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THREE COMPOSITIONAL ASPECTS OF
JOSEPH ROTH'S NOVEL DAS SPINNENNETZ

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Depending upon the emphasis in any effort to interpret a novel, the discussion will usually center upon one of the three traditional categories we speak of when we are discussing novels. These three categories are: plot or narrative development, characterization and narrative manner or technique. Many modern and contemporary novels, of course, present problems in this sort of endeavor because of the nature of the work and, in some instances, we cannot speak of all three categories since the particular work may not really contain a "plot" at all, for example, or one of the other two aspects may not be present in such a clear or dependant way.

In the case of *Pan Spinnennetz*, by Joseph Roth, we are able to speak of all three categories, and it is within these three frames of reference that this thesis will consider the novel. The plot, characterization and the narrative manner will be considered so that this discussion of the novel will be concerned principally with the work from the viewpoint of its composition, rather than its general content and the significance thereof. The general content of the work will be alluded to only in the context of the threefold analysis which has been mentioned, and only to the extent that such discussion is relevant to the problems which are presented by the three aspects of plot, characterization, and
narrative technique. The definitions which will be used in the thesis are, for the most part, taken from the critical writings of authors who have dealt with the problems of narrative prose works and whose definitions of terms are generally accepted in this sort of discussion. These definitions of terms and concepts will be considered only within the context of Das Spinnennetz.
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INTRODUCTION

In the following discussion of Joseph Roth's novel, *Das Spinnennetz*, I shall consider the work within three frames of reference: plot or narrative development, characterization and narrative manner or technique. These three categories constitute most of the discussion of any novel, regardless of where the emphasis lies. In any attempt to interpret almost any novel, whether it be from the viewpoint of a technical attempt, i.e., formal attempt, or whether it be a content-centered interpretation, the analysis will inevitably be required to deal with plot, characters and characterization, narrative manner or technique.

In order to give some useful definitions to these rather vague terms, I would like first to quote E. M. Forster's definition of plot: "Let us define a plot. We have defined a story as a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence. A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. 'The king died and then the queen died' is a story. 'The king died and then the queen died of grief' is a plot. The time-sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it . . . If it is a plot we ask 'why?' That is the fundamental difference between these two aspects of the novel. A plot cannot be told to a gaping audience of cave-men or to a tyrannical sultan or to their modern descendent, the movie public."[1]

Virginia Woolf, commenting on the novelist's responsibility to the aspect of characterization, says: "Your part (the reader) is to insist that writers shall come down off their plinths and pedestals, and describe beautifully if possible, truthfully at any rate, our Mrs. Brown. You should insist that she is an old lady of unlimited capacity and infinite variety; capable of appearing in any place; wearing any dress; saying anything and doing heaven knows what. But the things she says and the things she does and her eyes and her nose and her speech and her silence have an overwhelming fascination, for she is, of course, the spirit we live by, life itself."² I might add by way of explanation that the Mrs. Brown to whom Virginia Woolf refers to in the above-quoted passage is a fictional character whom she uses, in the context of that essay to demonstrate the various ways in which a character might be treated by a variety of writers, including herself.

Narrative manner or technique can, of course, be defined in a number of ways. Usually we refer to technique as being somehow to be understood as opposed to the content of the narrative fiction involved. The most adequate definition of technique that I have been able to find is that given by Mark Schorer. Technique, we are told by Mark Schorer, is "nearly everything." "When we speak of technique then, we speak of nearly everything."³ I shall comment on

²*ibid.*, p. 205.
³*ibid.*, p. 141.
this quote at greater length when I come to a discussion of
technique in particular.

