THE BITTER TASTE OF VICTORY

In the Ruins of the Reich

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Preface

When I tell people that I am writing a book about postwar Germany, they often ask if 'Feigel' is a German name. In fact as far as I know its origins are Polish; when my father's stepfather moved to Belgium in the 1920s he must have altered the spelling to fit in. Or perhaps it was just before the war that he changed his name from sounding Jewish to sounding German. At that stage he was married to my grandmother's sister, and I now realise that I don't know my actual grandfather's name. What I do know is that the Germans were not popular either with my father's Jewish family, who spent the war in concentration camps, or with my mother's Dutch family, who spent the war eating tulip bulbs in occupied Amsterdam. My Dutch grandmother still freezes every time she hears German spoken and is alarmed when I go to Germany.

And yet I have been drawn repeatedly to Berlin, a city I love, whose stacked up layers of history I find endlessly compelling. My German is better than either my (nonexistent) Dutch or Yiddish. Am I erasing family history as I cycle happily down Unter den Linden or past the Reichstag, carelessly oblivious of the buildings where Hitler plotted the events that destroyed the lives of my grandparents? Or am I confronting something that neither side of my family is able to confront, forcing us into the pan-European future that so many people (but not, I think, my grandparents) hoped to bring about in 1945? If I am then it took me some time to reach this point, and it now seems inevitable that I should have arrived in Germany in the safe company of 1940s British writers.

My interest in the Second World War began in London and not in Europe. This was a war where the tragedy played out on a manageable scale: a war where people had parties and love affairs amid the bombing and, most crucially, a war that could be talked about and written about. Often it is only in retrospect that we see why we write the books we do.

In India a year after it was published, I was asked by a journalist how I'd come to write *The Love-charm of Bombs*, my chronicle of the lives of five writers in wartime London. Had my own family been based in London? I answered that in fact I thought this exuberant celebration of Englishness (albeit in the company of one exiled Austrian writer, Hilde Spiel) was a retreat from my family, where the war was unmentionable, both for the Dutch and the Jews. You do not ask any of my grandparents casually what they were doing in the war, and as a result I know of their experiences only in pieced-together fragments, too shocking to be referred to again.

It is both strange and inevitable that this revelation should occur so far from home. Now it seems obvious that *The Love-charm of Bombs* came out of a lifelong desire to make myself as English as possible, chiefly through immersing myself in English literature past and present. For all those years of studying English literature, of reading delightedly about redoubtable English eccentrics from a lost age, I was creating an alternative ancestry for myself. And then in identifying myself with Elizabeth Bowen as she paced along the blacked-out streets, in imagining myself sheltering from the bombs with Graham Greene, I was claiming the war in London as my own heritage.

But it turned out to be more complicated. Not all British writers stayed put in London; some went to Germany and Austria. They visited the remains of the concentration camps where my father's family had been imprisoned; they saw Hitler's emaciated victims. While editing Stephen Spender's journals, I travelled to Germany with him in 1945, reading his astonishing account of the German ruins. While writing *The Love-charm of Bombs*, I followed Graham Greene and Elizabeth Bowen to Austria and Peter de Mendelssohn to Germany. It turned out that dozens of British and American literary and artistic figures had been sent to Germany in 1945 to witness the destruction, or begin to help reconstruct the country their governments had destroyed. Alongside Spender, there were other British figures I had written about previously: W. H. Auden, Humphrey Jennings, Rebecca West. Perhaps even more interesting were the Americans: Martha Gellhorn, Ernest Hemingway, Lee Miller. And then there were the Germans and

Austrians, sent to Germany in the uniform of the conquerors: Klaus and Erika Mann, Carl Zuckmayer, Billy Wilder.

Fascinated by these unexpected stories of Anglo-German collisions, I found that I could not stay away from the war in Europe forever. I found that the world of literary London and the world of my family were not as easily separable as I had made them. I had already come to love Berlin, where I had discovered a life of cycling, swimming and cafés that was conducive to writing. Now I became more concerned with peeling back its layers of history and seeing what remained of the Nazi era, curiously overlaid with the legacy of the Occupation that had ended up dividing the city in two.

I've now spent more time in Germany than anyone else on either side of my family. I also know more about the war in Europe than I initially wanted to know. Whether 1945 was a moment of hope or a moment of despair is explored in the pages that follow. What is certain is that it was a time that put any neat cataloguing of nationality in doubt. Indeed, for people like Stephen Spender this disruption of straightforward boundaries between nations was a positive effect of a war that had the potential to reconfigure Europe as a transnational entity united by its common culture. Perhaps one day another journalist will ask me if the book reflects my own wartime heritage and no doubt I will be surprised by my answer. Perhaps that will be the moment when I make sense of my English accent and preoccupations, my eastern European and Dutch ancestry and my German name.

Introduction

To arrive in Germany in the final months of the Second World War was to confront an apocalypse. Berlin, Munich, Cologne, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Dresden – the old names had nothing to do with the rubble that now spread for mile after mile, scattered with corpses. In Berlin, the streets were not flattened altogether. Instead, only the façades remained; thin strips of mortar and plaster whose blown-out windows exposed emptiness where homes had crumbled behind them.

