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## **Aliens at Prayer: Representing Jewish Life in the East End of London, c.1905**

*Samuel Shaw*

In August 1905 – the very heart of the Edwardian era – Arthur Balfour’s Tory government passed the first major British anti-immigration legislation, commonly known as The Aliens Act.<sup>1</sup> Though the Act claimed to have no specific target in mind, it was widely perceived as a response to several waves of immigration that took place at the turn of the century, following successive anti-Jewish pogroms in Russia, which brought a large number of Jewish refugees into the already over-crowded East End of London.<sup>2</sup> As several recent studies have convincingly shown, the terms ‘Alien’ and ‘Jew’ were often interchangeable during this period.<sup>3</sup> The Aliens Act may not have been driven by anti-semitic sentiment; nonetheless, it fueled a long-running public debate about the presence of Jews in Britain, prompting a growth of interest in the Zionist movement – which sought a more long-term solution to the problem.<sup>4</sup> Layered into these debates was a continuing concern over the political power of the established Anglo-Jewish community, mostly of German origin, which played out in various ways, including unease over Edward VII’s so-called ‘Jewish court’, and the argument that the Anglo-Boer War was being fought on behalf of influential Jewish financiers.<sup>5</sup>

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that this was – as David Glover has noted – an especially turbulent period in the representation of Jewish experience.<sup>6</sup> British anti-semitism may have been, in the words of Jonathan Schneer, ‘relatively mild’ at the turn of the century (relative, that is, to the virulent strands of prejudice being practiced on the Continent, especially in France, Germany, Austria and Russia); nevertheless, Jewishness remained a source of anxiety for many Edwardians.<sup>7</sup> Just because it was subtle didn’t mean it wasn’t endemic. Indeed, in a curious and intriguing passage in his memoirs, the Anglo-Italian Jew,

Humbert Wolfe (1885-1940), argued that the subtleties of anti-semitism in Britain made it harder for the multiple Jewish communities to come together:

It is a very different thing to be one of a minority not openly attacked but by a thousand signs, and by ways not always conscious, edged on the one side, excluded, different [...] the fact that the easy-going and good-humoured English couldn't be bothered to carry the thing to extremes, made it all the more difficult [...] when the taint of Jewry means only the exclusion from garden-parties, refusal of certain cherished intimacies and occasional light-hearted sneers, it is difficult to maintain an attitude of racial pride.<sup>8</sup>

Wolfe's longing for 'desperate comradeship against overwhelming odds' is dangerous – if not a little glib – though it serves as a reminder of what it must have felt like to be a Jew in Britain in the early years of the century. As Peter Gross notes, there was no monolithic, or even dominant Jewish community, but 'factions within the quasi-indigenous, host English Jewish community, whose sub-groups brought different nuances of Jewish practice, and within these, coalescing or splitting groups representing every shade of observance from devout to nominal'.<sup>9</sup> Although episodes such as the Aliens Act, or the exhibition of Jewish Art and Antiquities at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1906, helped to bring these communities together, it remains clear that there were a wide variety of Jewish experiences during this period, and many ways in which to represent the figure of the Jew.

In this chapter, I concentrate on the experiences of two Jewish artists, William Rothenstein (1872-1945) and Alfred Aaron Wolmark (1877-1961), both of whom produced a small but significant group of paintings representing life in the Jewish East End around 1905. In light of the foregoing issues, I consider the role that these representations played within the

political and social context of their time. What links can be made between Wolmark and Rothenstein's paintings and contemporary debates surrounding Anglo-Jewish identity? In closing, I ask a second significant question: what roles do, or can, these works play in the narrative of early twentieth century British art? To put it another way, what happens when we look at these paintings in a context that is not specifically Jewish? Though suited to the particular subject matter of life in the Jewish East End, the oft-noted austerity of Rothenstein and Wolmark's canvases – usually linked to their shared enthusiasm for the work of Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669) – had plenty of parallels beyond the Jewish community. For instance, British artists were, around 1905, still in the grip of a national obsession with Rembrandt, whose art was perceived to bridge the seemingly opposing modes of realism and symbolism.

It is clear that these paintings exist very much within wider artistic debates – and yet, when Wolmark and Rothenstein's paintings of Jewish life have appeared in publications or in exhibitions in the last twenty or thirty years, it is almost always to illustrate or to explore Anglo-Jewish identity.<sup>10</sup> Unlike the paintings of David Bomberg (1890-1957) or Jacob Kramer (1892-1962), which possess the saving grace of a conspicuously modern style – a style that allows these artists to overcome the possible stigma of their esoteric subject matter and earn a place in the mainstream of British culture – Wolmark and Rothenstein's representations of Jewish life are usually consigned to one context only.<sup>11</sup> Where Bomberg's works are seen as Jewish *and* modern, Wolmark and Rothenstein's are just Jewish. It is for this reason, primarily, that I won't be referring to their works in this chapter as 'Jewish paintings'. Despite the fact that we are looking at paintings by Jewish artists representing Jewish subjects, the phrase 'Jewish paintings' is a limiting and often misleading one.<sup>12</sup> For instance, Rothenstein's paintings of the East End were not received, during the period, as mere documents of a specific social moment, but artistic statements aimed at a wider

audience. By labelling them as his ‘Jewish paintings’ we risk cutting them adrift from the rest of Rothenstein’s oeuvre – and suggesting that some sort of specialized knowledge is required to understand them: a complete contradiction of what the artist was seeking to achieve. Therefore, though this essay follows previous studies in exploring the importance of the Jewish context, it does not mean to suggest that this is the only way to read these paintings.

Neither Rothenstein nor Wolmark were born in the East End of London. In Rothenstein’s case the area was very unfamiliar to him. In 1872 he was born into a middle-class German-Jewish family in Bradford, Yorkshire. His parents had emigrated from Germany in the late 1850s to work in the burgeoning textile trade.<sup>13</sup> Rothenstein’s family was spiritually liberal – his father was said to have leaned towards Unitarianism – and his education in Jewish culture was minimal.<sup>14</sup> Unlike his friend and contemporary, Humbert Wolfe, Rothenstein claimed not to have experienced anti-semitism during his childhood in Bradford: ‘I remember being called “sausage” at school’, he later wrote, ‘but never Jew’.<sup>15</sup> If Rothenstein’s memoirs are anything to go by – and we must bear in mind that these were written in the 1930s, when the artist seems to have been keen not to stress his status as an outsider – his Jewishness continued to present few problems throughout his teenage years and adolescence. In fact, for much of the 1890s, it was barely even alluded to. Admittedly, it was the leading Jewish artist, Solomon J. Solomon (1860-1927), who suggested Rothenstein should move to Paris in 1889, after only a year at the Slade School of Art; once there, however, this aspect of the artist’s identity seems to have slipped under the radar.<sup>16</sup> It did not stop him, for instance, becoming friends with Edgar Degas (1834-1917) and Auguste Rodin (1840-1917), both of whom would go on to align themselves with the Anti-Dreyfusards.<sup>17</sup> Degas appears to have been completely unaware of Rothenstein’s Jewish identity, remaining friendly with him long after he had broken ties with other Jewish friends.<sup>18</sup>

