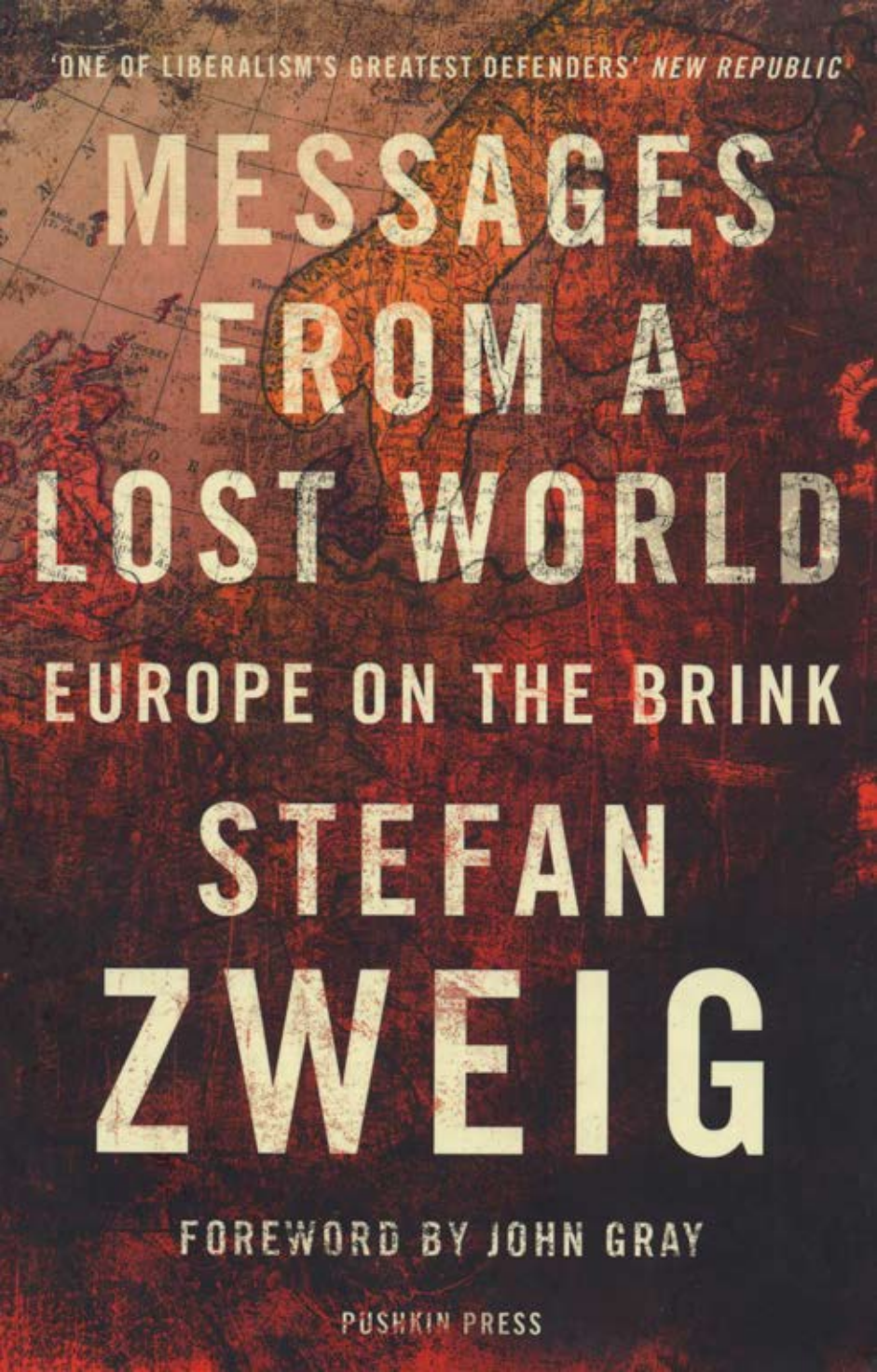


'ONE OF LIBERALISM'S GREATEST DEFENDERS' *NEW REPUBLIC*



**MESSAGES
FROM A
LOST WORLD**

EUROPE ON THE BRINK

**STEFAN
ZWEIG**

FOREWORD BY JOHN GRAY

PUSHKIN PRESS

'Stefan Zweig's time of oblivion is over for good... it's good to have him back'