Because Das Spinnennetz is a "Fortsetzungsroman,"
the traditional analyses of plot, characterization, narrative
manner and idea, etc., are made somewhat difficult. I shall,
however, attempt to deal with the work in toto, despite the
obvious fact that each chapter could be dealt with in and of
itself. The latter statement is true of almost all individual
chapters of the novel; there are, however, chapters which
do not lend themselves readily to a treatment which would
consider them to be autonomous and independent of the work as
a whole.
The first problem in the analysis of a novel is usually that of plot. In *Das Spinnennetz*, the protagonist is Theodor Lohse, a young veteran of the First World War. He is the son of a customs officer who has set modest goals for himself and for his son. At the outset of the work, Theodor Lohse is found in the home of a wealthy Jewish jeweller who has employed him as a tutor for his son. The original situation of the protagonist, then, is one of relative financial and social security. The initial possibilities of later disequilibrium in the development of Theodor are, I think, made evident by the author almost at the outset of the novel. The reader is told that Theodor has a definite feeling of uneasiness while in the Efrussi household where he is employed. This uneasiness is brought about by two factors: The Efrussi family is a wealthy Jewish household, and the son whom Theodor is tutoring bears a disturbing resemblance to a classmate of his, also Jewish.

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Glaser so ähnlich, dass Theodor Mucke hatte, vor dem Sohn des Juweliors Autorität zu bewahren. Theodor musste eine leise, hartnäckig aufsteigende Zaghaftigkeit unterdrücken, ehe er seinen Schüler zurechtwies. Denn so sicher schrieb der junge Russi einen Fehler hin, so selbstbewusst sprach er ihm aus, dass Theodor am Lehrbuch zu zweifeln und seines Schülers Irrtum gelten zu lassen geneigt war.4

This uneasy feeling of inferiority in the presence of Jews, even Jewish children, adds to a problem which grew out of his relationship to his family.


These two factors, his feeling of being somehow inferior to his Jewish compatriots and the unsympathetic attitude of his family towards him, combine to adumbrate to the reader, at the very outset, those possibilities of later disequilibrium which are present in the character of the protagonist.

The series of events which involve the protagonist in a central tension begin with his meeting with prince Heinrich, with whose regiment he served during the war.


5Roth, p. 6.
 Shortly after this initial meeting with Heinrich, Theodor obtains a position as secretary to Trebitsch, an acquaintance of the prince. Theodor now becomes member of an organization whose name he does not know; he knows only the letter S and the roman numeral II, and he knows that the seat of power in this secret organization is in Munich. This first step in the chain of events which leads to the central tension in Theodor's life is climaxed by his severing of formal relations with the Efrussi family. Already in the third chapter of the novel Theodor realizes that the security, social and economic, which he enjoyed while employed by the Efrussis is gone. "Seit jenem Vormittag in Buero des Dr. Trebitsch traumte er von brennenden Kerzen, gelben im Licht eines vollen Tages. An graeslichtesten war die Vorstellung, dass kein Entrinnen moglich war. Welche Befehle harrten seiner? Mord und Diebstahl und gefahrliches Spionieren? Wie viele Feinde lauerten im Dunkel der abendlichen Strassen? Schon jetzt war er nicht mehr seines Lebens sicher?"6

The second major event in this course is Theodor's experience as he contemplates a portrait of Ludendorff. This experience prompts him to write to Ludendorff, from whom he receives a rather perfunctory reply. "Lieber Freund!" schrieb der General, 'Sie gefallen mir. Arbeiten Sie fleissig mit Gott fuer Freiheit und Vaterland. Ihr

6 Roth, p. 22.
Ludendorff."7


At this point in the novel, Theodor has already arrived at the central tension which will dominate his subsequent development in the work. Resentful and frustrated, he has chosen to seek his solution in an organization. The uncertainty which he felt as he was faced with the decision as to whether he really ought to leave the relative comfort and security of the Efrussi household has been overcome and he has convinced himself that those higher goals in his own life can be better accomplished by joining the organization, whose only real identity to him is still S-II.

The deception committed by the protagonist in the fifth chapter is, I think, the salient indication of his willingness to overlook all other considerations in the pursuit of a goal which he believes in.