During his return to London in 1894, Rothenstein clearly remained unsure as to how to navigate his Jewish identity. Though he moved in Anglo-Jewish circles, socialising with Solomon J. Solomon and the writer Israel Zangwill (1864-1926), he resisted their initial attempts to bring him into the Maccabees, a prominent Anglo-Jewish society.<sup>19</sup> He was perhaps worried that his career might go the way of Zangwill's, who had complained that the success of his 1892 novel, *Children of the Ghetto*, had led to his being labelled as *the* chronicler of Jewish life in Britain, a role that the writer was not especially keen to play.<sup>20</sup> The complex and contrasting attractions of assimilation and of duty to one's spiritual background (a theme of many of Zangwill's writings) proved hard to manage; the evidence suggests that the artist played up his Jewishness when it suited him (most often when communicating with his mother).<sup>21</sup>

This all changed in about 1902, at a moment in which issues of cultural identity were probably at the forefront of Rothenstein's mind, for personal and political reasons. He had recently married Alice Knewstub (1867-1957), a Catholic actress, become a father, and was living the kind of settled, respectable life that must have seemed wildly out of reach for the new wave of Jewish immigrants. That very year he moved to Church Row, Hampstead – a splendid street of Georgian townhouses – which must have hosted its fair share of soirees and garden parties.

According to the artist, the turning point was a chance encounter that occurred in 1902 in the East End, with Solomon J. Solomon's brother. The two men visited the Spitalfields Great Synagogue in Brick Lane (built as a Huguenot Chapel, and consecutively converted into a Methodist chapel, a synagogue and, most recently, a Mosque) where they found, in Rothenstein's words:

the place crowded with Jews draped in praying shawls; while in a dark panelled room sat old, bearded men with strange sidelocks, bending over great books and rocking their bodies as they read; others stood, muttering Hebrew prayers, their faces to the wall, enveloped from head to foot in black bordered shawls. Here were subjects Rembrandt would have painted – had indeed, painted – the like of which I never thought to have seen in London. I was very much excited; why had no one told me of this wonderful place? Somehow I must arrange to work there.<sup>22</sup>

This passage is fascinating for many reasons, not least Rothenstein's surprise that the place existed (he had lived in London for almost ten years by this point) and of the sights he saw within it. Though it was common in the late Victorian era to refer to the exoticism of the East End – an area which had several times attracted comparisons to Darkest Africa – its ability to shock a Jewish visitor is nevertheless interesting, reminding us once again of the gulf between the traditions of Eastern-European Jewish immigrants and the assimilated Anglo-Jewish community. It is hard to underestimate just how surprised Rothenstein was by what he saw in the East End, which he described in almost breathless letters to his older brother. 'If anyone had told me a dozen years ago I should now regret having neglected semitic ritual', he noted at one point, 'I would have laughed at the notion'.<sup>23</sup> In 1903 he attended his first dinner of the Maccabees, in whose company he continued to feel ambivalent, while admitting that it was 'no means unpleasant to hear nothing but reasonable pride in Jewdom freely expressed instead of being suppressed, as it so often is among our friends who dive about in coaches [...] & call themselves MacGregor'.<sup>24</sup> As political tensions over the rising number of Jewish immigrants increased, culminating in the 1905 Act, so too did Rothenstein's interest in the community.

Shortly after the synagogue visit in 1902, Rothenstein established a studio in Spitalfields Square, the heart of the Jewish East End, and started work on a series of large paintings representing Jewish life, working from a small group of models who either sat for him in his studio there, or at his house in Hampstead (Jewish law dictating that he could not paint in the synagogue itself). Between 1902 and about 1908 he completed eight to ten paintings.<sup>25</sup>

This contrast, or tension, between the middle-class assimilated German-Jew living in Hampstead, and the poor immigrant Jews from Whitechapel, was later emphasised by Rothenstein's friend Max Beerbohm (1872-1956) in a 1906 caricature, *Sudden and belated recognition of Mr. Will Rothenstein as the Messiah* (private collection), in which a young, besuited Rothenstein appears on a table amidst a crowd of identical, elderly, orthodox Jews. The caricature plays off the apparent unlikeliness of this cultural encounter, gently mocking the idea that Rothenstein – a man who did not speak Yiddish, and described himself in 1903 as ‘hopelessly ignorant of all things Jewish’ – could be considered, just three years later, the saviour of Anglo-Jewish culture.<sup>26</sup> There was in fact much mutual anxiety between Rothenstein and his sitters. From the Whitechapel side came the suspicion that he was a Christian missionary, sent undercover to convert the Jews; from Rothenstein's side, meanwhile, was an inability to see beyond certain popular stereotypes.<sup>27</sup> ‘The Jews are servile, suspicious, secretive & tragically attracted by the clink of coin’, he told his brother in 1903, adding (as if to soften the blow) ‘but they have a noble element in them’.<sup>28</sup> Rothenstein's subsequent claim that ‘my heart went out to these men of despised race, from which I too had sprung’ circumvents these complications adeptly, highlighting a shared heritage while ignoring contemporary differences.<sup>29</sup> Beerbohm, for his part, was clearly tickled by the idea of Rothenstein venturing into, let alone belonging in, the East End.<sup>30</sup>



As Beerbohm's drawing suggests, Rothenstein's paintings – all of which feature elderly Jews in gloomy interiors, engaged in various different stages of Jewish ritual – quickly established him as one of the best-known Anglo-Jewish painters. Early works were exhibited at the New English Art Club – of which Rothenstein had been a leading member for almost a decade – and in 1906 several works featured in the influential exhibition of Jewish Art and Antiquities held at the Whitechapel Art Gallery.<sup>31</sup> For a brief moment, Rothenstein became the poster-boy of Anglo-Jewish culture; he was especially popular with the assimilationist Jewish Chronicle, who described his paintings as 'those forceful yet restrained manifestations of the true Jewish spirit'.<sup>32</sup> In his 1906 speech to the Maccabeans, Canon Samuel Barnett (1844-1913), the social reformer and founder of the Whitechapel Gallery, singled out Rothenstein's work, lending his support to the suggestion that one of his Whitechapel paintings be purchased for the nation. 'He was sure', reported *The Jewish Chronicle*, that 'it would be good for future generations to see in Mr. Rothenstein's pictures something of the earnestness and of the "other-worldliness" which characterised the Whitechapel Jew [...] Mr. Rothenstein had shown the ideal behind the real, the true behind the seeming'.<sup>33</sup> *Jews Mourning in a Synagogue* was duly purchased by the Bradford businessman Jacob Moser (1839-1922) and donated, amid much publicity, to the Tate Gallery on behalf of the Anglo-Jewish community, asserting the rights of the Whitechapel Jews to be represented in a national collection.<sup>34</sup> Two of the other paintings shortly entered national collections in the further reaches of the Empire, in Melbourne and Johannesburg.<sup>35</sup>