Almost all the cities in Germany had been badly bombed. By the end of the war a fifth of the country's buildings were in ruins.[1] Most of Germany had been plunged into darkness as one power station after another was bombed out of action; there was no city where gas, water and electricity were functioning at the same time. The streets in the city centres were eerily empty. Those people who remained had burrowed underground into cellars, basements or bomb craters, emerging to scavenge for food or water in the debris. The rows of flattened or hollowed houses were populated chiefly by *Trümmerfrauen* or 'rubble women', wiry figures employed by the Allies to clear away the mountains of pulverised buildings by hand.[2]

Between cities, the smashed Autobahnen were crowded with refugees. Much of the nation was on the move, with no particular destination. In September 1944 there had been 7.5 million foreigners in

Germany and they were all now attempting to return home or to reach one of the Allied DP (Displaced Persons) camps. In addition there were millions of Germans rendered homeless by the bombing and there would soon be nearly 13 million Germans expelled from Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia, Hungary and Romania, once their borders were redrawn to include former parts of Germany.[3] The roads thronged with families, trailing handcarts with children or elderly relatives perched on top of furniture; with former Wehrmacht soldiers, recognisable, according to one observer, by their filthy grey uniforms hanging from gaunt limbs, their feet bound in bandages and their 'countenance of defeat'.[4]

These were the scenes that confronted Ernest Hemingway and his soon-to-be ex-wife Martha Gellhorn when they arrived in the spring of 1945, competing to be among the first to witness the effects of the bombing. Relatively well fed on army rations and well dressed in American army uniforms, they stood out among the tattered Germans who rushed towards them, audaciously claiming them as liberators. They found that maps made no sense. North and south, left and right lost all meaning when there were no crossroads or corners to differentiate one pile of debris from another. Entering Cologne in March 1945, Gellhorn wondered if what she saw was too nightmarish to be real. This seemed not so much a city as 'one of the great morgues of the world'. But she did not grieve for the devastation because she was too appalled by the spectacle of 'a whole nation passing the buck': no one was prepared to admit to being a Nazi. This was a view shared by the photographer Lee Miller, who found the inhabitants of Cologne 'repugnant in their servility, hypocrisy and amiability'.[5]

Other Allied reporters were able to be more sympathetic. The British writer George Orwell followed Gellhorn to Cologne later in March and was distressed that a whole city could be reduced to 'a chaos of jagged walls, overturned trams, shattered statues and enormous towers of rubble out of which iron girders thrust themselves like sticks of rhubarb'. But when the concentration camps were liberated in April 1945, and journalists confronted the piled up corpses and skeletal survivors, it became even harder to pity the defeated Germans. Now

Miller, Gellhorn and others asked themselves where this evil had come from and to what extent all Germans were responsible, or at least complicit in the horror.[6]

Hemingway, Gellhorn, Miller and Orwell were among the first British and American cultural figures to arrive in Germany. They were sponsored by governments who had made provision for journalists as part of the war effort, wanting them to report on the strength of their forces and the brutality of the enemy. The US government had also sent in actors and singers to entertain the troops, so Hemingway's old friend Marlene Dietrich arrived in Germany shortly after he did, as a USO (United Services Overseas) entertainer, proud to be serving her new government though shocked to see her homeland in tatters. She was too loyal to the US and too angry with her former compatriots to feel much sympathy. 'I guess Germany deserves everything that's coming to her,' she told a reporter.[7]

In May 1945, Germany surrendered and Britain, the US, the Soviet Union and France divided the defeated country into four zones, each sending in additional forces of occupation to administer their area. Berlin was also partitioned into four sectors, though it lay in the Soviet zone. At Potsdam in July, the occupiers took responsibility for reconstructing the country economically, politically and, more surprisingly, culturally. As a result, a new cohort of British and American writers and artists arrived in Germany to help rebuild the country their armed forces had just spent five years destroying.

German speakers were needed for this task. Several of the figures who might be termed 'cultural ambassadors' were writers who had spent time in Germany before the war. Among them were two British poets, W. H. Auden, sent by the American government to report on civilian responses to bomb damage, and his friend Stephen Spender, posted by the British government to assess the state of German universities. Auden and Spender had been drawn to Germany in the 1920s, attracted by its atmosphere of sexual promiscuity and its artistic avant-garde. Now looking expectantly for the seedy Berlin bars and snug Munich coffee houses where they had once watched cabaret and discussed philosophy, they encountered only wreckage; the playground

of their youth had been razed to the ground. Wandering around the destroyed city of Darmstadt, Auden found himself constantly in tears, reporting that 'the people . . . are sad beyond belief'.[8]

The Allies also made use of the exiled Germans now living in Britain and the US. The Austrian film-maker Billy Wilder was sent by the American government to act as a film officer in their zone, returning to Berlin, where he had made his home until 1933 when Hitler had made it too dangerous for him as a Jew. Surrounded by former friends, he might have been expected to feel pity for the humiliated Germans, but he was spending his time watching hour after hour of concentration camp footage and he could not distinguish between the gaunt inhabitants of the bombed city and the perpetrators of the death camps. 'They burned most of my family in their damned ovens!' Wilder said. 'I hope they burn in hell!'[9]

Sent to be in charge of newspapers in the British zone of Berlin, the exiled German novelist Peter de Mendelssohn had come to see the Germans as a 'band of thieves and murderers and abject criminals', but was more troubled than Wilder by the sight of the ruined cities of his youth. He found that not only maps but language itself had become inadequate. 'We used to have a vocabulary with which to describe bombed cities,' he said, but now words like 'damaged, blasted, burnt-out, shattered, broken' and terms like 'debris, collapsed wall, bricks, masonry, bent girders, fallen beams' had become redundant. There was no 'damage' because the damaged thing itself had disappeared. Instead one needed 'new eyes to see, and totally new words to describe' what he could only evoke metaphorically as a 'white sea of rubble, faceless and featureless in the bright sunlight, acres and acres of white, bleached bones, the sprawling skeleton of a giant animal'.[10]

This book tells the story of Germany between 1944 and 1949 through the eyes of twenty writers, film-makers, painters, actors and musicians who arrived in Germany from Britain and the US and struggled to make sense of the postwar world. In addition to those already introduced, other important figures include Thomas Mann and his children Klaus and Erika Mann, all in Germany as Americans; the German-

American playwright Carl Zuckmayer; the British film-maker Humphrey Jennings; novelist Rebecca West; painter Laura Knight; and publisher Victor Gollancz. Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir (visiting the French zone), Bertolt Brecht (visiting the Soviet zone), the German composer Paul Hindemith, the American novelist John Dos Passos and the British novelist Evelyn Waugh all make brief appearances as well. The focus is on the better-known figures to visit Germany for the obvious reason that their reports had more impact in the US and in Britain. All of them were influential, affecting public opinion about postwar Germany in their home countries, shaping Allied reconstruction policy in Germany or producing important works of art in response to their encounters with the defeated nation.