Eine Viertelstunde nachdem Goldscheider die Lutten angesteckt hatte, rief Theodor die Polizei an: in einigen

7Roth, p. 29.
8Ibid.
Theodor's confrontation with the elderly Baron von Koeckwitz advances Theodor's development as an insular, pro-
vocal nationalist. He regains his belief in himself and his role in the future of Germany when he hears the baron speak of the "sanctity of the soil." "Eine Woche später nahm Theodor Abschied vom Gutshof. Er konnte seine Ruhm nicht unterdrücken, er dachte daran, dass der alte Freiherr bald sterben werde, er dachte an die Abendstunden, den Gesang der Froesche und der Grillen, die gemeinsamen Gefahren, die ihn mit dem Hause verbunden hatten, und an die Heiligkeit der 'Scholle.'"11

At this point in the development of the plot, Benjamin Lenz is introduced into the novel. He is perhaps the "hero" of the work. He hates and despises everything European, including his own Jewishness. As a foil character in contrast to Theodor, he despises the stupidity which he sees embodied in Theodor and others like him who are in a position to seize power but who are most unworthy to do so because of their profound stupidity. In reference to Lenz, Theodor's reaction is this: "Theodor hatte ihn nicht nur wegen der Duplicata abgeschafft. Seine Klugheit roch er. Er fuchlte das Judentum Benjamins; wie ein Jagdhund ueberall wild wittert, so witterte Theodor Lohse Juden, wo er einer Ueberlegenheit begegnete."12

From this point on the development is along those lines which lead to Theodor's confrontation with violence on the second of November. His resentment against anything and

11 Roth, p. 70.
12 Roth, p. 83.
everything which is not German grows with each chapter. His acquaintance with the journalist Risk, via Benjamin, brings him to the attention of the public and he finally achieves, to a considerable degree, the public recognition which he has sought for so long. Then, his marriage to the noblewoman von Schlieffen enables him to achieve a position as chief of the security police. He is, at last, sure of himself and of his role in the life and future of Germany. At the height of his career he is intoxicated by his own rhetoric, a captive not only of the larger socio-political milieu but of self-deception.

A question which is very often posed in discussions of plot and narrative-development is to what extent changes in the life of the protagonist can be attributed to fortune, moral character, or knowledge. In the case of T. Lohse, I think it is a question of fortune and moral character. The Spinnennetz in which he finds himself, i.e., the socio-economic, political and cultural milieu, has determined his development more than anything else. I think the very title of the novel is evidence of the fact that this was Roth's intention. In regard to moral character, I think this question, which implies a certain amount of free will on the part of the character, has also been determined by the larger socio-cultural context into which he has been cast by the author.

Another question which is very often asked in
reference to plot is the question of alternative action or actions on the part of the protagonist. The only real alternative to be found in the case of Theodor Lohse is the decision he makes as to whether to remain in the relative security of the Ehrussi household. The decision to seek the fulfillment of his life's goals in another context via other means determines his later development as a military, political and quasi-military figure.

Finally, the traditional question of "tightness" or "looseness" of plot remains to be answered. By definition, of course, an episodic novel of this sort is "loose" in plot development. However, most of the events in this novel do advance the central problem in a rather direct way. There are no serious digressions of materials from the central theme, and I do not believe that it is the case that the incidents in this novel are so independent of each other that they could be transposed without apparent loss.
CHAPTER TWO

CHARACTERIZATION

The analysis of characterization has traditionally begun with the terms "flatness" and "roundness;" flatness referring to the type of protagonist who is not highly individualized but who, to a large extent, represents a type rather than an individual. The "round" character, on the other hand, is the character who is highly individualized by the author. Theodor Lohse is, I believe, to a considerable degree, a flat character in that most of the traits which define him are those which are more representative of a type of individual, i.e., a collective; they are not traits which would set one off as highly individualized. This, I think, was Roth's intention. The author was concerned very likely with those characteristics which would define the collective of T. Lohses, the discontent, the frustration, the feeling of inferiority which would be over-compensated for, etc. This again, I think was Roth's intention and this degree of flatness of characterization, I believe, served the author's intention quite well, when the novel is considered in toto. There is, however, a certain amount of individualization in the characterization of T. Lohse. One example of a highly individualized trait is found in this passage: "Dreimal taeglich rauchte er, nach jeder Mahlzeit. Eine Zigarre genugte
This is a habit which serves to set off the protagonist from others who would share most of the other characteristics which Roth has used to define him. Almost the same could be said for the other, minor characters in the work. They are entirely "flat" characters, with the possible exception of Benjamin Lenz. In the case of Lenz, it might be argued that he does show a certain amount of individuality; however, I believe that he too would be essentially a "flat" character.

