

The White Cities – Reports from France 1925-1939 by Joseph Roth.  
Translated and Introduced by Michael Hoffmann. Granta 2004.

Joseph Roth's voice echoes across the decades from the pre-second world war years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is a quintessential European voice, and a quintessential Jewish one, and the fact that it records a world that was swept away by the evils of Nazism and genocide makes it poignant beyond belief.

Though best-renowned as a novelist – with such great works as *Job: the Story of a Simple Man* and *The Radetzky March* – Roth's journalism in *The White Cities* and *What I Saw* is stark, incredibly descriptive, humorous and tragic in almost equal measure, and possessed of a haunting quality that is all too rare in journalism.

In *What I Saw*, Roth writes of Berlin between 1920 and 1933, in *The White Cities* he writes of many things, including a number of French towns as well as the capital Paris, a city that he loved and from which he derived both inspiration and comfort when he contemplated events in Berlin.

The essays in this masterfully translated collection show Roth at his most powerful, his dispatches from Vienne and Nime make the places come alive, and those entitled *Paris (1927)*, *Europe is only possible without the Third Reich* (published in 1934) and *In the Bistro after Midnight* (published on November 11<sup>th</sup> 1938) show a writer at the height of his powers. The final essay is dated 1937 and two years later Joseph Roth was dead, dying in poverty in the French capital.

This is a wonderful book, and Michael Hoffman, who has made the translation of Joseph Roth's work into a mission, is owed a huge debt of gratitude for bringing this anthology of Roth's journalism to a wide audience.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh