



A group of Nazi-concentration-camp survivors have a meal at the Hôtel Lutetia in May 1945.

BOOKS

Grand Lutetia Hotel

How a Paris hotel that once hosted Hemingway and Picasso became a home for anti-Nazi exiles, German intelligence officers, and, finally, concentration-camp survivors

BY JANE ROGOYSKA

When I first started working on the book that would become *Hotel Exile: Paris in the Shadow of War*, I never envisaged featuring a hotel. My interest began with the idea of exile, specifically the experiences of a group of prominent German anti-Nazis who were faced with a stark choice when Hitler came to power in February 1933: to remain in Germany and face arrest, imprisonment, or even death, or to flee. At the time, the

Russian opposition activist Alexei Navalny was prominent in my mind. Navalny made the extraordinary choice to return to Russia after a poisoning attempt had almost killed him. He did so knowing that he would be imprisoned as soon as he set foot on Russian soil, and that in all likelihood he would be killed. And so it came to pass.

The individuals whose lives I was researching were prominent writers, politicians, journalists, pacifists, scientists—men and women who had publicly opposed the Nazis or fell afoul of their ideology. The majority of them were also Jewish. When they fled to France in 1933, they could not know that they would spend the next seven years in exile there, nor that they would be forced to flee a second time as the German Army advanced into the country.

As I began thinking seriously about how I might construct the book, I was conscious that, without a coherent framework to contain these varied human stories, it could end up being confusing, or worse, boring. So I started looking for a device that might provide a sense of unity. Was there a particular street in Paris associated with the exiles? An area where many of them lived? Somewhere they all used to meet—a café, perhaps?

When I first came across a mention of the Hôtel Lutetia in an article online, I learned that, during the 1920s and 1930s, this grand hotel was well known among Parisians for its large salons and banqueting rooms, which frequently hosted weddings, business meetings, press conferences, and parties. Amid a list of its most distinguished guests (Hemingway, Picasso, Joyce, Gide) was a brief paragraph describing a group of exiled Germans who used to meet in one of the banqueting rooms in the 1930s. They called themselves “the Lutetia Committee,” and their goal was to unite the various anti-Nazi factions abroad to form a “popular front” government-in-waiting that would be ready with a manifesto and program to take power when Hitler fell.

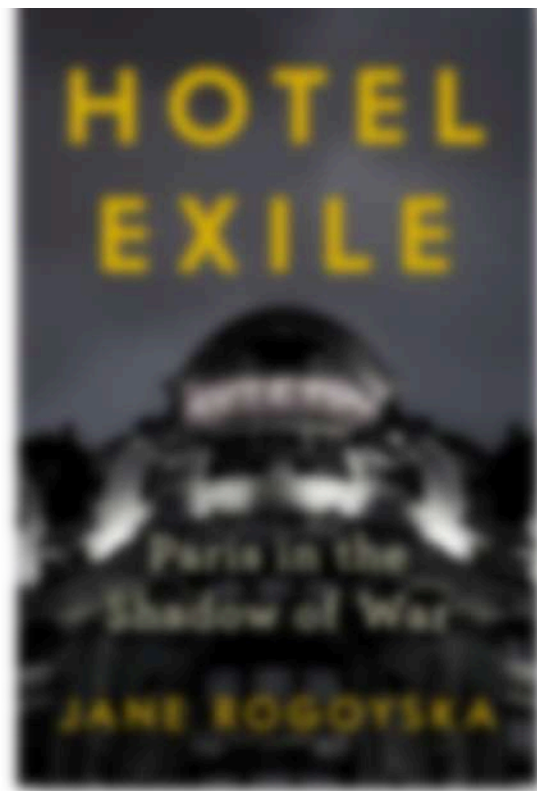
It turned out that the Lutetia Committee was only a small part of the hotel’s World War II history. There were two further elements to the story: during the occupation of France from 1940 to 1944, the German military authorities requisitioned all the major hotels in Paris. For four years, the Lutetia served as the headquarters of the Abwehr: German military intelligence. More than a hundred German Abwehr staff lived and worked in the hotel. Their task, among other things, was to spy on members of the Resistance.

The Hôtel Lutetia's third life began in April 1945, when the war came to an end. The hotel was used by the provisional government of General de Gaulle to serve as a reception center for survivors returning from concentration camps.

I decided to center my book on the Hôtel Lutetia, dividing it chronologically into three parts. The structure offered an opportunity to cover, in microcosm, the rise of Hitler and the catastrophic consequences of his ideology, though I was initially reluctant: I did not want to write about Nazis or the Holocaust. These are enormous, dark, morally demanding subjects that have been written about by so many others. What could I add?

As I reached the bottom of the article, I saw a photograph of a group of deportees seated in the dining room of the Lutetia. Some of the men gaze directly into the lens; others appear distracted, glancing elsewhere. It is a striking image, and an unnerving one. The contrast between the marbled walls and the appearance of the deportees is powerful. It was an invitation to learn more—one I felt I could not refuse.

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Hotel Exile: Paris in the Shadow of War, by

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