Salman Rushdie, *The New York Times*

'Zweig is the most adult of writers; civilised, urbane, but never jaded or cynical; a realist who nonetheless believed in the possibility—the necessity—of empathy'

Independent

'Zweig deserves to be famous again, and for good'

Times Literary Supplement

STEFAN ZWEIG was born in 1881 in Vienna, a member of a wealthy Austrian-Jewish family. He studied in Berlin and Vienna and was first known as a translator and later as a biographer. Zweig travelled widely, living in Salzburg between the wars, and enjoying literary fame. His stories and novellas were collected in 1934. In the same year, with the rise of Nazism, he briefly moved to London, taking British citizenship. After a short period in New York, he settled in Brazil. It was here that he completed his acclaimed memoir *The World of Yesterday*, a lament for the golden age of a Europe destroyed by two world wars. The articles and speeches in *Messages from a Lost World* were written as Zweig, a pacifist and internationalist, witnessed this destruction and warned of the threat to his beloved Europe. On 23 February 1942, Zweig and his second wife Lotte were found dead, following an apparent double suicide. Much of his work is available from Pushkin Press.

STEFAN ZWEIG
MESSAGES FROM A
LOST WORLD

Europe on the Brink

Translated from the German
by Will Stone

PUSHKIN PRESS
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THE MOST ANCIENT legends of humanity tend to be inspired by our earliest origins. The symbols of these origins harbour a wonderful poetic force, announcing as they do the great moments of a later history in which peoples renew themselves and the most significant epochs have their roots. In the books of the Bible, from the very opening pages, just after the chaos of creation, one of the most impressive myths of humanity is told. In that time, only just emerging from the unknown, still enveloped by the dark shadows of the unconscious, men were brought together by a communal work. They found themselves in a foreign place, with no means of escape, a place that seemed to them uncertain and filled with dangers, but high above them they saw the sky, clear and pure, eternal mirror of the infinite, and a yearning was born in them. So they came together and said: "Come, let us build a city and a tower whose summit will reach the sky so that our name will remain for all eternity." And they joined forces, moulded the clay and fired the bricks and began to construct a tower which would extend to the domain of God above, his stars and the pale shell of the moon.

From on high God saw their puny efforts and smiled, perhaps imagining that these men of such small stature, like tiny insects, were forming still smaller things from moulded

earth and sculpted stone. Below him these men were rising to the task, driven on by their desire for eternity, yet to him it seemed but an innocent game devoid of danger. But soon he saw the foundations of their tower begin to grow, because these men were united and in accord, because they never paused in their work and came to each other's assistance in a spirit of mutual harmony. So he said to himself: "They will never let that tower alone until they have finished it." For the first time he saw the greatness of the spirit which he had bestowed on men. But it dawned on him that this was not like his own spirit, which rested after seven days of labour, but quite another, both impressive and dangerous, with an indefatigable fervour which would never cease until the work was realized. And for the first time God became fearful that these men might become like him, a unity. So he began pondering ways he might slow down their labour and he knew there was nothing more effective to break their unity than sowing discord amongst them. He said to himself: "I shall disrupt them by ensuring they do not understand each other's languages." And for the first time God showed his cruelty towards mankind.

And God's dark resolution was made. He directed his hand against the men who down below worked in a spirit of unity and dedication, and smote that spirit. The bitterest hour of humanity had come. Suddenly, overnight, in the midst of their labours, men could no longer understand each other. They cried out, but had no concept of each other's speech, and so they became enraged with each other. They threw down their bricks, picks and trowels, they argued and quarrelled until finally they abandoned

the communal work, each returning to his own home in his own land. They dispersed into the fields and forests of the earth and there each built his own house which did not reach the clouds, nor God, but merely sheltered his own head and his nightly slumber. The Tower of Babel, that colossal edifice, remained abandoned; the wind and rain gradually tore away the parapets, which were already approaching the sky, and little by little the whole structure crumbled away, subsided and was laid to ruin. Soon it was just a legend that appeared in the canticles and humanity completely forgot the monumental work of its youth.

