

Zweig, un engagé paradoxal

par Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt

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Stefan Zweig incarne une Europe en perdition qui n'a cessé de se rêver pour finir par s'accomplir, inversée, dans le crime absolu car la Shoah est issue de son centre même. Les essais, discours et entretiens de Stefan Zweig, jusque-là inédits en français et publiés sous le titre L'esprit européen en exil, vont au cœur de cette problématique. Ils montrent à la fois la clairvoyance du grand écrivain autrichien et sa volonté de ne pas prendre part à l'action politique.

Stefan Zweig, *L'esprit européen en exil. Essais, discours, entretiens 1933-1942.* Édition établie par Jacques Le Rider et Klemens Renoldner. Bartillat, 416 p., 22 €

Jacques Le Rider, qui a si puissamment analysé *La crise autrichienne de la culture politique européenne* (titre de l'un de ses ouvrages), montre dans l'introduction à ces écrits que Zweig « s'est toujours tenu à l'écart de la politique et a cru pouvoir continuer à se placer au-dessus des affrontements partisans, même après la prise de pouvoir par les nazis ».



Stefan Zweig et Joseph Roth à Ostende (juillet 1936) © D. R.

Stefan Zweig représente aussi, malgré le décalage temporel, et de façon exemplaire, l'Europe de 2020, elle aussi traversée de mouvements et d'immobilités similaires qui mettent en cause sa façon d'être, son essence, à savoir la conciliation des divergences. Le désarroi contemporain d'une Europe prise entre courants migratoires et catastrophes écologiques se reflète dans l'impuissance renouvelée des « intellectuels » à infléchir le politique, impuissance qu'incarnait dramatiquement le grand auteur autrichien, qui entre 1933 et 1941, année de son suicide, au Brésil, ne cesse de mettre en garde contre le suicide de l'Europe civilisée.

Ce qui frappe dans l'ensemble de textes réunis par Jacques Le Rider et le germaniste autrichien Klemens Renoldner, c'est à quel point les discours, les mises au point, les divers textes de Zweig, sont à la fois généreux et totalement coupés de tout engagement personnel dans la réalité du moment. Dans sa préface, Klemens Renoldner montre combien l'œuvre de Zweig est placée sous le signe de la destruction de l'identité, autrichienne d'abord, européenne ensuite. En même temps, tous ces textes réunis dans cette sorte d'anthologie européenne contiennent tout ce qui constitue cette Europe suicidaire, « en voie de disparition ». L'exposé est entrecoupé, année par année, d'excellentes chronologies de la vie de l'écrivain qui constituent aussi un résumé de la descente progressive de la nuit nazie.

Stefan Zweig in the New York Times Book Review, July 28, 1940.

The Future of Writing in A World at War

Stefan Zweig Talks on the Plight of the European Artist And the Probable Form of the Literature of the Coming Years



Stefan Zweig

(Photo by Mrs. Arnold Platt)

By ROBERT VAN ORLEN
The artist has been wounded, said Stefan Zweig, in his concentration. He tapped his breast with the knuckles of his left hand. "How can the art themes hold our attention now? A man and woman meet, they fall in love, they have an affair—that was once a story. Sometimes again it will be a story that how can we lovingly live in such a trifle now?"

"The last months have been fatal for the European literary production. The basic law of all creative work remains invariably concentration and never has this been so difficult for the artists in Europe. How should complete concentration be possible in midst of a world earthquake? Most of the writers in Europe are doing war work of one kind or another, others had to flee from their country and live in exile, wandering about, and even the happy few who were able to continue working at their desks cannot escape the turmoil of our time."

"Education is no more possible while our world shudders in flames; the 'Tory Tower' of education is no more headquarters, as Erwin Rohlfen has said. From hour to hour one waits for news, one cannot read the papers, listening to the wireless, and at the same time one is oppressed by the worries about the fate of near relatives and friends. Here lives one without home in the occupied zone, others are interned and ask for freedom, others wander about begging from one consulate to another to find a hospitable country which would accept them. From all sides every one of us who has found a haven is daily assailed by letters and telegrams for help and intervention; every one of us lives more the prey of a hundred others than his own."

"He spoke of external hindrances occasioned by lack of freedom of movement, by inability to obtain success in research materials. "The historian, I was just about

to lay the last hand to my favorite book on which I had been working for twenty years, a large and ready the first comprehensive biography of the great genius Blake. Fortunately I had to abandon this nearly finished volume because the library of Chancery which contains all of Blake's manuscripts had been closed for the duration of the war and I could not take with me the hundreds and thousands of notes because of the censorship. Just as in my case, for thousands of artists and scientists work of many years has been stopped, perhaps for a long time, by purely technical difficulties.

