

PROLOGUE

The Frame

ON MAY 3, 1945, a man stood outside Buxheim monastery. The old Carthusian foundation, which was about ninety kilometers to the north of Munich, was a white-walled and red-roofed structure; it dated back to the fifteenth century and was later rebuilt in the rococo style. The man was squarely built, though not tall. He may have had more heft and less hair than during his student days, but he was more intense, resourceful, and determined than ever. He had not come to the monastery to study its accretion of architectural forms or its famous decorative carvings, although he would have been at home doing so. Nor had religious impulse driven the man there.

The man was on a mission rather than a pilgrimage.¹ Cleveland-born, Harvard-educated, just shy of forty, Lieutenant James Rorimer was a “Jewish gentleman,” as army intelligence put it.² His first major tour of Europe had been entirely different than his present one: before going off to college, he had studied art at the École Gory in Paris and had traveled in Germany, the land of his paternal ancestors, although his interior designer father had changed the family name from Rohrheimer in 1917 as anti-German prejudice mounted with America’s belated entry into the First World War.

James Rorimer had had to fight his way into the Second World War. After trying to enlist in the US Army in 1941, months before Pearl Harbor, he was rejected because of high blood pressure. He was plenty busy as director of the Cloisters, the recently opened medieval branch of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which he had helped build. He easily could have sat out the war cloistered in its safe, tranquil surroundings, overlooking the banks of the Hudson at the upper tip of Manhattan, but he refused to sit still with a war going on. He recruited powerful supporters to press his case to the Army: among them were Paul Sachs, his Harvard mentor, director of the Fogg Museum and scion of the Goldman Sachs financial dynasty; Robert Lehman, another art-loving heir to a German-Jewish banking family (who later donated a magnificent wing to the Met); and John D. Rockefeller Jr., whose \$10 million donation had made the Cloisters possible. Their combined clout pushed the Army into giving him another look. In May 1943, he was allowed to enlist as a private.

Rorimer was tapped soon after—with some help from Sachs, whose reach ex-

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tended from Cambridge to New York to Washington, DC—for a more suitable task. He joined the newly constituted Monuments, Fine Art, and Archives (MFA & A) section of the US Army as a G-5 (Military Government) Specialist Officer. His comrades were mainly art historians or museum curators. “Here I have the job of jobs as far as my background and desire are concerned,” Rorimer wrote to Sachs from liberated Paris on December 10, 1944.³ His mission was initially to safeguard historic structures threatened by, or damaged in, battle. In the wake of D-day, though, the focus shifted to hunting down an unknown quantity of works of art that the Nazis had despoiled as they conquered, occupied, and ransacked one country after another on the Continent.

This was why Lieutenant Rorimer had come to the monastery of Buxheim. As the Monuments Specialist Officer for the US Seventh Army, he had followed the troops as they battled their way through German territory, vanquished the once formidable but now much weakened Wehrmacht, and took control of one village and town after another as the Third Reich collapsed around them.

When Lieutenant Rorimer arrived at Seventh Army Headquarters, he joined forces with Corporal John D. Skilton, aged thirty-six, who was awaiting his own commission. Skilton was delighted to find that he would be working with an old friend he had known from the museum world and with whom he had been stationed, for a time, in England. This Connecticut Yankee, like fictional hero Dink Stover, had done the only decent thing and gone to Yale. Skilton had studied art history in New Haven and then at the University of Paris. Research trips had brought him to Europe seven times. He had served as a curator at the newly inaugurated National Gallery in Washington, DC, before enlisting in the army.⁴

The two curators worked together for about a month from early morning until late at night. In an office at Military Government Headquarters, they affixed maps to the walls and employed colored pins to mark the known and suspected locations of German repositories of stolen art.

