cohesion; to obey our instincts with compliance and detachment; to liberate all our souls so that their encounter may be fruitful. The very word asceticism means exertion not atrophy.”

“That morality is not for everyone.”

“No morality is not for everyone. I am talking to you. I can see what is torturing you – remorse.”

“Remorse?”

“Yes, remorse for what you have not done, the one pitiless remorse. Your desire for action is merely vexation at the thought that you are marking time. But it is not physical activity that you want; have you not just admitted that you tired yourself in vain?”

“And yet I had dreamed of an adventurous life. The first time you talked to me about Malaya...”

“Yes, you were out for adventure – and you were disappointed. Now you think you have exhausted Malaya. Nonsense” (Sutton, 1931: 103-104).]

This extract is quoted at length in that, significantly, the basis of the impasse that Fauconnier expresses is an impasse that goes beyond the mere historical moment, but an impasse that lies at the very heart of Western culture, relying as it does on assumptions of knowledge-derived power. Fauconnier illustrates the confining and damaging effects of presumed knowledge and presumed certainty. What Fauconnier's novel primarily represents is the open confrontation with what comes across as tentative in *Radetzky* and *Gli occhiali d'oro*. In effect Rolain articulates the dichotomy from which man suffers, namely the "dual citizenship" as Gellner calls it, the irresolvable tension between a naturalistic vision and a cognitive one; this is the impasse as he sees it and which he presumes to have solved, between the "beast" and the "angel". Rolain in this passage tries to reconcile the irreconcilable, or to fuse the two constituent elements, namely the "beast" and the "angel" by making it clear that seeking approval, adhering to morality with its concomitant notions of reward, or lack of punishment, are essentially meaningless. The point that Rolain makes earlier about satiety being for tourists is also a jibe at a Westerner's notion of omniscience, an idea that Lescale still clings to inasmuch as it represents certainty. Rolain is pointing out that knowledge is something more profound than facts or certainty, or merely something that is there only to serve human functionality.

Rolain's disparaging references to the Unconscious are reflected in the references to early childhood in the passage above and thus Fauconnier reflects a scepticism about the value of *pretending* to be able to fathom the Unconscious. In the passage Malaya is clearly a metaphor for the Unconscious, for the unknowable, and in Fauconnier's vision the idea of Malaya is one that is to be extrapolated as being valid for life itself. Thus it is clear that while the genesis of *Malaisie* lies in its reaction to the claustrophobia of the Western mode of life, Fauconnier does not content himself with only reacting. Rather out of this reaction is born a vision that presents itself as essentially liberating (« libérer toutes ses âmes pour que leur rencontre soit féconde »). It is clear what the appeal of Malaya is as a locale for this unshackling of conventions – conventions of thought especially, over and above the other scenes in the novel that could be deemed "transgressive". Fauconnier also clearly states above that morality is confining of the human spirit. Fauconnier makes Nietzschean allusions as a way of distancing himself from any

notion that delving into the Unconscious might present a solution to Western maladies. Western maladies are what they are; what is important is that the individual be allowed to simply *be* and to explore, as he exhorts Lescale to do, and not to content himself with boundaries imposed by a diseased Western culture. The impasse is the diseased Western culture and Fauconnier, through Rolain, is offering Lescale an alternative, as Rolain articulates above.

This theme of the liberation of the individual trapped by stifling convention is not in itself new, and can be found in the plays of Luigi Pirandello, for example, nearly a decade before *Malaisie*, in Italian modernist theatre (in *Enrico IV* and *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*) and other works as well as in the philosophical writings of Carlo Michelstaedter (1887-1910), not to mention any number of writers who fell under the Nietzschean spell. In this sense Fauconnier forms part of a continuum of any number of writers concerned with the mendacity inherent in Western normative structures and who similarly sought solutions to the unhappiness wrought by the expectations of bourgeois life. What distinguishes Fauconnier is that he seeks to find a resolution to the impasse outside the confines of Europe, thus sharing much with similarly minded exoticist writers who find Western man a more engaging subject of study when studied outside his home turf. One can think in this regard of any number of contemporary writers who conform to this trend, starting with Somerset Maugham, Joseph Conrad or André Gide, to mention only three.

What also distinguishes Fauconnier from some of his contemporaries is the notion of a striving towards that which can be deemed good, with the representation of the “angel” in both Gellner and Fauconnier maintaining this notion of fruitfulness, of a fecundity arrived at not through conformity, but through exploration and the placing of the ego to one side.

