

What I Saw – Reports from Berlin 1920-33 by Joseph Roth, translated by Michael Hoffmann. Granta 2003.

What I Saw is a collection of articles by the late and much celebrated writer Joseph Roth, author of such outstanding novels as *The Radetzky March* and *Job: The Story of a Simple Man*, but better known during his lifetime as a writer of short, pithy articles or *feuilletons* that were published in a string of newspapers in Vienna, Frankfurt and Berlin.

This collection is all about Berlin during the heady and troubled days of the Weimar Republic and the first stirrings of National Socialism. Roth is an extraordinary painter of pictures with words, often very few words that convey a great deal, and suffused with an ironic, sideways glance that deepens the pathos or the humour of that about which he writes.

His articles about the Jews of Berlin are ambiguous (perhaps deliberately so) and may leave some readers wondering what he felt about his own Jewishness; but the piece on his visit to the home of the late Walter Rathenau, the former Weimar Foreign Minister who had been brutally assassinated, more than answers any questions. And his final piece, written from Paris in 1933 after Hitler's ascent to power, is without doubt the most powerful piece about Nazism and its hatred of Jews that I have ever read. Would that it had been more widely read throughout the world, and acted upon.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh