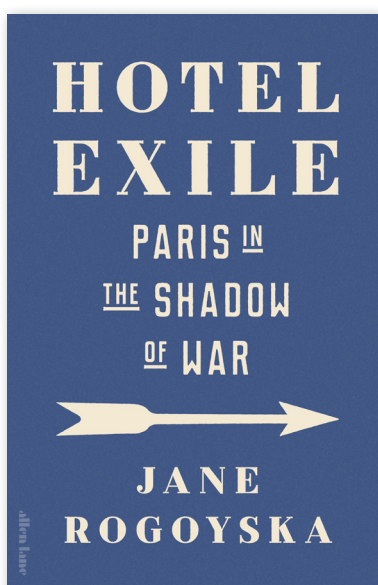


Hotel Exile

Paris in the Shadow of War

Jane Rogoyska



PLOT SUMMARY

A meeting place for Europe’s bohemian artists. A headquarters of the Nazi occupation. A shelter for camp survivors. This is the true story of how one Paris hotel came to hold the weight of a century.

The Hotel Lutetia is a Paris institution, the only ‘grand’ hotel on the city’s bohemian Left Bank. Ever since it opened, it has served as a meeting place for artists, musicians and politicians. André Gide took his lunch here, James Joyce lived in one of its rooms, Picasso and Matisse were regular guests. It has a darker history, too. During one short period, it became a focus for some of the most dramatic and terrible events in recent history.

In the 1930s, the Hotel Lutetia attracted intellectuals and political activists, forced to flee their homes when Hitler came to power, who met here with the hope of forming an alternative government. But when war came, Paris was occupied, and the hotel became the headquarters of the German military intelligence service – and the centre of their operation to root out enemies of the Reich. In 1945, the Lutetia was requisitioned once more, this time transformed into a reception centre for deportees returning from concentration camps.

Hotel Exile is about what happens on the edges of a war. At its heart are three groups of people connected to a place, to one another, and to the dark ideology which dictates the course of their lives. A masterpiece of empathy and concision, Rogoyska’s extraordinary book offers us a vision of individual human beings desperately trying to find a path through some of the twentieth century’s most devastating events.

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

Rogoyska considers what exile is, how different people experience it, and what it is to be an oasis for people who are far away from home.

First, there is the mass exile of German dissidents – intellectuals, people critical of the Nazi party – into France in the 1930s, and, later,

“This is rigorously researched, lyrical storytelling about the tragic loss of lives and of lost human potential.”

THANGAM DEBBOAIRE
2026 CHAIR OF JUDGES

from the north to the south of France. The German intellectuals initially enter France with an almost holiday-like spirit, believing that the Nazi party will be overthrown in months. Over time, their existence becomes more and more difficult. Their committees and newsletters do not stop Hitler, and the realities of exile become apparent when the German government refuse to reissue passports, and the French government will not grant the Germans residency. Exile becomes statelessness.

There is the self-imposed exile of General Charles de Gaulle, who leaves France for London in 1940 when he learns that the French government has declared an armistice.

There is the mental and emotional exile of the children rescued from the concentration camps and taken to the Hotel Lutetia: ‘That darkness, that violence, penetrated deep into their young souls, an inner exile from which some never emerged.’

The hotel becomes a centre for ‘les absents’ – and a brick-and-mortar repair of exile itself. Sensitively and thoughtfully, Rogoyska weaves personal stories together in a patchwork of loss and grief and the terrible impact of exile on families, communities and countries.

DISCUSSION POINTS

One of Rogoyska’s recurring motifs in *Hotel Exile* is the importance of language, and the identity that language gives us. For the older German exiles to France full assimilation in France was difficult, both because of a lack of French qualifications and fluency. This was especially hard for the German exiles who were writers: ‘whose livelihoods were built on their mastery of the German language now find themselves without a voice, their inability to speak French rendering them unemployable.’

Similarly, later in the book, Rogoyska describes the ‘mangled German’ that the rescued children from the camps spoke, representing the bleak lives they had experienced thus far.

What identity does a language give us? What do we lose when we are in a place where we don’t have a good command of the language, and what do we gain if we are multilingual? What does a shared language create between people?

QUESTIONS

Could you make parallels between public attitudes to immigration in modern day Britain and with France in the 1930s? Are there similarities in public opinion? Some of the rationale for learning about history is to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. As WWII becomes more distant in public memory, how can we best remember what happened?



Shortlist
2026

If you enjoyed this book try some of our recommended reads on the next page.

What impact did the 'Numbers' sections of the book have on you? What perspective did this give you?

NEXT STEPS

Look up some writers or artists referenced in *Hotel Exile*. You might read a James Joyce novel, or the work of André Gide, or the essays of Walter Benjamin. Or, look at the surrealist artwork of Max Ernst. Can you perceive the influence of the war in their work, and the struggles of exile? You might like to write a review of the work online, or share your thoughts with a friend.

Alternatively, imagine that you work at the check-in desk at the Hotel Lutetia during one of its various stages – the German occupation, as a hospital for concentration camp returnees, or a host for German intellectuals' meetings. Write a diary recording your impressions of a day. What did you see and hear/overhear? Perhaps you heard something you weren't supposed to? This could possibly form a writing prompt for a longer piece of fiction inspired by Rogoyska's book. Whose story would you tell, and why? ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jane Rogoyska is a writer whose work explores themes of conflict, exile, memory and politics in 20th-century Europe. She has a particular interest in the turbulent period between the 1930s and the beginning of the Cold War. Her books include the prize-winning *Surviving Katyń: Stalin's Polish Massacre and the Search for Truth*, about the 1940 massacre of 22,000 Polish prisoners-of-war by the Soviet secret police, and *Gerda Taro: Inventing Robert Capa*, the first English-language biography of the photojournalist Gerda Taro. She has also written a novel, *Kozłowski*, and collaborated on a variety of projects in radio, film, theatre and photography.



If you enjoyed this book...

RECOMMENDED READS

In *Surviving Katyn: Stalin's Polish Massacre and the Search for Truth*, Jane Rogoyska investigates the Katyn Massacre of 22,000 Polish prisoners of war, focusing on the experience of those individuals with the most at stake – the few survivors of the massacre and the Polish wartime forensic investigators. In *The Surreal Life of Leonora Carrington*, Joanna Moorhead describes Carrington's experiences in war-torn France with her lover, Max Ernst, amid a fascinating and varied life.

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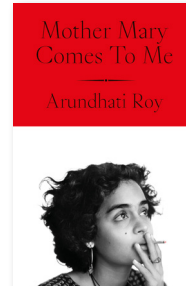
The Finest Hotel in Kabul: A People's History of Afghanistan
by Lyse Doucet



Hotel Exile: Paris in the Shadow of War
by Jane Rogoyska



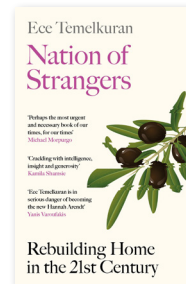
Art Cure: The Science of How the Arts Transform Our Health
by Daisy Fancourt



Mother Mary Comes to Me
by Arundhati Roy



Artists, Siblings, Visionaries: The Lives and Loves of Gwen and Augustus John
by Judith Mackrell



Nation of Strangers: Rebuilding Home in the 21st Century
by Ece Temelkuran

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