Individually, these figures often had diverse, personal reasons for volunteering to be in Germany, driven by curiosity or by a desire to help or punish, or by a more simple need to find former friends or family members. Collectively, they were dispatched by governments who placed journalism and, more controversially, the arts, at the centre of their plans for reconstructing Germany.

From 1942, when postwar planning for Germany became more a likelihood than an aspiration, diplomats and economists in Britain and the US had been asking themselves what kind of future there could be for this country once it had been defeated. How was the nation to be both punished and reconstructed and what constituted punishment and reconstruction? How would the Allies impose a settlement on Germany that would ensure the country could never again devastate Europe? How were the architects of the fighting, bombing, and genocide in the concentration camps to be held to account?

In 1945 official estimates for the expected duration of the Allied Occupation varied from ten to fifty years. The most urgent task for the Allies as they began to rule this divided country was to feed their new subjects and to attempt to restore electricity, gas, water and transport to their zones. But from the start, it was clear that this was not only to be a question of rebuilding the houses, streets, and in some cases whole towns that had been destroyed by the Allied bombing, nor of financial help. Postwar Germany had become Britain and America's dilemma. It

was essential to create a peaceful and stable nation if future wars were to be avoided, and it was for this reason that culture came to play a crucial role in the reconstruction programme.

At Potsdam the Allies authored an agreement to prepare the Germans 'for the eventual reconstruction of their life on a democratic and peaceful basis'. This was to be achieved through denazification, disarmament, demilitarisation, democratisation and re-education. Denazification involved both the straightforward task of removing Nazis from positions of power and the more complex but also more fundamental task of reconfiguring German society to be less militaristic. The arts would be vital in introducing the Germans to alternative philosophies and modes of interaction. For the Americans, democracy was not just the American political system but the American way of life, and that included everything from behaviour on public transport to dance styles, and was demonstrable through art, music, books and especially films.[11]

Germany was to be reborn; its citizens as well as its cities were to be reconstructed. This was a campaign for the minds of the Germans – a 're-education' in the ideas of peace and civilisation.[12] So, suddenly, a generation of British and American writers, film-makers, artists, musicians and actors found themselves the vanguard of the campaign to remake a country. The immediate postwar period was a time when culture mattered, when writers and artists were seen as fundamental in securing a peaceful postwar settlement not just in Germany but in Europe as a whole. When UNESCO – the United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation – was founded in November 1945 to prevent war, it guided itself by the credo that 'since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed'. This was accepted by politicians and sponsors in Britain, the US and other founding countries as a manifesto for cultural transformation. Often the cultural figures entering Germany in 1945 were hoping to forge not just a new denazified Germany but a new pacifist Europe. [13]

The story told here falls into two distinct periods. The first is the phase between 1944 and 1946, which was a period of urgent

reconstruction and cultural idealism; a time when the Allies planned fundamentally to denazify Germany and tried to use culture as a means to do so. This period culminated in the trial of twenty-two Nazi leaders at Nuremberg between November 1945 and October 1946 – an epic court case that was observed by writers including Rebecca West, John Dos Passos and Erika Mann. After the trial ended in the autumn of 1946, the Germans were transformed from prisoners to subjects. At the same time, the differences between the Soviet and the western zones of Germany became more marked and the co-operation of the Allies in ruling Berlin broke down. The onset of the Cold War and the change in enemies it entailed left the British and the American authorities keen to co-operate with the Germans in the struggle against the Russians, leaving denazification anachronistic and unnecessary. This impacted directly on artists visiting Germany from Britain or the US because after 1947 they were part of the Allied armoury of the Cold War.

Ultimately this is a story of individuals whose aims did not always or indeed often coincide with those of their governments. Even in 1945, several of the visiting writers and artists found the Allied aims absurd. The British and Americans in Germany were all officially 'occupying forces', segregated from the Germans in cafés and shops and forbidden from socialising with them. The booklet British soldiers and civil servants were issued with before leaving for Germany informed them that there could be no good Germans: 'The Germans are not divided into good and bad Germans . . . There are only good and bad elements in the German character, the latter of which generally predominate.' But for writers such as Spender and Auden, who had admired Germany and many of its inhabitants before the war, this seemed ridiculous, as did the possibility of transforming the German nation through British and American culture. Had not the Germans had a far superior *Kultur* of their own, which had dominated the artistic landscape of Europe for several centuries? This led to a second question. If German literature, music and film had not prevented the German people from following Hitler (if indeed the concentration camp at Buchenwald had been within walking distance of Goethe's former house in Weimar, the

symbolic capital of the *Kulturnation*), how was British and American culture going to do it?[14]

By 1947 the views of most of the protagonists had diverged from those of their governments and those, such as Klaus Mann, who still visited Germany became isolated individuals, bemoaning a moment when the opportunity to forge both a new Germany and a new Europe had been lost. In the end, most of the figures explored here had less effect on Germany than Germany had on them. As a result this is not so much a history of Germany in the years after the war as the story of a group of writers and artists who found that the encounter with ruined Germany necessitated a period of personal reconstruction. Broken by their own helplessness in the face of wreckage on a scale they had never believed possible in 1945, then disappointed by the failure of the Allies to use culture in winning the peace, they cast around hopelessly for possible modes of redemption.[15]

Some of them sought to counteract hatred and bitterness with love, defying the stench of death by committing themselves to living. But as the intense suspended present of war gave way to postwar, this became more difficult. A more durable promise for redemption was offered by art itself. In 1945, both Spender and Klaus Mann committed themselves to a vision of a new united Europe, underpinned by a shared artistic heritage that would allow nationalism to be replaced by a common consciousness of collective humanity. Most of the artists, however, sought a more personal form of reconstruction through artistic creation. They oscillated between seeing Germany as a real place, with bureaucratic, practical problems, and a dream setting, in which every object was symbolic. As they confronted the dilemma of German reconstruction, they created a genre of art that explored questions of guilt, atonement and redemption against a background of apocalyptic ruin.