CONCLUSION

From examining the three texts, it is clear that they are written from the vantage point of being beleaguered. Especially in *Radetzkmarsch* and *Gli occhiali d'oro*, one senses the encroachment of a political and social order on the characters. There is a claustrophobia at work in both *Radetzkmarsch* and in *Gli occhiali d'oro* that the authors have recreated, a claustrophobia which the characters respond to each in an inevitably different way. For Carl Joseph, Roth has created no little aperture, little room for manoeuvre; Roth's seemingly needless descriptions underscore this point, because he illustrates in this way how elaborate the edifice of the Habsburg Empire is, how thoroughly it has been legitimised by time and tradition. Roth has created a character that is not at the margins of his society, but part of the edifice. Carl Joseph is thus caught in a double bind because he cannot disown his rôle and function in the Habsburg Empire, minor though it may be. Thus Roth contrasts Carl Joseph with seemingly minor characters such as Moser, Jacques and Onufrij to illustrate the relative freedom these characters enjoy when compared to Carl Joseph: they might all live in the Habsburg Empire, but they are not obliged to justify or defend it. They carry no responsibility for it; they do not have to uphold the edifice. While it might be argued that Carl Joseph has the benefits of being part of the ruling elite, Roth makes it clear that he does not benefit, at least not psychologically, from being an instrument of a decaying order.

Carl Joseph's self-destructive behavioural patterns reflect this almost complete impasse in that to be opposed to that which oppresses him would in effect amount to being opposed to himself. The corollary of this is in effect a syndrome akin to self-hatred. In order for him to be content with what he is, he has to deny what he is, namely his role in the society of which he is an intrinsic part. Gradually, belatedly in fact, he becomes aware of his impasse and at the end of the novel he acts in a way which almost guarantees his death by fetching water for his men in the face of enemy fire. This act is an act of defiance; his death is an act of defiance. He can no longer be part of something that destroys him, and thus pre-empts his fate, so that at least he

has shown that he is aware that his life had been a lie, and while he died literally in the service of the defunct order, he did so on his own terms. Self-assertion for Carl Joseph is equated, by Roth, with death. But it is a death with a modicum of dignity, a death that shows that Carl Joseph has not been entirely duped. While it would be simplistic to suggest that death is a way out of impasse, Roth has given the reader an explanation for Carl Joseph's behaviour. His death at the end of the novel becomes comprehensible, dogged as his life has been by being what other people have wanted him to be.

And it is in this aspect that one can see a cogent link between Roth's *Radetzkymarsch* and Bassani's *Gli occhiali d'oro*. In *Gli occhiali d'oro* Bassani creates the *io narrante*, who refuses to be what others want him to be, what the state wants him to be, i.e. to accept the rôle of being himself, of being Jewish on the nefarious terms that others expect. The *io narrante* rejects the rôle assigned to him by a thuggish state. Unlike Carl Joseph, the *io narrante* is at the margins of his society, but only so by virtue of the 1938 Race Laws, the passage of which was a cheap political expedient on the part of the Fascist party. While previously he had been a thoroughly integrated individual, not at odds with his society, after the Race Laws he found himself an outcast. The question thus arises: which form of impasse is more insidious? That of Carl Joseph in the Habsburg Empire, where Carl Joseph is part of the ruling military elite, or the brutal marginalisation at the hands of the Fascists? There would seem to be little to choose between the two, except that Bassani has created the universal character of Fadigati, the homosexual doctor, in order to illustrate that small-mindedness is inherent in not only Ferrara, but beyond the confines of the city, Ferrara being a crucible for the forces at work in society at large. Signora Lavezzoli has that function, namely to show that narrow self-interest is what allowed Fascism to flourish. It was a political order that pandered to people's baser instincts, in order to stay in power, in order to justify its existence. Fascism dressed up self-interest and expediency with notions of recreating the Roman Empire, but at its heart it remained essentially small-minded and parochial, and that is why Fadigati was ultimately rejected, but tolerated as long as his vice was never made public. The same mentality that condemned Fadigati, would be the one that would condemn the Jews.

