After the National Socialists consolidated their power on a broad political level, they quickly established their rule in Germany’s cultural politics by staging one of their first cultural events in Berlin. The notorious burning of books ‘against the un-German spirit’ (‘wider den undeutschen Geist’), was coordinated by the Nazi student organization and enacted at many universities across Germany. University libraries had been asked to comb through their shelves for ‘anti-German’ and Jewish books, which were put in huge piles, before torches carried in the nocturnal parade were used to burn them. The Berlin ceremony took place on 10 May 1933 in the arena of Berlin’s Opernplatz or Opera Square, close to the buildings of the Humboldt University. Joseph Goebbels accepted the student organization’s invitation to give a public address, which established his reputation as Germany’s premier Nazi censor and propagandist.

The Nazis embodied the cultural political antithesis of the Weimar Republic. While many authors had felt inspired by Weimar’s artistic energy, the Nazis swiftly censored their creativity in 1933 and replaced individual experimentation with formulaic art. Much as many Weimar writers realized the Nazi horror instantly, others were slower to comprehend its magnitude. One of those was Victor Klemperer, who asked in 1933, ‘Where was I and how did it happen that nobody paid attention to this sudden rise of the Nazis?’ While the first authors who left Germany were Hitler’s more express political opponents, most others dug in and believed that the Nazi government would be just another episode in the attempt to set up a stable government. Germans as a whole did not realize that the regime had a monstrous master plan, one that used the weak economy and the Reichstag fire as pretences to push through arrest warrants against left-leaning intellectuals, journalists and writers.

The Nazis hated urban life, especially in the form it took in Berlin, and shifted their literary interests to historical topics and to mythical concepts of nature, commonly known by the slogan, ‘Blut und Boden’ (blood and soil).
Goebbels reviled contemporary urban literature as ‘Asphaltliteratur’ and described Berlin as ‘the reddest city in Europe besides Moscow’. And Hitler is said to have ‘despised Berlin’s greed and frivolity... he stood baffled and alienated by the phenomenon of the big city, lost in so much noise, turbulence, and miscegenation’. But the Nazis soon realized that a complete break with Weimar literature was not in their interest, as a discussion about city life in Alfred Rosenberg’s periodical Bücherkunde in 1941 showed. Here, the critic Hans Franke maintained that modern life could indeed only be found in cities, demanding in true Nazi spirit an organic, völkisch perspective to capture modern life, not a multifaceted view as Weimar authors had given. The wartime debate reveals the increasing tension between Rosenberg’s ideology, with its ‘blood and soil’ watchword, and that of Goebbels, who wanted National Socialist writers to have the ‘courage to engage with the present’ and occupy the domain of urban literature. And this was conducted against the background of Hitler’s desire to destroy Berlin as it stood and transform it into Germania, a heroically super-scaled metropolis. In stark contrast to Weimar Berlin’s aggregated, informal districts, or Kieze, Hitler planned to recreate a classical city that would erase one thousand years of history in favour of a concept borrowed from the Roman Empire. It is an irony of history that, while Hitler’s plans for Germania never materialized, the firebombing of Berlin almost achieved the city’s extinction by other means.

Party Lines

The first example of a Nazi propaganda novel is Karl Aloys Schenzinger’s Hitlerjunge Quex (Hitler Youth Quex (1932)), which subsequently also became a popular feature film. The book is based on the life of Herbert Norkus, who died in Moabit’s Beussel Kiez while being confronted by members of the Communist youth organization. Schenzinger fictionalized the case of Norkus to show how Heini Völker (the surname translates as ‘Peoples’), the son of an unemployed Communist, does not join the youth organization of his father’s party (the ‘Commune’), but instead the Hitler Youth. Heini befriends a Nazi teenager who invites him to his upscale Hansa Quarter home, where he explains how German society has become crippled by its class system. Heini then warns the Nazis of a Communist plan to bomb their assembly hall, and when his mother finds out, she is so afraid of the Communists that she turns on the gas to kill herself and the boy. After awakening in a hospital, Heini finds himself surrounded by Hitler Youths who present him with a uniform. The energetic Heini then works all night to print Nazi leaflets and distributes them in the Beussel Kiez. After Heini
falls in love with a member of the Nazi BDM organization (the Bund deutscher Mädchen, or Association of German Girls), they practise kissing at a play rehearsal. When the thrilled boy is attacked by Communists on his way home, he never recovers from the injuries and dies a week later. His last words are those of the Horst Wessel song, which would become the unofficial Nazi anthem, and the novel concludes with the scene of 75,000 boys singing the same song the martyr sang on his deathbed, as they parade before Hitler.

