Introduction

"HITLER SEEMS SO POPULAR HERE"

John F. Kennedy's Travels in Germany between Insight and Misperception

Oliver Lubrich

President Kennedy wants to visit Germany—in 1964 on the occasion of Adolf Hitler's seventy-fifth birthday. It is on this provocative idea that Robert Harris's bestseller *Fatherland,* published in 1992, is based, as is Christopher Menaul's film adaptation of the same name. In this nightmarish scenario, "Germania" has won the war in Europe and now wishes to obtain an accord with the United States, and it is Joseph P. Kennedy who, as president, wants to travel to Berlin. In reality, it was Joseph's son John F. Kennedy who went to the divided city in 1963 to make his legendary "Ich bin ein Berliner" speech.

What is much less well-known is that JFK undertook three journeys to Germany as a young man: in 1937 after his first year as a student at Harvard; in 1939 just before the beginning of World War II, when his father was the US ambassador to Britain; and in the summer of 1945 to attend, as a reporter, the conference of the victorious Allies in Potsdam, just outside Berlin. He thus came on different missions as a tourist, as an unofficial diplomat, and finally as a journalist. It was on these trips that he gained insights into dictatorial regimes, systemic conflicts, and the paths that lead toward war.

During these journeys, young Kennedy wrote texts that he never published. He kept a personal diary in 1937. In 1939 he wrote letters, and in 1945 he drafted press reports. These doc-

uments were edited in German under the title *John F. Kennedy: Unter Deutschen* (2013) and *John F. Kennedy: Das geheime Tagebuch* (2021), the latter of which focuses on Kennedy's diary from 1937 and includes that of his travel companion Lem Billings. Both diaries are published in English for the first time in the present volume. They demonstrate how Kennedy was interested in the Germans, how he tried to gain an understanding of their relationship with Hitler, and how his thoughts changed in the process.

In the contrafactual story in Robert Harris's novel, the fate of the world depends on Joseph P. Kennedy's visit to Berlin. At the same time, the trips that the young John F. Kennedy actually undertook had a profound impact and continue to raise far-reaching questions: What significance did Kennedy's German experiences have for his presidency of the United States? What role did they play in his policies toward Germany and Berlin? Can we better understand his development as a statesman by reference to his earlier notes?

Kennedy's time as US president from January 20, 1961, until his assassination on November 22, 1963, was marked by the competition between East and West and the danger of war. There were such dramatic events as the Bay of Pigs invasion on April 17, 1961, launched against the revolutionary government in Cuba. On August 13, 1961, there followed the Berlin crisis and the building of the Wall by East Germany's communist regime. These two crises took mankind close to another world war. Kennedy was grappling with similar challenges when he was traveling in Europe and Germany as a young man: How does a dictatorship work? How can a war be prevented? How does one deal with a society that is fundamentally different from one's own?

Kennedy first experienced totalitarian society when he visited Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany in 1937 and talked to refugees of the Spanish Civil War near the Spanish border in France.

He was able to follow the path that would ultimately lead to war when he visited Munich, Berlin, and Danzig in the summer of 1939: The Bavarian capital was the city where the crisis was de-escalated in 1938, when Hitler and the British prime minister Neville Chamberlain signed their agreement to keep the peace. Hitler's decision to tear up this agreement and attack Poland was subsequently taken in Berlin. And the invasion began in Danzig (after the Germans had staged a Polish attack on a radio station in Gleiwitz, then part of Germany). After World War II, Kennedy experienced the beginning of the Cold War when he stopped over in Potsdam near Berlin, where the victorious Allies were meeting to negotiate a new order.

Kennedy's connections with Germany, his public defense of (West) Berlin, his frequently quoted sentence that he uttered in German in front of an enthusiastic crowd on June 26, 1963, must be considered against the background of his familiarity with that country.

It was in the course of his earlier journeys that the future president slowly emancipated himself from his powerful father's political program—Joseph Kennedy was an advocate of keeping the United States out of Europe's conflicts and avoiding resistance against the dictators. This was the policy of "America First." His son shifted from this isolationist policy to one of intervention.

The early experiences of a man who later became a protagonist of global politics gain their significance in retrospect, but they are also worth studying in their original context. After all, Kennedy's diaries and statements provide examples of how foreigners experienced the German dictatorship on the spot and at the time. Their testimonial value is all the greater because they are direct recordings of Kennedy's observations—in different genres and without subsequent modifications.

How did Kennedy perceive the Third Reich in 1937, 1939, and 1945—i.e., during the consolidation of the regime, before

the war of aggression was launched, and after Hitler had been defeated? What insights are contained in his notes? But the questions we must also ask include, what errors, misperceptions, and blind spots become visible in hindsight?

1937—DICTATORSHIP

It was after his first year at Harvard that the twenty-year-old John, born on May 29, 1917, and nicknamed "Jack," undertook an extensive journey with Kirk LeMoyne Billings ("Lem," 1916–1981), a friend from Choate Preparatory School in Wallingford, Connecticut, who went on to study at Princeton. It was to be an educational trip, but also a fun one—a grand tour of Europe. They brought a Ford convertible across the Atlantic with them, and they drove it first through France to the Spanish border. Their next stops were Italy, Austria, and Germany before continuing to the Netherlands and Belgium, and finally they traveled by boat across the Channel to Britain.

On the way, Kennedy began to keep a diary. On the cover of this bound notebook was printed the generic title: "My Trip Abroad." It runs to some ninety pages, with entries made by the day. There is no indication that Kennedy changed any of his entries afterward, thereby preserving an unadulterated picture of the way he saw things at the time. This diary covers personal, cultural, and political aspects of the visit.

At first glance, it appears as if the two college students had a good deal of fun during their summer vacation. They met with friends, went to the movies, and enjoyed themselves in bars. In Munich they visited the famous Hofbräuhaus, followed by a night club. They went to the cinema to see the Hollywood movie *Swing High, Swing Low,* a love story featuring Carole Lombard. Women were a frequent topic of conversation. When they crossed the border into the Third Reich, Kennedy

records rather light-heartedly that they "picked up a bundle of fun." It seems that this is a reference to a young woman, Johanna, to whom they gave a lift. Johanna also seems to be the person whom Kennedy subsequently refers to as "Her Ladyship," as she was not happy with the simple accommodation that they found, which Kennedy writes sarcastically about on two occasions.