To evaluate the moral stature of a character requires that we rely upon that which the narrator tells us concerning the protagonist and that we accept the testimony of those witnesses who are also characters within the work. Roth describes the moral character of his protagonist as one who finds himself within a certain socio-cultural context and who predicates his conduct upon the determinations which that context has set. Theodor Lohse is a discontented, frustrated man who wishes to overcome his environment, both human and external, and to rise to those heights for which he feels himself destined. After his decision to leave the Ehrussi family, he becomes, in a real sense, "beyond good and evil." His actions are not so much predicated upon any particular ethic as they are upon his conception of himself, his milieu and the role which he conceives himself destined to play.

\[13\text{Roth, p. 77.}\]
the course of events. In addition to the narrator, B. Lenz supports this thesis, I think, in his analysis of Theodor's condition:


frieden mit Ihren Leben, Ihren Einnahmen, Ihrer sozialen Stellung. Sie haetten versuchen sollen, im Rahmen Ihrer Persoenlichkeit mehr zu erlangen, niemals aber ein Leben, das Ihrer Begabung, Ihrer Konstitution zu-

widerlaeuft.14

I do not think that there is any evidence in the novel to indicate that the protagonist thinks in the traditional terms of virtue and vice. There is virtue and vice only to the extent that these categories might apply to the very pragmatic, expedient decisions which he makes in regard to his own career and his own role in the life and future of the country of which he is a part. The psychology of the protagonist has been dealt with to some extent already. He is a character who finds himself in a hostile environment. Initially, his family rejected him because they felt that he had failed them; he would have been a far greater source of pride to them if he had died in battle. It is, of course, only to be expected that someone who finds himself in such an environment would be terribly frustrated with himself and with his family.

14Roth, p. 92.
An author's characterization also has a good deal to do with modes of awareness, i.e., through which modes of awareness is the character most responsive, rational, instinctual, sensory, emotional or intuitive? From the very beginning his attitudes and conduct are based upon what is largely an emotional response. Some of this quality has already been illustrated in the discussion of plot. The major decisions in his life are made on the basis of an emotional and perhaps instinctual grasp of things. His decision to forsake the Kruussi household, e.g., is predicated upon his feelings of inferiority and his frustration. Further, his deepening involvement with the S-II organization and his political engagement are largely a result of an emotional need and desire, a need to prove himself to himself and to others.

In his efforts to take hold of an emergency too, Theodor reacts principally in emotional terms. After the elimination of Guenther, the Communist sympathizer, and Detective Klitsche, Theodor's former superior, the narrator describes Theodor's state of mind thus: "Aus Theodors Innern kam das rauschende Rot, es erfüllte ihn, schlug aus ihm, aber es machte ihn leicht, und sein Kopf schien zu schweben, als wäre er mit Luft gefüllt. Es war wie ein leichter, roter Jubel, ein Triumph, der ihn hat, ein bescheuertes Hauchen, Tod der schweren Gedanken, Befreiung der verborgenen, begraben gewesenen Seele."15

15Roth, p. 51.
In this context it might also be said that Theodor sees his problems in terms of conspiracy, conspiracy of Jews, aliens and political adversaries. "Er las politisch-philosophische Schriften, die Trebitsch verfasst hatte. Flugschriften, in denen Zusammenhänge zwischen Sozialismus, Juden, Franzosen und Russen aufgedeckt wurden. Diese Lektüre befruchtete Theodors Phantasie. Er glaubte nicht nur, was er gelesen hatte, er kombinierte aus dem gelesenen Material neue Tatsachen und entwickelte sie im 'Nationalen Beobachter.' 16 He does not attempt to prove or disprove what he reads and what he has chosen to believe in. He grossly oversimplifies the world's problems in terms of his own situation and reduces the source of these problems to a belief in a well-defined international conspiracy. "Jetzt erinnerte sich Theodor, dass er im Russischen Hause eine schwachherzige Haltung eingenommen hatte, eine dumme Angst hatte ihn damals noch beherrscht, und die Schuld daran schob er den Juden zu. Wie uuberhaupt die Juden seine langjährige Erfolglosigkeit verursacht hatten und ihn an der schnellen Eroberung der Welt hinderten." 17

The author's characterization of Theodor Lohse is apparently intended to portray a character who is caught in the highly complex net of his times and his environment. The

16 Roth, p. 41.
17 Roth, p. 42.
protagonist attempts to free himself from his frustrations and feeling of inadequacy via a largely emotional response, a response which reduces all problems to that of conspiracy, a conspiracy of Jewish and alien elements within his mother country. The personality of the protagonist is, I think, worked out with probability and consistency.