The prototype for Schenzinger’s story is evidently Erich Kästner’s *Emil und die Detektive* (Emil and the Detectives (1929)), with the idea of solidarity among the boys an important factor in negotiating Berlin’s various classes and neighbourhoods. Like Kästner’s world, Schenzinger’s is divided into Manichean categories of good and evil. But where Kästner shows adults as corrupt, Schenzinger singles out the Communists for their dubious morals: the girls are lax, while the boys engage in theft and violence. After an excursion, the book takes on a different tone, as the Berlin teenagers are happy to get away from the city and its decadent atmosphere. While the Communists simply use nature for drinking and vulgar games, for Schenzinger, the Nazis are shown to need nature for their military games, as Nazi ideology romanticized a return to the natural state for political renewal.

*Hitlerjunge Quex* can be compared to Jan Petersen’s *Unsere Straße* (Our Street (1936)), the Communist version of a Berlin *Kiez* battle. *Unsere Straße*, one of the most influential Communist novels written in Berlin during the Nazi period, was smuggled out of Germany to enable its publication. Petersen was the Berlin leader of the Association of Proletarian-Revolutionary Authors (Bund Proletarisch-Revolutionärer Schriftsteller), founded in 1928. The BPRS counted among its members many of Germany’s prominent left-wing writers, such as Bruno Apitz, author of the Holocaust novel *Nackt unter Wölfen* (Naked amongst Wolves (1955)), Johannes R. Becher (who later became the GDR’s Culture Secretary), the journalist and writer Egon Erwin Kisch, the theatre director Erwin Piscator, the writer Anna Seghers, and Friedrich Wolf, whose *Professor Mamlock* (1933) is among the best-known plays written in exile. Petersen was able to keep the BPRS active as an underground organization until 1935, when it was betrayed to the Gestapo. In *Unsere Straße* he tells the story of his own Berlin *Kiez* and how his comrades tried to survive Nazi aggression by engaging in acts of active and passive resistance. The book portrays the Wallstraße, a proletarian street where the workers and servants of the middle-class Charlottenburg district lived. To disguise the identities of his comrades, Petersen fictionalized his diary entries and followed the pattern of the ‘barricade novels’ of the early 1930s which were popularized by Klaus
Neukrantz’s Barrikaden am Wedding (Barricades at Wedding (1931)), a Marxist novel of street conflicts in the working-class Wedding district.

Whereas Weimar’s flâneur culture had been decidedly bourgeois and often apolitical, the BPRS-rooted novel of the streets became the prototype for illegal writing during Berlin’s Nazi occupation. Unsere Straße is a self-reflective narrative, cast between reportage and novel, with the author’s creative hand visible in the narrative arc he creates out of the diary-style accounts. The text has the character of a political thriller, with its suspenseful scenes centring on the struggle between the Communists and the Nazis for control of the eponymous street. The story begins with a shooting on 30 January 1933, when a troop of armed SA-men march through the Wallstraße to claim the Communist territory as theirs and accidentally shoot one of their own number and an accompanying Berlin policeman. It ends with the trial of local Communists, when the twenty-eight accused are all sentenced to prison, while no Nazi is indicted. The Nazi terror on the streets of Berlin and in the early days of the concentration camps is described in full detail, including the torture and murder of the writer Erich Mühsam at the Brandenburg concentration camp. After an appearance at the First International Writers’ Congress for the Defence of Culture in Paris in June 1935, Jan Petersen was hunted by the Nazis, but was able to avoid capture and to emigrate first to Switzerland and then to England.

Outside Views

Other, less famous Berliners also emigrated from Hitler’s terror, among them Konrad Merz, whose autobiographical novel Ein Mensch fällt aus Deutschland (A Human Being Falls out of Germany (1936)) is one of the first exile books written from the perspective of a Jewish Berliner. It is a very touching literary document of the existential struggle Germans endured during the 1930s, when every day was finely balanced between survival and death. Merz’s various notes are not merged into a continuous text in the same way as Petersen’s, but they are left in their original form, as this example shows: ‘Gestern früh sind wir aus Berlin gekippt. Ungewaschen, ungewaschen, Wie ausgespuckt. Mit 6 Mark und 5 Pfennigen durch die Stunden gekrochen, durch die Nacht geschlichen . . . Jetzt soll Heiligabend sein’. (Yesterday morning we were pitched out of Berlin. Unwashed, uncombed. As if spat out. With 6 marks and 5 pfennigs we crawled through the hours and crept through the night . . . Apparently it’s Christmas Eve now).5 The experience of enforced emigration is recounted with sober immediacy.
Writing under National Socialism

Several well-known Weimar authors who were on the Nazis’ Black List left Germany quickly but felt compelled to write about life in Berlin as they imagined it from exile. It is interesting to consider the degree of authenticity in those émigré texts, as compared to the accounts of eyewitnesses. Lion Feuchtwanger was already in exile when he wrote his novel Die Geschwister Oppermann (translated as The Oppermanns) in 1933. A Jewish writer, Feuchtwanger had been one of Weimar Germany’s most popular authors. He was in exile in southern France when the SA raided his house and destroyed his manuscripts and most of his library of over 10,000 books. 

