

La vera patria (The true homeland)

Stefan Zweig // Joseph Roth

Bulletin #02

Livorno, former City of Nations, 8 may 2022

The white cities¹ | Joseph Roth

The white cities

Because it is war, and we know it, we – the expert witnesses on battlefields – we understood right away that we have come home from a small battlefield to a great one.

Avignon

If I were the pope, then, I'd live in Avignon. I would take pleasure in seeing what European Catholicism had brought about, the wonderful mixing of races, the colorful confusion of all the different essences of life, and how the results of miscegenation are actually not dull monotony. Everyone carries in himself the blood of five different races, young and old, and every individual is a world comprising five continents. Each can understand each, and their society is open; no one is forced to take up any particular position. This is assimilation at its best: A person may remain as different as he is and feel at home.

Will the world ever come to look like Avignon?

Les Baux

And this is where the ruins of Les Baux are.

They are not ruins in the accepted sense. Just the reversion of stone to stone. Chalk that once was a castle and now is chalk again. The whole castle was pitched on the rock. The rock had brought it forth, and dandled it on its lap for several centuries. Now the rock is rock again. It has started to grow again. It renews itself, and spills over the old outlines of the castle. And still people live in its intestines.

¹ from Joseph Roth "The White Cities. Reports from France 1925-39", Granta Books, London 2004

The world of Yesterday: memories of a European² | Stefan Zweig

School in the last century

But the coffeehouse was still the best place to keep up with everything new.

In order to understand this, it must be said that the Viennese coffeehouse is a particular institution which is not comparable to any other in the world. As a matter of fact, it is a sort of democratic club to which admission costs the small price of a cup of coffee. Upon payment of this mite every guest can sit for hours on end, discuss, write, play cards, receive his mail, and, above all, can go through an unlimited number of newspapers and magazines. In the better-class Viennese coffeehouse all the Viennese newspapers were available, and not the Viennese alone, but also those of the entire German Reich, the French and the English, the Italian and the American papers, and in addition all of the important literary and art magazines of the world, the Revue de France no less than the Neue

Rundschau, the Studio, and the Burlington Magazine. And so we knew everything that took place in the world at first hand, we learned about every book that was published, and every production no matter where it occurred; and we compared the notices in every newspaper. Perhaps nothing has contributed as much to the intellectual mobility and the international orientation of the Austrian as that he could keep abreast of all world events in the coffeehouse, and at the same time discuss them in the circle of his friends. For, thanks to the collectivity of our interests, we followed the orbis pictus of artistic events not with two, but with twenty and forty eyes. What one of us had overlooked was noticed by another, and since in our constant childish, boastful, and almost sporting ambition we wished to outdo each other in our knowledge of the very latest thing, we found ourselves actually in a sort of constant rivalry for the sensational.

Bypaths on the Way to Myself

The furniture that I bought was not particularly good, for I had no desire to “tend” it as my parents had done in their home, where every chair had its own slip cover which was only removed when company came. It was also my intention not to settle down in Vienna lest I might become sentimentally bound to a definite place. For many years I looked back on this self-training for the temporary as a mistake, but when later I was compelled once again to leave each home that I created for myself and when I saw everything about me crumbling, this enigmatic instinct not to bind myself proved an aid. Acquired early, it made all loss and all leave-taking easier for me.

² from Stefan Zweig “The World of Yesterday. An autobiography”, The Viking Press, New York 1943