The mission was nearly scotched before it began. In the final days of the war, when the need to move men and materials trumped other concerns, it was difficult for Rorimer to convince his superiors of the importance of the objects that he and Skilton were trying to find. That he was only a lieutenant and Skilton a mere corporal did not help their cause. In a moment of desperation, the two learned curators even considered stealing a car so that they could hunt down Nazi-stolen art. Before they tried to pull off this unlikely heist, a Red Cross worker gave them the only aid they needed: he let them borrow his jeep. On May 3, they set off from Augsburg, which once had been a Free Impe-

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rial City, in a nonmilitary vehicle marked with red crosses. En route, hopeful American soldiers crowded around the jeep in search of coffee and doughnuts, first aid they were unfortunately unequipped to supply.⁵

Rorimer and Skilton arrived at Buxheim to find American soldiers on guard at the side of the building. Local people, Germans desperately seeking dry goods (that had been appropriated from France), had vandalized the room. Nothing in the one crate that they had pried open, though, had had an immediate use to the locals. They ignored or bypassed objects of extraordinary value that the American connoisseurs recognized immediately. As Rorimer and Skilton entered the room, they saw rows of packing cases, seventy-two in all, stamped "Fragile." The cases were crammed with beautiful paintings, including works by Watteau, Boucher, David, and Goya.⁶ On top of the vandalized crate were several pieces of bronze. Skilton picked up a gilt-bronze plaquette of Marie Antoinette. He turned it over and let out a tremendous yell when he saw that it had been marked in red with the official collection number of its former owner; just below, marked in black, he saw the letters "ERR" followed by a series of numbers.⁷

The French shipping labels, which were still intact on the cases, told the story. They had been stamped "D-W," an abbreviation that signified that they had belonged to M. David David-Weill, the eminent American-born, Parisian investment banker and art collector. When the Germans sacked Paris, he had been the Chairman of Lazard Frères and President of the National Museums of France. For all the power and



James Rorimer and unidentified men, ca. 1945.

prestige these positions carried, David-Weill could not keep the art collection that he had chosen so scrupulously over decades from falling into Nazi hands.

The black marking "ERR" on the cases confirmed what had happened to David-Weill's art treasures: they had been acquired by peaceful means or even in an emergency sale dictated by the exigencies of war. A special unit of the Wehrmacht, the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg, had confiscated the collection. This task force for cultural plunder was spearheaded by Nazi propaganda chief Alfred Rosenberg, who preached Aryan domination and practiced massive theft. From 1940 to 1944, fueled by racial fury and endless greed, ERR systematically stripped Jews of any and all prized cultural assets—fine and applied

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art, manuscripts, musical instruments, and sacred objects. Their aim, Skilton later wrote, was to “make Germany the greatest cultural center of Europe; in fact, of the world.”⁸ Unlike ordinary thieves, the ERR carefully numbered and cataloged every collection and object that they branded with their own stamp.

Buxheim was not Corporal Skilton’s first encounter with Nazi-stolen art. Not long after his arrival in Germany, he had been ordered to go to a unit near the front to examine eight paintings that had been found in a baggage car and bring them back to Seventh Army Headquarters if they were of sufficient value. One look had confirmed the aesthetic value of the recovered works, the most important of which was Tintoretto’s *Holy Family*. Skilton recognized that they had belonged to Jacques Goudstikker, the Dutch-Jewish art dealer whose entire collection had been looted after the Nazis overran Holland. Reichsmarschall Göring, who was particularly fond of getting his hands on art that he did not have to pay for, had plucked what he wanted for his own collection and sent the rest off to auction, the profits from which evidently went into his personal coffers.⁹



John Skilton.

Rescuing these old master paintings had been a challenge. None of the equipment that Skilton had at his disposal was remotely fit for transporting the works—always a delicate business—on the journey back to headquarters. He made do by wrapping them individually in blankets, which he put into the command car. Despite his precautions, his driver got lost deep in enemy territory as he struggled to find a bridge to cross the Rhine. “The driver was none too pleased,” Skilton recalled, “when I said that it really did not matter much what might happen to us, but that we must get the pictures to safety.” The sudden appearance of a plane swooping down on them threatened the survival of both the soldiers and the

paintings. Fortunately, it turned out to be one of their own and the pilot held his fire when he saw their vehicle’s Allied markings. They did not get back to headquarters until late at night, and the next morning Skilton deposited the old masters with US Property Control in Army Mannheim.¹⁰

BUXHEIM REPRESENTED A different challenge. Corporal Skilton remained in the side room of the monastery to count and inspect the cases’ contents, while Lieutenant Rorimer directed his attention to the other parts of the monastery, which American military personnel had yet to enter.