The solid middle-classes who sat in judgement of Fadigati would do the same to the Jews, not out of any conviction, but merely because it was expedient to do so. Of course, his behaviour, or his being, could be rejected for a thousand reasons, but what criteria could be used for condemning the Jews who had lived in the midst of the Ferraresi for centuries? Indeed, they were invited to Ferrara in the wake of the Spanish Inquisition. Self-interest is the only explanation, self-interest devoid of any transcendent ideal, devoid of any obeisance to the ideals which had ennobled so much of Italian civic virtue. It stands to reason that self-interest can also be ennobling, but this did not apply to the Jews of Ferrara, and not when it is held up as a *raison d'être*, and when self-interest happily sees people being deported to death camps. Signora Lavezzoli encapsulates this attitude, again dressing up her prejudice and small-mindedness by referring to the Catholic Church for justification and through her adoration of Il Duce. The impasse is thus multiplied in Bassani. And it is intimate: it sullies personal relationships, it undermines everything in which the *io narrante* believes, that the higher self responds to. His friendship with Nino Bottechiari is thus sullied, his trust in those around him evaporates and all the while he bears witness to the alternative that could await him if he so chose: to behave like Fadigati, to reduce life to an endless ritual of obsequiousness and fawning, merely to be accepted. What is more is that Bassani's *io narrante* finds him questioning his father and his rôle in the Fascist set-up, bearing in mind that for many patriotism and Fascism were one and the same thing, and for many Jews to be patriotic was a way of underscoring their sense of belonging: if Fascism was the way to acceptance, then so be it. All the greater the betrayal then, when the Fascists turned on the Jews in 1938, 26 years after coming to power. The intimacy of the impasse is further felt in that the *io narrante*, as mentioned previously, views his co-religionists, metaphorically speaking, behaving like Fadigati, i.e. compromising themselves for the sake of survival. This theme is explored more fully in Bassani's other works, most notably *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* and in *Una lapida in Via Mazzini*.

Compromise itself is reflective of impasse in that compromise denies the attainment of anything beyond banal and immediate self-interestedness. As mentioned, in the Ferrara under

Fascism compromise had become equated with cowardice in Bassani's eyes. However, that compromise comes at a price, and that price ultimately was deportation to the death camps: a pact with the devil can only have deleterious consequences.

So one sees Bassani's *io narrante* has to confront a myriad impasses, with the cardinal distinction being that he becomes aware of the impasse inherent in his existence much sooner than does Carl Joseph and hence a resolution to the impasse need not necessarily be equated with death.

In Fauconnier's *Malaisie* the impasse takes altogether a different form. For a start, there is no adherence to traditional family structures. It's a novel about individuals.

Whereas in *Radetzky* and *Gli occhiali d'oro* one has the assumption of more or less a traditional family structure, in *Malaisie* this is dispensed with altogether. Fauconnier has distilled a situation that finds the individual left to his own devices, in a situation that bespeaks an apparent liberty for the individual. *Malaisie* is an overtly "existentialist" novel, with Fauconnier having the protagonists to contemplate the meaning of existence, and how best to live that existence. Rolain and Lescale, have turned their back on "civilisation" as they know it, with the intention to make the most out of their freedom; theirs is a response to the impasse they have experienced in Europe, specifically the First World War, of which they are both veterans. In the text itself, however, the amok scene symbolises the untenability of their stance.

In a certain sense the impasse that Rolain and Lescale face is all the greater in that while having rejected the origins of the impasse, namely bourgeois Europe and its values, their attempt at rebellion ultimately falters. At most they have had a bucolic interlude, much like Carl Joseph's short-lived residence at Graf Chojnicki's behest. Read differently, the impasse can be said to be partially overcome as neither of the two protagonists dies. Carl Joseph dies and Fadigati dies. Death is the inevitable outcome in Roth and Bassani's novels, as a consequence of impasse. But in *Malaisie* a continuity of sorts is hinted at when Rolain says to Lescale: "Se quitter, ce n'est rien, quand ce n'est pas se lâcher" (Fauconnier, 1930: 312) ["To part is nothing when we do not

really lose each other” (Sutton, 1931: 247).] The implication is also that both Rolain and Lescale have now seen through the façade – much as do the protagonists in *Radetzky* and *Gli occhiali d’oro*. The confrontation with impasse is to be faced stoically and is destined to be a solitary experience, as when Rolain exhorts Lescale repeatedly at the end of the novel to sleep. Fauconnier leaves the reader contemplating nothingness as a way of overcoming the pitfalls that the search for meaning places on our path, of overcoming the impasse of life itself. Impasse then in Fauconnier is faced by everyman, is part of life and, unlike in *Radetzky* and *Gli occhiali d’oro*, not restricted to a given set of social and political circumstances. Impasse is deemed inherent to life itself.