However, it is also possible that he is mocking his friend Lem Billings for whom he never stopped inventing new nicknames.

Kennedy's diary contains many references to flirts, dates, and sexual conquests. Lem apparently did not have such affairs; for all we know, Lem was gay—and in love with Jack. When he made advances to him at school, Kennedy casually rejected them in a letter without letting it affect their relationship, as David Pitts reports in his double biography, *Jack and Lem: The Untold Story of an Extraordinary Friendship*. One of JFK's closest friends, Billings later visited him in the White House, where he stayed in one of the guest rooms. There are passages in Kennedy's diary where his companion appears as a comic figure. As Kennedy's sidekick, Lem is subjected to a fair amount of amicable mockery: for smelling of French cuisine or when he is forced to sprint or when he falls ill, of all places, in the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes. The Protestant Billings has to spend hours in the nave of Notre Dame, while his Catholic friend succeeds in getting a seat near the altar. In the end, Kennedy unceremoniously leaves Lem with the car in Boulogne and takes a mail steamer across to Britain.

In Germany, Kennedy and Billings acquired another companion: a dachshund that they named after Carmel Offie, the US ambassador's secretary in Paris. The journey of the two Americans in Nazi Germany in the company of a pet is reminiscent of the strange trip undertaken by the novelist Virginia Woolf, who had traversed the country two years earlier with her domesticated monkey "Mitz" in the hope of distracting the

native population and authorities from her and her Jewish husband. Woolf recorded her own reactions to fascism in her diary.

The dachshund exacerbated a problem that played an important role in Kennedy's life: his poor health. He suffered from allergies and developed a skin rash that was quite worrying. He spent his life in pain from chronic ailments affecting his stomach, his intestines, and his backbone. As Billings liked to joke, if he would ever write a biography of his friend, it would be titled *John F. Kennedy: A Medical History*.

All these details receive a passing mention in Kennedy's diary. His style is laconic. His boyish humor is reflected in a somewhat careless writing style, but also in dry, ironic sentences, and it is not always easy to immediately capture his meaning. Thus, he compiles a list of all hotels and hostels, marking with a star those where he has been told he is "not [a] gentleman!" A total of ten of these establishments receive this arbitrary distinction, and two receive a second star. As Billings was not as well-heeled, the two stayed in inexpensive guesthouses or youth hostels—and their behavior was less than exemplary. Repeated references appear to angry proprietors demanding payment or responding to physical damage the two caused.

At the same time, the two students from elite institutions clearly exhibited interest in European culture. They took a sightseeing tour. Kennedy's diary mentions visits to cathedrals in Rouen, Beauvais, Notre Dame, and Orléans, the Dome in Milan, and the Domes of St. Peter and Cologne. They visited and admired the chateaux of Thierry, Fontainebleau, Versailles, Chambord, Blois, Amboise, and Chenonceau, as well as the castles along the Rhine. Their list also includes museums such as the Louvre, the Vatican, and the German Museum in Munich. Kennedy records visits to historical sites such as Invalides Cathedral, Lourdes, the Colosseum, Castel Sant'Angelo, and Pompeii, and he remarks on encountering Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* in Milan and Michelangelo's *David* in Florence.

A faithful Catholic, Kennedy attended Mass during his visit to Cologne's cathedral, where his admiration of Gothic architecture is evident. He mentions the Passion plays in the Bavarian Oberammergau and specifically Anton Lang, who played Christ on stage and gained international fame in this role.

The two tourists also drove to Garmisch-Partenkirchen, which the Hitler regime had selected for the Olympic winter games. At the German Museum in Munich, Kennedy and Billings admired the displays of mining and aircraft technologies as expressions of German perfectionism. Both of them highlight in their notes the beauty of the Rhine River valley, with its picturesque villages and castles, but they also note the modernity of the autobahns that had been built with military uses in mind.

Among their exploits as students and impressions as tourists, Kennedy includes a series of political observations that are of particular interest from a contemporary perspective. Several earlier issues during their trip influence his subsequent attitudes toward Nazi Germany. Thus, it was shortly after their arrival in France that the two friends visited the battlefields of World War I at Chemin des Dames and Fort de la Pompelle, the damaged cathedrals of Soissons and Reims, and the American war cemetery near Château-Thierry. At the border between France and Spain they could see the Basque town of Irún that Franco's forces had destroyed, and they also met refugees who told them about their horrendous experiences. Irún is not far from the town of Guernica, which had been severely damaged by bombs of the German "Condor Legion." Pablo Picasso's triptych commemorating this attack was shown in the Spanish Pavilion at the World Exposition in Paris (May 25 to November 25, 1937), which Kennedy and Billings visited. There they saw the monumental pavilions of Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union that stood juxtaposed next to the Eiffel Tower as architectural monuments of a conflict between opposing systems of government.

Kennedy also attended a Mass held by Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli who, before becoming Pope Pius XII in 1939, had been the apostolic delegate to Nazi Germany and who in 1933 signed the Vatican's Concordat with the Hitler government. Pacelli was a friend of Kennedy's father Joseph.

John Kennedy had taken courses in political history during his first year at Harvard, but he realized that his knowledge was still quite patchy. Thus, he misspells the word "Fascism" as "Facism" throughout his diary. He also concedes that it is easy to be influenced by others, "if you know nothing." However, he is keen to improve his knowledge—almost like a political journalist or a junior anthropologist doing field research. He is influenced by the book *Inside Europe* (1936) by the American journalist John Gunther, which provides a panorama of the most important European countries with their different societal systems and leading personalities. Wherever they traveled, the two students interviewed indigenous people or gave hitchhikers lifts, among them German soldiers, but also an anti-Nazi. Kennedy was able to talk to Enrico Galeazzi, Pacelli's secretary, and with Arnaldo Cortesi, the Italian bureau chief of the *New York Times.* They informed him of the "advantages" of Italian Fascism and in particular its "Corporatism" as a system of statist mediation between divergent interests. As Kennedy records rather gullibly, but with hesitation, "it really seemed to have its points." Looking at daily life, he writes that "Fa[s]cism seems to treat them well." However, he was aware of the fact that Mussolini has started a colonial war in 1935/36 and had occupied Ethiopia.