He went round to the main doors, which were located in a courtyard behind a

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closed gate. He rang the bell and waited for a long while until the monastery's resident director appeared and, later, returned with the repository's superintendent. The two old Germans were neither openly hostile nor readily forthcoming. Finally, they grudgingly handed over the keys he needed to carry out his inspection.¹¹

Lieutenant Rorimer began to make his way through corridors stacked with furniture from the Renaissance and the eighteenth century, which he judged good, bad, and indifferent. The connoisseur was disappointed with the uneven quality of the ethnographic materials that the Nazis had seized from Russian museums. He did not have time to look carefully at the dizzying quantity of objects that surrounded him: piles of bric-a-brac, pottery ornaments, and paintings that were housed in various rooms and arranged on shelves.¹²

He gave the chapel closer scrutiny. On its large floor, Lieutenant Rorimer found oriental rugs, tapestries, and Coptic textiles, piled eight to ten inches high, many still bearing tags identifying their original owners. He saw at once the Rothschild textiles that had graced the walls and floors of their magnificent Parisian hôtels right until the Nazis had emptied them. He had scoured these sites after the Liberation trying to unravel what had happened to the many private art collections during the Nazi Occupation.¹³

The American lieutenant's reconnaissance had suggested that the ERR had converted the monastery into a repository for despoiled art. What he had not expected to find was that Buxheim also had become the ERR's main center for art restoration. This is why he had encountered so many damaged objects as he conducted his inventory.

Lying perilously on one of the small tables that Lieutenant Rorimer spotted in the workshop was a small painting whose restoration was still in progress. He thought it was especially fine. He was right: the canvas was a Rembrandt. Its authorship was as clear as its provenance was murky. There was no record of who had owned the painting, but it evidently had come from a bank vault in Munich and been transported to Buxheim after the great fire.¹⁴



Restoration Laboratory at Buxheim Monastery in Bavaria, 1945.

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BUXHEIM ASTONISHED RORIMER. Nothing in his experience as a curator had prepared him for what he discovered within the monastery's ancient walls. "There were few museums in the world that could boast a collection such as the one we found there," he later wrote. "Works of art," he continued, "could no longer be thought of in ordinary terms—a roomful, a car-load, a castle-full, were the quantities we had to reckon with."¹⁵ Even a partial list of the 158 paintings he had found at Buxheim underlined the aesthetic importance of the works of art the ERR had plundered. They included six Bouchers, four Watteaus (including the School of Watteau), seven Fragonards, one Vlaminck, two Delacroix, two Goyas, four Davids, two Reynoldses, two Gainsboroughs, one Greuze, one Guardi, and two Renoirs.¹⁶

This treasure trove required very special treatment. Lieutenant Rorimer tried to secure the plundered art by stepping up the military guard, clearing out any and all unauthorized personnel, not moving the precious objects until adequate personnel were at hand, and banning publicity on the spectacular find until he could investigate other suspected ERR sites.¹⁷ Then he and Skilton headed off to the famous Bavarian castle of Neuschwanstein, the neo-Gothic phantasmagoria conceived by Ludwig II, who ruled Bavaria from 1864 to 1886.



Aerial view of Neuschwanstein Castle in Bavaria, Germany, ca. 1944.

What they discovered in the castle as in the monastery testified to both the range and quality of the works of art that certain Jewish collectors had acquired and to the depth and extent of Nazi art plunder. Crucial issues remained unanswered, however. Neither Lieutenant Rorimer nor Corporal Skilton had the opportunity to discuss, let alone the authority to resolve, the complex questions of restitution. Deciding what should happen to the despoiled art they had recovered—how, when, where, and to whom it should be returned—would have to wait for another day, if not another time.