"And the internal difficulty—what means psychology, what artistic perfection at such an hour, when for countless the fate of our real and spiritual world is at stake? I repeat had more after completing my last novel, 'The World of Peter,' prepared the sketch for another novel. Then war started and suddenly it seemed frivolous to represent the private fate of imaginary persons. I had to leave the courage to deal with private psychological facts and every 'story' appeared to me today irrelevant to contrast in history."

He said that most of the other writers he knew had experienced this same distraction to their own work. Paul Valley, Roger Mar-

tin de Gault, Dehmann and Rimbaud all had confessed to him that they could no longer concentrate on their work. "I would be suspicious against any European author who would now be capable to concentrate on his own, his private work. What was allowed to Archimedes, the mathematician, to continue his experiments undisturbed by the siege of his town seems in our great misfortune for the poet, the artist, who does not deal with abstractions but whose mission it is to feel with the greatest intensity the fate and sufferings of his fellow-beings."

"Yet out of this war will come vast realms of experience in which the artist may work, and Mr. Zweig passed the hour so clearly as he talked of this. "On each day, in each hour, however, in each moment, one may hear from quite unimportant, anonymous people the stories of adventures and pilgrimages which are less dangerous and thrilling than those of Odysseus. If any one would print, without altering a single word, the documents of the refugees which are now kept in the offices of charity organizations, by the Society of Friends, in the Home Office in London, it would make a hundred volumes of stories more thrilling and important than those of Jack London or Maupassant."

"Not even the first World War struck so many lives to such extent as this one year; never human existence has known such troubles and apprehensions as today—the much tension to be dissolved immediately into artistic form. That is why in my opinion the literature of the next years will be more of a documentary character

than purely fictional and imaginative.

"We cannot at the next defense battle for freedom that has ever been fought, we will be witnesses of one of the greatest social transformations the world has ever gone through and we writers in fact all have the duty to give account of what happened in our time. If we reproduce faithfully but not verbatim, our own experiences—and I intend to do so in an autobiography—we have perhaps done more than in an ordinary novel."

"No fiction can nowadays convey anything which surpasses the dramatic events of the present time, and also the best poet has again to become student and servant of the greatest master of his art of history."

Mr. Zweig says that the one thing he can work on now is his autobiography, which will carry the title "Three Lives."

"My grandfather lived a life, my father lived a life, I have lived at least three. I have seen two great wars, revolution, the devastation of money, exile, famine. The period of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, the period of the Restoration—they were times not unlike this. No other times can equal the change we who are of middle age now have seen."

He commented that he was not the most translated author in the world.

"My books were published in Italian, Japanese, in practically all the countries on earth. They had, how do you say, universal coverage. When Hitler came in my books were banned in Germany, now they are banned in Italy, perhaps next week in France. There were French large editions and Polish—no more. Every fortnight I lose a country."

"Oh, that is not important. So long as they are published in one language, that is enough. And I believe that even now you will read the death of freedom for a long time. It is impossible that liberty could be destroyed here. It will be regained in France; here it will not be lost."

Mr. Zweig is seen only on a visitor's visit. He intended to leave shortly for South America, where he will lecture. Then he will return to England. "I cannot tell you what is happening there."

He said that he is writing his autobiography as he writes everything else—"one thing at a time."

"I write the first lines to please myself. I put in everything that I think of. I am a somewhat nervous man and write all day and by night. In the early drafts of my books are very, very long. "On the other hand, I am a nervous reader. I become very impatient when any author is chattering about—strange facts, for a point, so when I read what I have written, I cut it in great violence. I stop and they come back to me a spare word, a sentence that can be done without."

Commentary on Matthew Arnold Poems

THE POETRY OF MATTHEW ARNOLD. A Commentary by G. R. Parker and D. F. Lopez. 342 pp. New York: The Oxford University Press, \$2.50.

THIS handbook, instead of being a commentary on the poetry of Matthew Arnold taken as a whole, consists of commentaries on individual poems. Critical opinion is seldom, if ever, expressed. But every poem in the final collected edition of Arnold's works, or nearly every one, is touched upon at greater or shorter length. C. B. Tucker is Sterling Professor of English at Yale and keeper of rare books in the University Library; H. F. Loyce is Professor of English at the College of Wooster. Yale possesses that Arnold manuscript which, strictly speaking, is no manuscript at all, but a collection of notes left by the poet, and it is this collection which forms the basis for the present collaboration. Professors Tucker and Loyce originally designed their handbook to come out as a companion volume to a new edition of Arnold's complete

poems, but as this may not come off the press for another year or more they have let this book issue first, since it can be used with any edition now available.