This is a genre in which we could include works as diverse as Martha Gellhorn's novel *Point of No Return*, Stephen Spender's account of his time in Germany, *European Witness*, W. H. Auden's allegorical poem 'Memorial for the City', Billy Wilder's triumphantly comic film *A Foreign Affair,* Humphrey Jennings's documentary *A Defeated People,*

Laura Knight's paintings of the Nuremberg trial, Lee Miller's obliquely surrealist German photographs, Rebecca West's strangely personal account of her time in Nuremberg 'Greenhouse with Cyclamens' and Klaus Mann's unfinished novel *The Last Day.*[16] All of these works used the concrete landscape of the bombed cities, the concentration camps or the fallen pomp of the Third Reich to explore more metaphysical questions of guilt. Surveying Germany from the perspective of an outsider, these artists saw in Germany's tragedy the larger tragedy of the human condition.

In the late 1940s the artistic landscape of Germany was dominated by a genre that came to be known as *Trümmerliteratur* (rubble literature) or *Trümmerfilm* (rubble film): art set in the ruins of the bombed cities, imbuing the 'zero hour' after the war with physical form and exploring the relationship between architectural and psychological destruction.[17] Perhaps the genre of works set in Germany by British and American visitors could be called 'outsider rubble literature', or even *Fremdentrümmerliteratur.* This is a genre that asked, ultimately, what right the Allies had to judge Germany from outside when they were guilty too. Surely they shared the responsibility for Germany's crimes because they had allowed them to happen? The Allies had condoned Hitler's initial aggression and then, during the war, had fought to win rather than to prevent inhumanity, failing to free Jews in the territories they liberated or to exploit their knowledge of what was happening to the Jews to influence world opinion about the Nazis. 'The victors who seat us on the defendants' bench must sit next to us. There is room,' the German writer Erich Kästner observed in his diary on 8 May 1945.[18]

This genre of 'outsider rubble literature' includes Thomas Mann's great postwar novel *Doctor Faustus*, a book written by a man who had not seen the ruins he described, but who had heard about them from his friends and children who visited Germany and now imaginatively recreated them from his study in California in frightening detail. It is a novel that takes on new resonance and becomes more movingly confessional when read alongside *Point of No Return* or *A Foreign Affair* because Mann's troubled distance from the scenes he describes becomes the central emotion of his book.

All these works are acts of reckoning that at the same time enabled a kind of tolerance in the face of bitter disappointment. Collectively, they demonstrate the slow, ambivalent reconstruction of the human spirit; for their creators, they formed part of a process of attempting to learn to live again. For the participants of this book, the experience first of the bombed cities and the concentration camps, then of the cool Realpolitik of the Allies was too distressing to be forgotten. The Occupation and the *Wirtschaftswunder*, or economic miracle, of 1950s West Germany may have counted as a success story for the Allies but in the midst of the occupation forces' frantic efforts at reconstruction, a series of individual tragedies played out, set against a background of ruined buildings and scattered bones.

This book is in part an attempt to reconcile or at least to disentangle these two stories. The four years after the war are the bridge between two worlds we know well: the devastation and horror of the Second World War and the powerful and peaceful Western Europe of today, dominated by a prosperous, liberal Germany. In between these is another world that might have been; one that the cast of this book hoped to bring into being, but in the end were defeated from creating, first by German intransigence and then by the all-consuming pragmatism of Cold War politics. This is the story of a group of artists who fought to bring a new order into existence and then, when the fight became hopeless, mourned all that they had lost.

PART I

The Battle for Germany

1944–45

1

'Setting out for a country that didn't really exist'

Crossing the Siegfried line: November–December 1944

During the autumn of 1944 Ernest Hemingway and Martha Gellhorn raced each other to the front line. For five years of war Gellhorn had taunted her husband for his apparent weakness; while she covered the conflict in Europe as a war correspondent, Hemingway preferred to remain safely in Cuba, attempting to sink German submarines from his fishing boat. As far as he was concerned, he had been heroic enough in the First World War and Spanish Civil War, when his relationship with Gellhorn had begun. At forty-four he wished to remain at home writing his novels with Gellhorn by his side. 'ARE YOU A WAR CORRESPONDENT OR WIFE IN MY BED?' he asked her in a cable. Gellhorn saw it differently. It was Hemingway who had made her a war correspondent; Hemingway who had taken a promising young novelist with honey blonde hair and improbably long legs and exposed her to the sight of civilian slaughter in the Spanish Civil War, browbeating her into writing about it. She had fallen in love with him as a comrade in reckless bravery and was frustrated to find herself married to a complacent coward who had lost interest in the fate of his world.[1]

When Gellhorn returned from Europe to see her husband in March 1944, Hemingway woke her in the night to 'bully, snarl, mock' her for seeking excitement and danger in Europe. 'My crime was to have been

at war when he had not.' Eventually, Hemingway decided to take up Gellhorn's gauntlet. But, unlike in Spain, they were to be competitors rather than collaborators. Hemingway's previous two wives had accepted that there was only room for one great writer in the house. Gellhorn's attempts at independence seemed to demonstrate a waning love and he wanted to wound her in return. He therefore used his superior reputation to attach himself to *Collier's*, Gellhorn's own magazine. Each publication could only officially employ one war correspondent so this left Gellhorn unauthorised. What was more, Hemingway procured a seat on one of the few aeroplanes flying to London and pretended to his wife that women were barred from the aircraft. Gellhorn made the crossing on a vulnerable and rat-infested cargo ship and was furious when she discovered that she could have been on the plane after all.[2]

By the time the couple were reunited in London in May, Hemingway had found an alternative, more compliant lover, the journalist Mary Welsh, while Gellhorn was determined to have as little as possible to do with her dishonest, competitive and too frequently drunken husband. They made their separate ways to Europe, with Gellhorn getting far closer to the D-Day landings than Hemingway, despite the official order barring women from the battlefields. Hemingway beat Gellhorn to liberated Paris where he loitered with Mary Welsh at the end of August, departing briefly to Rambouillet where he contravened the regulations for war correspondents by stacking his room with hand grenades, Sten guns, carbines and revolvers and unofficially directing intelligence operations.[3]