**Fig. 1. William Rothenstein, *Aliens at Prayer*, 1906 (National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne)**

Why was Rothenstein's work so well received by the Anglo-Jewish community? According to *The Jewish Chronicle*, Rothenstein produced work that managed to celebrate Jewish culture without making it seem arcane or impenetrable. 'What appeals to me', claimed the artist in the same year, 'is the devotion of the Jew. It is that, that I have endeavored to put on to canvas – the spirit of Israel that animates the worshippers, not the outward trappings of the ritual'.<sup>36</sup> In some senses, then, he was trying to de-alienize Jewish culture; to present it in such a way that British audiences would not find it threatening. His 1905 painting, fittingly titled *Aliens at Prayer* (fig.1), represents this most clearly. Here the viewer is confronted with the humanity of the praying Jew. Unlike his other paintings of Jewish life, there are no props; only the clothing (patiently represented though it is) reminds us of the subject's cultural identity. Rothenstein's 'aliens' are a long way from the money-grabbing sweatshop-owning Jews that appear in anti-Semitic literature of this period, or the young, impoverished Jews that appear in contemporary photographs, such as those taken by C. A. Mathew (dates unknown) or William Evans-Gordon (1857-1913).<sup>37</sup> As Member of Parliament for Stepney from 1900-1907, Evans-Gordon was a leading voice in the debates surrounding the Aliens Act. Evans-Gordon visited Eastern Europe in the early years of the century as part of a fact-finding mission for his book, *The alien immigrant*, which he published in 1903, with thirty-four photographs. The vast majority of the images detailed conditions abroad, though the opening chapter of the book contained four photographs of Stepney (*Ghetto Children; Deserted Mission Hall, Now Foreign Club; Alien Butchers; and Alien Fishwives*). As befits one of the central subjects of the book – the issue of over-crowding – the photographs show large groups of Jewish immigrants, with a high proportion of children, giving the impression that the East End is bursting at the seams.<sup>38</sup> These groups cannot even be contained within the frame; at least two of the photographs contain figures hovering at the edge of the image, cut out of the picture. A sense of menace, meanwhile, is introduced (perhaps unintentionally) by

the decision to focus on a butcher's shop, complete with a man wielding a knife (see. Fig.2, far right).

**Fig. 2. William Evans-Gordon, *Alien Butchers, Stepney, c.1903***

No such questions trouble viewers of Rothenstein's paintings which, like Wolmark's, always take place inside. In the midst of fierce political debate and widespread social paranoia, Rothenstein challenges his viewers to find fault in the spiritual devotion of a handful of old men; their advanced age offsetting any kind of physical threat, while hinting that this is, potentially, a dying culture. He manages to do so, furthermore, in a manner that appears to belie his peripheral relationship with the Jewish community. 'This is not a clever study of praying Jews by someone interested from the outside in a picturesque corner of actual life' noted one critic: 'the artist has sunk himself in his subject'.<sup>39</sup> Although it clearly relates directly to the 1905 Aliens Act, there is in fact little in *Aliens at Prayer*, beyond certain stylistic qualities, to tie it to this period. Rothenstein's interiors never allow so much as a view from a window. Light from a window perhaps, and the suggestion of a world beyond the dusty interior of the synagogue, but never an actual glimpse of that world. For that, we have to turn to the work of his contemporary, Alfred Wolmark.

Constructing Wolmark's biography, and untangling his own complex relationship with his Jewish identity, is a difficult task.<sup>40</sup> Wolmark was a somewhat isolated figure, whose large artistic legacy was not matched (unlike Rothenstein's) by any autobiographical writings or a significant cache of correspondence.<sup>41</sup> Born in Warsaw in 1876, Wolmark moved with his family to England around 1883, in response to the continuous persecution of Jewish people by the Polish authorities. A significant portion of his teenage years (at least six) were spent in

the Jewish East End, though by 1900 he was probably living outside of this area.<sup>42</sup> Like Rothenstein, there is no evidence Wolmark received any Jewish instruction, or that he was a regular worshipper. There is little doubt, however, that his exposure to orthodox tradition – in both England and Poland – was much greater than that of Rothenstein's. In light of this Peter Gross has argued that 'for Rothenstein the Jewish East End, the locus and inspiration for his Whitechapel paintings, was external and foreign to his everyday life and his beliefs' whereas 'for the young Wolmark it was his home and its inhabitants were not just subjects'.<sup>43</sup> As I note later on, this is a slightly dangerous argument, playing up to the general tendency to under-emphasize Rothenstein's Jewish identity; nevertheless, it does point to crucial differences between the artists, which informed their art in distinct ways.<sup>44</sup>

From 1895-1900 Wolmark attended the Royal Academy schools, where he was taught by Solomon J Solomon; around the same time he attracted a German-Jewish patron called Anna Wilmersdoerffer (dates unknown), who may have encouraged him to paint Jewish subjects.<sup>45</sup> Patronage is an important issue here; it is, after all, easy to assume that Rothenstein and Wolmark, as Jewish artists, had a primarily personal interest in representing Jewish subject matter. While it is true, I think, that both artists used such art as a means of exploring their complex Jewish identities, it is also true that they used it as a potential means of engineering sales and furthering their careers. There was, after all, good reason to suppose that there was money in Jewish subjects. Rothenstein recalled how John Singer Sargent (1856-1925) 'urged me to paint Jews, as being at once the most interesting models and the most reliable patrons'.<sup>46</sup> Despite the purchase of his paintings for national collections, however, Rothenstein failed to gain the attention of major Jewish collectors; and there is little evidence that Wolmark found it an especially profitable venture, beyond Wilmersdoerffer's early patronage. It is notable that Solomon J. Solomon – one of the successful Jewish artists of the period – rarely tackled Jewish subjects.

Though Wolmark had early success exhibiting at the Royal Academy (*Waiting for the Tenth* was shown in 1903) it is for his later, Fauvist-style paintings that he is best known: works that would not have been accepted in the Academy's annual exhibitions of the period.<sup>47</sup> His earlier paintings – predominantly Jewish subjects – are easily cast, in retrospect, as a conservative, inward-looking phase in the artist's career: Victorian relics as opposed to the bold, brash modernism of his later work. The political backdrop to these paintings, however, demands that we read them differently. Considering the political context, there was clearly nothing backward about tackling Anglo-Jewish identity in the early years of the twentieth century. There was in fact more contemporary charge to this subject matter than to that of Wolmark's so-called modernist paintings, representing still lifes and coastal landscapes.

It has been claimed that Rothenstein and Wolmark worked alongside each other in the East End, perhaps even sharing a studio.<sup>48</sup> Although the claim seems to have originated from Wolmark himself, there is very little evidence to support it; not only does Rothenstein fail to mention Wolmark in any of his writings, but Wolmark spent large parts of the period 1903-1906 (when Rothenstein was working in the East End) out of the country, including an extended period in Warsaw. Though it is impossible that the two artists were not aware of each other – they both exhibited at the 1906 Whitechapel Gallery exhibition, and shared friends in common – it is clear that they were never close. Could there have been something of a rivalry between the two men? While I am reluctant to play up Gross's assessment of the artists' relationship to the Jewish East End – casting Rothenstein as the presumptuous outsider, and Wolmark as the heroic native – I think it would be fair to argue that Wolmark must have viewed Rothenstein's ascendancy to the role of Anglo-Jewish idol c.1905 with as much, if not more, suspicion than Max Beerbohm.

