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Every few decades a book is published that shapes Jewish consciousness. One thinks of Wiesel's *Night* or Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz*. But in 1927, years before these works were written, Joseph Roth (1894-1939) composed *The Wandering Jews*. In these stunning dispatches written when Roth was a correspondent in Berlin during the whirlwind period of Weimar Germany, he warned of the false comforts of Jewish assimilation, laid bare the schism between Eastern and Western Jews, and at times prophesied the horrors posed by Nazism. *The Wandering Jews* remains as vital today as when it was first published. "[A] book of impassioned reportage and polemic...it is impossible not to feel a sympathetic wonder."—Michael Andre Bernstein, *The New Republic* "In these disturbing yet strikingly illuminating pages, the truth of Jewish destiny from long ago vibrates and sings..."—Elie Wiesel "No other writer...has come so close to achieving the wholeness that Lukacs cites as our impossible aim."—Nadine Gordimer "What a marvelous writer! Read him now. You can thank me later."—Michael Dirda, *Washington Post Book World*

"[C]aptures and encapsulates Europe in those uncertain hours before the upheaval of a continent and the annihilation of a civilization."—Cynthia Ozick, author of *Quarrel and Quandary*; "[A] writer well worth adding to the short list of giants such as Thomas Mann, Elie Wiesel, and Primo Levi."—*Hadassah Magazine*, Sanford Pinsker

The Wandering Jews Details

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From Reader Review The Wandering Jews for online ebook

Liam says

"Anyone deserves the West who arrives with fresh energy to break up the deadly, antiseptic boredom of its civilization." (11)

"In their prayers they inveigh against him, they cry to high heaven, they complain at his severity, they go to God to accuse God, and then go on to admit that they have sinned, that their punishments were just, and that they will be better in the future. There is no other people that lives on such a footing with their god. They are an old people and they have known him a long time! They have experienced his great goodness and his cold justice. They have sinned often and repented bitterly, and they will know that while they may be punished they will never be abandoned." (27-8)

"But I saw Jews losing consciousness, admittedly not after three pints of beer but after five tankards of strong mead, and not on the anniversary of a battle but out of joy that God has chosen to share his knowledge and his law with them." (40)

"In the windows a small, dim light burns in front of a piece of white linen, and the neighbors bring the mourners a hard-boiled egg, suitable food for those whose pain is round, with no beginning and no end." (44)

"Half a Jew's life is consumed by the futile battle with papers." (68)

"They renounced. With a heavy heart they renounced their family and with a joyful heart their fatherland. They went to America." (95)

"It's an old destiny, an old, richly experienced blood. Jews are of an intellectual cast. They are a people that has had no illiterates for nearly two thousand years now; a people with more periodicals than newspapers; a people whose periodicals, probably uniquely in the world, have a far higher readership than its newspapers. While the other peasants around him are finally struggling to read and write, the Jew, behind his plow has his mind on the problems of relativity theory. No machinery has been invented for peasants with such an advanced brain. Primitive gear demands a primitive mind." (111)

"[E]veryone should take notice as one people is freed from the stain of suffering and another from the stain of cruelty. The victim is freed from his torments and the bully from his compulsion." (114)

"Lest we forget that nothing in this world endures, not even a home; and that our life is short, shorter even than the life of the elephant, the crocodile, and the crow. Even parrots outlive us." (123)

Guido says

"Terwijl overal elders pas nu de boeren moeizaam leren lezen en schrijven, is de jood achter zijn ploeg aan het nadenken over de problemen van de relativiteitstheorie."

Mario Rufino says

O meu texto sobre "Judeus Errantes", de Joseph Roth, para P3/Público.

Editora: Sistema Solar.

<http://p3.publico.pt/cultura/livros/7...>

Peter Landau says

My son has become suddenly interested in his Jewish roots and has been asking me a lot of questions about his heritage. I don't have many answers, having been raised in a secular household, even though I did have a bar mitzvah. I can't even say why I chose this rite of Jewish passage, except to say it wasn't because of the money, as everyone including my parents thought.

The thing about my son is that according to Talmudic law he's not Jewish, having only a Jewish father, not a Jewish mother. But according to Talmudic law I'm not a Jew, having been surgically circumcised in the hospital and not with a ceremonial bris, even if both my parents are Jews. I think my son's curiosity is because he's infatuated by a Jewish girl. It's lead him astray. He's been telling me things he's researched online, like that Ashkenazi Jews are proportionately more intelligent than the population at large.

It was about then that I sought to point him in the direction of more authoritative texts. I had the good fortune to have been reading THE WANDERING JEWS by Joseph Roth at the time and suggested it to him, being a history of the Eastern Jews from which our family has descended. He wasn't interested.

