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**JOSEPH ROTH**
**The Hotel Years: Wanderings in Europe between the Wars**

Transl. MICHAEL HOFMANN

 London: Granta Books, 2015
 

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**J**OSEPH ROTH was born on 2 September 1894, to Jewish parents, in Brody, Galicia, a place populated by Greeks, Armenians, Ukrainians, Poles and by a sizable majority of Jews, including Roth's family. Joseph never met his father, Nahum, who lost his mind while still young. His mother, Miriam, was very strict, and Roth's desire to travel was partly fueled by the wish to escape her oversight. He was a sharp student at the local gymnasium and, after he finished it, he went to the University of Vienna, where he studied literature and began to publish poetry and newspaper articles. He wrote for a considerable number of newspapers from all over Europe (from *Frankfurter Zeitung* or *Berliner Börsen-Courier* to *Prager Tagblatt* or *Neue Berliner Zeitung*, *12 Uhr-Blatt*), but he was best known as the author of the famous *The Radetzky March* (1932), his masterpiece, a family saga about the decline and fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Roth's last years were extremely difficult. He moved from one hotel to another, he was drinking heavily, increasingly anxious about money and the future. But despite suffering from chronic alcoholism, he remained a prolific writer until his premature death in Paris on 27 May 1939.

In the articles gathered here under the title *The Hotel Years*, Joseph Roth describes the panorama of the human condition. Beginning with 1921, Roth wrote mostly for the liberal *Frankfurter Zeitung*, which sent him on assignments throughout Germany and abroad (to Italy, Poland, USSR and Al-

bania). He covered inflation, the rise of fascism, and political assassinations. Joseph Roth described what he saw, using simple words, but stirring powerful feelings. In his French exile he was an active anti-Nazi. The Third Reich was, as he declared, "dependency of hell on earth." That is why he loved to celebrate his return "to lobby and chandelier, porter and chambermaid."

*The Hotel Years* brings together 64 pieces on hotels, people, places, pains and pleasures, political personalities, and the international political situation of the 1930s. This title was chosen because Roth lived out of suitcases from 1925 until his death in 1939. Michael Hofmann is also the official translator of Roth's books that have appeared in English, novels and short works alike. He is justly considered the scholar most responsible for having reintroduced Roth's personality to our times. The articles included in *The Hotel Years* begin in Vienna just at the end of the First War, and end in Paris near the outbreak of the Second World War.

Joseph Roth had a great passion for hotels, which he considered a special world. In fact, he was an archetypal outsider: a Jew, a lifelong exile, a cosmopolitan individualist. He earned his living as a newspaper journalist, and he perfected a new kind of journalistic essay which combined reportage with impressionism, spiced up with humor and graced with profound wisdom. *The Hotel Years* captures his wanderings in European cosmopolitan society before the rise of Nazism. Hofmann organizes the articles into sections, imposing an order upon Roth's travels. Some are geographical: Germany, USSR, Albania; some are conceptual: Sketches, Pleasures and Pains, Ending.

Roth perfectly managed to combine his personal feelings with historic objectivity.

This is a better way to savor the delights within, such as this description of one individual that perfectly sums up the whole of “Germany in Winter” (pp. 29–32), in 1923, a place where “the harshness of nature is nothing to the boundless cruelty of history” (p. 29). “In Leipzig I saw a man from a firm of undertakers. He wore a gleaming top hat. He had a pomaded, up-twirled black moustache. He looked like a first-class funeral. He provoked fear and respect. Round about him gusts of infinity blew. He was a representative intercessor between this world and the next; a Middle European Charon; a splendidly ceremonial death” (p. 30).