Die Geschwister Oppermann, one of the first books about Nazi activities in Berlin to be published in exile, provides narrative accounts of torture in concentration camps that were predictions of what was to come. And Bertolt Brecht also left Germany in 1933 and, in Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches (translated as The Private Life of the Master Race (1938)), gave his own reconstruction of the ideological conditions of life in Germany. In his scenic montage he shows the country as a land of poverty, violence, fear and pretence that has fallen into the hands of greedy capitalists.

While many of Weimar Germany’s leftist authors left Berlin quickly in the early 1930s, the city was becoming increasingly interesting for a number of foreign authors, providing the perspective of the outsider. While Christopher Isherwood’s Goodbye to Berlin (1939) is known for the prototypical use of the viewpoint of a foreigner, using ironic distance to show the emergence of Nazi terror, there were others who gave a more chilling perspective on the ascendancy of the new regime. Thomas Wolfe, who was America’s best-known author in Germany at that time, recognized the brutality behind Berlin’s splendid façade and expressed the change in his attitude from naïveté to eventual understanding of the evil nature of the regime. Wolfe’s I Have a Thing to Tell You (1937) is a novella about a conversation between a fictitious Berlin writer and a German friend. The latter’s quiet voice ‘touched somehow, for an American, with unfathomed depths of living, with a resignation that had long since passed despair, a fortitude that had gone far past both pride and hope’, with which he wants to master his life in these difficult times. When the narrator realizes that the friend is Jewish, the novella provides a classical peripetia, or turning point, to reveal his misconceptions about Nazi Germany, and he finally grasps the country’s tragic destiny.

In Through Embassy Eyes (1939), Martha Dodd chose another classic German literary form for her autobiographical text: a version of the Bildungsroman. Dodd describes her encounter with a number of famous writers, among them Hans Fallada and Thomas Wolfe, and the effect they had on Berlin in the 1930s. According to Dodd, Wolfe’s early uncritical
attitude towards the Nazis was not unlike her own, which created an awkward situation for her father, the American ambassador in Berlin. Martha Dodd met Hitler through a friend, Putzi Hanfstengel, who suggested she become Hitler’s girlfriend, and Dodd gives us here one of the earliest descriptions of the Nazi leader: ‘The first glance left me with a picture of a weak, soft face with pouches under the eyes, full lips and very little bony facial structure. The moustache didn’t seem as ridiculous as it appeared in pictures – in fact, I scarcely noticed it’. She was, however, impressed by Hitler’s ‘startling and unforgettable’ eyes that could contain ‘fury and fanaticism and cruelty’. Although initially scared of him, Dodd warmed to Hitler’s ‘quiet charm’ and his ‘tenderness of speech and glance’, before she eventually became the girlfriend of Rudolf Diels, the first head of the Gestapo.

Klaus Mann also wrote about a Nazi fellow-traveller in his Mephisto, Roman einer Karriere (Mephisto – Novel of a Career (1936)), which became the most influential of the early exile novels. After failing to write his autobiography, Mann decided to write a novel about the director of the Prussian state theatre, Gustaf Gründgens. Hendrik Höfgen, the Gründgens character in the novel, is a man obsessed with becoming a famous actor. When the Nazis come to power, he renounces his Communist past and deserts his wife and mistress in order to continue performing. His diabolical performance as Mephistopheles proves to be the stepping-stone he yearned for, attracting the attention of Hermann Göring. The rewards – public esteem, a castle-like villa, a place in Berlin’s highest circles – are beyond his wildest dreams, but the moral consequences of his betrayal begin to haunt him, turning his dream world into a nightmare. This betrayal built into the pact with power is at the core of the novel and, with its Mephistophelean theme, gives insight into the lives of artists under the Nazis and their reasons for collaboration. Klaus Mann was able to reconstruct Gründgens’ motivations, since he knew him very well. The climactic scene, where Höfgen tries to save a friend from Nazi persecution, contains Mann’s blunt warning to anybody considering working with the ruthless Nazis not to enter into a pact with them.

Staying On

Mann’s advice sounds like the motto for those writers who stayed in Germany and would become known as the authors of Inner Emigration. One of them was Sebastian Haffner (Raimund Pretzel), a relatively unknown journalist in 1933 who would later become a major historian of the Hitler period with his books Germany – Jekyll and Hyde (1940) and Anmerkungen zu Hitler (translated as The Meaning of Hitler (1978)). Haffner began his career during the Nazi period as a reporter for fashion magazines and, by
following Weimar’s celebrated reportage tradition of the pragmatic journalist, painted a colourful picture of life in Berlin during the 1930s in a collection later published as *Das Leben der Fußgänger* (The Life of Pedestrians (2004)). Superficially, everything looks normal in Haffner’s texts, but with each short essay the reader is challenged to discover the truth beneath the surface of the reports he presents.