SUCH STORIES ARE now well known thanks to a spate of works that explore the theft and recovery of Jewish-owned collections, notably Bernhard Schlink's "Girl with Lizard," Jonathan Petropoulos's *Art as Politics in the Third Reich*, Lynn Nicholas's *The Rape of Europa*, Hector Feliciano's *The Lost Museum*,

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Daniel Silva's *The English Assassin*, Anne Webber's *Making a Killing*, and the films *The Monuments Men* and *Woman in Gold*.¹⁸

Since the late 1990s—more than five decades since these crimes were perpetrated—there has been a dramatic resurgence of interest in the fate of Nazi-stolen art. We are now well aware that Nazis and collaborators plundered thousands of works of art (as well as rare books and musical instruments) from Jews. We know that the legendarily upright Swiss furnished Hitler with both an alpine money laundry and a clearinghouse for plundered art.

During and after the Nazi era, ignorant or unscrupulous individuals, institutions, and governments acquired despoiled works of art. It evidently was difficult for dealers, collectors, museums, and European states to resist the sudden availability of a bonanza of old and modern masterpieces. If some knew or suspected that gaps in wartime provenance signaled that they might be buying looted objects, others had little or no idea that there was anything wrong with their purchases.

The fate of pillaged Nazi art has become a cause célèbre—a problem to be solved as well as a story to be told. The realization that countless paintings, drawings, sculptures, and objets d'art were never returned to their owners or their heirs provoked justified outrage. Rarely did months go by at the turn of the twenty-first century without articles in the press about the discovery of plundered art and bitter disputes about ownership. It seemed that no more major revelations would take place. Then, in February 2012, German authorities seized over 1,400 objects valued at approximately \$1.4 billion, including works by Matisse, Picasso, and Chagall that had been confiscated by the Nazis from the Munich apartment of eighty-year-old Cornelius Gurlitt. His father, Hildebrand Gurlitt, had been ousted by the Nazis from his position as a museum director because they considered him “one quarter Jewish,” but they had authorized him to buy and sell “degenerate”—which is to say, “modern”—art.¹⁹

Family history, art history, and political history collided in battles over Nazi-stolen art. Such cases raise complicated legal and moral questions regarding the rights of various parties and the responsibilities of persons, museums, and governments to survivors or their heirs. There is good reason to welcome the



James Rorimer (left) and Antonio Valin (right) examine recovered objects, Neuschwanstein, Germany.

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long-delayed restitution of Nazi-stolen art, most famously the return of Gustav Klimt's *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* (1907) to its rightful heirs.²⁰

Even so, the danger of dwelling on the darkly enthralling story of theft and murder—how Nazis stole the art collections of Jews, along with many of their lives—is that it can obscure a compelling historical question: How did certain European Jews acquire so much great art in the first place, and what does this reveal about the Jewish encounter with modernity? This is the untold story of Nazi-stolen art.

THIS BOOK SETS out to reframe our picture of Nazi-stolen art. It does so by turning the story on its head: Taking the true measure of dispossession is only possible when we grasp what art meant to the dealers and collectors who loved and lost them. “Even when one is no longer attached to things, it’s still something to have been attached to them; because it was always for reasons which other people didn’t grasp.” Thus Charles Swann observes in Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*. Grasping these reasons entails delving into the story of how certain Jews became art dealers and collectors, what art meant to them, what impact their activities had on art and society, and, finally, how these people were regarded, received, and treated.

Insofar as it is possible, the purpose of this book is to restore and recreate the life, work, and milieu of certain Jews who became arbiters of taste. It explores how, against the odds, members of a minority, outsiders on the margins of European high culture, suddenly became the old masters’ new masters and the modernists’ champions. My aim is to present a portrait, a history painting on a wide canvas, that tells the story of the rise and fall of a small number of Jews, individuals and families, who were both merchants and connoisseurs, dealers and collectors.²¹ They competed and cooperated at various times and operated more often than not on both sides of the Atlantic. The protagonists of this story took a leading part in the critical transformations that shook the art world in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: namely, on the one hand, the great migration of old master paintings from Europe to the United States, and on the other, the eventual triumph of successive schools of modern art. Though no individual’s experience is typical in all regards, the dramatis personae of this story are representative figures whose lives reveal larger patterns. Art dealers dominate this story because they were the link between art, artists, collectors, auction houses, and museums. The story begins with their rise in the late nineteenth century and ends with the Nazi plunder of their collections.