Looking over Wolmark's representations of Jewish life from this period, it is immediately evident that he not only created a larger body of work than Rothenstein, but that he also captured a much wider range of experience.<sup>49</sup> Where Rothenstein selected a theme – that of the elderly Jew at worship – and stuck with it, Wolmark explored further options. He shared with Rothenstein a reluctance to venture outdoors; however, young figures did appear in his paintings, as did women, and he did not limit himself to the synagogue. Several paintings, such as *The Carpenter's Shop* (1903), and the relatively late *Sabbath Afternoon*, c.1910 (fig.3), take place in domestic settings, the like of which we never see in Rothenstein's work (whose Jews are, perhaps deliberately, figured as homeless). In the latter case, the setting is distinctly contemporary; however, Wolmark did, on occasion stray into the field of history painting, most notably *The Last Days of Rabbi Ben Ezra* (1903) a large canvas – over three metres long and almost two metres high – featuring well over twenty figures. What is noticeable about this latter work, and all of Wolmark's representations of Jewish life, is that the figures, despite the commonality of their religion, tend to be differentiated. He pays close attention to variance in dress and demeanor, rather than garbing almost every figure – as Rothenstein does in *Jews Mourning in a Synagogue* – in the same dress. What Rothenstein describes as the 'outward trappings of the ritual' (details which he regularly reproduced incorrectly) seem to have been of much more interest to Wolmark. Occasionally, his sketches also include passages of Hebrew, a detail that is never encountered in a drawing or painting by Rothenstein.

**Fig.3. Alfred Wolmark, *The Sabbath Afternoon*, 1910 (private collection)**

Just as there is a range in personnel, so too is there a range in mood. In Wolmark's paintings – such as *The Disputation* (1907) and *Sabbath Afternoon* (c.1910) – there is noticeable distance placed between viewer and subject. There is the sense that his figures are on the other side of the room and not, as with Rothenstein's *Aliens at Prayer*, within touching distance. Wolmark achieves this not simply by showing us more of the floor, but by putting more objects and ideas between us and the human subject. This is seen most clearly in *Sabbath Afternoon* and *In the Synagogue* (1906), both of which adopt a curious and complex tone. The figure in the foreground of the latter painting, with his hand on his head, could have appeared in any one of Rothenstein's paintings of the same year. However, the activity going on behind this figure shifts the tone somewhat; behind the left shoulder of the seated worshipper another man appears to lie sleeping, while two figures shuffle between the pews. The spirit of communality, so integral to a painting such as *Jews Mourning in a Synagogue*, is missing here. The central figure is, instead, alone in his thoughts; removed rather than at one with his companions.

Humour (which is surely what is intended by the sleeping man in *In the Synagogue*) reappears in *Sabbath Afternoon* in the form of a stray ball of wool lying on the floor at the bottom right of the image. As Gross has suggested, this object introduces a narrative – a kitten lurking offstage, perhaps – that runs counter to the generally pious mood of the painting.<sup>50</sup> Wolmark's 'gently humorous touch' (notably absent from Rothenstein's work) changes our relationship with the figures in the room, as does the rather remarkable depiction of an industrial landscape beyond their window, situating this room in the middle of contemporary London.<sup>51</sup> As noted previously, Rothenstein's Jews are frequently represented near windows, but we are never given a view out of them, ensuring that his paintings exist in a temporal void. *Sabbath Afternoon*, on the other hand, is unapologetically anchored in the Edwardian East End.

Wolmark's representations of Jewish life, in general, contain a greater sense of specificity: less symbols of Jewishness than depictions of particular people going about their daily life. His greater understanding of what it means to live as a Jew in the East End seemingly enables him to capture the more intimate aspects of Jewish life. His Jews are quite clearly demarcated from each other, literally wearing their differences, and could therefore be read by a non-Jewish audience as less easy to control or understand, thus representing a greater threat to the wider community. Action tends to happen at one remove, and there are more objects – not to mention possible narratives – presented to the viewer. While Wolmark's paintings are clearly sympathetic to Jewish culture, they do not strain to simplify it, or make it less 'alien'. For this reason, perhaps, their relative complexity and variety was less conducive to immediate critical appraisal from the anxious and assimilationist Anglo-Jewish community and beyond. Occasions on which Wolmark's representations of Jewish life were held above Rothenstein's were, indeed, rare: in 1906 an art critic in *The Times* argued that Rothenstein's *Aliens at Prayer*, exhibited at Thomas Agnew's Bond Street gallery, was 'somewhat prosaic in treatment – wanting, in fact, in the passion which another young Jewish painter, Mr. Alfred Wolmark, infuses into the pictures of similar subjects which we have seen at the Academy and elsewhere'.<sup>52</sup> Largely speaking, however, Wolmark's exhibited paintings gathered little critical attention, especially among non-Jewish audiences.

It is to this latter group that I wish to turn in the closing paragraphs of this chapter. As stated earlier, it is important that the paintings discussed are not considered, in cultural discourse, as being relevant only in a Jewish context. Rothenstein and Wolmark's representations of Jewish life are much more than politically interesting oddities; they are, in many ways, typical Edwardian paintings, responding as much to artistic debates at the turn of the century as they do to the nuances of Anglo-Jewish identity.



**Fig.4. Max Beerbohm, *A Quiet Morning in the Tate Gallery*, 1907 (Tate)**

This idea is explored by Max Beerbohm's 1907 caricature, *A Quiet Morning in the Tate Gallery* (fig. 4, Tate), which represents the Tate curator and leading art critic D. S. MacColl (1859-1948), a close friend of Rothenstein's, expounding the spiritual fineness of his painting *Jews Mourning in a Synagogue* to a wealthy Jewish businessman (just the type of patron Rothenstein may have been hoping to attract when he set up his studio in Whitechapel). The joke here, however, is that it is the solemn MacColl to whom this 'spiritually fine' picture primarily appeals, and not his smartly dressed guest, whose attention seems to be drawn elsewhere – perhaps to the painting of a charming woman in a bonnet hung to the left. It is left to the non-Jewish art critic to explain the painting to the Jew, the suggestion being either that the Jew in question has assimilated to the degree that he cannot (or does not wish) to comprehend the struggle of recent immigrants, or that Rothenstein's manner of representing said struggle is more interesting to art critics and curators than Jewish businessmen. As Gross has noted in reference to the latter: 'the leadership of Anglo-Jewry and the more affluent Jewish middle class were very anxious not be seen in English eyes as part of this alien horde. They did not want to risk upsetting the carefully created balance that had been achieved over so long and that had so recently been crowned by Rothschild's entry into the House of Commons'.<sup>53</sup> MacColl's guest, in this sense, has too much to lose by displaying excessive interest in Rothenstein's painting.