The focus of the European war effort had turned to Germany. Now that Paris and Rome had been liberated, the world was waiting for the conquest of Berlin. The end of the war in Europe had become contingent on Germany's surrender and this was to be brought about by destroying the country by air and leaving helpless the army on the ground. In the East, the Russians began an enormous offensive called Operation Bagration on 22 June, co-ordinating air, artillery, tanks and infantry in an effort to recapture Belorussia and push west into Poland and Germany. Within five weeks, the Red Army had broken through the German line, expelling Germans from Belorussia; simultaneously

they launched an attack on Poland that brought them within sight of Warsaw by the end of July. On the western front, the war effort was focused on penetrating the German defensive Siegfried Line and crossing the Rhine. For the British at least this was partly an attempt to beat the Russian advance into Germany and stop them setting up a communist regime.[4]

As Allied generals such as Bernard Montgomery, Dwight Eisenhower, George Patton and Omar Bradley debated how best to manoeuvre their troops into Germany, war correspondents such as Hemingway and Gellhorn tried to attach themselves to army units likely to be sent towards the Rhine. For five years, Germany had seemed unreal and distant; the word 'Germany' conjured a place of mythical evil. Now it was about to become real again and everyone involved in the war wanted to be the first to see it. The New York-based Anglo-Irish writer James Stern, describing his motives for visiting Germany, wrote that he 'thought of the prospect of returning with a mixture of horror and fascination. I felt that it would be like setting out for a country that didn't really exist.'[5]

Throughout the autumn of 1944, war correspondents and entertainers convened in Paris between trips to the front and contrived to join the troops entering the growing sliver of Germany occupied by the Allies. Hemingway, Gellhorn, the American photographer and war correspondent Lee Miller and the German-born movie star Marlene Dietrich were among the British and American literati to wander restlessly through Parisian boulevards, drink in the cafés of the Left Bank and visit the liberated French intelligentsia, in a bizarre, shabby imitation of life in 1920s Paris.

The city had gone mad, Lee Miller announced in an article for *Vogue* describing the early weeks after the liberation. Pretty girls lined the streets, screaming and cheering; the air was filled with perfume that the French had been saving for this moment. For Miller, as for Hemingway and Gellhorn, this was a return home. The former lover and collaborator of Man Ray and the muse of the surrealists (she was currently engaged in an affair with the British surrealist painter Roland Penrose), Miller had lived in Montparnasse in the 1930s and she was now

revisiting former haunts. All of these visitors tried to find the city they had once loved beneath the wounds of Nazism while they celebrated this small victory in the midst of an apparently endless war.[6]

By September 1944, the Western Allies were racing ahead of the Russians in the competition to enter German territory and Hemingway triumphed in his contest with Gellhorn. On 1 September he received a telegram from his current hero, Buck Lanham, commander of the Fourth Infantry Division's 22nd Regiment. 'Go hang yourself, brave Hemingstein,' Lanham jeered, 'we have fought at Landrecies and you were not there.' The next morning Hemingway began making his way to Landrecies, on the Franco-Belgian border; he was with Lanham when the 22nd Regiment began its assault on the Siegfried Line on 7 September. Two days later Hemingway was camping with the regiment in the forest on the Belgian-German border near Hemmeres, sleeping on a pine-needle floor. It was freezing and wet and he came down with a cold, but he wrote contented, loving letters to Mary Welsh declaring that he was now 'committed as an armored column in a narrow defile'.[7]

This was a happiness occasioned both by the reciprocity of his love for Mary Welsh and by the war. Though in Cuba Hemingway had resisted Gellhorn's call to arms, he was as temperamentally restless as she was. He too was calmed by the intense immediacy of battle and now told his son Patrick that he had never been more satisfied nor more useful. While in the forest he met Bill Walton, a suave *Time* reporter colleague of Welsh's whom Hemingway had befriended that summer in London and Paris. Like Hemingway, Walton was a journalist determined to prove his own heroism; he had parachuted with the US troops into Normandy on D-Day. Now Hemingway had the satisfaction of saving his friend's life. Recognising the sound of an incoming German plane, he ordered Walton to jump out of a jeep moments before it was strafed.

Hemingway entered Germany with the first American tanks on 12 September and moved into a farmhouse near Bleialf which he and his army companions nicknamed 'Schloss Hemingstein'. Here he shared a double bed with Walton and was glad to reprise the heroic role

he had already played in two wars. When a shell landed outside the house, breaking windows and eradicating lights, Hemingway calmly continued eating in the darkness while the officers around him hid under the table.

Two months later Hemingway's triumphant report of the battle would appear in *Collier's*. 'A lot of people will tell you how it was to be first into Germany and how it was to break the Siegfried Line and a lot of people will be wrong.' It was the infantry who had cracked the line, not the air force; the infantry who had made their way through grim, forested country until they reached a hill and 'all the rolling hills and forests that you saw ahead of you were Germany'. They had passed the pillboxes that some 'unfortunate' people believed constituted the Siegfried Line, made it past the concrete fortified strong-points and then, in a freezing gale, penetrated the West Wall that many Germans considered impenetrable. Even at the time, Hemingway wrote, it was a battle that felt more cinematic than real; it would be easy to turn it into a movie: 'The only thing that will probably be hard to get properly in the picture is the German SS troops, their faces black from the concussion, bleeding from the nose and mouth, kneeling in the road, grabbing their stomachs, hardly able to get out of the way of the tanks.' Patriotically, he concluded that these scenes made him feel that 'it really would have been better for Germany not to have started this war in the first place'.[8]

