

La vera patria (The true homeland)

Stefan Zweig // Joseph Roth

Bulletin #04

Livorno, former City of Nations, 31 may 2022

The world of Yesterday: memories of a European¹ | Stefan Zweig

Light and Shadow over Europe

For a different rhythm prevailed in the world. None could foretell all that might happen in a single year! One discovery, one invention, followed another, and instantly was directed to the universal good; for the first time the nations sensed in common that which concerned the commonweal. On the day that the Zeppelin made its first flight I happened to be in Strassburg on my way to Belgium when, amidst the jubilant roaring of the crowd, it circled the cathedral as if to pay homage to the thousand-year-old edifice. That night at Verhaeren's in Belgium came the news that the ship had crashed in Echterdingen. Verhaeren had tears in his eyes and was terribly moved. He was not indifferent to the German catastrophe as if, being a Belgian, it concerned him less, but as a European of our time he shared the common victory over the elements as he now did the common trial. In Vienna we shouted with joy when Blériot flew over the Channel as if he had been our own hero; because of our pride in the successive triumphs of our technics, our science, a European community spirit, a European national consciousness was coming into being. How useless, we said to ourselves, are frontiers when any plane can fly over them with ease, how provincial and artificial are customs-duties, guards and border patrols, how incongruous in the spirit of these times which visibly seeks unity and world brotherhood! This soaring of our feelings was no less wonderful than that of the planes, and I pity those who were not young during those last years of confidence in Europe. For the air about us is not dead, is not empty, it carries in itself the vibration and the rhythm of the hour, it presses them unknowingly into our blood and directs them deep into our heart and brain. In those years each one of us derived strength from the common upswing of the time and increased his individual confidence out of the collective confidence.

The Struggle For Intellectual Brotherhood

For this was the favorable difference between the First World War and the second: in the first the word still had power. It had not yet been done to death by the organization of lies, by "propaganda," and people still considered the written word, they looked to it. Whereas in 1939 not a single pronouncement by any writer had the slightest effect either for good or evil, and up to the present no book, pamphlet, essay, or poem has stirred the masses to their core. In 1914 a forty-eight line poem like Lissauer's "Hymn of Hate," an inane manifesto like that of the "93 German Intellectuals," or an eight-page essay such as Rolland's *Au-dessus de la Mêlée*, or a novel like Barbusse's *Le Feu*, became an event. The moral conscience of the world had not yet become as tired or washed-out as it is today. It reacted vehemently to every obvious lie, to every violation of international law and of humanity, with the whole force of centuries of conviction.

¹ from Stefan Zweig "The World of Yesterday. An autobiography", The Viking Press, New York 1943

The Hotel Years² | Joseph Roth

The All-Powerful Police

A change in regime is something a traveller sees first in a hotel porter. His first move after welcoming the guest is to ask for his passport. I will admit, I have a deep suspicion of states that demand the surrender of your passport in a hotel. (Some travelers are less particular in this regard.) All the traditional hospitality of a country that has been getting by on tourism for many years, and seems likely not to be able to get by without it for many more, becomes suspicious to me when hotel personnel start to behave in a semi-official capacity and take away my passport, and thereby my freedom of movement, even if it's only for half a day. But the hotel porter does more. When I go to him for stamps, he takes the trouble to read the names of my addressees. So concerned is he for my comfort that he will not let me walk a few steps to the letter box. He insists on posting my letters himself. The outcome is that they arrive a day or two later than they should have done.

² from Joseph Roth "The Hotel Years: Wanderings in Europe Between the Wars", Granta Books, 2016