I was. These are my people. For a long time I've believed that my heritage is more Eastern European peasantry than observant Jew, considering my family is seeped in that area's food, culture and language. Reading Roth both confirmed and contrasted that conclusion. In his reportage of a vanquished people he shows how Judaism is the glue that has held the homeless nation together. I recognize much of the lore if not the rituals. While I may not be observant, my bloodline is rich in the religion of my people. It's my assimilation that will do what a genocide couldn't accomplish.

Lois says

This book goes well with "When Nietzsche Wept". I read this a few years ago, and it also gives a good idea of what late-19th-century/early-20th century life was like in Vienna. While "When Nietzsche Wept" is based on upper-middle-class life, "The Wandering Jews" includes good descriptions of what life was like for the poor and struggling.

Gijs says

Joseph Roth's "Juden auf Wanderschaft" is een reeks essays over hoofdzakelijk het leven van de "Ostjuden". Door verschillende aspecten van deze groep te bespreken werpt hij licht op het Europees antisemitisme, nationalisme en het "onjoodse" zionisme. Het boek lijkt ondanks alles hoopvol. In de door mij gelezen editie

bevond zich echter ook een nieuw voorwoord voor de tweede editie uit 1937, tien jaar na de eerste editie en in een volledig andere wereld. In dit voorwoord is alle hoop verloren en blijft alleen maar de angst voor het onvermijdelijke over. Dat is misschien wel het indrukwekkendste aan dit boekje.

Murtaza says

The Jewish communities of Eastern Europe suffered centuries of oppression and discrimination before being wiped out entirely during the cataclysm of World War II. When Roth wrote this book, the Holocaust still some years away. But he still seemed to grasp that he was documenting a world that was on the brink of annihilation, taking the time to carefully record the habits, beliefs and lifestyles of these communities in sympathetic detail. And indeed, world of Jewish dockworkers, poor tailors and devout Eastern European Hasidic villages is so far gone now that it seems hard to even imagine just a few decades later.

Roth is harsh towards what he sees as an arrogant Western civilization that abominates the Eastern European Jews and holds them in contempt. For his part, he sees much to value in these people and their simple ways. The mentality of the poor, coarse, yet large-hearted Slavic Jewish peasants is contrasted favorably with the repressed animality of Western Europeans, of whom Roth himself was of course one. Given the massive changes that have occurred among Jews around the world over the past decades, it's interesting to recall how different attitudes were not long ago, when many Jews were considered by the West to be an uncivilized other. When these communities were forced to become refugees due to pogroms and war, the world did all it could to hold them at bay, while scarcely bothering to hide their contempt for them and their culture. They wanted nothing to do with them and were content to see them die quietly in their misery, far out of sight. It is not hard to see echoes of this arrogant attitude today in the response to the waves of Syrians and Iraqis fleeing war to unwelcoming Western shores,

The segment on immigration to America also notes vividly how, for once, Jews got to benefit from their race by being subsumed into a larger racial category of "white." As newly-minted white people, they were placed in a novel hierarchy that saw them no longer at the bottom of the social hierarchy, a space which was occupied in America by Black Americans, who Roth describes as "more Jewish than the Jews" in their oppression. It's an interesting glimpse into how new categories of oppression ended up offering a new opportunity for Eastern European Jews, though it came at the expense of the local Black population. It's also a sobering reminder of how the new world of the United States made and unmade entirely new categories of people, including thriving and honored Jewish communities of a type which have seldom survived in Europe. The status of immigrants in America has always, often tragically, placed them above Black Americans in the hierarchy, although I would argue that the category of "white" that was offered to Jewish emigres does not hold for many new immigrants today, no matter how some of them may still misguidedly strive for it.

This book is a *crie de coeur* that called on the world to pay attention to the suffering of the Eastern European Jews and to cease its bigotry against them before it's too late. As Roth poignantly describes, this bigotry existed not just among gentiles, but among assimilated Western European Jews who were tempted to look askance at their backwards "cousins from Lodz," in an attempt to fit in better within their own societies. As time showed, trying to differentiate themselves from their backwards kin did not do much to save German and Austrian Jews in the end. It is a worthwhile reminder to Muslim communities today not to countenance the bigotry of those who would attack conservative Muslims while claiming exception for their assimilated, "good" co-religionists.

BlackOxford says

What We All Lost

This is a short book, but also a long, if unwitting, epitaph; a heart-breaking celebration of a culture on the verge of its destruction.