Centuries and millennia passed and men lived in the isolation of their languages. They erected boundaries between their fields and territories, between their customs and beliefs, and when they crossed them it was only in order to rob. For centuries and millennia there was no unity amongst them, only their own pride, and egocentric works prospered. However, of their communal youth some vestige remained in them, a vague dream of the great work, which gradually over the years grew in them and unconsciously they began to reflect deep within on their lost community. A handful of audacious men made the first move: they visited foreign kingdoms, carried messages; little by little people established friendships, one learnt something from the other; they exchanged their knowledge, their values, their precious metals and they gradually realized that their national languages only distanced themselves from each other and their frontiers were not in fact a chasm between peoples. Their sages came to realize that a science practised by one people could never hope to reach towards the

infinite and the scholars soon saw that if they exchanged their knowledge humanity would progress at a faster rate; the poets translated the words of their brothers into their own languages and music, the only art not subjected to the narrow confines of language, served as the common language of emotions. Men loved life more when they knew that, in spite of the obstacle of languages, unity was possible. They thanked God for the punishment he had dealt them and thanked him too for having divided them in such a radical manner, because it gave them the opportunity to relish their world in different ways and to love more consciously their unity with all its many differences.

So the Tower of Babel once more began to rise gradually from the soil of Europe, the monument to communal brotherhood, mankind's solidarity. But it was no longer raw materials which went into this tower's construction, no longer bricks and clay, mortar and earth that they used to reach the heavens and fraternize with God and the world. The new tower was built with a more delicate and yet more indestructible substance which they discovered on earth, that of spirituality and experience, the most sublime material of the soul. Wide and deep were its foundations; Eastern wisdom lent depth, Christian doctrine gave balance, and the humanity of antiquity its building blocks of bronze. Everything humanity had achieved, all that the terrestrial spirit had accomplished was put into this tower, and so it rose up. Each nation contributed to this monument of Europe; the young people rushed in to learn all they could alongside the old, offering their untainted strength to experience and wisdom. They built the tower

by hand and the fact that each worked in a different way only fed their communal fervour, for if one achieved more, it encouraged his neighbour to do likewise, and the discord which often threatens nations en masse was powerless to halt the realization of the communal work.

Thus it grew, the new Tower of Babel, and never had its summit reached so high as in our epoch. Never had nations had such ease of access to the spirits of their neighbours, never had their knowledge been so intimately linked, never had commercial relations been so close in forming a formidable network and never had Europeans loved both their homeland and the rest of the world. In this rapture of community, they could already almost touch the sky, for the poets of all languages began in the last few years to celebrate through hymns the beauty of being and creating; and they felt like the builders of that other tower and even like God because they were about to accomplish their work. The monument was growing, the whole of humanity counted on assembling there for the consecration and music resounded around the edifice like a gathering storm.

But God on high, who is immortal like humanity itself, saw with horror that the tower he had destroyed was rising once more, and furthermore he knew that in order to remain more powerful than this humanity he would have to sow discord anew and ensure that men ceased to understand each other. Once more he was cruel, causing confusion to break out amongst them; and so, after thousands of years, this horrific moment appears again in our lives. Overnight men ceased to understand each other, the very same who were peacefully creating together. Because

they didn't understand each other they became enraged with one another. Once again they threw down their tools only to use them as weapons instead; the scholars hoarded their own knowledge, the technicians their discoveries, the poets their words, the priests their faith; all that previously had enriched the communal work was transformed into mortal combat.

This is the monstrous moment we are living through today. The new Tower of Babel, the great monument to the spiritual unity of Europe, lies in decay, its workers have lost their way. Still its battlements stand, still its invisible blocks loom over a world in disarray, but without the communal effort to keep the work going it will be entirely forgotten, just like the other in the time of myths. Numberless are the people today who, indifferent to its collapse, believe that their contribution can be withdrawn from the magnificent construction, so that they will reach the sky and eternity through their individual national strength. But some exist who believe that never can a single people, a single nation achieve what a collective of European nations has not through centuries of heroic endeavour, men who ardently believe that this monument must be brought to completion in our Europe, here where it was started, and not in foreign continents like America or Asia. The hour of communal action is not yet upon us, the discord that God has sown amongst us is still too great and years may pass before the conception of a work destined for eternity can be born through peaceful rivalry. But we need to return to the construction site, each to the position he was in when the work was abandoned, when confusion struck. Perhaps

we will never see it come to pass, or even hear of it spoken of amongst people; but if we place ourselves there now, each in his allotted spot, expressing the same ardour as in times past, the tower will surely rise again and ultimately all nations will find themselves upon its summit. For this call to work should not come from the pride of individual nations, ever more self-fulfilled in race and language, but rather from the old ancestor, our spirit, which remains the same in all forms, all legends, that nameless builder of Babel, the genius of mankind, whose meaning and salvation it is to strive against his Creator.