The books published by Heinrich Spoerl during the Nazi period are an established part of Germany’s cultural heritage, beginning with the publication of *Die Feuerzangenbowle* (The Fire Tongs Punch) in 1933. Unlike many entertainment novels at this time, Spoerl’s *Der Gasmann* (The Gas Man (1940)) contains a number of references to contemporary life in Berlin. The protagonist Hermann Knittel sells his business suit for the exorbitant sum of 10,000 marks to a man on a train. As is later revealed, the man’s identity had to be protected since he had spent the night with a woman on the train. The result of this transaction is disastrous for Knittel, as everyone suspects illegal activities behind this huge amount of money. In Knittel’s escape to Berlin’s entertainment district, Spoerl furnishes a critique of Berlin’s decadent life style, which had been at the core of Weimar Berlin’s frenzied culture and which the Nazis despised. Knittel’s conflict with the justice system offers a caricature of Nazi bureaucracy as he gets lost in a Kafkaesque police building where he ends up in a Gestapo-like interrogation, where no one knows why he is being questioned. The book captures the sinister atmosphere of the 1930s in which someone is assumed to be guilty if questioned by the police. It is full of telling Berlin city scenes, illustrating the murky dynamics of power under the regime, including a woman bragging about her relationship with a Nazi party member and a neighbour reporting Knittel’s wealth to the police when he buys a piano.¹⁰

Although Erich Kästner is mainly known for his children’s literature and his belief in the regenerating powers of youth, he was put on the Nazi Blacklist. However, unlike many fellow authors who were critical of the dictatorship, he did not emigrate. When the Nazis assumed power, Kästner traveled to Italy and Switzerland, where, after meeting with exiled fellow writers, he decided to return to Berlin, arguing that he could chronicle the times better from there. He later described this in a poem:

Ich bin ein Deutscher aus Dresden in Sachsen.
Mich läßt die Heimat nicht fort.
Ich bin wie ein Baum, der – in Deutschland gewachsen –
wenn’s sein muss, in Deutschland verdorrt.

(I’m a German from Dresden in Saxony.
My homeland won’t let me go.)
I'm like a tree that – grown in Germany – if needs be, will wither in Germany too.)

Although Kästner was one of the few writers who watched his books burn in 1933, he did not speak up and chose instead to publish apolitical entertainment novels such as Drei Männer im Schnee (Three Men in the Snow (1934)).

In 1942, Kästner received a special exemption to write the screenplay for the prestigious Münchhausen film for the UFA studios, on the occasion of the production company’s twenty-fifth anniversary.

Kästner’s Die verlorene Miniatur (The Lost Miniature (1935)) is considered one of his apolitical books. As with Spoerl, however, we recognize subtle criticism of the Nazis, as in the fact that the protagonist in the story is fighting against gangs of criminals located in Berlin. Also, one of the novel’s characters wants to live in a world where the sun only shines on the just while the unjust stand in the shadow. The pleasant and naïve owner of butcher’s shops in Berlin, Oskar Külz, is on vacation in Copenhagen when he gets involved in a crime case concerning stolen art. In this comedy of errors, the stolen miniature changes hands frequently, which is made more complicated by the fact that there is an exact replica in circulation. Eventually, nobody is sure anymore which is the real miniature and which the fake. In this adult variation of Emil and the Detectives, everything ends well; the miniature is returned to its rightful owner and the robbers are punished. And just as Kästner’s children’s books are fairly light fare, with a simple lesson to impart, Die verlorene Miniatur has a straightforward conclusion: keep your positive disposition, even in times of difficulty, and things will work out for you. That seemed to be the attitude with which Kästner himself survived the Nazi years.

In his Notabene 45, Kästner described his literary experience in Nazi Germany as one in which the country resembled a destroyed anthill, with his writings as the observations of a ‘thinking ant’.

Alongside Kästner, Hans Fallada was the Weimar Republic’s best-known author in the sober observational style of Neue Sachlichkeit or New Objectivity. His books were not burned, and he remained in Germany, keeping a low profile. However, in 1937 he produced one of his most important books, Wolf unter Wölfen (Wolf among Wolves), which describes Berlin’s economic and political crisis in 1923 inflation and contrasts it with the situation in the Prussian countryside. Fallada gives a realistic portrait of both Berlin and rural life to show how both parts of Germany were equally guilty of promoting fascist thinking. Fallada had experienced life both in the city and on Prussian country estates, since he had worked as an estate manager in Pomerania. In this novel, he deploys montage elements with a film-like technique and
abandons his journalistic perspective for a balanced, multifaceted approach. By limiting the first part of *Wolf unter Wölfen* to one day and one night, Fallada gives close attention to the hectic atmosphere of the time, which was exacerbated by the continuously rising dollar exchange rate and the frantic search for money. The narrative starts with a desolate scene that seems directly modelled after Hemingway’s bleak novels; a man and a woman sleep in a miserable backyard apartment in one of Berlin’s tenement buildings near the Alexanderplatz. The precise and unemotional description shows the two bodies as objects placed in their historical context.