Their trip through Germany took the two students to places that had played a prominent role in the Nazification of the country. These included, above all, Munich, the "capital of the movement" of National Socialism, infamous also as the location where Hitler attempted to overthrow the Weimar Republic in November 1923. They also stopped in Nuremberg—the city of the annual Nazi Party rallies—which they saw in the form of

a scale model at the World Exposition in Paris and where, on August 19 and 20, 1937, they just missed the arrival of Hitler. With the "Reich Party Rally of Labor" taking place from September 6 to 13, 1937, Lem Billings, looking back on the visit, later admitted they always regretted that they did not stay longer to see Hitler in person.

Thanks to the survival of both Kennedy's and Billing's diaries, we are in a position to compare two impressions of the same journey. Both documents overlap in many respects, in some cases even literally. This is probably due to the fact that the two friends exchanged their observations spontaneously and then recorded them in parallel. However, there are not only variations with respect to some details but also differences in emphasis. While Kennedy is interested in political questions, Billings foregrounds his art-historical observations. Thus, the notes of the latter repeatedly mention that Kennedy had a "political talk" (that Billings apparently did not join)—be it with the executive director of a champagne winery or with the correspondent of the *New York Times* in Rome. Framed by his often-trivial experiences as a tourist, Billings's political commentaries are sparse, superficial compared to Kennedy's. Yet they coincide with Kennedy's analyses, in particular when it comes to Hitler's and Mussolini's obedient followers and totalitarian propaganda. Thus it is Billings who observes in Germany that "Hitler seems very popular here—you can't help but like a dictator when you are in his own country—as you hear so many wonderful things about him and really no bad things.—Hitler's strongest weapon seems to be his very efficient propaganda."

In comparing the two testimonies, we get an idea of how one could travel and perceive Europe and Germany in 1937. Billings's diary shows how an educated and informed person could make rather personal observations on cultural aspects, without paying much attention to the political situation. Conversely, by reading Kennedy's notes in parallel with Billings's, his words

gain in importance. The more private quality of Billings's notes enables us to gain a better understanding of Kennedy's efforts to focus on politics.

The two stayed less than a week in Germany—August 17–22, 1937. Apart from writing about Garmisch-Partenkirchen and Oberammergau, Munich, and Nuremberg, they also discuss their visits to Frankfurt and Württemberg (or do they mean Würzburg?), their trip along the Rhine, their arrival in Cologne, and their departure for the Netherlands.

Their 1937 trip took place in an intermediate period of apparent calm. Following the Olympic Games of 1936, when the Hitler regime tried to impress its many visitors from all over the world by putting up an elaborate façade of success, Hitler began a series of aggressive foreign policy moves, exacerbated by the Anschluss of Austria in 1938 and the occupation of the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia. In November 1938, the Nazi regime unleashed the pogrom against its Jewish population. If one went to Germany in the summer of 1937, though, it was still possible to tour the country under seemingly "normal" circumstances. While much could be overlooked or misunderstood, one also had a chance to gain insights into the Nazi dictatorship, and this coexistence of insight and misperception makes Kennedy's observations especially worthwhile, also in light of his later attitudes as president of the United States.

At the same time, the two friends were not the only foreign tourists who saw the Third Reich from the inside and documented their impressions. The novelist Thomas Wolfe, for example, had visited Germany several times and had even declared it his country of choice. But he abandoned it in 1937, when he described in a confessional short story his shock of witnessing the persecution of Germany's Jews during his trip a year earlier. The title he chose: "I Have a Thing to Tell You." Samuel Beckett, who stayed in Germany for half a year in 1936/37, kept a diary

that is riddled with many German expressions. In it he spoke of a growing frustration with the *Gleichschaltung*, which he observed with regard to literature, the arts, the media, and society at large. As he put it: "what a Schererei [aggravation] this trip is becoming." He concluded: "Soon I shall really begin to puke. Or go home." Even more provocatively, Jean Genet saw the "Third Reich" in 1937 as a vagrant. He noted that the criminality he had been idealizing in order to set himself apart from French bourgeois society had penetrated the whole of Germany: "This is a people of thieves" ["C'est un peuple de voleurs"]. He had to realize, "If I steal here, I commit no singular act" ["Si je vole ici je n'accomplis aucune action singulière"].

The American filmmaker Julien Bryan, who traveled in Germany at the same time as John F. Kennedy, filmed peasants during harvesttime and children in a Jewish school, but also veterans and soldiers in uniform, autobahns, and warplanes. He attended the Nuremberg Party Rally that Kennedy and Billings had missed and dubbed it the greatest "show" on earth. Overwhelmed by what he saw, he added that American football games were nothing in comparison.

The African American sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois wrote weekly reports of a five-month research trip to Germany in 1936 for the *Pittsburgh Courier.* He had undertaken the journey in order to compare the situation of the Jews in Germany with that of the Black population back home. He was astounded that he did not experience any discrimination at all: "I cannot get over the continual surprise of being treated like a human being." As a Black man he was received "with uniform courtesy" in all places in Hitler's Germany. He experienced no offensive behavior, which would have been "impossible" in the United States over such a long period under conditions of racist segregation. At the same time, Du Bois knew all too well that German racism was directed much more sharply against another minority: "There is a campaign of race prejudice [. . .] against the Jews

which surpasses in vindictive cruelty and public insult anything I have ever seen; and I have seen much."

In comparison with the statements by these witnesses, the private notes of John F. Kennedy and Lem Billings reflect how they experienced National Socialism at the same time—spontaneously, without later emendations, without knowledge of hindsight, with the eyes of strangers, and without German inhibitions.

It is only later that their experiences appear unambiguous. As Billings remembered three decades after their journey: "We disliked the whole setup. We left there with a very bad taste in our mouths." This clear assessment does not tally with Billings's own notes or with the entries in Kennedy's diary that contain everyday banalities, superficial impressions, and naïve misperceptions by two young tourists, side by side with occasional doubts and critical evaluations.