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This book sets the protagonists' stories against the backdrop of the broader changes that affected their fortunes and transformed art and society. Among them were the gradual opening of high culture; the dynamics of assimilation, acculturation, and antisemitism; the decline of the landed classes and ascent of a new capitalist elite; the cultural impact of the "Great War"; and the Nazi war against the Jews.

THE ENTRY OF Jews into the art world was one chapter in the larger story that unfolded in a variety of cultural realms. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, certain circles of Berlin Jewry, especially children of wealth, found new opportunities that even the highly educated and talented would have been denied previously but for a few exceptional figures. Many who might have become rabbis or cantors a generation earlier instead became composers or performers. Some converted to Christianity or assimilated to the point that their "Jewishness" was all but erased.

The fine arts offered Jews neither their first nor their only path of entry into European civilization.²² Pride of place belongs to music and, to a lesser extent, theater. In 1800, there was only a sprinkling of Jewish composers, conductors, and performers in Europe. By the time that Richard Wagner issued his diatribe *Judaism in Music* (1850), though, substantial numbers of Jews played significant parts in the music world. This was one reason why Wagner, determined to strengthen his own position, needed to denounce Jewish competitors.²³ Among the most gifted and influential figures in the music world were a bevy of Christian converts led by Felix Mendelssohn. The grandson of Enlightenment Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (who Gottfried Ephraim Lessing celebrated in his play *Nathan the Wise*), he was responsible for renewing interest in the work of Johann Sebastian Bach, in part through his performance of the *St. Matthew Passion*.²⁴ Felix Mendelssohn was, as far as we know, a sincere Lutheran, but he did not deny or deride his family or origins, which were, at any rate, no secret. Nor did Mendelssohn fall prey to the self-hatred that afflicted those who internalized heinous old stereotypes.²⁵ As a result, they inadvertently carried within themselves the very things that they were desperate to get away from.

There was nothing palpably or specifically "Jewish" about Felix Mendelssohn's musical language as a composer or about his aesthetic preferences as a conductor. No matter: neither his religious conversion nor his musical attainments shielded him from those who resented him on both counts. The Jewish origins of Mendelssohn and his circle attracted no end of attention and

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antagonism from their antisemitic detractors.²⁶ They presumably would have preferred that Mendelssohn and his brethren stayed out of conservatories and concert halls (if not head for the furthest ghetto).

The cultural participation of Jews widened and deepened in the course of the nineteenth century as the process of political emancipation unfolded in one country after another. Nowhere perhaps was the presence of Jews in the worlds of art and thought more striking than in fin-de-siècle Vienna. In the autobiography he completed shortly before he and his wife took their own lives in Brazil in 1941, Stefan Zweig captured (and, at times, idealized) the world of his youth. In public life, he observed, few, if any, Jews occupied key political or diplomatic posts in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Economic success did not ensure social ease. Far from it: his father, a man of parts who had prospered as a textile manufacturer, avoiding dining at the legendary Sacher Hotel but not for reasons of economy. What held him back was that it would have been unbecoming or uncomfortable for him to find himself sitting next to the likes of Prince Schwarzenberg.²⁷

No such inhibitions obtained in the realm of art, which was for Viennese, "a communal duty." Indolent aristocrats might choose to attend the Imperial Court rather than bother with the avant-garde. Christian millionaires might prefer to spend their time on racing stables or hunting than on art collecting. This left the Jewish bourgeoisie an unprecedented opportunity to seize the aesthetic initiative. And they made the most of it: "They were the real audience, they filled the theaters and the concerts, they bought the books and the pictures, they visited the exhibitions."²⁸

And, little hampered by tradition, Jews were the "exponents and champions of the new."²⁹

RECOUNTING THE STORY of how certain Jews penetrated the art world (and indeed other spheres) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries inevitably raises the vexing and potentially explosive question of who is and is not a Jew. For the purposes of this story, I refer to Jews in terms of origins or descent; this is what I mean when I refer to Jewish art dealers, collectors, and so forth. This choice most certainly is not based on the notion that Jews are a race with inborn traits and an unchanging essence that exists independent of specific social situations. Nevertheless, Jewish origins were a critical social fact that could and did affect religious practices, ethnic ties, migration patterns, occupational choices, and cultural identity. Jewish origins shaped how individuals and families were treated and regarded by the "compact majority," as Henrik Ibsen put it, and how they saw

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themselves and others, whether or not they openly expressed such sentiments.