In a scene that shows Fallada’s intention of building up his female protagonist, Petra, the shabbiness of the tenement building is contrasted with her attempt to escape the environment. Although Petra has worked as a prostitute, she realizes that the time has come to establish her independence. In confronting her landlady and coworkers, she insists on acting with sophistication and not in the downtrodden manner of these working class women. Although her coworkers challenge her attitude as arrogant and ridicule her belief that she can free herself from her current situation, she takes the first step towards her independence. Eventually, she manages a life as a reputable middle-class citizen. At first sight, Petra’s story would fit well with the Nazi ideology of branding the city as the source of all evil, as most characters leave the city to go to the country, where they hope to find a wholesome atmosphere. Instead, however, they find even more intrigue and poverty there than in the slums of Berlin, where people were more inventive in overcoming their misery. In the country they found ultra-right groups preparing a coup against the vilified political system of the Weimar Republic. Fallada’s description is similar to George Grosz’s surreal drawings, a description of a perverse time for a Germany that had not found its bearings. This perversity extended in all directions, both left and right, with the ‘romantic’ domain of the country as fertile breeding ground for the latter. And so it was no surprise that this novel, with its subversion of the ideological fantasy of blood and soil, was quickly banned in Nazi Germany.

Like so many others, Fallada also turned from the dangerous ground of contemporary life to historical subjects, as in his *Der Eiserne Gustav* (*Iron Gustav* (1938)). It was first conceived as a film treatment and relates the true story of the Berlin horse-cab driver Gustav Hartmann, who took his carriage to Paris in the 1920s in order to show that he could compete with the burgeoning motorized taxi business. The book reveals Fallada’s increasing dependence on the Nazis for the opportunity to publish: the main characters all have to convert to National Socialism.
Victims

Another novel turning on the depiction of a unique urban character was Georg Hermann’s *Rosenemil* (Roses Emil (1936)). After the publication of his novels *Jettchen Gebert* and *Henriette Jacoby* in 1906, Hermann had been one of Berlin’s principal authors of city novels, introducing to his substantial readership such distinctive characters as Kubinke and Doktor Herzfeld. *Rosenemil* was published not in Berlin, where it clearly belonged, with its portrayal of one of the city’s petty criminals, but in Amsterdam, to where Hermann had emigrated. The narrative takes place in the Eastern part of Berlin with which Hermann was very familiar: the Lothringerstraße, now Torstraße, where the peddlers, prostitutes and petty criminals meet. The book was Hermann’s last and a superb dedication to the old Berlin that he had made so famous in his earlier novels. Hermann, who was Jewish and died in Auschwitz, has been almost completely forgotten by post–Second World War generations.

From October 1941 to April 1943, Berlin’s remaining Jews were deported and many of them killed in the concentration camps in Eastern Europe. The poems of Gertrud Kolmar are some of the most significant literary documents of the Holocaust in the German language. She was born into a middle-class Jewish Berlin family and grew up in the Charlottenburg district. In November 1938, after the Kristallnacht, Kolmar and her father were forced to sell their spacious home in Finkenkrug, a rural suburb of Berlin, and move to a *Judenhaus* in the Schöneberg district, where Gertrud pined for what they had lost. In 1941 she was compelled to do forced labour in the German armaments industry, and in February 1943 she was arrested and then deported to her death in Auschwitz (Figure 6.1).

In her letters, Kolmar described the mundane aspects of her life, such as walking long distances through the city in disguise, and the lack of privacy and solitude brought about by the constant presence of others in the close quarters of the *Judenhaus.* Kolmar’s unusual ability to render her traumatic experiences in lyric form makes her one of the most important poets in German literature and places her amongst the greatest lyrical poets of Jewish descent. Her poetry reveals how she consciously selected other spaces, other times and other self-representations than those either forced upon her by the Nazi regime or chosen by the other Jews in her environment. Thus, in ‘Abschied’ (Farewell (1932)), she sends her face forth in a self-constructed exile to the East:

> Nach Osten send’ ich mein Gesicht:  
> Ich will es von mir tun.  
> Es soll dort drüben sein im Licht,
Ein wenig auszuruhn
...
Und wenn ich dann nur leiser Schlag
An blasse Küsten bin,
So roll ich frühen Wintertag,
Den silbern kühlen Sarkophag
Des ewigen Todes hin,
Darin mein Antlitz dünn und leicht
Wie Spinneweben steht,
Ein wenig um die Winkel streicht,
Ein wenig flattert, lächelnd bleicht
Und ohne Qual verweht.

(Into the East I send my face:
I’m giving it away.
And in some distant sunlit place
A moment it should stay.