In “Arrival in the Hotel” (pp. 155–159), Roth proudly describes the nationalities represented in one place: “The waiter is from Upper Austria. The porter is a Frenchman from Provence. The receptionist is from Normandy. The headwaiter is Bavarian. The chambermaid is Swiss. The valet is Dutch. The manager is Levantine; and for years I’ve suspected the cook of being Czech. The guests come from all over the world. Continents and seas, islands, peninsulas and ships, Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Muslims and even atheists are all represented in this hotel. . . . People seem to come together here and at least appear what they should always be: children of the world” (p. 157).

In the essay “The Destruction of a Café” (pp. 202–205), while describing the transformation of an old, beloved café into a whitewashed anodyne void, Roth writes: “The color of the age is white, laboratory white, as white as the room where they invented lewisite, white as a church, white as a bathroom, white as a dissecting room, white as steel and white as chalk, white as hygiene, white as a butcher’s apron, white

as an operating table, white as death and white as the age’s fear of death!” (p. 204).

The collection’s final piece, “Cradle” (pp. 259–260), published in 1931, where Roth describes losing a cradle aged around three, serves as a summary of the loss of a homeland: “I am left feeling sad, inconsolably helpless and sad. I seem to understand that I have lost something irrevocable. I have been in a certain sense robbed.”

Hugely gifted and recognized as an amazing storyteller, sociable and gallant, Joseph Roth might have flourished. But alcohol worked against him. In 1925, the prestigious *Frankfurter Zeitung* sent him to Paris. He loved the city! “Whoever has not been here is only half a human, and no sort of European,” he wrote to his editor. France also made Roth realize just how much he abhorred Germany. He considered Paris “the summit of European civilization.” But Roth was replaced after a year, dispatched to the USSR and Albania, where he wrote some of the most striking essays in this volume: “Down the Volga to Astrakhan” (pp. 108–116), “Saint Petroleum” (pp. 121–125), “Arrival in Albania” (pp. 134–136). The cruelty of war was everywhere: “Sooner or later, you’re going to get shot. By the Italians? By the South Slavs? Who cares? War is war” (“Westerns Visitors in Barbaria,” p. 145). All his pieces present a Europe on the brink of change and offer some kind of postcards from a world heading towards war.

As Michael Hoffmann writes in his Introduction, “Roth may indeed have sketched the portrait of his age, but these pieces also make a portrait of their author: willful and versatile, aggressive and benign, beautiful and drawn to ugliness, everywhere and nowhere” (p. xvi). *The Hotel Years*, this wonderful selection of journa-

lism, displays Joseph Roth's genius "from every angle, as a rebel, as a loyalist and as a man of compassion" (Jan Morris, *Daily Telegraph*). Or, as Roth presented himself: "I am a hotel citizen, a hotel patriot."

*The Hotel Years* is a wonderful book, indispensable for those interested in the hidden history of Europe.



MIHAELA GLIGOR

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TIMOTHY SNYDER

**Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning**

New York–London: Vintage, Penguin Random House, 2016

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**I**N HIS previous book called *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, which appeared in 2010 and concentrated on the mass killings of Stalin and Hitler in regions where they both clashed and coexisted, Timothy Snyder has emerged as an analyst of the sanguinary borderlands between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union. He described like no other before him the scene of one of history's great calamities. In *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning*, Timothy Snyder, a Yale University specialist in the history of Eastern Europe, continues to reveal important historical details while giving respectful attention to the Holocaust. For Snyder, "the Holocaust is not only history, but warning" (p. xv). Let us see what he means by this.

Everybody knows that the Holocaust began in Hitler's mind. He desperately wanted to eliminate the Jews so that Germans can have the needed resources. "In Hitler's world, the law of the jungle was the only way" (p. 1) to fulfill this plan.

"For Hitler the bringer of the knowledge of good and evil on earth, the destroyer of Eden, was the Jew" (p. 4), and his destiny was to save the planet from this unwanted element. Hitler, as Timothy Snyder correctly observes, was a believer in race as the fundamental feature of life on Earth. And so it began!