Singling out the participation of Jews in just about any activity sets off anti-semitic alarm bells and for good reason. Counting Jews in a given population to determine what is a “disproportionate” number has been a historical prelude to discrimination if not persecution. This method has been used to determine quotas—the *numerus clausus* (closed number) of how many Jews should be permitted to enter a school, university, club, profession, and so forth. In Jean-Paul Sartre’s famous essay on the Jewish Question, which was written under the shadow of the Nazi occupation, he observed that those who tried to find out how many Jews allegedly had dodged military service during the First World War were already antisemites before the facts and in spite of them. Nazi ideologues denounced the intolerable “concentration” of Jews in suspect fields from international finance and department stores to theoretical physics and psychoanalysis. This was one of many specious justifications for the purification of the Third Reich through expulsion, plunder, and mass murder.

Serge Sabarsky, the Austrian émigré art collector who cofounded the Neue Galerie in New York with Ronald Lauder, reacted against an insidious history he had seen firsthand. “One does not do a favour to the wealthy lovers of art, who happen to be Jewish, by calling them ‘Jewish patrons of art.’”³⁰ There was nothing surprising, or noteworthy, about the fact that these lovers of beauty happened to be Jewish. And there was no reason to assume that they acted out of “cultural nationalism.” In a just, rational world, the artistic activities of Jews might not warrant special attention. Yet there are several reasons why we cannot take Jews’ artistic activities for granted. Whatever Jews have been identified with, for better or worse, in their long history, they rarely have been linked to visual art. Rather, Jews were traditionally the “people of the Book” who focused on the interpretation of texts rather than images.³¹ Their participation in the fine arts as well as in theater and music was a relatively recent development. Jews, like other minorities, were unevenly represented in various economic or cultural endeavors. They tended to cluster in some activities and shy away from others.³² This had nothing to do with supposedly intrinsic racial dispositions and everything to do with social circumstances. Jews faced greater discrimination in certain fields and naturally gravitated to those that seemed most promising and hospitable. Jews’ success in one or another field, such as diamond cutting or retail created a “demonstration effect” that encouraged others to try their luck on the same path. Lastly, the issue is not whether “cultural nationalism” drove Jewish patrons of the arts (with the possible exception of those who

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sponsored religious art and architecture). Rather, the issue is how, if at all, their desire for social acceptance influenced their cultural activities.

The question of questions is whether the role that certain Jews assumed in the art world—as dealers, collectors, critics, historians, and, not least, artists—was distinctive, and, if so, how and why.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Jews in various parts of Europe were caught up in the maelstrom of modernization. Their lives were disrupted, for better or worse, by the rapid advance of industrialization, urbanization, and democracy. They experienced the same social, economic, political, and cultural processes that swept up, or bowled over, other groups. These included peasants who were the first in their families to receive formal education from schoolmasters or priests, artisans who migrated from small villages or market towns to capital cities, and merchants who devoted their new fortunes partly to imitating nobles who patronized the arts.

Jews were not the only group stopped in their tracks by obstructive forces. The protagonist of Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895), a self-taught scholar and stone mason, dreamed of attending Christminster (Oxford), which he idealized as the "New Jerusalem" and the "city of light." And yet, Hardy observed: "For the present he was outside the gates of everything, colleges included; perhaps some day he would be inside." It was not to be. For all of his efforts, Jude Hawley was denied the enlightenment he craved; the promised land eluded him.³³

By rights, Virginia Woolf should have had an easier time of it. Her father, Leslie Stephen, was an eminent man of letters and a charter member of the "intellectual aristocracy" that included the Darwins, Macaulays, Wedgwoods, Stracheys, and Trevelyans. On a lovely autumn morning, with the "leaves fluttering red on the ground," she walked on the grounds of an Oxbridge college. Instantly, a curious-looking man, the College Beadle, stopped her. Dressed in cutaway coat and evening shirt, his face expressed horror and indignation. It turned out that she had stepped out of line. "This was the turf; there was the path," Woolf observed in *A Room of One's Own* (1929). "Only the Fellows and Scholars are allowed there, the gravel is the place for me." And they were protecting the turf "which had been rolled for 300 years in succession."