Figure 6.1: Stolperstein, or stumbling-stone, commemorating the deportation of Gertrud Kolmar, in front of Münchener Straße 18a
(Photo by OTFW, Berlin, licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons).
...And finally, when I fade away,
A wave on pale coasts,
I’ll wash to sea a winter’s day,
A sepulcher of frigid gray,
Death’s everlasting ghost.
Inside, my fragile face will stay
As I sail round the bend,
And I will smile and drift away,
And disappear in wind and spray
To meet a painless end.\(^{14}\)

Kolmar’s poetry relies on the use of metaphorical landscapes and topographical tropes through which she resisted the Nazis by reconfiguring a politically controlled social space into her own poetically organized domain. As Amir Eshel writes, ‘Jewish writers across the generations of exile were not so much obsessed with the urge to return to Zion – a notion many of them regarded as messianic – but were motivated by the desire to inhabit their dwelling place poetically, at least, and thus, by doing so, ontologically to be’.\(^{15}\) Kolmar’s imaginary Orient has been interpreted as an escapist place and substitute homeland, and indeed this hope for an ancient Asia had been a central theme in German-Jewish attempts to redefine Judaism and Jewish nationalism.

Gertrud Kolmar did not survive the Nazis, and neither did the less widely recognized writer, Albrecht Haushofer. As a policy advisor at the Foreign Office, he became involved with people from the Kreisau Circle, who took part in the failed 1944 plot to assassinate Hitler. Haushofer was an academic and had never written poetry, but he started writing the *Moabiter Sonette* (*Moabit Sonnets* (published posthumously in 1946)) after he was incarcerated in Berlin’s Moabit prison. He was carrying one of his sonnets, ‘Schuld’ (*Guilt*), at the time of his execution on the night of April 22, 1945:

Doch schuldig bin ich. Anders als Ihr denkt!
Ich musste früher meine Pflicht erkennen,
Ich musste schärfer Unheil Unheil nennen,
Mein Urteil hab ich viel zu lang gelenkt ... \(^{16}\)

... Ich hab gewarnt – nicht hart genug und klar!
Und heute weiß ich, was ich schuldig war. \(^{17}\)

(But I am guilty. Not in the way you think!
I should have recognized my duty earlier,
I should have called evil evil more sharply;
I steered my judgement much too long ...
Of the Jewish survivor stories in Berlin, Inge Deutschkron’s *Ich trug den gelben Stern* (I Wore the Yellow Star; translated as *Outcast: A Jewish Girl in Wartime Berlin* (1978)) is one of the best known. Deutschkron starts her reminiscences with the first episode that marred her happy childhood, when her parents inform her that she is Jewish and can no longer play with other children. To support his family, Inge’s father learns new occupations, and Inge is driven from one Jewish school to another, until the last has closed. The family moves from lodging to lodging until they end up in the cramped quarters of a *Judenhaus* in Schöneberg. A major part of their lives consists of following ordinances designed to marginalize Jews, such as women having to adopt Sara as their middle name, submitting a list of everything they owned to city authorities, relinquishing their telephone and radio, and not straying into urban areas forbidden to them. One month after the wearing of the yellow star became law, in September 1941, the deportations started, affecting most of Inge’s family. For a considerable period, she was able to continue her secretarial work for Otto Weidt’s workshop in the Rosenthaler Straße, where he employed blind Jews. In the last months of the war, Inge and her mother even lived more openly in Berlin, for they succeeded in passing themselves off as refugees who had lost their papers in their last-minute flight from the advancing Russians.

Marie Jalowicz’s *Untergetaucht* (Gone Underground), published in 2014, tells her story of a survivor who operated completely on her own by cutting all ties with her extended family. This was easier for her than for many Berlin Jews because both of her parents died before the Holocaust, and as the daughter of a Jewish lawyer, Marie realized that she had to adjust her behaviour to her working-class environment quickly if she was to survive. One of her mentors explained that she should not act normally in abnormal conditions. *Untergetaucht* relates in detail how middle-class Jews were often unprepared for their changed situation and chose death rather than go into hiding. In 1941 Marie slipped out of the official city records when she told the postman who had come to deliver a letter from the employment office that her ‘neighbour’, Marie Jalowicz, had been deported. The postman noted that she had moved to an ‘unknown destination in the East’, and the young woman vanished from the records. Marie’s friends recognized her determination, and, when she told them that she would write her story down one day, they predicted she would be the only one to survive. By assuming a false identity, Marie realized how merging with Berlin’s working class and
using its dialect was the key to survival. As the Jewish middle class perished, she writes, the educated German bourgeoisie failed in a similar way when asked to help Jews. However, when she meets another survivor after the war who uses standard German and not dialect, she can hardly control her emotions and feels she is back home. Marie Jalowicz Simon died in Berlin in 1998 after a long and successful career as a professor of ancient literature and culture at Berlin’s Humboldt University.