From a contemporary perspective it is irritating to read the stereotypes the travelers used to apparently gain some firm ground under their feet. After visiting a bullfight, Kennedy concludes that Spaniards love violence. The French are deemed to be negligent in respect of hygiene: a "primitive nation" with "cabbage breath." The Italians strike him as "the nosiest race in existence," but "regimented," "the whole race seems more attractive." There are similar clichés in Billings's account, and he even uses racist terms such as "to gyp," meaning to deceive someone. Another word is "wob," derogatorily used for Italians or Italian Americans. Ethno-psychological prejudices or speculations like these even lead Kennedy to the daring conclusion that "Fa[s]cism is the thing for Germany and Italy, Communism for Russia and democracy for America and England."

Even in their great enthusiasm for the beauty of the Rhineland, the travelers provide disturbing commentary. As Billings remarks: "All these German towns are very attractive—clean + well planned out. This is certainly a great difference from the dirty little Italian towns that we have gotten to dislike so much.

The Germans seem to do everything well—and their only trouble is that they are a little to[o] con[s]cious of it." Kennedy's notes are even more troubling: "All the towns are very attractive, showing that the Nordic races certainly seem superior to the Latins. The Germans really are too good—it makes people gang against them for protection . . ." Even though these are private notes, the diarist is quite careful here, whether involuntarily or consciously. The verb "seem," contrasting so strangely with the adverb "certainly," relativizes the statement—just as in other places in the diary—as a superficial impression. The terse yet intensified adjective ("too good") can also be read ironically or sardonically. And the points of omission at the end indicate a certain openness, unfinishedness, or uncertainty. The strange remark nevertheless testifies to the fact that the author—as already in Italy and now also in Germany—was deceived by the impression of public order in the dictatorship.

Reluctant and ambivalent responses can also be found among other foreign travelers who visited Nazi Germany during those years. When the Swiss writer Max Frisch reported for *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* in 1935, his article on a racist exhibition in Berlin reflected a mix of moral alienation and technical admiration. As late as the first year of the war, 1940, the Danish author Karen Blixen was sufficiently impressed by Hitler's disproportionately large new buildings to refer to them as "the greatest aesthetic achievement," provoking "profound admiration" and yet maintaining a "ghost-like" quality. In a piece written by Heinrich Hauser, who had emigrated to the United States, entitled "Berlin in the Summer of 1939," the author pinpoints the contradictory impressions that a foreign visitor could carry away from two different guided tours through Berlin: the first was led by an official Nazi spokesman, the second by an opponent of the regime.

Similar ambivalences can be found in many other reports. Numerous visitors vacillated between attraction and repulsion, or they changed their attitudes as they experienced the dicta-

torship over the course of their stay. Thus Martha Dodd, the daughter of the US ambassador to Germany William Edward Dodd, who was stationed in Berlin from 1933 to 1937, experienced several contradictory twists and turns in her attitudes toward the Nazi regime. In her memoirs *My Years in Germany* (or *Through Embassy Eyes*), published before the outbreak of the war, she mentions how she had a romanticized view of the country, how she sided with the Germans and even the Nazis at first and ignored early irritations. When observing anti-Semitic violence in the streets, she managed her growing insecurity by resorting to sarcasm and making even worse political judgments before the news of Nazi terror, torture, and concentration camps had a sobering effect on her. All the while, her aesthetic and even erotic attraction to the country and its people continued until she arrived at a strictly rejectionist position, at which point she even began to support the Communist underground movement. In the end, Martha Dodd insistently and with clear eyes warned her fellow Americans that Hitler would plunge the world into a war and that he was planning the "liquidation" of the Jews.

Looking back, Lem Billings describes the growing maturity of his friend Jack quite straightforwardly:

> There was a noticeable change in Jack Kennedy. In the summer of 1937, he had just completed his freshman year at Harvard and he was beginning to show more interest and more of a desire to think out the problems of the world and to record his ideas. [. . .] He insisted, for instance, that we pick up every German hitchhiker. This worked out very well because a high percentage of them were students and could speak English. In that way, we learned a great deal about Germany. I remember picking up two German soldiers who were on leave. [. . .] They were with us for a week and we gathered that their general attitude was pro-Hitler.

> We picked up another German student who was very anti-Hitler. He is probably dead now.

The European journey during the summer of 1937 amounted to a kind of political initiation. As Billings puts it, Kennedy "was absolutely overcome with interest in the Hitler movement." Kennedy was particularly interested in its public display. As he observes, the media had a major share in promoting the popularity of the dictators: "Hitler seems so popular here as Mussolini was in Italy, although propagand[a] seems to be his strongest weapon." He thought the outside world did not fully appreciate the extent to which this popularity was artificially produced or reinforced: "These dictators are more popular in the country than outside due to their effective propaganda." Such insights into media communication would later be useful to Kennedy in his campaigns, first for Congress, then for the Senate, and finally for the US presidency.

Kennedy posed a number of questions at the end of his diary: Just how popular is Mussolini? Will the alliance between Hitler and Mussolini hold? How does the Spanish Civil War unfold? Can Britain's rearmament diminish the danger of a large-scale war? What is the role of France? Or the Soviet Union? Would fascism be possible in the United States? Is fascism the final stage of capitalism? Is it a prelude to communism? The diary concludes with the feelings of doubt on the part of the observer who asks these questions and who wrestles with these problems, his last sentence being: "Is this true?"

On August 22, 1937, the day of his departure from Germany, Kennedy's diary entry concludes with observations of the mansion of the exiled German emperor Wilhelm II at Doorn in the Netherlands. It is, Kennedy notes, "entirely surrounded by barbed wire." His report on Germany thus ends with a reference to Germany's earlier attempt to become a world power, with "barbed wire" being his last word.