When the author of *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) opened the door of the famous library, another obstacle appeared. She saw a man in a black gown, "a deprecating, silvery, kindly gentleman, who regretted in a low voice as he waved me back that ladies are only admitted to the library if accompanied by a Fellow of

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the College or furnished with a letter of introduction." And she possessed neither. Had Woolf wanted to enter the chapel door, she imagined that the verger might have stopped her, "demanding perhaps my baptismal certification, or a letter of introduction from the Dean." A woman with money and property would face no such tests, however, in the peace of a "room of one's own."³⁴

Presenting a baptismal certificate or venturing into Christminster was considerably more complicated for Jews. Emancipation gave Jews political and legal rights, but it did not wipe away religious difference, let alone widespread prejudice. Nor did it change the fact that during the nineteenth century most Jews, with the exception of certain bankers and intellectuals, remained cultural outsiders. Few could take social respectability for granted.

Many Eastern European Jews continued to speak Yiddish rather than the language of the surrounding community and knew little about Europe's artistic and intellectual traditions or new forms of expression. Jews were, in this regard, in much the same situation as socially mobile peasants, artisans, or petty bourgeois with limited education.

There was, however, at least one crucial distinction. Unlike those who had grown up in a world of rich visual images, especially if they had attended Catholic churches, Jews had little or no such exposure. It was not simply that Jews were usually unfamiliar with Christian icons. In fact, they were brought up to fear, if not despise, the sacred symbols of their historic oppressors. Moreover, these "graven images" violated the Second Commandment. This complicated their encounter with European painting, which was suffused with Christian imagery. Pictorial renderings of charged religious subjects such as Titian's heartrending *The Crucifixion* (1558) were particularly menacing and threatening to Jews who had been persecuted as Christ-killers.

IN THIS BOOK I argue that the crisis of the old order in the art world, which lasted well into the late nineteenth century, and the emergence of modern culture and society, provided openings for new players. The end of the old order took place on two fronts: on the one hand, the financial crisis of the landed aristocracy culminated in an unprecedented sell-off of old master paintings, sculptures, and objets d'art; on the other hand, there was the crisis of the Academy and the Salon, the dominant institutions that enforced classic aesthetic standards, and their unwillingness and inability to accommodate new forms of aesthetic expression.

What enabled certain Jews to take advantage of the decline and fall of the old regime was their distinctive economic culture and cultural aspirations. In the

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late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, art dealing, like other businesses in which Jews congregated, was a rapidly expanding field that presented relatively few barriers to entry, required modest capital investment, offered competitive advantages to family firms and ethnic networks, provided growing opportunities for international trade, and offered a degree of geographical mobility. Art dealing was a good fit for Jews because they were a classic middleman minority who mediated between producers and consumers in different settings.³⁵

Unlike Quakers, Parsees, and overseas Chinese, who performed similar tasks in their own societies, Jews became cultural interpreters and intermediaries. Art dealing and collecting furnished a means of acculturation, a source of wealth, and a mark of status. These activities promised emblems of national citizenship and cosmopolitan standing to Jewish outsiders who were seeking a place in the larger society.

The growing prominence of Jews in the art world, however, provoked, or became a pretext for, new outbursts of antisemitic hatred and, eventually, the furious assault from Nazis. Trafficking in significant symbols was a dangerous business.³⁶ Trading old master paintings of the Holy Family violated sacred Christian ground, and trading cubist portraits threatened enshrined notions of beauty and truth. Moreover, the Nazis asserted their own cultural claims and economic hunger through the systematic, racially driven theft of Jewish-owned collections. Fine art, therefore, became a bloody crossroads where culture and money, aesthetics and avarice, collided with disastrous consequences.