

# La vera patria (The true homeland)

## Stefan Zweig // Joseph Roth

**Bulletin #01**

**Livorno, former City of Nation, 11 April 2022**

### **The Auto-da-Fé of the Mind<sup>1</sup> | Joseph Roth**

If the books of Jewish or supposed Jewish authors are burned, what is really set fire to is the Book of Books: the bible. If Jewish judges and attorneys are expelled or locked up, it represents a symbolic assault on law and justice. If authors with European reputations are exiled, it is a way of proclaiming one's contempt for France and Britain. If communists are tortured, it carries the fight to the Russian and Slavic world, which is always far more that of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky than that of Lenin and Trotsky.

### **Mukachevo, a peaceful city<sup>2</sup> | Joseph Roth**

Mukachevo is a small and peaceful city. People here speak German, Yiddish and Hungarian and Slovak and Ukrainian – a bit of everything and all rather well. In the old monarchy, it enjoyed its own polyglot peace as well as military peace, because it was occasionally a territory for maneuvering. And now that so many paramilitaries are circulating around the world, we understand how much a true army can be peaceful. Plus, now, when so many States – not only citizens – cross over, so to speak, its borders, you understand what a grace of God a polyglot state structure can be. So much time has passed! So, the Ruthenians didn't think of firing on Mukachevo. Twice a week, there was a cattle market in Mukachevo. Even then, people beat each other: but at Salomone Komrower's tavern. Today, Mukachevo, the peaceful city, would be right to wonder, and to ask heads of State – in German, Yiddish, Slovak, Ruthenian –, how it came to be tossed like a snowball across the borders of different States.

In no time at all, there are fourteen deaths in Mukachevo. Czechoslovakian gendarmes, who yesterday were still Hungarian, fire on Hungarians, who yesterday were still Czechoslovakians. The custodian Szatmari comes home and says to his wife: "Just think, I killed my best comrade: the train conductor Kaniuk! He served alongside me. But he was Ruthenian. It's so hard to navigate these demarcation lines!"

Because of this, a world war could break out, more terrible than the one that started in Sarajevo. Then, an heir to the throne was killed. Now it's a cinema! Whose cinema was it? Probably not Salomone Komrower. Probably not his descendants. The patrons that once loved to drink and brawl in his tavern now obey racial laws, which they complain about as much as the Jews suffer from them...

Oh, Mukachevo, what have you become! What do small cities have to sustain under the great powers, and small men under great men? Much time has passed since Komrower could understand Kaniuk and the others could understand Szatmari. And yet they spoke different languages. But ever since it became fashionable to force people living on the same square meter to use exactly the same language, the same customs, and trace back to the same ancestors, they can no longer understand one another. And Mukachevo, the peaceful city, suddenly becomes a symbol for the entire world, a focal point in its own right! And this is precisely what it never wished to be.

### **At the Spanish border<sup>3</sup> | Joseph Roth**

To me – and to anyone wishing today to claim the right of considering himself European and seeing himself in the great and only homeland, after the small ones have failed so miserably or bloodily (or even miserably bloodily) – to us last Europeans, this photo remains, today in the newspapers, tomorrow in the weekly columns: an unending procession of people, mothers, the elderly, children in flight, passing in front of a Hotel with the sign:

HOTEL ITALIA  
TOUT COMFORT

Hundreds of hotels in hundreds of countries are ready to offer that “tout comfort” to all the refugees of Barcelona and Catalonia. And there are many Barcelonas, and many countries that could be called Catalonia, and many hotels called “Hotel Italia”.

<sup>1</sup>from What I Saw: Reports from Berlin 1920-1933” Published in New York, 2003. Original title Das Autodafé des Geistes, Cahiers juifs, Parigi settembre-novembre 1933

<sup>2</sup>original title Munkacs, eine brave Stadt, “Pariser Tageszeitung”, 8-9 gennaio 1939. Translation ITA/ENG Rachel Moland

<sup>3</sup>original title An der spanischen Grenze, “Pariser Tageszeitung”, primo febbraio 1939. Translation ITA/ENG Rachel Moland

### **Friendship is indeed true homeland | Joseph Roth e Stefan Zweig\***

Stefan Zweig to Joseph Roth. Letter dated 21 July 1934

“Now all of a sudden, I see in your letters hate and vengefulness against individuals, threats to denounce them even in your last will – Roth, I implore you, you’re a kindly, helpful, understanding soul: don’t you feel the evil in them, an evil that isn’t in you, but that comes from outside? THAT’s what alarms me for you now, the fact that you see evil, and feel evil intentions all around you, and that evil is already inside you. Yes, initially as a fantasy and resistance, but to be forever thinking of the evil coming from others means to hoist it into you, to let it nest in you and grow like a cancer, like a tumor. No, Roth, I don’t *want* that.”

Joseph Roth to Stefan Zweig. Letter dated 24 July 1935

“You’re not right when you say we’ve all been driven mad. There is a balance in the world between madness and logic. At any rate, we, who have been given the sword of reason, have no right to throw it away.

The Habsburgs will return. Please don’t deny what’s all too evident! You see I’ve been right thus far. Austria will be a monarchy. I’m right. I foresaw the madness and excess of Prussia. Because I believe in God. And you, you didn’t see it, because you believe in “humankind”, a concept so unclear that by contrast with it, you could think to meet God on the nearest street corner. Of course friendship is our true home. And you may be sure I will observe it more faithfully than anyone else.”

\* from “Joseph Roth: A Life in Letters. New York, 2012.”