The Allies' incursion into Germany continued with a three-week battle for Aachen, which was the first German city to surrender on 21 October. Immediately, Allied war correspondents arrived to witness the destruction wrought by their armies and airforces and to interview the defeated Germans. As participants in the Allied war effort, they were intended to produce reports indicting German brutality but instead they often ended up describing the astonishing devastation of the city. Aachen had been heavily bombed in 1943 and shelled throughout the three weeks of battle. Now 85 per cent of the town was in ruins and only 14,000 of the prewar population of 160,000

remained.[9] In parts of the city there was row after row of plaster-decorated façades still presenting a semblance of ordinary architecture while in fact there were no houses behind them; elsewhere there was mile after mile of rubble. Only the cathedral stood tall, towering eerily over a sea of ruins. When the inhabitants remained they were living in basements, frightened both of the Americans and of their German rulers, who hurled abuse at them on the radio, accusing them of cowardice for surrendering. The streets were lined with the skeletal remains of their bombed inhabitants and the whole city seemed to exude the smell of rotting flesh.[10]

Among the first Allied visitors to Aachen was Erika Mann. Once a bohemian German actor, car racer and cabaret writer, Mann was now an American war correspondent, defiantly proud of her army uniform and Anglo-American accent. She was also the daughter of the German writer Thomas Mann, a US citizen and the most prestigious spokesman for German literature in exile. For several months she had been driving around Europe in a battered Citroën bestowed on her by a friend in the French resistance shortly before he died.

Mann had spent the early years of the war broadcasting for the BBC in London and had seen the destruction created by the London Blitz. As an American war correspondent, she had then come close to the battlefields of France, Belgium and Holland. However, nothing had prepared her for the flattened German cities. Like many returning Germans, Mann found it hard to take in the transformation of her former homeland or to believe that this 'phantastically ruined' wasteland had really been a city.[11] But she had little sympathy either for the vanished buildings or for their demoralised inhabitants. She was determined not to reveal her own German identity and kept up an American persona to stop herself striking out and hitting the unrepentant Germans she now encountered. Meeting a group of German policemen currently being 're-educated' by the Americans, Mann was shocked by the 'complete lack of feeling of their collective guilt' displayed by the men, who asked her naively what plans were being laid in Washington for German reconstruction. How did the Americans intend to strengthen the German economy? As a war correspondent had Mann

come across any interesting stamps? Perhaps she could help fill the gaps in their collections?[12]

Staggered that the Germans could be so oblivious to her own outrage, Mann asked them questions in return. As Military Government policemen, did they expect to run into trouble among Germans still wanting to display the Nazi flag? Immediately, three or four policemen assured her that the Germans were ready to abandon Nazism. Their failure to do so was explained by a familiar mantra: 'Terror!' 'Dictatorship!' 'The Gestapo!' It seemed to Mann that this was becoming a childish song, intoned everywhere. 'In one breath as it were, these Germans would tell you that a) Nazism was kept alive in Germany by a mere handful of hated fanatics, while b) every German was watched over by two Nazis.' She believed that Nazism had finally become objectionable but thought that it had lost popularity not because of its moral depravity but because of its military weakness. 'Germany's leading criminals stand accused today not of being criminals but of being failures.'[13]

Writing to her brother Klaus in the English language she had determinedly made her own, Erika said that it was 'phantastic' to be back in the 'Hunland' and that she was convinced more than ever of the hopelessness of the Germans. 'In their hearts, self-deception and dishonesty, arrogance and docility, shrewdness and stupidity are repulsively mingled and combined.' She was now certain that neither she nor her brother would be able to live again anywhere in Europe, which was in as bad a state morally as it was physically. This was a 'bitter pill' to swallow, even though she had already been loyally committed to Uncle Sam.[14]

Erika Mann had very little patience with anyone who claimed to have been duped by the Nazis. She herself had openly mocked and resisted them even before they came to power, though in the very early days it was Klaus who was the politically orientated Mann sibling, warning the world about the dangers of fascism in 1927. Erika's own political stance began spontaneously and passionately five years later when she recited a pacifist poem by Victor Hugo at an anti-war meeting. A group of Brownshirts broke up the gathering and threw chairs at her, denouncing her as a 'Jewish traitress' and 'international agitator'. Fired from her acting role after the Nazis threatened to boycott the

theatre unless she was dismissed, she felt called upon to make a stand. She was successful in suing both the theatre and a Nazi newspaper who had described her as a 'flatfooted peace hyena' with 'no human physiognomy'. After examining several photographs of Erika, the judge declared that her face was in fact legally human. Galvanised into politicial activism, Erika opened the Pepper Mill revue in Munich on 1 January 1933, collaborating with her lover the actor Therese Giehse and a troupe of players to perform anti-Nazi satirical cabaret until the Nazis drove them out of Germany two months later.[15]

Having retained her uncompromising stance throughout twelve years of exile, Erika was certainly not prepared to mellow now. She was exhausted by her year of press camp cots and army rations; aware that her thirty-eight-year-old body was taking the same battering as the car given to her by her dead friend. She missed her parents (at home in the plush comfort of Los Angeles) and her brother Klaus (stationed in Italy reporting for the US army). But she was propelled by hatred of the Germans who had driven her family from their homes and killed many of her friends. The people who confronted her daily exhorting sympathy for the destruction of their cities or demanding additions to their stamp collections were the same Germans who had thrown chairs at her in Munich and burned thousands of the books she loved. She was determined to play whatever part she could in witnessing their humiliation and convincing them of their guilt.

In early October, Ernest Hemingway was forced abruptly to return from Germany to France because he had been court-martialled for joining in the combat at Rambouillet. If he wished to free himself, he now had to forsake his own heroism and pretend that he had not borne arms. His anger was compounded by an encounter in Paris with Martha Gellhorn, who suggested dinner only to spend the evening demanding a divorce. Hemingway was reluctant; he preferred leaving to being left and had not quite lined up his next wife. None the less, he found solace in the arms of Mary Welsh, and the company of his old friend Marlene Dietrich who took to sitting on Hemingway's bathtub at the Ritz and

singing to him while he shaved. This was the first time Hemingway and Dietrich had met in a war zone and it suited them well. Both were in love with courage and were foolhardily determined to emerge as heroes.