Whalen-Bridge’s assertion in Chapter I is also borne out: one has seen in this investigation that a dogmatic division between politics and culture is difficult to sustain.

Few scholars now accept the dogmatic division of politics and culture, and yet the obsessive linkage of politics and culture in today’s academy is better understood as the eclipse of culture by politics than as the rich intermingling of two areas of human activity (Whalen-Bridge 1998: 6).

In all three novels, one encounters the individual emerging out of political contexts, with their attendant mendacities. The individual cannot help but be affected by these. Of the three novels, Fauconnier’s is the least obviously political, and the most obviously philosophical, but it is philosophical in response as well to situations that are political in origin. His philosophising is ultimately also a political statement in that it rejects the normative precepts upon which European hegemonies rely.

These precepts are the ones that form the impasse in *Radetzky* and in *Gli occhiali d’oro*. In *Malaisie* after identifying the impasse, the underlying assumption is that the impasse can be overcome but not until it has been identified as such.

Bull asserts that “writers reveal the full effects of political action in an age when clear-cut solutions no longer seem to exist” (Bull 1999: 215). One sees too that through these literary endeavours, through a “presa di coscienza”, that is, a sense of awareness of the world, the writers engage with the conflicting and contradictory nature of existence and try to navigate their way through the impasse that history, politics and psychology have woven for their

protagonists. There is no solution, or resolution, to the impasse; it is a maze created by modernity. But identifying the maze, following its various lanes and blind exits, distils and presents the impasse for what it is, namely as the search for an enduring resolution. And this is conveyed to the reader.

The three authors also address, seen in terms of this exploration, the same questions that the social anthropologist, philosopher and historian Ernest Gellner addresses. As far as one has been able to ascertain, the works of Gellner have not been used as a key for literary texts, and it is also the contention of this exploration that the works of Ernest Gellner are apposite to use as a key for literary texts. What does this prove? one may ask. Simply that the concerns expressed in one realm of thought or discipline may well serve to illuminate concerns that can be identified in works of literature. Specifically, the concerns Gellner raises, straddling a variety of disciplines, serve in the quest to better understand the world which man has created for himself. The three texts can thus be viewed as being mutually enriching and their confluence – with the concerns expressed by Gellner – underscores the benefit of a comparative analysis.

In this exploration, reference has been made to politics, history, psychology and philosophy, all in a bid to unravel the complexities found in the texts examined. Can one, so many years after the publication of *Radetzky* (1932), *Gli occhiali d'oro* (1958) and *Malaisie* (1930), be satisfied with a reading that does not include the resonance of these works in other disciplines? And similarly, as shown, other disciplines shed light on these texts, and become part of the tools at one's disposal in order to make more sense of the texts and enrich one's reading of them.

Another aspect which this dissertation has highlighted is the confluence of concerns, or quests for fulfilment, for an *Ordnung* that straddles the Modernist literary canon in German, Italian and French, as it happens. It could be applied to any number of literary traditions. The trauma of modernity is expressed in each of these novels in a different way. The irreversible loss of a transcendental worldview is bemoaned. These texts aspire to a framework that would seek to question human arrogance, as is evident in the themes of all three novels, dealing as they do (in

two cases directly so) with unbridled political power and the effects of the same on the individual, whether monarchical as in *Radetzky*, fascistic in *Gli occhiali d'oro* or a would-be Nietzschean rebellion against French democracy – in the case of *Malaisie* – part of the European malady that led to the First World War. In all cases, the five protagonists either have had to assert themselves against political and social forces or succumb to these pressures. So Whalen-Bridge's assertion above is thus confirmed by this: politics and culture are interwoven as a "rich intermingling of two areas of human activity" (1998: 6).

While the emphasis in the three novels has been on the individual and explored to some extent the notion of the individual and the fulfilment of the individual, this does not suggest that the authors are socially insensible. The underlying notion, especially in *Radetzky* and *Gli occhiali d'oro*, is that the individual's happiness is dependent upon, to a significant degree, the norms and aspiration of the society in which s/he lives. Fauconnier's rebellion, and escape to Malaya, is an acknowledgement of this view in that he chooses to live in a milieu that is not of the making of his forebears. Instead, Fauconnier's Rolain prefers to create a milieu that is of his "own making", disingenuous as the attempt may be in that it relies to a great extent on the forbearance of his Malay hosts and his economic function in the colonial context.