1939—WAR

Kennedy made his second trip to Germany shortly before the beginning of World War II. While his father represented the United States as ambassador to London, Jack spent a semester in Europe to do research for his senior thesis at Harvard. He wrote about the policies of appeasement by the democratic states. These had culminated in the Munich Agreement of September 29/30, 1938, in which the Sudetenland was handed to Hitler: "Appeasement at Munich," as he titled his thesis. Kennedy, the student of political science, focused on the question of how the aggressive German dictatorship, which he had witnessed from the inside two years earlier, should be treated by outside powers and how war could be avoided, above all through a timely rearmament program. After submitting his work in the following year, he decided to publish a revised version under the telling title *Why England Slept.* This title is a play on the book of a similar name, *While England Slept*, by Winston Churchill, who had published his analysis of British policy in 1938. A joke circulated at the expense of Joseph P. Kennedy, who had favored appeasing Hitler, suggesting that the title should have been *While Daddy Slept.* The slim book became a bestseller.

As he was studying British appeasement und American isolationism, Kennedy ran into Charles Lindbergh—one of the most prominent advocates of "America First," a friend of his father's, and a pioneer of aviation—at the American embassy in Paris. Lindbergh had visited Nazi Germany repeatedly, and on one occasion Hermann Göring, the chief of the Luftwaffe, had informed him of the construction of the German air force and given him a decoration.

As tensions rose in Europe during the summer of 1939 and the outbreak of war appeared likely, Kennedy immersed himself more deeply in German foreign policy. From his base in

London, but also during visits to France, he took several trips to an increasingly turbulent European continent. However, his travels were also semiofficial explorations in the service of his father. As his movements became in many ways quite hectic, he no longer kept a continuous diary but instead sent intermittent situation reports to his father's embassy, complemented by letters to his friend Lem Billings.

He traveled to Danzig, the city around which the crisis began to escalate; it became the initiation point for the German invasion on 1 September 1939. Writing to Billings about the "Free City" that looked as if it already belonged to Germany, Kennedy concludes that "Danzig is completely Nazified—much heiling of Hitler." The formula "completely Nazified" coincides with the assessment of William Shirer, the well-known American journalist who had visited the city on August 11, 1939, and recorded his observations in his *Berlin Diary.*

Kennedy exploited the opportunities that opened up to him as the delegate of a US ambassador: "Talked with the Nazi heads and all the consuls up there." What follows is an analysis of geostrategic, political, and diplomatic factors that is much more complex and coherent than the observations he had jotted down in his diary in 1937. He even reinforces his deliberations by including a map drawn in his own hand.

Kennedy assumes mistakenly that Hitler is prepared to compromise, provided he can assert himself against foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop "and the radicals" who are bent on war. Although he continues to hope that war can be prevented, his prediction for the opposite case will be true: "What Germany will do if she decides to go to war—will be to try to put Poland in the position of being the ag[g]ressor—and then go to work." And indeed on August 31, 1939, German agents dressed in Polish uniforms staged the Gleiwitz radio station incident in Silesia, which the Nazis used as pretext for their attack on Poland that unleashed World War II.

In his letters from London of July 17, 1939, and from Berlin of August 30, 1939, Kennedy makes further reference to the Danzig crisis. In the first, he notes that propaganda (which had already intrigued him in 1937) had developed a fateful dynamic of its own: "I still don't think there will be a war, but it looks quite bad, as the Germans have gone so far internally with their propaganda stories on Danzig + the [Polish] corridor that it is hard to see them backing down. England seems firm this time, but as that is not completely understood here, the big danger lies in the Germans counting on another Munich + thus finding themselves in a war when Chamberlain refuses to give in."

Kennedy undertook his trip to Germany in 1939, accompanied by his Harvard roommate Torbert Macdonald (1917–1976), who had come to Britain for a sports competition—and became a member of Congress after 1945. Joseph Kennedy had admonished his son to avoid conflicts with ordinary Germans at all costs, thereby pursuing private "appeasement" as well. In Munich in July, they ran into Byron "Whizzer" White, who was a football star—and was later nominated by JFK to the Supreme Court. What Kennedy's father had feared promptly happened: they found themselves in a brawl with some Nazi storm troopers. According to Macdonald's account, Kennedy, White, and himself had driven their car close to a monument that commemorated Horst Wessel, a young SA-Sturmführer who had died in 1930 in a violent clash between Nazis and Communists:

> we went by this monument to some beer hall hero, *Worst Hessel* or something, and we slowed down to take a look. Some stormtrooper types had a flame burning, and they started to yell. At that time, I didn't know who Horst Wessel was, frankly, I thought just a guy who was some sort of a local hero—so we stopped. They started getting rough; we were yelling back, and they started throwing bricks at the car. As we drove the car away, I turned to Jack and said,

> "What the hell is wrong with them? What's this all about? We weren't doing anything." And Whizzer explained it: the car we were driving had English plates on it.

On their return to France, "Jack" and "Torb" rented a car that they drove to the Kennedys' vacation home on the Côte d'Azur. But on August 12 they departed for Germany once more. As Kennedy writes to his father, in Munich they attended a performance of Richard Wagner's opera *Tannhäuser.* Next they drove to Vienna, which had been incorporated into Hitler's Reich. Finally, they arrived at Prague through Nazi-occupied Sudetenland. It is a journey that should have been off-limits for them. US-American diplomat George F. Kennan, then posted in the Czech capital, remembered how unwilling his office was to organize this visit of Ambassador Kennedy's son, whom he considered "an upstart and an ignoramus":

> In those days, as the German forces advanced like encroaching waves over all the borders of Bohemia, no trains were running, no planes were flying, no frontier stations existed. Yet in the midst of this confusion we received a telegram from the embassy in London, the sense of which was that our ambassador there, Mr. Joseph Kennedy, had chosen this time to send one of his young sons on a fact-finding tour around Europe, and it was up to us to find means of getting him across the border and through the German lines so that he could include in his itinerary a visit to Prague. We were furious. Joe Kennedy was not exactly known as a friend of the career service, and many of us, from what we had heard about him, cordially reciprocated this lack of enthusiasm. His son had no official status and was, in our eyes, obviously an upstart and an ignoramus. The idea that there was anything he could learn or report about conditions in Europe which we did not already know

> and had not already reported seemed (and not without reason) wholly absurd. That busy people should have their time taken up arranging his tour struck us as outrageous. With that polite but weary punctiliousness that characterizes diplomatic officials required to busy themselves with pesky compatriots who insist on visiting places where they have no business to be, I arranged to get him through the German lines, had him escorted to Prague, saw to it that he was shown what he wanted to see, expedited his departure, then, with a feeling of "that's that," washed my hands of him—as I thought. Had anyone said to me then that the young man in question would some day be the President of the United States and that I, in the capacity of chief of a diplomatic mission, would be his humble and admiring servant, I would have thought that either my informant or I had taken leave of our senses. It was one of the great lessons of life when memory of the episode returned to me, as I sat one day in my Belgrade office many years later, and the truth suddenly and horribly dawned.