Dietrich had come to Europe from America in April as a USO entertainer. She would later look back on her time with the army as one of the happiest periods in her life. Night after night she shivered stoically in sequined dresses as she sung to US troops of love and home and reminded them of the softer and more romantic world they were fighting to regain. She was in her forties with a grown-up daughter but here once again she could be a youthful sweetheart. According to one colonel, Dietrich seemed to look each soldier straight in the eye and say: 'You mean something to me. I hope somehow I get through to you that I want to be here with you.' These were her boys; she was beloved by all and especially by the generals, whom she flattered and adored. She had spent September in the protection of the swashbuckling General 'Old Blood and Guts' Patton, enjoying taking on the role of First Lady to a war hero. Early on Patton asked her if she was afraid of performing so close to the fighting. She assured him that she was brave; she had no fear of dying. But as a German by birth who was reviled by the Nazis for taking US citizenship, she was aware that she would have enormous propaganda value as a prisoner of war: 'They'll shave off my hair, stone me, and have horses drag me through the streets. If they force me to talk on the radio, General, under no circumstances believe anything I say.' Patton handed her a revolver and instructed her to use it swiftly if captured.[16]

While Hemingway and his 'Kraut' were swapping war stories, Gellhorn returned to London, 'to eat and sleep'. She was feeling frighteningly lonely as she took stock of the end of her marriage. The relationship with Hemingway had lasted seven years and Gellhorn had admired him for some time before that. In 1931 she had told a childhood sweetheart that she took her code from Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, where the hero tells his lover 'You're brave. Nothing ever happens to the brave.' This was enough for her: 'A whole philosophy – a banner – a song – and a love.' Meeting Hemingway in 1936 and accompanying

him to Spain the following year brought just the shared bravery, the love and the song that she had longed for. But their hopes in Spain for a better world had been shattered and their years in Cuba had blunted the passion. Hemingway's competitive anger and jealousy had exhausted her; marriage itself seemed fundamentally incompatible with spontaneous happiness.[17]

'I can resign myself to anything on earth except dullness, and I do not want to be good,' Gellhorn had told her friend Hortense Flexner in 1941; 'Good is my idea of what very measly people are, since they cannot be anything better. I wish to be hell on wheels, or dead. And the only serious complaint I have about matrimony is that it brings out the faint goodness in me, and has a tendency to soften and quiet the hell on wheels aspect, and finally I become bored with myself. Only a fool would prefer to be actively achingly dangerously unhappy, rather than bored: and I am that class of fool.'

Gellhorn had always felt compelled to run away from the people she loved, restlessly seeking out new people and places or disappearing alone to write. In the same letter she told Flexner that she wanted 'a life with people that is almost explosive in its excitement, fierce and hard and laughing and loud and gay as all hell let loose' and the rest of the time she wanted to be alone to work and think 'and let them kindly not come to call'. Marriage was not conducive to this kind of balance; she was now on her way to freeing herself from its snare.[18]

But if she was pleased to escape marriage, Gellhorn could still mourn those early, heady days of love, which she had looked back on nostalgically in a letter to Hemingway the previous June. Longing to be young and irresponsible together again, she begged her husband to give up the prestige and the possessions and return to Milan, with Hemingway brash in his motorcycle sidecar and Gellhorn 'badly dressed, fierce, loving'. This was when they were intense, reckless and noisy, before marriage had polished off the edges and left their voices low and quiet. It was too late to return to Milan; both their love and the city itself had been smashed up by war. All that remained was for Gellhorn to regain her freedom and to seek out reckless intensity alone. And there was a danger that too much freedom would lead to a desolate rootlessness.

'I am so free that the atom cannot be freer,' she wrote to her friend Allen Grover; 'I am free like nothing quite bearable, like sound waves and light.'[19]

In London, Gellhorn wrote a report of the battles she had witnessed in Italy. Published in *Collier's* in October, it undermined the heroic accounts in Hemingway's articles, suggesting that war, even when victorious, was too chaotic to be strategic and too costly to be triumphant: 'A battle is a jigsaw puzzle of fighting men, bewildered, terrified civilians, noise, smells, jokes, pain, fear, unfinished conversations and high explosive.' Gellhorn mocked later historians who would neatly catalogue the campaign, noting that in 365 days of fighting the Allied armies advanced 315 miles. They would be able to explain without sadness what it meant to break through three fortified lines, they would describe impassively how Italy had become a giant mine, but they would fail to capture the essence of the battle. She ended the piece on a caustic note. 'The weather is lovely and no one wants to think of what men must still die and what men must still be wounded in the fighting before peace comes.'[20]

London had provided Gellhorn with the food and rest she sought but she was soon anxious to return to the jigsaw of fighting men and to follow Hemingway into Germany. The relative ordinariness of London life made her aware of her own homelessness. She told her mother that she wanted to return home but aged thirty-six she still had no home to go to. 'Home is something you make yourself and I have not made one.' Still lonely, Gellhorn made her way back to France where she informed readers of *Collier's* that the wounds of Paris (prisons, torture chambers, unmarked graves) would never heal. Published in the same issue as an article by Hemingway extolling the friendliness of the American GIs, Gellhorn's piece describes the red-hot hooks in the prison at Romainville and the cemetery where Germans brought in the bodies of dead prisoners in trucks. 'It is impossible to write properly of such monstrous and incredible and bestial cruelty: you will find it impossible to believe such things exist.' Before the war started Gellhorn had told a friend that she felt her role in life was to 'make an angry sound against injustice', paying back for her own good luck by defending the

unlucky. The unlucky were now proliferating and Gellhorn's anger was becoming uncontainable.[21]

She left Paris and wandered to the Ardennes, installing herself in a farmhouse in Sissonne where part of the US army was based, training and regrouping between attacks. One day a group of soldiers came across her and demanded to see her papers. Finding that she was not officially accredited to be in a war zone, they led her to the tent of General James M. Gavin, who was the leader of the elite 82nd Airborne Division.