Roth and Bassani illustrate the maladies of their respective societies and how the individual – Carl Joseph, the *io narrante*, Fadigati – responds. The interpretations and limitations of the idea of the "common good" determine the response of the individual, who has to navigate a passage through a society that is either mendacious, treacherous, friendly or hostile. One has seen what Carl Joseph had to contend with in having to comply with the demands of the Habsburg hierarchy; similarly, one has seen what Bassani's response has been to the machinations of the Fascist state. Fauconnier decided not to engage with Europe (even though he does so by proxy) and has his protagonists explore a new definition of what it means to be an individual, a new way of finding fulfilment, for the very reason that he perceives individual happiness to be unattainable in a society that has developed and refined – over centuries – the means by which it contrives to conspire against individual aspirations. It is as if to say, what kind of society sends its young men to the trenches to be slaughtered? Or, in *Gli occhiali d'oro's* case, what kind of

society legitimises racial and religious prejudice? In Roth's case, what kind of society betrays its young so elaborately, for the mere sake of maintaining an order that can no longer be sustained? So, while the emphasis has been on the individual, the individual is part of a society that can promote or obstruct the possibility of individual fulfilment. In other words, one is not dealing in these novels with a kind of narcissistic infatuation with the individual, but as one sees, the context in which the individual finds himself is central in *Radetzky* and *Gli occhiali d'oro*. Fauconnier, by deviating from this, illustrates the point in the Roth and Bassani novels. Fauconnier has decided to engage with his own society by distancing himself from it; the Malay society that surrounds him, on the other hand, is kept at a distance, and the fact that he does not understand it, helps him to explore a more unbridled individuality that does not need to take heed, more than is strictly necessary, of the surrounding society. The failure to understand Malay society beyond its exotic top layer underscores Rolain's mystical musings and allows the reverie to maintain itself for the author, confirming his doubt in epistemological certainty. Thus, taken out of his French context, Fauconnier's Rolain can explore what he is, on his own terms, unencumbered by the demands of the "bourgeois conformity" with which he upbraids his own society.

Fauconnier's *Malaisie* is also part of a continuum, not only in terms of philosophy, but also in terms of a utopian tradition in French literature. Adam Paul's *Lettres de Malaisie*, published in 1898, bears this out inasmuch as it is an evocation of an Eden-like Malaya, far from the suffocating moral climate of Europe. Fauconnier seems to have continued in this tradition too, utopian ideals being in effect as well a response to modernity.

Utopian visions provide an escape, a return to innocence, and it is this spirit which suffuses *Malaisie*; similarly, in Carl Joseph in *Radetzky* one sees the opposite, with the individual going from innocence to being worn down, from disillusionment to disillusionment and on to a state of despair. But for the brief respite in the forest, Carl Joseph's life is a litany of lies and disappointments, and yet, in a sense, he remains true to an idealism of sorts that sees him sacrificing himself, however foolishly, for others. In *Gli occhiali d'oro* any kind of utopian vision is hovering on the side and takes the form of reminding the reader that a better world is there

as an ideal, but for the present, in Fascist Italy, it is far from attainable. Bassani manages to keep alive throughout the novel a vision of an ideal, the ideal behaviour, an ideal of values, all of which he illustrates by presenting the reader with their opposite, such as Signora Lavezzoli, Delilieri or indeed Fadigati. Or as Gellner summarises this vision:

The angel was the presupposition of knowledge and morality in the world. As such he was allowed to remain, but only on condition that he was never visible in the world. We know him by his fruits, and *only* [Gellner's italics] by his fruits. We can never meet him face to face. The world-machine leaves us no room for either knowledge or value. The fact that we recognise them and respect both of these, shows that the ghost-angel is operating within us (Gellner, 2003: 102 [Gellner's italics]).

Significantly, Gellner also refers to modern society as “the only society ever to be based on sustained cognitive growth” (Gellner, 2003: 103). Each of the three novels reveals this aspect of the “technological/industrial society” in that they presuppose “cognitive growth”, and indeed assume it and propagate it. Bassani, and indeed Roth and Fauconnier, describe what could be “good” in the world by illustrating the obverse, while alluding all the while to the invisible “angel” of knowledge and morality.