The Arnold manuscript, or Yale Manuscript, as it is officially known, is "a volume of some seventy pages of notes of the simplest and most casual sort," with words, the authors add, often totally illegible. The work is, however, of the greatest interest to students of Matthew Arnold in particular and, even if in a less degree, to students of poetry in general. By comparing the first drafts of poems in the MS. with the final printed text, the growth of Arnold's poetry can be readily be seen, and perhaps also why Arnold eventually turned from poetry to prose as offering more scope and a surer medium for the outlining of a view so profoundly reflective as his own. Many are likely to wish that Wordsworth, his great poetic rival indeed, had come to a similar conclusion.

Matthew Arnold had a distinctive flair for narrative poetry

but lacked entirely the wild romanticism so often displayed by Byron, also a master of the genre. This handbook is nowhere else more illuminating and interesting than in the commentaries on the narrative poems, especially "Roderick and Huanac" and "Thyrsis and Irenis."

Arnold used lavishly a book of Greek in Poems by one Francis and published in London in 1828, a source little studied by Arnold commentators. The sources for "Thyrsis" were, of course, readily at hand, and a wealth of detail could be readily assembled. The changes, therefore, will be found to be mainly for the purpose of heightening emotion and increasing pathos. As all know, Arnold clung to the tradition of the love poem, making E. A. Robinson to be the first to realize that the ghosts love poems and not of earlier writers were but devices to objectively state psychological states.

This is a scholarly and valuable piece of work.

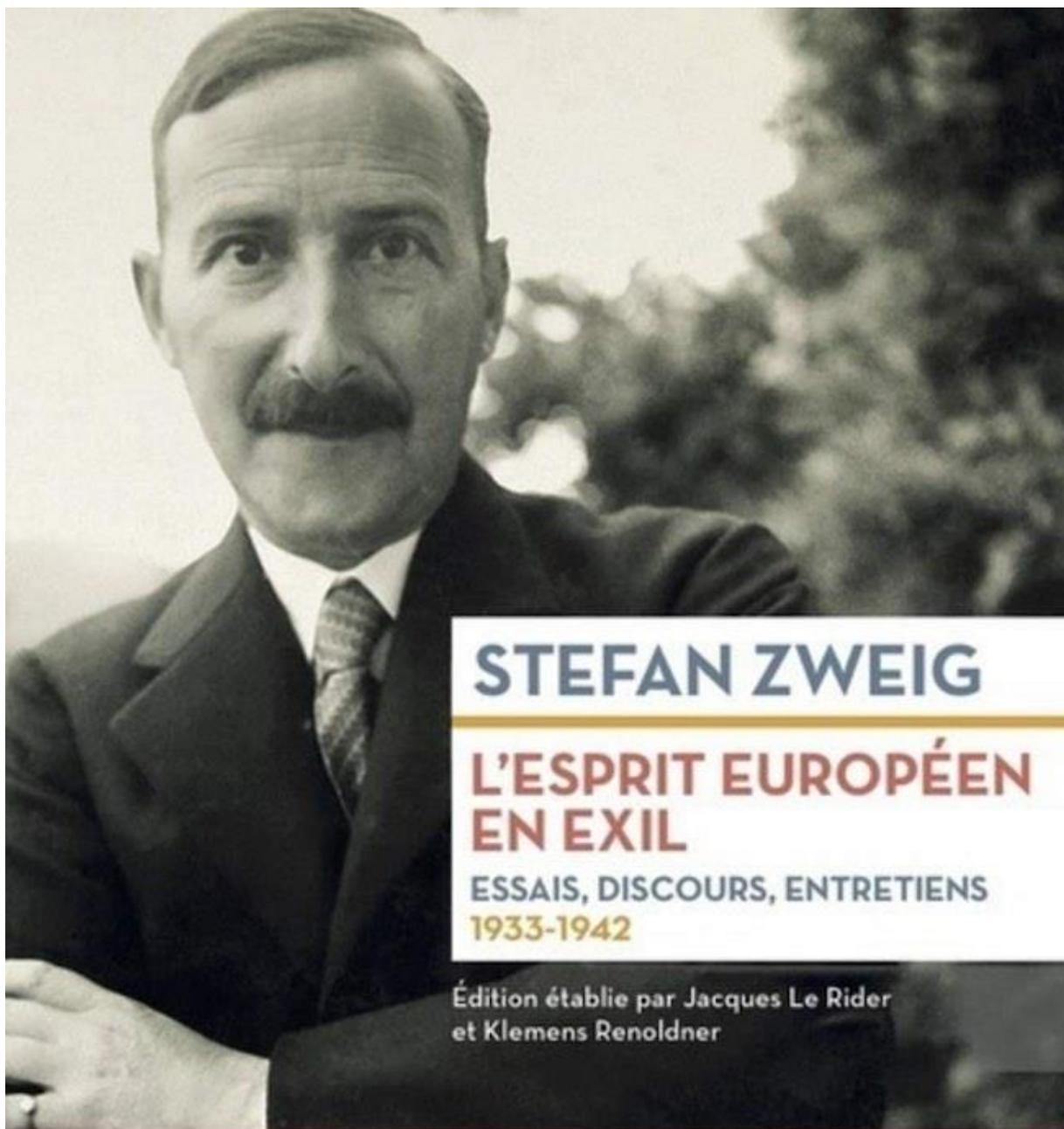
FRANK HUTCHINGS.

