

# La vera patria (The true homeland)

## Stefan Zweig // Joseph Roth

**Bulletin #05**

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### **The Death of German Literature<sup>1</sup> | Joseph Roth**

Of course, they are of a mind to introduce another one; from now on they want it to be nourished by a national ideal. Only a traditionalist like me will raise himself against such a principle: I understand perfectly well that the Germans desire a specifically German literature, just as there is a specifically French one. But is such a thing feasible? If our literature has always been cosmopolitan, it is because we have never been a nation. If the Germans are obsessed with a 'return to the soil', it is precisely because they are nowhere near it.

<sup>1</sup>from What I Saw: Reports from Berlin 1920-1933" Published in New York, 2003. Original title Der Tod der deutschen Literatur, «Le Mois», Parigi, agosto 1933

### **Exhibition <sup>2</sup> | Joseph Roth**

The Fascist party plan to install an 'anti-bourgeois' exhibition within the already open 'exhibition of autarky'. The idea is to denounce in the most graphic fashion those manners and customs which, in Italy at least, are viewed as specifically bourgeois. The journalist ticks off the 'denounced' exhibits: a handshake, a raising of the hat, gala dinners, evenings of conferences, society games, festive dinners, five o'clock tea, the easy life and all manner of compassion for the Jews.

I should warn against mockery. There is nothing to laugh at here! Fascism is evidently in the throes of its menopause. Its delirious innovations are the result of a dangerous imbalance which, far from effecting only 'being' or the 'spirit', completely transforms the personality. Not only has any sense of regularity been interrupted, but unpredictability and random chance have decisively taken its place. There is no further recourse to legality. Even in the case where the delirium results from calculation and cunning, it doesn't invalidate the established diagnosis: malice and trickery are, on the contrary, indices of an organically proven incurable psychosis detected in the functions of the organism. Certain actions are belatedly recognised as the fruit of prolonged reflection, secretly prepared and finely conceived with the dangerous complicity of the mysterious, as if the grave of the soul broke open and from it some force erupted.

<sup>2</sup>from What I Saw: Reports from Berlin 1920-1933" Published in New York, 2003. Original title Die Ausstellung, «Das Neue Tage-Buch», Parigi, 24 dicembre 1938

### **The world of Yesterday: memories of a European<sup>3</sup> | Stefan Zweig**

Eros Matutinus

All this has to be set down in an honest picture of the times. For often when I converse with younger comrades of the post-war generation, I must convince them almost by force that our youth was by no means specially favored in comparison with their own. True, we had more freedom in the political sense than the present generation, which is compelled to submit to military service, compulsory labor, and in many countries to mass ideologies, and in almost all countries is helplessly delivered up to the arbitrary power of world politics. We were able to devote ourselves to our art and to our

intellectual inclinations, and we were able to mold our private existence with more individual personality. We could live a more cosmopolitan life and the whole world stood open to us. We could travel without a passport and without a permit wherever we pleased. No one questioned us as to our beliefs, as to our origin, race, or religion.

### The Agony of Peace

Ten years before, meeting Dmitri Merejkovsky in Paris, he lamented that his books were banned in Russia and I, in my inexperience rather thoughtlessly tried to console him by saying that this really meant little when measured by world distribution. But, when my own works disappeared from the German language I could more clearly grasp his lament at being able to produce the created word only in translation, in a diluted, altered medium. Similarly, I only understood what this exchange of my passport for an alien's certificate meant in the moment when I was admitted to the English officials after a long wait on the petitioners' bench in an anteroom. An Austrian passport was a symbol of my rights. Every Austrian consul or officer or police officer was in duty bound to issue one to me on demand as a citizen in good standing. But I had to solicit the English certificate. It was a favor that I had to ask for, and what is more, a favor that could be withdrawn at any moment. Overnight I found myself one rung lower. Only yesterday still a visitor from abroad and, so to speak, a gentleman who was spending his international income and paying his taxes, now I had become an immigrant, a "refugee." I had slipped down to a lesser, even if not dishonorable, category. Besides that every foreign visa on this travel paper had thenceforth to be specially pleaded for, because all countries were suspicious of the "sort" of people of which I had suddenly become one, of the outlaws, of the men without a country, whom one could not at a pinch pack off and deport to their own State as they could others if they became undesirable or stayed too long. Always I had to think of what an exiled Russian had said to me years ago: "Formerly man had only a body and a soul. Now he needs a passport as well for without it he will not be treated like a human being."

<sup>3</sup> from Stefan Zweig "The World of Yesterday. An autobiography", The Viking Press, New York 1943