Thus it can be said that all three writers have a vision that can be deciphered; the metanarrative in each of the three novels illustrates a vision that recognises impasse: in *Radetzky* the impasse is overwhelming, in *Gli occhiali d'oro* one can see chinks in the impasse, and in *Malaisie* the vision is maintained that the impasse can be overcome, even if only briefly. To describe the novels as “pessimistic” is not of much use, and doing so would reduce the novels to their tragic components. Tragedy is there, directly or obliquely. But there is in each of the three novels a powerful element of empathy for the protagonists, significantly because this in itself illustrates the underlying sense of humanity with which the authors endow their protagonists.

In *Radetzky* the most complex character is Carl Joseph's father Franz, the Bezirkshauptmann who has to endure the full tragedy of the demise of his world – the fall of his entire belief system, being old enough to understand the significance of the empire; he also has to endure the death of his son, after the humiliating visit to the emperor himself to seek pardon

for his son. The Bezirkshauptmann is the one who is kicked in the gut by the march of history and politics. This is further illustrated by the death of Jacques, his old retainer, and Jacques's death awakens a sensibility in the Bezirkshauptmann that his world is changing much faster than he could recognise. Carl Joseph is too young to understand the full gamut of his own personal tragedy. One sees too, in *Radetzkmarsch*, the death of a utopia, or what many considered to be a utopia, or what many wished could become a utopia. Roth, however, does not try to convince anyone that the Habsburg Empire had been a utopia, but he compares the empire to his contemporary world, wracked by sectarian and political violence and opportunism. In *Gli occhiali d'oro* Fadigati embodies the tragedy, contrasted as he is with the *io narrante*, the latter being a character that holds out hope for the future, imperilled though his life may be. It is Fadigati who has internalised the malady of Ferrarese society and the Fascist state most thoroughly. He has succumbed to its precepts, the groundwork for his submission already having been laid by the way he conforms to Ferrarese society in order to disguise his homosexuality. The Fascist state tried to present itself as a nationalist utopia, but Bassani deftly illustrates the converse, namely the ultimate dystopia, and Fadigati its ultimate victim, not the *io narrante*. For the *io narrante* to be the victim would be against Bassani's vision, as defiance is the *Leitmotiv* in *Gli occhiali d'oro*, as it is in *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini*, among much else. In *Malaisie* the tragedy is contained in the amok scene in that the utopia that Malaya was supposed to be has not been entirely realised for the two characters, but much of it has. And it is Lescale who is left enriched by his relationship to Rolain. It is Rolain who sees himself as emancipated from what he considers middle-class notions of good and evil, and who imparts to Lescale (and the reader) a vision of individual freedom, nigh mystical in its intensity.

Perhaps Claudio Magris encapsulates the debate even more succinctly in that he sees the problem essentially as the individual freedom that humanity has, but does not know how to manage adequately. Reason, he says, is but a tenuous flame and as such needs to be nurtured and used to intervene, however modestly, to bring about a modicum of progress in humanity:

Se si guarda lontano il corso della storia, si è indotti a vederlo come fatale, qualcosa che sembra patetico voler fermare o modificare con interventi morali, così come sembrerebbe patetico opporsi con ideali o morali, o con misure arcadiche, da idillio pastorale, a quello sviluppo

tecnologico che ha assunto sempre di più per l'Occidente, le sembianze del destino. Ma se si guarda all'esistenza individuale, si avverte, con altrettanta insopportabile concretezza, il quantum di libertà di cui essa dispone; ognuno, se guarda entro se stesso, sa bene quali sono e sono stati i limiti delle sue scelte e del suo agire, ma anche quali possibilità erano nelle sue mani e ha perso per sua responsabilità. (Magris, 2001: 105) [If one looks from afar at the course of history, and one is forced to look at it as something fatal, something that seems pathetic, something which it would seem pathetic to want to stop or modify with moral interventions, as it would seem pathetic to oppose it with ideals or with arcadian measures, from pastoral idylls to that of technological development which has assumed ever more for the West, the appearance of destiny. But if one looks at individual existence, one notes, with equally irrepressible concreteness, the quantum of freedom over which the individual disposes; each one of us, if he were to look inside himself, knows well which are and which have been the limits of his choices and his actions, but also which possibilities were at hand and for the loss of which he is responsible (translation author's).]

However sceptical one might be about Magris's vision of human progress, the authors' creations emerge out of a frustrating state of impasse and involve a perception of humanity that, to be conveyed, first of all requires the impasse to be identified as such.

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