In this connection, I think Northrop Frye’s discussion of fictional modes and forms might be of assistance in dealing with the questions of character and characterization. In one of the essays in *Anatomy of Criticism*, Mr. Frye presents five possible "mimetic modes," ranging from the vastly superior character or hero to the character who is cast by the author as inferior to the reader. I believe that the category into which Theodor Lohse would most appropriately fit would be the fourth mode as presented by Mr. Frye:

If superior neither to other men nor to his environment, the hero is one of us; we respond to a sense of his common humanity, and demand from the poet the same canons of probability that we find in our own experience. This gives us the hero of the *low mimetic mode*, of most comedy and realistic fiction. "High" and "low" have no connotations of comparative value, but are purely diagrammatic, as they are when they refer to Biblical critics or to Anglicans. On this level the difficulty of retaining the word "hero," which has a more limited meaning among the preceding modes, occasionally strikes an author. Thackeray thus feels obliged to call *Vanity Fair* a novel without a hero.18

It is clear that Roth had no intention of creating a

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central character, Theodor Lohse, who was to be conceived of by the reader as being superior to himself; nor is there any evidence, in my opinion, to indicate that both would have the reader conceive of Theodor Lohse as an inferior being, relative to himself (the reader). Theodor Lohse is definitely portrayed as "one of us."
CHAPTER THREE
NARRATIVE MANNER

"When we speak of technique, then," says Mark Schorer, "we speak of nearly everything. For technique is the means by which the writer's experience, which is his subject matter, compels him to attend to it; technique is the only means he has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning, and, finally, of evaluating it. And surely it follows that certain techniques are sharper tools than others, and will discover more; that the writer capable of the most exacting technical scrutiny of his subject matter will produce works with the most satisfying content, works with thickness and resonance, works which reverberate, works with maximum meaning."19 Later, in the same essay, Mr. Schorer goes on to say: "Technique is really what T. S. Eliot means by 'convention'—any selection, structure, or distortion, form or any rhythm imposed upon the world of action; by means of which—it should be added—our apprehension of the world of action is enriched or renewed."20

The obvious interest of the novel lies in the characters engaged in a plot, much as the obvious business

19 Ibid., p. 141.
20 Ibid., p. 143.
of the snapshot is the figure posed in action. A photographer, of course, does more than click the shutter; he selects angle, distance, filter, film, shutter, speed, etc. A novelist has the same sort of flexibility in the means of telling his narration. He can choose the angle from which the reader is to observe, the order of presentation, the styles of language, the closeness at which the reader is to be held, etc. Some assistance is gained by being aware of the various options which are available to a novelist and how he may use them in his work.

Before proceeding to a discussion of the various technical aspects of this novel in particular, I would first like to present the following brief definitions of terms which I shall be using in the further course of the discussion.

Point of view (also called angle of narration) may be defined as the restriction of the reader's observation to a limited field of consciousness. It does resemble a camera angle which, once selected, allows the spectator to see all within a given field of vision but nothing outside that field. Such a focusing of experience imitates individual life itself, since every man is confined to his own point of observation, and must experience life with both the vividness and the blindness conferred by that angle.21

The novelist, of course, has a number of angles of narration, among which he may choose, depending upon the advantages which he feels he may gain according to his individual situation and according to the goals which he has

set himself as a novelist.

Time and tempo may be thought of in the context of this definition:

Although most narrative... is conveyed by the past tenses (except for direct dialogue), the reader understands that there is a now-point, a fictional present moment at which events are being directly experienced and from which other events are assigned to the past or future. For example: "Henry sat down at the counter and ordered black coffee (fictional present). He had spent a sleepless night (fictional past); and he would get little rest that day (fictional future)."