The Jews of Eastern Europe - Poland, Lithuania, Russia and Romania - had the misfortune to have settled, usually by invitation, sometimes by coercion, in one of the most fought-over pieces of real estate on the planet. They were rarely under anyone's rule long enough to establish a political position or a collective voice or even recognition as human beings: "...*fatherland for them is whatever country decides to conscript them.*"

Their culture was profoundly religious. "*They are not rare visitors to God, they live with him...There is no other people that lives on such a footing with their God...They know that while they may be punished they will never be abandoned.*" The more his religious zeal is mocked, the more the Jew of Galicia and the Pale insists on an appearance that marks him out as 'God's Jew': untrimmed beard, scholarly intensity befitting the importance of the Torah, a second home in the prayer house, devotion to the rabbi who advises him and intercedes on his behalf. His culture does not run on money, of which there is little, but on prayer, of which there is an abundance. His is an economy of prayer lying under a layer of material poverty.

Isolated by law for centuries from the Christian inhabitants of these Christian countries, the Jews of Eastern Europe were also isolated by culture from the assimilated Jews of Germany and Western Europe. Despised by both Christians and Jews, they learned to despise themselves and their unique culture. They knew nothing of nationality, Jewish or otherwise. With no rights, only obligations, they yearned for escape, not from their culture but from their oppression. They wanted to escape to anywhere, as long as it was West.

But culture and oppression are linked in a sort of ecological dependence. Like the Native Americans, and the tribes of the Amazonian jungle, culture dissipates without the pressure of oppression and its provocation to resistance. To escape is to lose the need to resist, and therefore to assimilate into the culture which simply doesn't care about culture.

Religious indifference is a new sort of oppression which the emigrant Jew doesn't know how to deal with. Now he is despised because he is poor and merely strange. So he becomes part of a nation, to the benefit of neither the Jew nor the West:

"Anyone deserves the West who arrives with fresh energy to break up the deadly, antiseptic boredom of its civilisation, prepared to undergo the quarantine that we prescribe for immigrants. We do not realise that our whole life has become a quarantine, and that all our countries have become barracks and concentration camps, admittedly with all the modern conveniences. The immigrants - alas -do not assimilate too slowly, as they are accused of doing, but if anything much too quickly to our sorry way of living."

Wandering Jews learn French, Italian, and English (but not Spanish, Spain is not welcoming to Jews); they forget their native Yiddish. They do well because they work at it and they know how to 'read the country'. This is a skill honed by oppression. If they can get the necessary exit papers and if they can get into the quota, they go to America: "*America signifies distance. America signifies freedom.*" Every Eastern Jew has a relative in America. In America he can still speak Yiddish, he thinks, just because of all the Jews there

already!

In the preface to the 1937 edition, Roth notes the dismal fact that it is the German Jews who now must learn again to wander, either rounded up into ghettos or forced abroad like their Eastern brethren by the Nazi Nuremberg Laws. His apocalyptic final observation is, *"There can be no European or European- Christian morality so long as the principle of 'noninvolvement' [by other countries in German anti-Semitism] is respected."* *"A chilly sort of family," he says, "this 'family of nations!'"* Indeed, it was about to freeze solidly.

Linda says

Beautifully written, thoughtful consideration of the place of the Jews in Europe, including an insightful understanding that the Jew remained an outsider in Germany after the time many Jews had become largely secularized and felt themselves to be Germans first and foremost. The 1930s were soon to show them an alternate and searing reality.

Laurent says

'Sterreporter' Roth pakt in 'Joden op drift' uit met een verbluffende les in essayistiek. Grotendeels gebaseerd op teksten uit 1927 die tijdens Roths leven nooit uitkwamen in boekvorm (dit zou pas gebeuren begin jaren 70 met de uitgave van het verzameld werk), is dit een ode aan de verdreven joden uit zijn geboortestreek Galicië, nu deels Polen en Oekraïne. Ook het leven van de joden in Berlijn, Parijs, Wenen en de Verenigde Staten komen aan bod, en in een 10 jaar later toegevoegd hoofdstuk de situatie van de joden in nazi-Duitsland. Een vlijmscherpe analyse van de Oost-Europese joodse cultuur, de emigratie en het antisemitisme, doorspekt met Roths typerende ironie en opzweepende maar heldere argumentatiedrift. Brandend actueel in het licht van de huidige vluchtelingencrisis. Verplichte lectuur voor alle haters.

Enthousiast voorwoord van Geert Mak, knappe vertaling van de onvermoeibare Els Snick (die ook een boeiend nawoord schreef over de ontstaansgeschiedenis van de tekst en een bondig notenapparaat).

Joe says

This is an account of the Jews in Europe (and briefly the US) in the period between the wars. Given the subject matter it is an understandably angry book, but over c140 pages it doesn't let up and consequently starts to lose its impact.

Roth is always on the side of the downtrodden and oppressed and strongly champions the Jews of Eastern Europe. In particular he provides interesting anecdotes and insights about life in the Shtetl and a very human understanding of the sheer grind of having to get by and survive in Anti-Semitic societies.