But what might MacColl – or fellow critics such as Roger Fry (1866-1934), a leading supporter of Rothenstein during this period – have seen in such a painting as *Jews Mourning in a Synagogue*? For Fry, writing in June 1910, it was the formal attributes that impressed him most:

[*Jews Mourning in the Synagogue*] hangs in the Tate Gallery, and shames, by its gravity of design, its clear realisation of form, the high plausibilities or clever sentimentalities with which it is surrounded. Two others, the latest and the most accomplished, hang in the Goupil Gallery. The larger of these is, I think, the most serious attempt at dramatic composition that any quite modern English artist has attempted.<sup>54</sup>

Fry seems almost to be acting out the part of MacColl in Beerbohm's caricature, with his dismissive reference to the 'clever sentimentalities' that may have been exhibited alongside Rothenstein's painting. In doing so, he comes very close to mirroring the artist's own ideals, with clarity and seriousness (along with dignity, severity and weight) ranking high among Rothenstein's watchwords during this period. Crucially, he eschews all reference to the political implications of the painting, or to the Jewish identity of the painter: the work is by a 'modern English artist' and is interesting not for its subject matter, but for its 'dramatic composition'.<sup>55</sup>

Fry, as did others, recognized that *Jews Mourning in the Synagogue* was no mere snapshot of everyday life in the East End: the carefully choreographed composition was hard won, and the result of much experimenting on the artist's part.<sup>56</sup> Details were subordinate to the general effect, which seems to have been to create a scene of austere, restrained drama: a quality that can be found in the work of many other Edwardian artists, including Rothenstein's younger brother Albert Rutherston (1881-1953), whose *Laundry Girls* of the same year, is very similar in spirit and tone.<sup>57</sup>

If we ignore the distinctly Jewish dress of the inhabitants of Rothenstein and Wolmark's paintings, we are left with a type of painting that is, I would argue, typically

Edwardian. The sparsely decorated, relatively poorly-lit interior was, after all, a mainstay of exhibitions of the New English Art Club in the early 1900s.<sup>58</sup> When Rothenstein wasn't painting Jews praying in plain rooms in the East End, he was painting his wife and children looking equally meditative in their Hampstead house.<sup>59</sup> William Orpen (1878-1931), James Pryde (1866-1941), Ambrose (1878-1927) and Mary McEvoy (1870-1941), Harold Gilman (1876-1919), and – most famously – Walter Sickert (1860-1942), were all drawn to the gloomy interior during this period, advancing a new type of art in which the narrative of a domestic interior was made increasingly hazy, with a greater focus on the relationship between space and mental states than on old-fashioned, morally-driven stories told through objects, or recognizable gestures and expressions. The ball of wool on Wolmark's floor was, more often than not, eschewed by artists of the New English in favour of a blank wall, occasionally decorated with an indistinct painting, harking back to James McNeill Whistler's influential *Arrangement in Grey and Black No.1* (1871, Musee D'Orsay, Paris; also known as *Whistler's Mother*). The varied uses of narrative in Rothenstein and Wolmark's paintings, as discussed, reveal a lot about their respective relationships with their Jewish identity; it is also telling with regard to the respective approaches to narrative among British artists of the period. Wolmark's ball of wool, in this sense, represents more than a sly reference to the necessary interruption of manual labour on the Sabbath; it is also the symbol of a particular storytelling technique at which Rothenstein, as a self-consciously 'advanced' artist, may have turned up his nose.<sup>60</sup>

Mary McEvoy's *Interior: Girl Reading* (1901) offers another useful comparison. Her contemplative, simply-dressed female figure pictured reading in a sparsely decorated room by the dim light of a window offstage may lack the highly charged political background that informs Rothenstein's *A Corner of the Talmud School* (1907), but it nonetheless belongs to the same artistic trend. Robert Ross noted in a review of an exhibition featuring Rothenstein's

*Aliens at Prayer*, held at Agnew's in 1906, that artists of the New English Art Club were defined not so much by what they sought to achieve, but by what they sought to avoid. 'I see among them an absence of any *desire* for beauty – for physical beauty', Ross complained, quietly questioning their 'mission' to abolish the 'sweetly pretty Christmas supplement kind of work' associated with the Edwardian Royal Academy.<sup>61</sup> Their work was associated, instead, with words such as 'sincerity', 'dignity' and 'humanity'. They sought not to create an immediate sensation, but to impress themselves upon repeated viewings. As Fry put it in his 1910 review (almost in riposte to Ross's earlier comments): 'Rothenstein's paintings do not accommodate themselves easily to the exigencies of domestic life. Their reality is too insistent, too energetic. Charm is the last thing they aim at, and charm is what we idly desire'.<sup>62</sup>

One particular artist casts as large a shadow over these paintings as he does over turn-of-the-century British art as a whole: Rembrandt. Wolmark once claimed that Rembrandt was the only painter to have ever influenced him, while Rothenstein – in the early years of the century – was clearly fixated with the artist.<sup>63</sup>

They weren't alone. In January 1906, *Punch* published an illustration by Bernard Partridge (fig. 5) playing off the Aliens Act by noting that two paintings by non-English artists – Diego Velasquez and John Singer Sargent – had recently been secured for the nation. 'Desirable Aliens' ran the caption, underneath an image of Velasquez and Sargent walking arm and arm along a London street, earning a salute from Mr. Punch. The very naming of the Velasquez painting in question – *The Rokeby Venus* – betrays a sense of belonging that extended towards Rembrandt also. To many British critics it made very good sense that the major retrospective of the Dutch master's oeuvre held in Amsterdam in 1898 should be followed by two shows in London the following year. As Catherine Scallen has noted, 'only six of the paintings on view [at the Royal Academy in 1899] were from non-British

collections’, arguing that ‘it is reasonable to view the London show as a response that championed British taste, wealth, and cultural imperialism’.<sup>64</sup>

**Fig.5. Bernard Partridge, ‘Desirable Aliens’, *Punch*, Jan 30<sup>th</sup> 1906**

To put it another way, Rembrandt was already something of a British institution, inescapable at the turn of the century. The Amsterdam and London exhibitions spawned countless publications and reviews, and thanks to generous attributions there were more Rembrandt paintings in existence than ever before (and since).<sup>65</sup> The relevance of the Old Masters to Edwardian art world in general cannot, indeed, be underestimated. Fueled both by the burgeoning art market, and by an ever-expanding audience for art historical publications – not to mention new discoveries – there was always something new to see, or to be said, when it came to the Old Masters, which explains why so many young artists fashioned themselves in the form of such figures as Velasquez, Titian and Rembrandt.<sup>66</sup> The Old Masters were not seen as stuffy relics, but pertinent models: a means of escape from, rather than return to, tired Academic modes.<sup>67</sup> The Old Masters also allowed modern artists to legitimize potentially spurious – or politically dangerous – subject matter with knowing allusions to celebrated precedents.<sup>68</sup>

To claim Rembrandt as a non-Jewish context in which to view Wolmark and Rothenstein’s paintings is, of course, somewhat misleading, bearing in mind Rembrandt’s historical association with Jewish subjects.<sup>69</sup> Rothenstein made this connection himself in a passage I have already quoted: ‘Here [in the East End]’, he recalled, ‘were subjects Rembrandt would have painted – had indeed, painted – the like of which I never thought to have seen in London’.<sup>70</sup> It is as if the fact that Rembrandt had painted Jewish life made it easier for Rothenstein to do the same. One might even go as far as to say that the opportunity

to invoke Rembrandt was the driving force behind his decision to paint in the East End, and not the desire to give voice to a disadvantaged community.<sup>71</sup> Either that or Rothenstein, realizing that his memoirs were going to be read by a largely non-Jewish audience, used Rembrandt as a shield: a means of softening the impact of Rothenstein's complex encounter with his cultural heritage (the nuances of which were unlikely to have been appreciated by the vast majority of casual art-lovers).