The term narrator's present is used when the narrator exists in a now of his own, and looks back from the now of his own, and looks back from the now of his own to the now of the story.

The temporal order of events in a novel may be narrated in a number of ways. The normal order of the nonfictional world may be present, thus we have event a occurring at time a, followed by time and event b, etc. A simple modification of this order is the flashback, employed for the purposes of recollection by a character or by the narrator himself.

The related concept tempo may be defined in this way: "... Tempo, refers to the rate by which events unfold to the reader. A story may proceed so slowly that the reader would take longer to read the story than for the actual

22 Ibid., p. 43.
events to occur . . . Or the story may hurry over years of events within a few pages. "23

Any concise, adequate definition of the concept of style itself would, unfortunately, be impossible. The question of style involves so many things, such as formality, informality, dialect, sub-standard speech, etc., which are themselves subject to a multiplicity of definitions. Out of context any of the terms relating to style are really quite meaningless and defy, for the most part, any adequate definition.

A question which is closely related to style is that of the narrator's degree of presence. This refers to the involvement of the narrator, or lack thereof, in that which he is narrating. It has to do then, with the subjectivity or objectivity of the narrator. This aspect may, of course, vary within a narrative work or it may remain quite static throughout. 24

The level of artificiality of the narrator has to do with the impression which the narrator makes upon the reader. In many cases this is quite simply a level of literate formality, but there are a number of specialized levels which may be used: biblical, allegorical, theatrical, etc. 25

23 ibid., p. 38.
24 ibid., p. 43.
25 ibid., p. 49.
Distance might be thought of in this way: "All the narrative controls available to the author have as their proximate purpose the precise involvement or detachment of the reader so as to fix his response to the fiction. Failure to place the reader often disrupts the harmony of amateur writing clubs, where, to the author's dismay, his audience laughs at pathetic scenes or grows indignant at comedy. The metaphor commonly used for this placement is distance, the reader's sense of closeness to the story or his remoteness." 26

These, then, are the principal categories we are dealing with when we speak of the problem of technique. Of course, as has been said earlier, any definition of any one aspect of the problem cannot be adequately judged or even quite understood when that definition is considered out of context and quite apart from a particular fictional work. 

As Spinnemetsz allows for a discussion of all of the above aspects of technique and it is in the context of this novel, of course, that I have endeavored to consider and elucidate them.

The predominant point of view in the novel is that of third person omniscient. The author has the flexibility, from this point of view, to tell us what he wishes about the focal character, the minor characters and the environment into which they are cast. We learn a substantial amount about

26 ibid., p. 53.
the protagonist and his family at the very beginning of the novel. "Theodor wuchs im Hause seines Vaters heran, des Bahnzollrevisors und gewesenen Wachtmeisters Wilhelm Lohse. Der kleine Theodor war ein blonder, strebsamer und gesitteter Knabe. Er hatte die Bedeutung, die er später erhielt, sehnsüchtig erhofft, aber niemals an sie zu glauben gewagt. Man kann sagen: er übertraf die Erwartungen, die er niemals auf sich gesetzt hatte."²⁷

There are throughout the novel some minor shifts in focus, e.g., when Theodor addresses Efrussi and at other infrequent points when there is some dialogue. At these points the narrator withdraws from the course of events being described and the individual characters take up the narration, very briefly, however. One rather significant shift of focus is found in Chapter Sixteen when Theodor is addressed by Benjamin Lenz, a passage already quoted earlier in this discussion. It is a significant shift in focus, I think, because it reveals an analysis of Theodor's personality which is not given by the narrator but by a foil character.

²⁷ Roth, p. 5.
The principles which govern the relatively few shifts in focus in the novel seem to be those which govern shifts in focus in any novel. When the author feels that something can be said more effectively by a character, who will be accepted as a convincing witness by the reader, that shift is used.