This is well worth reading not least because the subject matter is so important, but "What I Saw: Reports from Berlin 1920-33" is a better book. Both are translated by the superb Michael Hofmann. If you've not read any Roth before then start with the novels, which I strongly recommend.

Steve Middendorf says

This is a review from Michael Andre Bernstein, The New Republic: I have added a quote at the end of the review, to give you a flavor of lessons contained in this book which could apply to one's understanding of, say, Ukraine today.

Every few decades a book is published that shapes Jewish consciousness. One thinks of Wiesel's Night or Levi's Survival in Auschwitz. But in 1927, years before these works were written, Joseph Roth (1894-1939) composed The Wandering Jews. In these stunning dispatches written when Roth was a correspondent in Berlin during the whirlwind period of Weimar Germany, he warned of the false comforts of Jewish assimilation, laid bare the schism between Eastern and Western Jews, and at times prophesied the horrors posed by Nazism. The Wandering Jews remains as vital today as when it was first published.

"Only in the East do people live who are unconcerned with their 'nationality' in the Western European sense. They speak several languages, are themselves the product of several generations of mixed marriages, and fatherland for them is whichever country happens to conscript them. The Armenians of the Caucasus were for a long time neither Russians nor Armenians; they were Muslims living in the Caucasus, and yet they furnished the czars of Russia with their most loyal bodyguards. Nationality is a Western concept. It was an invention of Western scholars, who have struggled to explain it." 1937

Gerard says

BAM! Al op de eerste bladzijde is dit boek over Joden en Joodse vluchtelingen in het Europa van de jaren dertig een ware slag in het gezicht. Vervang het woord Joden hier door Soedanezen, Syriers, Afghanen, Zigeuners of Albanezen en het boek zou niet actueler kunnen zijn. Met hoofdstukjes over 'het gevecht om (tegen) papieren', over de verschillende status van verschillende soorten vluchtelingen, de (on)mogelijkheid om werk te vinden of men nu ingenieur of arbeider is en ga zo maar door; het is meteen duidelijk dat er voor de vluchteling niet zo'n groot verschil is tussen onze tijd en de jaren dertig.

Als je dan bedenkt wat er met die vluchtelingen uiteindelijk gebeurde, dan wordt het je toch wat koud om het hart.

Lees dit en kijk in een spiegel.

Lees Dit!

P.S.: Joseph Roth, een van de bekendste schrijvers/journalisten van de jaren dertig was zelf het grootste deel van zijn korte leven (gedwongen) nomadisch vluchteling en verbleef onder andere in Berlijn, Wenen, Parijs en Oostende.

Karen Codner says

Si se quiere comprender la Shoa, es un must. Si se quiere comprender de dónde venimos lo judíos laicos es un must. Si se quiere, si realmente se desea leer un buen ensayo, debes comprar este título. Lo acaban de reeditar en Acantilado.

Frantisek Trapl says

Joseph Roth psát umí! V této ani ne 100stránkové brožurce předkládá tená?i sv?j pohled na problematiku "putujících žid?" z Východu na Západ, v?etn? Západu zaoceáního. Nejbrilantn?jší ?ástí je bezesporu hned úvodní sta?, zamyšlení se nad skute?ností co obnáší být židem v Evrop? 20./30. let 20. století (alespo? odtušuji, nebo? ani p?ekladatel ani editor z nakladatelství Academia nepokládali za hodno Roth?v spis ?asov? za?adit). Následuje oddíl "žid a m?sto", na které navazují jednotlivá nejvýznamn?jší m?sta Evropy, v nichž židé žili (Víde?, Berlín, Paříž), a také zem? Spojených stát? amerických a Ruska. Nelze si nepovšimnout Rothovy náklonnosti k našemu "bratru na v?né ?asy", zvlášt? v úvahách, jež ze všech výše zmín?ných p?ípadech vychází jediní pozitivn?. Pro druhé vydání dopsal autor novou p?edmluvu reagující na hrozivý vývoj v N?mecku, který brožuru uzavírá. Dovolil bych si uvést dv? citace: "Židé vyvraceli p?ísloví, které říká, že když se dva perou, t?etí se sm?je. Židé byli stále ten t?etí, jenž nem?l žádný d?vod ke smíchu." (str. 19) "Nem?že existovat žádná evropská, a také žádná evropsko-k?es?anská, morálka, dokud trvá zásada "nevym?šování". Pro? si tedy evropské státy osobovaly právo ší?it civilizaci a morálku ve vzdálených sv?tadílech? Pro? ne v Evrop?? Staletá civilizace jednoho evropského národa ješt? zdaleka nedokazuje, že skrze záhadnou kletbu osudu nebude op?t barbarská." (s. 97)