Rothenstein and Wolmark also used Rembrandt – as I have discussed elsewhere – as a means of reconciling the competing (and frequently overlapping) claims of aestheticism, symbolism, realism and even a nascent formalism.<sup>72</sup> Rembrandt's refusal to fall securely under any of these categories – or, conversely, his ability to be claimed by each – suited him well as a model for artists operating between and within distinctly Victorian and Modernist modes. As a contemporary critic wrote of Rembrandt in 1898, 'he takes an old, careworn, & even ugly face [...] and it becomes, not only a palpable reality, but a spiritual fact'.<sup>73</sup> This curious conjunction of 'spirit' and 'fact', something rooted both in the palpable and in the metaphysical, and regularly attributed to Rembrandt, proved a powerful exemplar for Edwardian artists such as Rothenstein and Wolmark. It was a conjunction that lay not just at the heart of their attempt to represent Jewish life in the East End, but at the heart of Edwardian painting as a whole. When we look at Rothenstein and Wolmark's representations of Jewish life we are, then, not merely entering a debate over the complexities of Anglo-Jewish identity around 1905, but a debate over the complexities of artistic identity as well.

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significance of the late Peter Gross's 2004 Ph.D. thesis *Representations of Jews and Jewishness in English Painting 1887-1914*, (University of Leeds) which offers the most comprehensive study of this subject to date.

<sup>1</sup> For more on the Aliens Act and its historical background see Bernard Gainer, *The Alien Invasion: The Origins of the Aliens Act of 1905* (London: Heinemann, 1972). For a recent response to the Act and its continuing relevance see David Glover, 'Still Closing the Gates: the legacy of the 1905 Aliens Act', *The Jewish Quarterly*, 2013, 60:1, pp.18-27 and Peter Gross's essay in *The Ben Uri Story from Art Society to Museum* (London: Ben Uri) pp.22-36.

<sup>2</sup> 150,000 Jews came to England between 1881 and 1914, most of them settling in the East End of London. See Lisa Tickner, *Modern Life and Modern Subjects: British Art in the Early Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), pp.147-148 for a good summary of the Jewish East End during the 1900s.

<sup>3</sup> See David Glover, *Literature, Immigration and Diaspora in Fin-de-Siècle England: a Cultural History of the 1905 Aliens Act* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) and essays in Eitan Bar-Yosef and Nadia Valman, ed. *'The Jew' in late-Victorian and Edwardian Culture: between the East End and East Africa* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan 2009).

<sup>4</sup> For a recent over-view of Zionism in Britain see Jonathan Schneer, *The Balfour Declaration: the Origins of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010)

<sup>5</sup> Claire Hirshfield, 'The Anglo-Boer War and the Issue of Jewish Culpability', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 15, No. 4, 1980, pp.619-631 and Anthony Allfrey, *Edward VII and his Jewish Court* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1991). See also David Cesarani, ed. *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry* (New York: Blackwell, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> Glover, *Literature, Immigration and Diaspora in Fin-de-Siècle England*.

<sup>7</sup> Schneer, *The Balfour Declaration*, p.111. For more on anti-semitism, ambivalence, and liberalism in Britain see David Feldman, 'Jews in the East End, Jews in the Polity, "The Jew" in the Text, 19: *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 12 (2011) and Bryan Cheyette *Constructions of 'the Jew' in English Literature and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> Humbert Wolfe, *Now a stranger* (London: Cassell, 1933) pp.125-6.

<sup>9</sup> Wolfe, *Now a Stranger*, p.125 and Peter Gross, *Representations of Jews and Jewishness in English Painting 1887-1914* (University of Leeds, PhD Thesis 2004) p.297 .

<sup>10</sup> For example, Charles Spencer, *The immigrant generations: Jewish artists in Britain, 1900-1945* (New York: Jewish Museum, 1983), Lizzie Carey-Thomas, ed. *Migrations: Journeys into British Art* (London: Tate Gallery, 2012) and *Jewish Artists of Great Britain* (London: Belgrave Gallery 1978).

<sup>11</sup> There is a long tradition of situating Anglo-Jewish artists at the forefront of modern art in Britain, which, while justified, tends to obscure less obviously 'modern' artists from a similar background. David Bomberg's early masterpieces *The Vision of Ezekiel* (1912), *In the Hold* (12-1914) and, in particular, *The Mud Bath* (1914), all owned by Tate, are regularly displayed among other works of the period, whereas Rothenstein's *Jews Mourning in a Synagogue* (1906) has been aired only once in recent years (in the 2012 exhibition *Migrations*). Likewise, the modernist stylings of Jacob Kramer's *The Day of Atonement* (1919) have ensured that it is almost always on display at Leeds Art Gallery. Within the monographic exhibition, Rothenstein and Wolmark's paintings of Jewish life have been situated within wider narratives, most obviously at the recent surveys of Rothenstein's career: *From Bradford to Benares: The Art of Sir William Rothenstein* (Cartwright Hall Gallery, Bradford, 2015) and *Rothenstein's Relevance: William Rothenstein and his circle* (Ben Uri Gallery, London, 2015). *Rediscovering Wolmark: a pioneer of British modernism* was held at the Ben Uri Gallery and Ferens Art Gallery in Hull in 2004-5.

<sup>12</sup> There is, of course, a wider debate here over whether Jewish art can in fact exist – and if it does, what constitutes it – which is beyond the scope of this chapter. For further reading see, for instance, Robert Gordis and Moshe Davidowitz, ed. *Art in Judaism: studies in the Jewish artistic experience* (New York 1975).

<sup>13</sup> Moritz came to Bradford in 1859, Bertha followed a little later. For more on Rothenstein see Robert Speaight, *William Rothenstein: The Portrait of an Artist in his Time* (London: Eyre & Spottiswode 1962), Samuel Shaw, *From Bradford to Benares: The Art of Sir William Rothenstein* (Bradford: Cartwright Hall Gallery, 2015) and Sarah MacDougall and Rachel Dickson, ed. *William Rothenstein and his Circle* (London: Ben Uri Gallery, 2016). Rothenstein completed three volumes of memoirs: William Rothenstein, *Men and Memories, 1872-1900, Vol I* (London: Faber & Faber 1931), *Men and Memories, 1900-1922 Vol II* (London: Faber & Faber 1932) and *Since Fifty* (London: Faber & Faber 1939).