When the nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union was announced on August 23, 1939, journalist William Shirer wrote in his Berlin Diary: "Great excitement." And on August 23: "What a *turn* events have taken in the last forty-eight hours."—"It looks like war tonight." Antiaircraft guns were positioned on rooftops. Air force planes flew over the German capital. According to one anecdote, the chargé d'affaires of the US Mission in Berlin, Alexander Kirk, entrusted young Jack Kennedy with a diplomatic message for his father, the ambassador in London: Within a week, Germany would strike.

Kennedy's reports from the summer of 1939 were written under this tense historical moment. At the same time, however, he complains with characteristic sarcasm—on the stationery of the Berlin Hotel Excelsior, no less—about the German food ("one

week of these German meals"), the consequences of which were already showing on him. The cynical jokes, the tales of parties and affairs, which took up a lot of space in the 1937 diary, can also be found on the eve of the world war: Kennedy reports about his trip from Warsaw that "it was pretty good fun."

John F. Kennedy predicts in his report on the situation in Danzig that if Poland surrendered the city to the Germans, it would give control of its export lanes to Hitler. But as he writes, he lapses into anti-Semitic stereotype. The Germans, as he puts it, would be able to force "Jew merchants" to dispatch their goods through the lost port. It is striking that this terminology appears in the Kennedy documents, even if anti-Semitic remarks were nothing particularly unusual in the social environment through which he was moving. Kennedy's elder brother Joe, who was traveling in Europe at the same time, in a letter to his father of June 10, 1939, is much blunter in his references to Jews and his rejection of their immigration into the United States. Like his father, he is very firmly of the opinion that the United States should not involve itself in the European crisis, which means that he also distances himself from the policies of US president Franklin Roosevelt and his secretary of state, Cordell Hull:

> Before Mr. Hull and Mr. Roosevelt ask me to go over and fight because an American ship is sunk or some tourist is killed by the Germans, I want them to answer me the following questions. What do they think would be the economic and political effect of German domination of Europe and having licked England and France? How much trade would we lose and how would it effect us? [*sic*] [. . .] Do we want to get frightfully aroused by the treatment of the Jews when Cath[olics] and others were murdered more cruelly in Russia and in Republican Spain and not a word of protest came? Do we want an increasing anti-Semitism in our country brought about by the production of forty

> thousand Jews and political undesirables in our country from Europe [. . .]?

In other words, Joe Jr. articulates here his father's advocacy of isolationism, a policy leaving Europe's dictators to deal with their victims. It was a position that Joe's younger brother gradually abandoned.

> Are we going to fight for the liberties of the people of the world when [it] is really none of our damned business but is up to the people in those countries themselves? Are we going to guarantee liberty in every country [in] the world and if there isn't that liberty, are we going to march in? Are we going to yell bloody murder when the Italians go into Ethiopia and Spain and the Germans in Czechoslovakia and then do nothing about it except to call the English cowards for not fighting? [. . .] Does it ever occur to people that there are happy people in Italy and Germany?

When on August 21, 1939, Joe Jr. met with the British aristocrat Unity Mitford, he nonetheless expressed abhorrence for the Nazi sympathizer and admirer of Hitler: "She is the most fervent Nazi imaginable, and is probably in love with Hitler." Meanwhile, instead of a British Nazi sympathizer, his younger brother John met with Marlene Dietrich, the famous German actress in exile, in Antibes. She was accompanied by the writer Erich Maria Remarque, the author of the antiwar novel *All Quiet on the Western Front.* Dietrich mentions in her memoirs that during this last summer of peace she met young Jack Kennedy, who asked her for a dance.

Kennedy's travels through the Third Reich triggered erotic and cinematic fantasies. This is shown by the two-part television production *JFK: Reckless Youth* (directed by Harry Winer, 1993, starring Patrick Dempsey). An episode that is particu-

larly laden with clichés stages the trip with Torbert Macdonald through Italy and Germany in the summer of 1939 (and also incorporates elements of the 1937 trip with Lem Billings). Kennedy's relationship to fascism is consistently sexualized here. Right at the beginning, the Americans pick up a German hitchhiker, the red-haired Beate, who combines both the allure and the danger of her country in the classic double role of saint and seductress. She appears in front of a statue of the Virgin Mary and ends up in bed with the hero in the next scene, while a fascist march is heard outside. Afterward, a chamber concert (Wagner, of course) sends her into an agitation that apparently only Germans can feel. "You're not German," she explains to the American. And the latter wonders: "How can a country produce so much beauty and at the same time so much violence?"

As he struggles to get to the bottom of this question, Kennedy approaches the Germans in an uncanny way—namely erotically. In a beer cellar, as the "Horst Wessel Song" is sung, a sexual rivalry ensues with Beate's German lover. The lover corresponds to the stereotypical elegant film Nazi and wears a black fantasy uniform, somewhere between a traditional costume, an SS uniform, and existentialist dandy attire. He has the pseudo-Prussian name Joachim von Hildenstein, but he has studied at Oxford and speaks appropriate English. It is only here that Kennedy says a few words in German, and about beer, the metaphor of German intoxication: "Das ist gut" (That's good).

The relationship to Germany is an underlying leitmotif of the series, which retells Kennedy's life from childhood to his first electoral success. Thus, the Nazi dictatorship is jokingly compared to the regime led by the principal of his boarding school in Connecticut. The appeal of "German hitchhikers" is alluded to. When the father/ambassador sends Jack and Torb on their journey, he ironically equates them with Adolf Hitler as ruthless seducers: "If they think Hitler is bad, wait till they see you two." Later, Kennedy's lover Inga Arvad, a Danish journalist who has

met Adolf Hitler, comes under suspicion of being a German spy. She too represents a German temptation that combines beauty and fascism. Kennedy asks, while Inga seduces him: "Is this the way you interviewed Hitler?" In more ways than one, the series is a symptom.