A considerable breadth of vision is obtained by the third person omniscient narration. Roth is able to tell the reader a good deal about the protagonist, the minor characters and about the total situation in the novel. This type of narration can provide information about two or more characters at once in one passage, about their motives, their attitudes towards one another, towards the general situation in which they are found. An example of this breadth can be seen in this quote:


23Roth, p. 92.
The time order in the novel involves a use of the traditional fictional present, fictional future and fictional past. The narration is carried out on all three levels. There are occasional flashbacks in the narration, e.g., the flashback to Theodor's experiences in school or the later memories of things as they were in the Efrussi household. In the same context, the tempo of the narration is rather regular throughout. There are no significant irregularities in the temporal order of the narration.

The diction and sentence structure of the novel are direct and narrative in quality. The first paragraph of the novel is indicative and representative of the entire work: "Theodor wuchs im Hause seines Vaters heran, des Bahnzollrevisors und gewesenen Wachtmeisters Wilhelm Lohse. Der kleine Theodor war ein blonder, strebsamer und gesitteter Knabe. Er hatte die Bedeutung, die er später erhielt, sehnsüchtig erhofft, aber niemals an sie zu glauben gewagt. Man kann sagen: er übertraf die Erwartungen, die er niemals auf sich gesetzt hatte." 30

In this connection, it might also be said that there is no overt use of style in the novel to individuate the speech, thought or personality of given characters, nor is

29 Roth, p. 111.
30 Roth, p. 6.
any dialect or sub-standard speech used. I do not believe that there is any evidence in the novel that it was Roth's intention to individuate his characters in this way.

In regard to the question of the "degree of presence" of the narrator, the narrator in this novel is, for the most part, rather remote from that which is being told. There are no points at which the narrator enters into the course of events and overtly pleads for or against anything that is being told or described.

Finally, the question of "distance," i.e., the reader's sense of closeness to the story remains to be discussed. There are times in the novel when the reader is drawn into the narration and feels rather close to the protagonist, as, for example, in this passage: "Theodor hoerte das rote Blut, es schrie, es bruellte wie aus tausend Kehlen, es flamnte wie tausend Feuerbrauenste, purpurne Haeder drosten in der Luft, purpurne Kugeln rollten auf und nieder. Aus seinem Innern kam das rauschende Rot, er erfuellte ihn und machte ihn leicht, ein roter Jubel kam uober ihn, ein Triumph hob ihn empor."31 On the other hand, there are those many points at which the narration is almost totally descriptive, with little emotional impact on the reader: "Nationalsozialismus war ein Wort wie andere. Es bedeutig nicht Gesinnung. Er wurde empfangen, von nationalsozialistischen Fuehrern mit Achtung ausgezeichnet vor anderen wartenden. Man kannte ihn

31 Roth, p. 51.

32Roth, p. 59.
CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would say that I am sure that what strikes the contemporary reader of *Das Spinnennetz* more than anything else is the accuracy of its prophetic content. From the viewpoint of form, it is, for the most part, a conventional episodic novel. I do not mean "conventional" in a pejorative sense, but simply to indicate that the novel does not show any marked departure from the standard procedures for writing a novel, i.e., the casting of characters into a plot, telling how and why they act as they do, etc. I am sure than in the future, however much we may wish to eschew discussions of ideological content this, the prophetic accuracy of the content of the novel, will be its chief and most enduring "raison d'etre" in the history of modern Western literature.

Then too, in this same context, it would be appropriate to speak of the various ways in which this novel might be classified. To be sure, for many it would be, first and foremost, an historical novel, because of its documentary realism. For others it might very well be considered a psychological novel, i.e., in the sense that it presents a rather thorough analysis of the psychological makeup and motivations of the protagonist. From another viewpoint it might well be looked upon primarily as a sociological document. None of these categories is, of course, adequate. Certainly any literary work of art may be read on a number
of levels, and, depending upon the level, the tendency will be to classify the work from that viewpoint. Any effort in this respect is inadequate and rather meaningless. In this regard, Das Spinnennetz is in the same situation as any other novel. Apart from the obvious fact that it is an episodic novel there is really no other classification which could be given which would not, from some other opposing point of view, be tenuous at best or indefensible at worst.
LIST OF WORKS CONSULTED


Hatfield, Henry. Modern German Literature. Bloomington, Ind. 1968.