Ruth Andreas-Friedrich was one of the Germans who built up a network to find hiding-places for Jewish Berliners. In her Berlin diary, Der Schattenmann (The Shadowman; translated as Berlin Underground (1948)), Andreas-Friedrich showed the Jewish survival from the German perspective. As her diary reveals, Andreas-Friedrich, the conductor Leo Borchard, the doctor Walter Seitz and approximately eight of their friends helped by creating an underground organization, ‘Onkel Emil’, that saved countless Jews from deportation, hid war deserters and helped many others with illegal papers. Her extensive diary is one of the best sources about the difficult life during the Third Reich.

Anja Lundholm’s Das Höllentor (The Gate of Hell (1988)) gives a disturbing account of the atrocities that took place in the infamous camps near to Berlin, Sachsenhausen and Ravensbrück. Lundholm was a political prisoner in the Ravensbrück women’s concentration camp, and despite its fictionalized character, Das Höllentor is a highly personal book. When Lundholm is on a work assignment, she asks herself whether the people outside the camp are not bothered by the smell of burning flesh that covers the entire town of Fürstenberg: ‘Burning bones have a different smell than burning wood. Does nobody question the origin of the smoke that blackens their houses?’ At night, Lundholm ponders the fate of the prisoners being killed:

First the Jews and Gypsies, then the sick and those unfit to work. It will be everybody’s turn. Everybody. I will die, you will die, he, she, it will die. Words that our brain recites without letting the meaning enter our brain cells. Tomorrow or the day after tomorrow I will be dead as well. What will I look like then? Like Wanda, chewed up by rats?

The author includes in her book a copy of the SS’s financial calculations about the profit the prisoners generate, an average of 1631 marks. When Lundholm was liberated in 1945, she was twenty-seven years old and reduced to a skeleton. When a woman who helped her asked for her name, she could not remember it; the only thing she recalled was ‘Youthere’ (‘Duda’), as the camp guards had addressed her.
Writing under National Socialism

Downfall

Surprisingly, a number of foreign authors and journalists stayed in Berlin until the very end and provided some of the more objective accounts of Berlin’s increasingly disturbing atmosphere. The Danish author Karen Blixen observes restaurant guests at the fin-de-siècle Adlon Hotel that contrasts with Berlin’s wartime greyness. The Swedish journalist Gösta Block witnesses a scene on the underground when a Nazi official grabs a seat from an old Jewish woman but is resisted by the entire train car. The Polish journalist Jacob Kronika describes the increasing scenes of destruction in the bombed-out city, among them a dead American fighter pilot sitting with his plane on top of a flower shop, or scenes of teenagers engaging in public sexual acts in a bomb shelter. As a result of the carpet-bombing, Berlin ceased to exist as such. What had been a ten-minute walk could take hours through areas of rubble and blocked streets. Increasingly Berlin took on the look of the uninhabited landscapes of the Eastern steppes. Berlin had lost its pride; its atmosphere was marked by tension, poverty, anger, prostitution and despair. Marie (Missy) Illarionovna Vassiltchikov’s volume Berliner Tagebücher (Berlin Diaries (1988)) is considered the best account of the carpet bombings. Vassiltchikov was a Russian émigré writer who spent the war years working with Adam von Trott in the German Foreign Office, where she was involved in the plot to assassinate Hitler in July 1944. Her diaries take on an air of the surreal as she writes about days with lunches at the Adlon and nights spent in ruined apartments gossiping about her noble friends planning the intended killing of Hitler.

Among the accounts of Berlin’s downfall, Marta Hiller’s and Traudl Junge’s are the best known. Eine Frau in Berlin (A Woman in Berlin) is the autobiographical account of Berlin women as rape victims of the Soviet Army, which was first published anonymously in 1954, and republished as a bestseller in 2003. The author has since been revealed as the journalist Marta Hiller. Traudl Junge’s Bis zur letzten Stunde (Until the Final Hour (2002)), about her work as Hitler’s secretary, began as a documentary film, Im toten Winkel (translated as Blindspot (2002)). Junge was taught to believe in Germany and was oblivious to the morbid implications of the Nazi ideology. She had access to Hitler’s inner circle and provides many vignettes on Hitler and the people around him. Moving within and outside Hitler’s bunker, Junge notes the vast differences between the unreal, suspended life on the inside and the raging, unstoppable destruction outside. She barely sees anything in Berlin other than what she perceives as the frightening labyrinth of the huge complex of the Reich Chancellery.
Meanwhile, by 1945, Hans Fallada knew that he had compromised everything, his existence as a writer, his personal morals and his life, and as a result he had a nervous breakdown and ended up in an institution. After returning from Moscow in 1945 the Expressionist poet and later Cultural Secretary of the GDR, Johannes R. Becher, persuaded Fallada to write a grand novel about the final days of the Nazis with a focus on resistance. As a member of the provisional Soviet government in Germany, Becher had access to Gestapo files, where he found the case of Elise and Otto Hampel, a couple who had been executed for distributing anti-Nazi material. As Becher relates, Fallada began writing Germany’s first resistance novel in 1945, based on the Hampel file.23 The resulting work, *Jeder stirbt für sich allein* (translated as *Every Man Dies Alone*, or *Alone in Berlin* (1947)), arguably Fallada’s most powerful, begins with the postwoman Eva Kluge delivering the mail door-to-door in a tenement building, starting with the family of the staunch Nazi Persicke, who used to own a Berlin pub, but has risen to prominence in the Nazi hierarchy. Kluge, who has kind words for all her letter recipients, then rings the Quangel’s doorbell, aware of the fateful content of the letter she bears – their son’s official death notice. Otto Quangel, who had been a middle-class craftsman, is now working for a company manufacturing mortar shell boxes and coffins. Other tenants are introduced, among them the retired state prosecutor Fromm and the Jewish widow Rosenthal. And along with the main characters in this apartment building, we encounter Eva Kluge’s husband, Enno, an occasional petty criminal who is connected to wartime Berlin’s underworld. The social mix of the tenement building setup allows the reader a glimpse into the secretive goings-on in the closed-off world of a country at war.