« L'avenir de l'écriture dans un monde en guerre », article de Stefan Zweig dans le New York Times Book Review (28 juillet 1940) © D. R.

La tendance à se réfugier à l'abri des incidents de plus en plus violents de la scène publique s'inverse en proportion de la gravité des événements. « La véritable littérature ne sera jamais asservie à la politique », dit Zweig en 1933 et il ajoute : « La politique a déjà beaucoup trop envahi notre vie. Elle a pris, à mon avis, beaucoup plus à l'individu qu'elle n'avait le droit de le

faire. » Mais, en 1940, il écrira : « *Tout écrivain qui, en ce moment, se [concentrerait] sur son travail individuel, me semblerait suspect* ».

Zweig, tout au long de ces pages, insiste sur la nature apolitique de l'écriture littéraire, comme si le fait de rester en dehors préservait des aléas de l'Histoire. C'est toujours le même balancement entre la conscience la plus extrême et l'inaction politique. Au fil des pages, on est surpris par son côté presque abstrait, resté à distance et pourtant paradoxalement « engagé », alors qu'il ne veut pas l'être ; la plus extrême clairvoyance va de pair avec le retrait. Il parle **dans une lettre à Romain Rolland** de « *la folie froide* » des nazis. Ainsi, le magnifique *Hommage à Joseph Roth* est l'expression de sa propre façon d'être européen.



STEFAN ZWEIG

**L'ESPRIT EUROPÉEN
EN EXIL**

ESSAIS, DISCOURS, ENTRETIENS
1933-1942

Édition établie par Jacques Le Rider
et Klemens Renoldner

INÉDIT

Bartillat

Comme le souligne Jacques Le Rider, malgré son inaction politique, Zweig est considéré comme un écrivain de gauche, et la police autrichienne perquisitionne chez lui à Salzbourg en février 1934. Si, en janvier 1933, après la prise de pouvoir par Hitler, on pouvait encore hésiter malgré l'évidence, dès le 10 mai 1933 les jeux étaient faits ; ce jour-là, les ouvrages de Zweig furent les premiers à être brûlés, lors du bûcher de livres qui inaugure, ce n'est pas un hasard, la dictature nazie.

Ce qui ne cesse de préoccuper et de poursuivre Zweig, c'est sa propre condition juive dans l'hésitation entre nationalisme sioniste et intégration cosmopolite. Jacques Le Rider montre ses hésitations entre une conception pluraliste de la judéité et le sionisme qu'il finit par rejeter, sans le désapprouver. Il ne lui échappe pas que l'antisémitisme est la substance même du nazisme, sa raison d'être. Dès 1933, il s'inquiète du sort des enfants juifs d'Allemagne, mutilés jusqu'au fond de l'âme. Les premières chasses à l'homme de la prise du pouvoir ne seront que la première étape de l'extermination en préparation. L'ensemble de ces textes importants décrit tout ce qui faisait la matière vive de la culture et surtout de la civilisation européenne, exilée comme Zweig lui-même et bientôt détruite par le national-socialisme. Ce qui en reste aujourd'hui risque bien d'être à jamais effacé par la conjonction de l'audiovisuel, du nationalisme et de l'islamisme.