<sup>14</sup> The family attended the synagogue on feast days only, and all sources suggest that Rothenstein's understanding of, and exposure to, Jewish tradition was slight. See Rothenstein, *Men and Memories, Vol I*, for description of the artist's upbringing. See Gross (2004) for a more thorough investigation of Moritz Rothenstein's Unitarianism. I discuss Rothenstein's Jewish identity in more detail in my 2010 thesis *'Equivocal Positions': The Influence of William Rothenstein, c.1890-1910* (University of York, 2010) pp.211-223. See also MacDougall and Dickson, ed. *William Rothenstein and his Circle*.

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<sup>15</sup> This line is taken from a review Rothenstein wrote of Humbert Wolfe's memoir *Now a Stranger*, accessed in two boxes of uncatalogued material in the Tate Archives in 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Rothenstein, *Men and Memories Vol I*, p.35.

<sup>17</sup> See M. R. Marrus, 'Popular Anti-Semitism', *The Dreyfus Affair*, ed. N. L. Kleeblatt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

<sup>18</sup> 'I wish you could see what Degas is doing now. He asked affectionately after you, in spite of his *Judenhetze monomania*' wrote Walter Sickert to Rothenstein at the turn of the century: see Rothenstein, *Men and Memories, Vol I*, pp.102 and 341.

<sup>19</sup> 'They want me,' explained Rothenstein to his father in 1896, 'to join the "Maccabees", but I shall not'. William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, undated from Chelsea, Rothenstein Archives, Houghton Library, Harvard.

<sup>20</sup> In 1893 Zangwill noted that 'I must resist the solicitations of editors to shut myself up in the Ghetto': quoted in Bryan Cheyette, 'The Other Self: Anglo-Jewish Fiction and the Representation of Jews in England 1875-1905', in David Cesarani, *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry*, (New York: Blackwell, 1990), p.107.

<sup>21</sup> For example, in a letter from the 1890s, in which Rothenstein outlines his misgivings over a friend's complex relationship, he writes: 'I suppose, dearest mother, it is my Jewish blood which always sings injustice and I believe still that honesty is the finest quality in man & can see in fact no other line of conduct to follow except that dictated by justice, and honour.': William Rothenstein to Bertha Rothenstein, undated, Rothenstein Archives, Houghton Library, Harvard.

<sup>22</sup> Rothenstein, *Men and Memories, Vol II*, pp.35-6.

<sup>23</sup> William Rothenstein to Charles Rutherston, December 20<sup>th</sup> 1903, Rothenstein Archives, Houghton Library, Harvard.

<sup>24</sup> William Rothenstein to Moritz Rothenstein, May 14<sup>th</sup> 1903, Rothenstein Archives, Houghton Library, Harvard. The reference to changing names is interesting: during the war the three Rothenstein brothers were forced to consider a change of surname. Charles and Albert duly became 'Rutherston' while William stood by 'Rothenstein', reluctant perhaps to dishonor his German-Jewish heritage.

<sup>25</sup> Rothenstein claims to have painted 'eight pictures' in all, but at least ten exist: Rothenstein, *Men and Memories, Vol II*, pp.35-6.

<sup>26</sup> William Rothenstein to Charles Rutherston, December 20<sup>th</sup> 1903, Rothenstein Archives, Houghton Library, Harvard.

<sup>27</sup> Rothenstein, *Men and Memories, Vol II*, p.35.

<sup>28</sup> Rothenstein, *Men and Memories, Vol II*; William Rothenstein to Charles Rutherston, December 20<sup>th</sup> 1903, Rothenstein Archives, Houghton Library, Harvard. In his memoirs Rothenstein would describe his sitters as 'rigidly orthodox, extremely poor and feckless'. Note here that he tends to refer to the East End Jews as a group sharing the same characteristics; at no point in his letters or paintings are any specific individuals named, let alone clearly demarcated; Rothenstein, *Men and Memories, Vol II*, p.35.

<sup>29</sup> Rothenstein, *Men and Memories, Vol II*, p.36.

<sup>30</sup> A couple of letters from the same period continue where this caricature left off: to William's brother Albert, Beerbohm wrote: 'I haven't seen Will since he went away. I hear he is just off on a flying visit to Palestine, to restore the tomb of Moses': a wild fabrication of course, as was his account to William's wife Alice of a visit in which Rothenstein 'arrived on his bicycle but sternly refused to cross the threshold – probably because of some Jewish feast or fast: the threshold was unleavened, or there ought to have been blood on the lintel, or something of that kind'. See Mary Lago and Karl Beckson, *Max and Will: Max Beerbohm and William Rothenstein, their friendship and letters, 1893-1945* (London: J. Murray, 1975) p.51.

<sup>31</sup> For more on this highly influential and important exhibition see Juliet Steyn, 'The Complexities of Assimilation in the Exhibition "Jewish Art and Antiquities" in the Whitechapel Art Gallery', *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol 13:2 (London 1990).

<sup>32</sup> Anon, 'Mr Will. Rothenstein: A Great Artist and His Work', *The Jewish Chronicle*, June 15<sup>th</sup> 1906, p. 34.

<sup>33</sup> Anon, 'The Maccabees: Dinner to the Jewish Exhibition Committee', *The Jewish Chronicle*, December 7<sup>th</sup> 1906.

<sup>34</sup> A second painting – *Aliens at Prayer* – was considered by a Royal Academy committee for purchase as part of the Chantrey Bequest, but rejected on the grounds of deficient drawing. It was instead purchased by Melbourne.

<sup>35</sup> Destined there, it seems, for a life in storage; audiences in neither cities proving especially susceptible to gloomy representations of life in London's Jewish End, whatever the wider resonances of the painting. The Johannesburg painting, *Kissing the Law*, was Rothenstein's most involved painting of the series, featuring at least ten figures.

<sup>36</sup> Anon., 'Mr. W. Rothenstein's works', *The Jewish Chronicle*, June 3<sup>rd</sup> 1910, p. 20.



