



Hotel that played host to James Joyce and the Nazis

• **Hotel Exile by Jane Rogoyska (Allen Lane £25, 368pp)**

By ROGER LEWIS

PUBLISHED: 10:00, 8 March 2026 | UPDATED: 10:00, 8 March 2026

If walls could speak, Jane Rogoyska has been on hand to take down the dictation and pick up what she calls the 'emotional residue'. For we are in Paris at the Hotel Lutetia.

Built in 1910, it's a grand establishment, full of chandeliers, mosaics, parquet floors and brass fittings. There's an Art Nouveau façade, with shell-shaped canopies.

Traditionally a habitat for artists, intellectuals, musicians and politicians, the Lutetia also harbours a dark history.

Before the **Second World War**, the hotel was a destination for foreign refugees, intent on warning the world of the dangers of German fascism. In the early Thirties, the French government facilitated their arrival – writers such as Heinrich Mann, elder brother of Thomas, the critic Walter Benjamin, even James Joyce, who had 'an air of perpetual melancholy on his thoughtful face'.



The Hotel Lutetia now the Mandarin Oriental Lutetia

When, in April 1933, the Nazis began dismissing Jews from state employment and there was a crackdown on 'undesirables', the trickle became a flood.

Meetings of well-meaning sorts were held at the Lutetia to publish pamphlets, raise funds, organise rallies and protests. But it was too late.

Come September 1939, there was a general mobilisation. In May and June of the following year, 90,000 Frenchmen were killed in combat.

German and foreign refugees were suddenly classed as enemy aliens and interned – and later handed to the Nazis. In June 1940, bombs fell and the Nazis arrived, 40,000 military personnel 'clad in leather overcoats'.

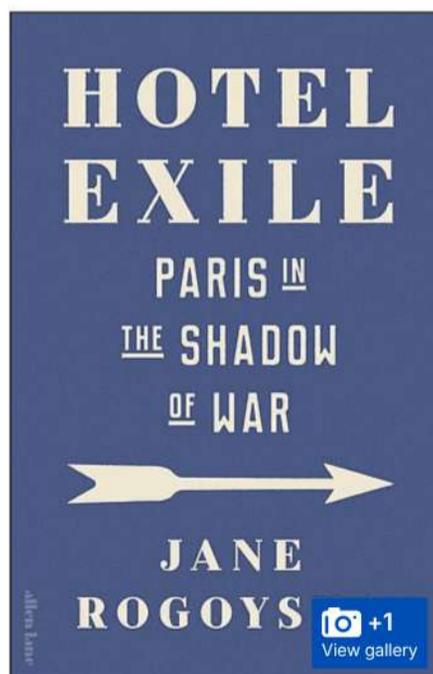
The Lutetia was requisitioned by the Abwehr, the German intelligence service. Secretaries, radio operators, clerks and officers took over the rooms. One admiral had a room for himself, another for his dachshunds. The staff kept their jobs, providing gourmet meals for the occupiers. The sole act of resistance was when the manager bricked up a corner of the cellar containing the finest vintages. Whilst the occupiers lived it up, rationing of food and fuel was imposed on the French population. The bulk of France's agricultural and industrial production was sent to Germany. Art was looted. Young Frenchmen were sent to the Reich as forced labour in the mines.

'The world of books and conversation was replaced by incomprehensible brutality,' writes Rogoyska. The Vichy regime and other collaborators, including Roman Catholic clergy, enacted the Nazis' repressive racial policies, and by July 1944, more than 75,000 people, including 11,400 children, had been rounded up, held in Parisian sports stadiums, and despatched to Auschwitz.

With Normandy invaded on D-Day, it was the turn of the Germans to leave Paris, Hitler giving orders (thankfully ignored) that the city had to be reduced to rubble. The Lutetia, with the assistance of 600 volunteers, became a repatriation centre for returning deportees, above.

Hotel Exile is a powerful story of 'the shame of collaboration, the lack of solidarity, the betrayal of foreigners, the betrayal of Jews, the poverty, the hunger, the suffering'. And the most disconcerting moment in Rogoyska's first-class study? Decades after the war, who should go through the hotel's revolving doors than one of the former Abwehr officers, now merrily in Paris on holiday.

'How delightful to see you again and welcome, Colonel!' bowed the manager. 'Unfortunately, your favourite table is currently busy. But if you don't mind waiting a few minutes, it will be free!'



Hotel Exile is available now from the Mail Bookshop

Share or comment on this article: **Hotel that played host to James Joyce and the Nazis**