"The globalization of the German Jew in the 1930s was an important but limited achievement. . . . With a few hundred exceptions, Germans would not kill German Jews on the territory of their common prewar homeland" (p. 43). For that, they established camps in Poland, where they punished people as they wished. This was the "redefinition of war" as Hitler understood it. At that time, Poland was a new state with territories from three empires: Russian, Habsburg and German. The Jews (doctors, lawyers, traders, artists) were present in large numbers and were assimilated, both in Poland and Germany. In fact, "Poland was the home of Europe's largest Jewish population, more than three million people" (p. 57).

From here on, Snyder follows German-Polish relations in the second half of the 1930s, and writes about the complex issues of Polish and Polish-Jewish politics. He insists on Vladimir Jabotinsky's Revisionist movement and offers some insides from the Polish national government. Then he takes us to the crucial year 1938 with a full chapter on German and Polish policies on Palestine. He insists, in many pages, on right-wing Polish Zionism, and the idea of "a State of Israel." He also mentions the German preparations for an attack on the Soviet Union (through the destruction of the Polish state). "The German invasion of the Soviet Union thus began as a *reinvasion* of territories that had just been invaded"

(p. 116). But the double occupation happened when “like the Nazis, the Soviets began from the assumption that the Polish state created in 1918 had no right to exist and so could be eliminated” (p. 124).

Forgotten stories of survival and resistance emerge and complete Snyder’s view on the Holocaust. “Almost every Jew who survived had some help from non-Jews, of one kind or another” (p. 251). “The most effective rescuers were, and had to be, people who had good contacts with assimilated Jews, who, in their turn, had further contacts with other Jews” (p. 270). “Among the thousands of individual Polish Roman Catholics who chose to help Jews, many explained their motivations by the same reference, inexact but unmistakable: the duty to ‘help a neighbor’” (p. 297).

Chapter 12 of Snyder’s book, “The Righteous Few,” offers some amazing stories of rescuers while admitting that “it is very hard to speak of the motivations of the men and women who risked their lives to rescue Jews without any anchor in earthly politics and without any hope of a gainful future with those whom they rescued” (p. 314). These incredible stories mean, today—more than ever, hope in humanity. In fact, this is the main purpose of the volume, as Timothy Snyder writes in his Conclusion: “understanding the Holocaust is our chance, perhaps our last one, to preserve humanity” (p. 344).

Based on new sources from the archives of Eastern Europe and forgotten or new testimonies of Jewish survivors, Timothy Snyder presents in *Black Earth* an updated explanation of the great atrocity of our recent history. *Black Earth* is an analytical book, with a message that needs to become more familiar to all readers. Since it offers an extensive list of archives, a well

documented bibliography, a very useful index, and many well explained notes, Snyder’s book is indispensable both to the academic community (professors, students, researchers) focused on Holocaust and genocide studies, World War II and related topics, including European and Russian studies, and also to the readers interested in the history of Europe.

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MIHAELA GLIGOR

ARISTINA POP-SĂILEANU

**“Să trăiască partizanii până vin americanii!”: Povestiri din munți, din închisoare și din libertate**

(“Long live the partisans until the Americans come”: Stories from the mountains, prison and freedom)

Interview by LIANA PETRESCU, preface by ROMULUS RUSAN

Bucharest: Fundația Academia Civică, Istorie orală, no. 10, 2008

**T**HE BOOK is an epic tale of the partisans from the Mountains of Maramureș as told by Aristina Pop-Săileanu, one of the last survivors of the anticommunist rebellion in Romania. The particularity of this work is that almost every character of her story is portrayed by written and photographic documents selected by the editors from the Archives of the International Center of Communism Studies within the Civic Academy, the Sighet Memorial.

Aristina Pop-Săileanu, born on 13 May 1931 in Lăpușul Românesc, the daughter of the forester Nicolae Pop from Lăpușul Românesc, who led the group of rebels from the Țibleș Mountains, is one of the last witnesses of the rebellion from the