- <sup>37</sup> For discussion of sweatshop stereotypes see Glover, *Literature, Immigration and Diaspora in Fin-de-Siècle England*, p.47-79
- <sup>38</sup> Evans-Gordon, as Gross has noted, was by no means unsympathetic to the Jewish plight, as his book reveals. Nonetheless it is clear that he opposed their resettlement in Britain. See Peter Gross, 'A cultural moment in the midst of change', *The Ben Uri Story from Art Society to Museum* (London: Ben Uri, 2001) p.29
- <sup>39</sup> Anon, 'Independent Art at Messrs Agnew's', *The Athenaeum*, Feb 17<sup>th</sup>, 1906, p.206
- <sup>40</sup> Biographical material can be found in Gross, *Representations of Jews and Jewishness*, and the catalogue to the 2004-5 exhibition *Rediscovering Wolmark: a pioneer of British Modernism* (London: Ben Uri Gallery, 2004).
- <sup>41</sup> The Jewish Museum in New York owns two early sketchbooks by Wolmark, containing studies for many of his representations of Jewish life. These were discovered too late in the writing process to make full use of, and may be the form the subject of a future study.
- <sup>42</sup> Gross, *Representations of Jews and Jewishness in English Painting*, pp.321-322.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* p. 319.
- <sup>44</sup> Like many British Jews from a German background, Rothenstein found himself in a strange position in relation to more recent Jewish immigrants, many of whom struggled to understand his Jewish identity. The artist Mark Gertler was among these. For more on Gertler and Rothenstein see Shaw, *Equivocal Positions*, p.186-228 and Sarah MacDougall's chapter in MacDougall and Dickson, *William Rothenstein and his Circle*.
- <sup>45</sup> Gross, *Representations of Jews and Jewishness in English Painting*, pp.323-4.
- <sup>46</sup> Between 1898-1908 Sargent painted several portraits of the Wertheimer family. For discussion see Adler, K. 'John Singer Sargent's Portraits of the Wertheimer Family', *The Jew in the Text: Modernity and the Construction of Identity*, ed. Linda Nochlin, L. and Tamar Garb (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1995).
- <sup>47</sup> See *Rediscovering Wolmark: a Pioneer of British Modernism* (London: Ben Uri Gallery, 2004) for illustrations and discussion of paintings across Wolmark's career.
- <sup>48</sup> Charles Spencer, 'Anglo-Jewish Artists: the Migrant Generations', in *The Immigrant Generations: Jewish Artists in Britain, 1900-1945*, eds. Charles Spencer and Vivian D. Lipman (New York: Jewish Museum, 1983) p. 22. Gross rightly questions this claim: Gross, *Representations of Jews and Jewishness*, p.344.
- <sup>49</sup> Rothenstein stopped painting Jewish life in 1908; Wolmark continued to produce paintings representing Jewish life as late as 1949, though post-1910 it was a subject he tackled rarely.
- <sup>50</sup> For a close reading of this painting see Gross, *Representations of Jews and Jewishness*, p. 348.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>52</sup> Anon, 'Independent Art', *The Times*, Feb 10<sup>th</sup>, 1906, p.6.
- <sup>53</sup> Peter Gross, 'A cultural moment in the midst of change', *The Ben Uri Story from Art Society to Museum* (London: Ben Uri) p.29.
- <sup>54</sup> Roger Fry, *The Nation*, June 11<sup>th</sup> 1910.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>56</sup> A sketch for *Jews Mourning in a Synagogue* (owned by the Cartwright Hall Gallery, Bradford) shows the same models in very different poses.
- <sup>57</sup> *Laundry Girls* is owned by the Tate, and is one of a few paintings by Rutherston featuring working women in sparse interiors.
- <sup>58</sup> For a recent discussion of this phenomenon, see Kenneth McConkey, 'New English *Intimisme*: The Painting of the Edwardian Interior', *The Edwardians: Secrets and Desires*, ed. Anne Gray (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2004) pp.89-103 and Samuel Shaw, 'Turn-of-the-Century Interiors', in Samuel Shaw (ed.), *In Focus: The Doll's House 1899-1900 by William Rothenstein*, Tate Research Publication, 2016, <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/in-focus/the-dolls-house-william-rothenstein/turn-of-the-century-interiors>, accessed 29 April 2016.
- <sup>59</sup> The relation between these two interiors was briefly explored in Tate's 2012 exhibition *Migrations: Journeys into British Art* where *Jews Mourning in a Synagogue* was hung alongside Rothenstein's 1903 *Mother and Child*. This theme was further explored in the 2015 Bradford exhibition *From Bradford to Benares: the Art of Sir William Rothenstein*.
- <sup>60</sup> For more on Rothenstein's approach to narrative in art see Samuel Shaw, 'Narrative and Anti-Narrative', in Samuel Shaw (ed.), *In Focus: The Doll's House 1899-1900 by William Rothenstein*, Tate Research Publication, 2016, <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/in-focus/the-dolls-house-william-rothenstein/narrative-and-anti-narrative>, accessed 29 April 2016.
- <sup>61</sup> Robert Ross, *Masques and Phases* (London: A. L. Humphreys, 1909), p.169.
- <sup>62</sup> Roger Fry, *The Nation*, June 11<sup>th</sup> 1910.
- <sup>63</sup> *Rediscovering Wolmark: a Pioneer of British Modernism* (London: Ben Uri Gallery, 2004) p.9. Rothenstein later recalled in a letter to Roger Fry, 'I believe at the time [c.1899] I was perhaps more under the influence of Rembrandt than of Goya -you remember there was a great exhibition of his work at Amsterdam a little time

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before': Beckson and Lago, *Max and Will*, p. 9. This suggests Rothenstein – like Wolmark – attended the Rembrandt exhibition in Amsterdam; he almost certainly saw the two shows that followed in London.

<sup>64</sup> Catherine Scallen, *Rembrandt, reputation, and the practice of connoisseurship* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2000) p.155.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> See Barbara Pezzini, 'InterNational art: the London 'old-masters' market and modern British painting (1900-1914)' in *Art Crossing Borders: the Birth of an Integrated Art Market in the Age of Nation States* (Europe, c. 1780-1914), (Bril, forthcoming, 2015). See also Kenneth McConkey's work on Velasquez: "The Theology of Painting: The Cult of Velazquez in British Art at the Turn of the Twentieth Century", *Visual Culture in Britain*, Vol VI, no.2 (Manchester 2005).

<sup>67</sup> One of the ironies of this is that it was the Royal Academy who created the term 'Old Master', through their series of Winter Exhibitions, inaugurated in 1870.

<sup>68</sup> This argument is well made by Ysanne Holt, with particular reference to Rothenstein's earlier painting *Coster Girls*: 'London Types', *The London Journal*, Vol 25, No 1, (London, 2000) pp.34-51.

<sup>69</sup> Rembrandt's special relationship with Jewish artists and subjects has been challenged in recent years, but was very alive c.1905. See entry on Rembrandt, van Rijn, *Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 2006).

<sup>70</sup> Rothenstein, *Men and Memories*, Vol II, pp.35-6.

<sup>71</sup> Painting old men – a subject Rothenstein seems to have associated with Rembrandt – was another of the goals achieved in Whitechapel. As he later noted in his memoirs: 'I longed to paint old men': Rothenstein, *Men and Memories Vol I*, p.20.

<sup>72</sup> Samuel Shaw, 'Rembrandt and Reality', in Samuel Shaw (ed.), *In Focus: The Doll's House 1899–1900 by William Rothenstein*, Tate Research Publication, 2016, <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/in-focus/the-dolls-house-william-rothenstein/rembrandt-and-reality>, accessed 29 April 2016.

<sup>73</sup> Frances H. Low, 'Impressions of the Rembrandt Exhibition in Amsterdam', *Pall Mall Magazine*, June 1898, pp.90-91