Fallada’s kaleidoscopic narrative, with its focus on petty fortune seekers, underscores Otto Quangel’s noble character, which is gradually developed throughout the story. The simple Berliner Otto Quangel sees his principles of fairness and justice violated by the Nazis and undergoes a major change in a key scene. Quangel and his son’s girlfriend, Trudel Baumann, meet in the former’s workplace in front of a Gestapo poster that displays resistance fighters who had been executed:

And a vision appears before him of how one day a poster with his own name and Anna’s and Trudel’s might be put up on the wall ... He shakes his head unhappily. He is a simple worker, he just wants peace and quiet, nothing to do with politics, and Anna just attends to the household and a lovely girl like Trudel will surely have found herself a new boyfriend before long ... But the vision won’t go away. Our names on the walls, he thinks, completely confused now. And why not? Hanging on the gallows is no worse than being ripped apart by a shell, or dying from a bullet in the guts. All that doesn’t matter.
Writing under National Socialism

The only thing that matter is this: I must find out what it is with Hitler. Suddenly all I see is oppression and hate and suffering, so much suffering ... ‘Papa’, she says, ‘I will never forget that when I stood crying over Otto, it was in front of a poster like this. Perhaps – I don’t want it to be – but perhaps it’ll be my name on a poster like that one day.’

The gruesome posters in the background represent the brutal Nazi reality Quangel had blocked out for so long, but which he is now forced to confront. As he quickly finds out, the girl has already gone much further in her resistance to the Nazis and joined an underground group. In this single scene, Fallada shows how the unremarkable character Quangel is transformed into a political being and resistance fighter. An encounter with Mrs. Rosenthal, whom his wife has been hiding in their apartment, hardens his resolve to act against the Nazis. He decides to act alone: ‘I don’t want to be dragged into other people’s funny business. If it is to be my head on the block, I want to know what it’s doing there, and not that it’s some stupid things that other people have done’. He is a loner who wants to take on the Nazis, and ultimately ready to die ‘alone in Berlin’, as the title of the British translation suggests. *Jeder stirbt für sich allein* follows Fallada’s fundamental artistic principle, whereby the environment – specifically that of National Socialist Berlin – triggers a reaction and transformation in the character, leading to life-and-death consequences. Since Quangel is a loner, he does not understand the destructive nature of the Nazis until the bitter end, and, when it is almost too late, he finally comes to his senses. Although he is not able to rebuild the destroyed city, he can give it back some dignity, at the price of his life.

Berlin’s destruction resulted in new forms both of common cause and isolation, of being together and of being alone in Berlin. Not unlike the Communists, the Nazis based their ideology on solidarity but embarked on a colossal distortion of how to build a society. The Communist resistance in Berlin provided strong examples of their ideology in their street novels, especially in the barricade novel, which would become the prime genre of resistance during the Nazi period. There is no such genre of Berlin literature written by Nazis during the Third Reich; *Hitlerjunge Quex* was published before 1933. Rather, most books written during the Nazi period were escapist and conceived either by authors of the Inner Emigration or by blood and soil authors. Escapism included escape from the realities of Berlin, as in *Barb, Roman einer deutschen Frau* (Barb, Novel of a German Woman (1933)) by Nazi writer Kuni Tremel-Eggert, who traces the trajectory of a woman from unhappy city life to a romantic country existence. In contrast to such kitschy popular writing, the majority of works of serious
literature during the Nazi period pay tribute to the victims of the Nazis, including Jews and resistance fighters, and the city of Berlin is a particular arena for that tribute. At the same time, there has hardly been a period in German literature where literary experimentation has played such a small role under the pressure – for more progressive writers – of the demand for sober testimony. The recent publication of Marie Jalowicz’s *Untergetaucht* indicates that more narratives in this testimonial mode may well appear in years to come.

NOTES

8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
16. Ellipsis in original.
20. Ibid. p. 176.
Writing under National Socialism

25. Ibid. p. 89.