

## An Aline

In his detailed biography on Wittgenstein (Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius, London 1990) Ray Monk (as Borges might say: one day the life and times of the saint of the new philosophy will be written by a man named Monk) says that many who had hardly known Wittgenstein published their memories about the famous philosopher: his milkman, the photographer who took his last photo, even a lady who thought that Wittgenstein was Russian! And was he Russian? He spoke with a foreign accent, he was taciturn, pensive, introverted. Tall, bony. He used to pray for hours on end, talked about incomprehensible subjects, read and often quoted Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, was at the Russian front in the First World War, and later studied Russian, travelled to Russia, even wanted to settle and work there as a labourer, and yet Russian soldiers commandeered the family house he had designed for himself in Vienna and turned it into a stable. Sufficient for the image of a Russian emigrant... Let me correct myself: Wittgenstein was no Russian. He was English. He was English the same way Karl Marx was Russian. Marx, nevertheless, never became a Russian citizen, while Wittgenstein became a British citizen., but many have linked him with the "first country of Socialism" due to his philosophy. Wittgenstein's true spiritual homeland is the Anglo-Saxon world. Wittgenstein is the pride of Anglo-Saxon philosophy.

He himself, however, felt alien everywhere. Does a philosopher have a homeland or nationality at all? Or is such a person a kind of spiritual proletarian, whose nation is a world of ideas, a world without frontiers, but also without a firm homeland? Wittgenstein's biography claims that he was born in Austria-Hungary. For many Austrians the demise of the monarchy was a tragedy; for other nations that formed part of it, it meant liberation from centralised domination. It has not been recorded that Wittgenstein lamented the downfall of the empire. He spent a large part of his life in England. He came to it for the first time when he was 19, and

after the "second return" he settled in England for good. Second return? Now I am splitting hairs: one can come and go to a foreign country umpteen times, but only to his homeland can he return.

One finds in Wittgenstein's *Notebooks* (16 February 1938) that at the moment when Germany and Austria started to draw ideologically closer, that he was seriously thinking of changing his citizenship, but he still was not ready to make the final decision. When, finally, he opted for British citizenship, his reasons were more of a practical than patriotic nature. Wittgenstein sought his home where he spent the best years of his life, where he felt safe, where he could realise, considering the circumstances, his life concept. It was not a matter of lack of patriotic feelings. In 1938, in his homeland, the death threat was hovering over all people of Jewish origin. Wittgenstein's sisters in Austria had gone through terrible trials and tribulations.

Wittgenstein was a Jew. Or did he not feel such prior to 1938? His family had converted long ago to Christianity. His father was even a bit antisemitic, and even he himself had adopted many of the antisemitic prejudices. As with Marx, with Wittgenstein too, the origin of his somewhat antisemitic attitudes probably springs from the typical attitudes of many assimilated persons: by undermining their origin they were trying to prove their loyalty to their adapted identity and by breaking away from their tradition, they confirmed their acceptance of the new order of values. Even when he thought about himself as a Jew, he could not avoid the usual antisemitic prejudices: "among Jews 'genius' is found only in the holy men. Even the greatest of Jewish thinkers is no more than talented (myself for instance). I think there is some truth in my idea that I think reproductively. I don't believe I have ever invented a line of thinking. I have always taken one over from someone else." (*Culture and Value*, pp. 18-19). Nevertheless, even such blunt demonstration of his own shortcomings by Wittgenstein, which could be attributed to his origin, springs from his own rigorous self-assessment, and not from a rampant racism. Rarely was he happy with himself, nor ever entirely with his work, so he could not be happy with his origin either: dissatisfaction, suspicion

and criticism are frequent traits of the creative individuals who are able to think about themselves in a critical manner, because they are aware of the enormity of the task they undertake. Furthermore, Wittgenstein had denied as early as his school days that he belonged to a renowned Viennese family and it was then that he expressed for the first time that he wanted to be only what he was – Ludwig Wittgenstein. Ludwig Wittgenstein, the thinker. The origin of a thinker is thinking itself. Is not the thinker influenced by his own choice and not by his biological origin? All philosophers share a “family resemblance” in their own individualistic manner. And then again, each one of them owes something to his own origin. To the language, if nothing else. We can entirely express ourselves only in one language. Our spirituality nests in that particular language. Wittgenstein knew English very well, and yet, and maybe because of it, he did not write in English. He used to feel a great urge to speak German with someone, to speak his language, the only language in which he could express his complicated thoughts and feelings. (Note: I wish I could talk to my colleague who for some reason reminds me of Wittgenstein, to speak about what torments me in my language, the language in which I feel the word and know what I am saying, and not in English, the language which is only a technical tool for communication, the language in which everything I say is only a translation of what I want to say, the language in which I express myself indifferently). The origin can be detected in the language; it is there that all the layers of tradition and culture are displayed; in it the identity of a person is expressed.

Although he was of the opinion that a philosopher has no homeland, Wittgenstein searched for “his country” many times: Austria-Hungary, England, Norway, Austria, again England, Ireland. He was thinking about Russia, and Israel, too. When ailing he found himself in America. He did not want to spend the last days of his life there: “I am European, I want to die in Europe”. He writes to his sister hoping that a return to Vienna and a sojourn in their family house would bring him peace. He goes to his native city, but he cannot write there either. Even there he found no home. Nearing the end of his life, he wants to see Vienna again, but he dares not “after all that had happened”. He died far away from his hometown which

he had left long ago. He did not care for fame, for his Jewish origin, he did not even want to be referred to as a philosopher. The encyclopaedias refer to him as a philosopher of Jewish origin, born in Vienna.

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