Exhibiting similar ambivalence, Francine Mathews stages Kennedy's relationship to Nazism in her spy thriller *Jack 1939*, published in 2012. The novel by the former CIA employee is based on the fictive assumption that President Roosevelt hires the twenty-two-year-old ambassador's son as a special agent in the spring of 1939. JFK's mission is to spy on a European Nazi network—in which, embarrassingly, his father Joe Kennedy Sr. is involved—that wants to influence the presidential elections in the United States. The role of the elegant sadist ("a connoisseur—of food, of music, of violence") and the diabolical seducer ("his hand at her back was intoxicating") is played here by Reinhard Heydrich, the head of the Gestapo. Kennedy competes with him for the same woman as his assignment takes him to Berlin, Danzig, Moscow, Vienna, Prague, and Warsaw. In the process, the American secret agent loses the mysterious mistress to the German secret police chief. Plagued by jealous fantasies, he follows the two across the continent. As the men take turns having sex with the same partner, an indirect erotic relationship obscenely develops between the future organizer of the "Final Solution" and the future president of the United States. Kennedy even imagines that he feels Heydrich's touch on his lover's skin with his own body ("Jack could almost feel the imprint of his thumb on her flesh"), while Heydrich, conversely, should feel that she is distracted by his clandestine presence ("Would Heydrich feel her sudden awareness through his fingers in her arm?"). When he discovers the double game being played by the beautiful woman with the ambiguous name, Diana Playfair (hunter and game), Heydrich has her killed. Kennedy reproaches himself for not saving her, conjuring the

political allegory of the United States' and England's inability to save Poland: "What sort of man," he wonders, "left the girl he loved to sadists and knives?" As he looks at himself in the mirror, he seems to have transformed into the image of Heydrich. For what he sees is a murderer—"a killer's face."

1945—FASCINATION

The extent to which not only the fictional but also the historical Kennedy traced his sinister fascination with National Socialism is shown in accounts of his next trip to Germany. Kennedy himself makes an attempt to understand the impact of a charismatic personality by following Adolf Hitler's footsteps. He does so by the end of his 1945 account, after visiting a ruined country.

After the liberation of the concentration and extermination camps, Kennedy tries to uncover the Germans' attraction to Hitler. Before writing about this topic, he examines a number of political, military, and economic problems in the report on his visit to Germany's bombed-out cities. But he also witnesses the beginnings of the Cold War, which would so profoundly define his later policies as US president. How does Kennedy experience the early phase of this confrontation between East and West? What does he report on the Red Army that he is able to observe in Germany at close range? What does he have to say about the situation of the defeated country, its division into zones of occupation, and Allied occupation policies more generally? And what are the insights he has gained into the character of the Third Reich after its demise?

Having returned home shortly before the outbreak of World War II, Kennedy observed the unfolding of the European struggle against Hitler and Mussolini until he decided to join the US Army officer training program in 1940. Though he was rejected on medical grounds, as he suffered from chronic back problems,

in September 1941 he was admitted to the Naval Reserve. There he was promoted to junior lieutenant, and, after the United States had entered the war in December 1941, he saw action in the Pacific as a torpedo boat commander aboard *PT-109*. In a battle against the Japanese, his boat was rammed and sunk, but despite being badly injured, he survived to serve in further missions during 1943/44. He commanded *PT-59*, was injured again, and spent the next months in a military hospital until December 1944. Having been honorably discharged and receiving several decorations, he retired from the US Navy in the spring of 1945 and began work as a journalist, a job that took him to the Allied conference at Potsdam in the summer of 1945.

He thus arrived at the Potsdam Conference that took place from July 17 till August 2, 1945, attending as a war veteran and a professional observer. He had been hired by the International News Service founded by media mogul William Randolph Hearst. After he had written a number of articles on the signing of the Charter of the United Nations at San Francisco on June 26, 1945, he traveled to Britain where elections to the Lower House took place on July 5, 1945, that ended in a victory for the Labour Party and the rise of Clement Attlee as Churchill's successor.

On his trip to Berlin and then to Potsdam, Kennedy accompanied US secretary of the navy James Forrestal, another friend of his father's. The Western Allies were represented at Potsdam by US president Harry S. Truman and secretary of state James Byrnes and British prime minister Attlee and his foreign secretary Ernest Bevin. On the Soviet side, Joseph Stalin and his foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov had flown in from Moscow. This enabled him to observe the key actors up close. Kennedy encountered Truman (1945–1953) and Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953–1961), his presidential predecessors. It is possible that he participated as part of Forrestal's group in a breakfast meeting with the new US president. There is a photo that shows him

at Frankfurt airport just behind Eisenhower, the supreme commander of US forces in Europe.

His methods of travel and observation remained the same. In 1937, he had given hitchhikers lifts and made it his habit to ask people he met about politics. In 1939, he had had access to diplomats and talked to Nazi leaders and consuls while in Danzig. In 1945, he tried to strike up conversations with Allied military administrators such as Colonel Frank Howley, foreign correspondents such as Pierre Huss, and ordinary Germans, including "a German girl," more likely to have been a young woman.

Again Kennedy keeps a "European Diary." Rather than chronological experiences and thoughts he records more detailed and coherent observations, so the result reads like a reporter's travel account. On his flight from Paris to Berlin, he sees bombed-out cities and damaged railroad stations. Remembering his visit to the city in 1939, he finds that "there is not a single building which is not gutted." "The devastation is complete." He describes the "ash gray" rubble, "the stench—sweet and sickish from dead bodies," and "the colorless faces" of people who live in the cellars of ruins. His style has changed since his student days—it is more mature and descriptive. His depictions of the destruction are memorable, and his conversations are conducted in the manner of a newspaper correspondent.

When he sees that people lug their belongings in "bundles," the term now takes on a macabre meaning compared to how he used it in 1937, when he described the carefree beginning of his first visit to Germany meeting a "bundle of fun." The women with whom the young Kennedy had been flirting in 1937 or 1939 have now become the victims of rape or prostitution—they attempt to become unattractive to Russian soldiers but make themselves up for American GIs.