At thirty-seven, Gavin was the youngest divisional commander in the US army. He was tall, boyish and charming, with the looks of a Hollywood hero. He carried a rifle instead of a pistol, wanting to shoot accurately and far, and was renowned for always fighting on the front line beside his men. He also exuded the confidence of swift youthful success. At the start of the war the 82nd had been under Bradley's command and Gavin (then a colonel) was assigned as the commanding officer of its new Parachute Infantry Regiment, as part of a general move towards airborne warfare. He was so successful in aiding the Allied encroachment into Sicily that he was entrusted with three airborne regiments for the Normandy landings. In August, Gavin had been promoted to general and put in charge of the entire 82nd Airborne Division, who were chosen to capture two bridges in Holland in September to enable Allied troops to cross the Lower Rhine and encircle German forces defending the frontier.

Now, Gavin and his division were waiting for their next instructions in the relative safety of Sissonne. He was inclined to behave leniently toward this beautiful intruder. He told Gellhorn that he would let her go unnoticed and asked her for the name of her hotel in Paris, planning to look her up when next on leave. Shortly afterwards, he tracked her down at the Hôtel Lincoln. More used to commanding troops than seducing women, Gavin was peremptory. Gellhorn disliked being summoned 'like a package and pushed into bed', but she succumbed none the less and the results were electrifying. Afterwards she wrote that he had taught her 'what I had guessed, read about, been told about; but did not believe; that bodies are something terrific'.

This was the first sexually satisfying relationship of her life. She later described sex with Hemingway as 'wham bam thank you maam' without the 'thank you'.[22]

Gavin, like Gellhorn, was married, with a wife and child waiting for him in America, but he too was determined to live riskily and intensely in the continuous present of war. Later in November he was posted to the liberated area of Holland, instructed to retain order in the towns he had helped to destroy, and he invited Gellhorn to accompany him. The consequence was a triumphant paean to the 82nd Airborne Division, published in *Collier's* in December. Regular readers may have wondered what had changed since Gellhorn's report on the Italian front a month earlier; war was no longer quite as miserable as it had looked then. The article begins with Gellhorn informing her readers that the troops of the 82nd 'look like tough boys and they are'. They are good at their trade and they walk as if they know it and it is a pleasure to watch them: 'You are always happy with fine combat troops because in a way no people are as intensely alive as they are . . . You do not think much about what war costs because you are too busy being alive for the day, too busy laughing and listening and looking.'[23]

Gellhorn and Gavin quickly began to fight about the methods of war. She could not forget the costs of conflict for long and she complained in *Collier's* later in December about the death of the Dutch town of Nijmegen, ravaged in part by Gavin's division. Although she announced dutifully at the start of the article that the moral of the story was that 'it would be a fine thing if the Germans did not make war', she described the destruction in too much detail for the reader to remain oblivious of the perpetrators of this particular carnage. The piece ends with a portrait of a little girl of four, her arms both broken by shell fragments and her head gashed: 'All you could see was a tiny soft face, with enormous dark eyes, utterly silent eyes looking at you.'[24]

By December 1944 Gellhorn was back in Paris, where she once again crossed paths with Hemingway, who returned from his second sojourn in Germany on 5 December. For three weeks he had been reporting on the experiences of Lanham's division in the savage battle of Hürtgen Forest. This campaign in the dense conifer woodland between Bonn

and Aachen had begun in mid-September and was initially expected to last a few weeks. The Allies intended to clear a wide pathway through fifty square miles of forest to provide entry into Germany. However, the terrain was ferociously inhospitable; the Germans had prepared the forest with mines and barbed wire which were now hidden by the mud and snow. The battle was already two months in by the time Hemingway arrived on 15 November and showed no sign of coming to a close. In three days in mid-November, Lanham's 22nd Infantry Regiment incurred more than 300 casualties, including all three battalion commanders and about half the company commanders. By the time that this stage of the battle ended in mid-December, 24,000 Americans had been killed, wounded, captured or were missing.

This was a much bleaker experience than Hemingway's summer campaigns. He was in Germany once again but without the excitement of being the first to break through the Siegfried Line. His overwhelming experience was of mud, rain and shells. The consolations were the camaraderie of army life – Hemingway entertained Lanham in the evenings with impressions of the mating antics of African lions – and the possibilities for hunting. He might now be forbidden to bear arms against the Germans but it did not stop him shooting deer and cows.

Hemingway returned to Paris with pneumonia, but after a couple of weeks in bed he followed Lanham's division to Rodenbourg (ten miles north-east of Luxembourg City) where they invited Gellhorn to spend Christmas with them. Her visit was a disaster. Lanham instantly disliked Hemingway's wife, finding her distant and ungrateful. Gellhorn felt embarrassed and powerless surrounded by her husband's war cronies, though she fared better at dinner with General Bradley, who was 'much smitten' with this enticing war correspondent whom his aide described in his diary that night as 'a reddish blonde woman with a cover girl figure, a bouncing manner and a brilliant studied wit where each comment seems to come out perfectly tailored and smartly cut to fit the occasion, yet losing none of the spontaneity that makes it good'.

Meeting Gellhorn for the first time at a party on New Year's Eve, Hemingway's friend Bill Walton was impressed by 'her elegant hair, the tawny-gold colour' and by her bearing – 'like that of a fine race

horse' – and was horrified by Hemingway's rudeness to her. Chided by his friend for his boorish behaviour, Hemingway retorted that 'you can't hunt an elephant with a bow and arrow'.[25]

For both Gellhorn and Hemingway, this trip signified the end of the marriage. 'I wasn't meant for every day consumption,' Gellhorn had told a lover twelve years earlier, 'you'll have to think of me as oysters – you wouldn't want oysters everyday for breakfast?' Hemingway was not meant for daily consumption either; shared everyday life had become impossible for them. Afterwards he told his son that they were going to divorce and he was planning to take Mary Welsh home to Cuba: 'We want some straight work, not be alone and not have to go to war to see one's wife . . . Going to get me somebody who wants to stick around with me and let me be the writer of the family.' Ernest Hemingway wanted no more part in the war and had lost interest in following the army into Germany; he would leave Martha Gellhorn to see the ruined cities without him.[26]