Kennedy takes a systematic approach to recording his observations about the postwar order and reconstruction in the zones of occupation. He writes about de-Nazification, frater-

nization, and public administration. He discusses various ways of treating the Germans—as defeated subjects or as partners in renewed cooperation. He examines the provision of foodstuffs, coal, and firewood as well as the system of rationing, the black market, infrastructure, and transportation. He touches on looting and currency questions and the role of marks, dollars, and occupation money. Without citing his sources, he presents data and statistics.

Surrounded by ruins, he visits damaged armament installations and ponders the country's potential, with special reference to the industries of Bremen and Bremerhaven. There are the shipyards that mass-produced submarines, including their sophisticated protection in bunkers and the latest technologies for air circulation. As a former PT commander, he speaks from personal knowledge when he calls Germany's torpedo boats "far superior."

The Soviet soldiers whom Kennedy encounters in Berlin and Potsdam at first appear in his typescript as "rugged and tough" fellows who are frequently drunk and wear soiled uniforms. He learns that they have stolen and pillaged goods and committed rapes. He quotes a German woman who says that "[i]n many ways the 'SS' were as bad as the Russians." The SS as bad as the Red Army—the Russians have replaced Germany's Death Head units as the yardstick of all evil. The focus already seems to be on the emerging conflict between East and West.

"As far as looting the homes and the towns, however," Kennedy adds quite soberly, "the British and ourselves have [also] been very guilty," relating that the Soviet soldiers behaved with no less discipline than that of American GIs. He even praises political activism in the Soviet Zone that has allowed the founding of (socialist) parties, the publication of newspapers, and the reopening of schools.

Having known Germany before the war, Kennedy is particularly impressed by the extent of the destruction he sees from

the air, in the streets, and in the shipyards. Like many foreign observers, he wonders what the impact of the Allied bombing raids were. Did the air raids accelerate Germany's imminent defeat? Or did they result in senseless casualties? Was the death of so many civilians necessary? Journalists such as Janet Flanner, Martha Gellhorn, and Virginia Irwin were among the first to come to Germany with Allied troops and among the first to report on the extent of the destruction. They also estimated what impact this had on the morale of the population. Authors such as W. H. Auden and James Stern, who had stayed in the country before the Nazi dictatorship, now returned in order to interview German civilians for the *US Strategic Bombing Survey*, recording their experiences of the attacks.

It was Kurt Vonnegut who provided the most impressive literary testimony of the traumatic destruction in his disturbing 1969 novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*. He had survived the massive air attack on the city of Dresden in February 1945 as a prisoner of war in the basement of an abattoir. Not long after Kennedy's visit, the Italian filmmaker Roberto Rossellini made a semi-documentary in devastated Berlin with German lay actors in 1947. In it he described the material and psychic damage that had been done by the regime and the war by relating the story of a downtrodden youth who, still misled by Nazi ideology, kills his own father in desperation. Its title: *Germania anno zero* (*Germany Year Zero*).

Kennedy arrives at a negative conclusion as far as the bombing campaign is concerned: "[T]he bombing of Germany was not effective in stopping their production." And yet he considers the damage the bombers left behind considerable, as it will remain visible for a long time. As to the divided capital of a divided country—the city that he will visit again eighteen years later as president of the United States—he comes to a pessimistic hypothesis: "Berlin will remain a ruined and unproductive city."

It was only a few days after Kennedy had recorded this that air warfare would reach an unprecedented level of destruction. When Kennedy arrived in Potsdam, Truman had signed the order to deploy atomic weapons, and by the time the young journalist returned with Forrestal to the United States, the Japanese city of Hiroshima had been obliterated.

Earlier on, Kennedy had seen the buildings of IG Farben, which had profited from the employment of forced labor in Auschwitz (Monowitz) and had also manufactured Zyklon B, the poison used to murder millions of Jews and other minorities in the gas chambers. The only place he mentions these German crimes, using the term "concentration camps," is when he quotes a German woman: "People did not realize what was going on in the concentration camps." The reporter himself sidelines existing knowledge of the genocide and the moral questions raised by it. He seems to be more interested in military technology, such as the bunker-cracking "Tallboy" bomb, the "Willow Run" for the serial production of long-range bombers, and the snorkel technique of German submarines.

Such information, however, would have been available to Kennedy. Martha Dodd, the daughter of the US ambassador in Berlin, had explicitly warned in her widely read book *Through Embassy Eyes* that even before the war Hitler was bent on the "extermination" of the Jewish people. Edward Murrow visited Buchenwald before the end of the war and reported from the liberated concentration camp on the CBS radio program. "For most of it," the veteran war reporter confessed, "I have no words."

At the same time, Kennedy seems to be aware of how certain attitudes among the Germans to follow authority ("almost docile in accepting directions") and to execute orders ("extremely willing") with great efficiency ("passion for accuracy") had disastrous consequences: "The docility of the German bureaucrats demonstrates how easy it would be to seize power in

Germany." What makes the difference is a charismatic and ruthless personality.

At the end of his journey, Kennedy grapples with the dark fascination that Hitler continued to generate even after his death. There had been a long-standing interest in the Führer among foreigners even before the Nazi seizure of power. A myth had been created around this man who seemed quite ordinary and yet dangerous, ridiculous and yet diabolical. It arose after the American journalist Karl Henry von Wiegand interviewed Hitler—a mere political agitator in Bavaria at the time in 1922—portraying him as a "German Mussolini." And the myth was analyzed in Dorothy Thompson's 1932 book "*I Saw Hitler!*" in which she diagnosed the psychology of allegiance. In 1938, the British magazine *Homes & Gardens* put out a richly illustrated report on "Hitler's Mountain Home." It spoke admiringly of the stylish chalet high up on Obersalzberg in the Alps south of Munich, where the vegetarian Hitler, acting as "his own architect," had designed his estate, the "Berghof," giving him "the fairest view in all Europe."

Kennedy first visits the ruins of the former Reich Chancellery in Berlin before descending into Hitler's bunker, where he describes the room in which the dictator shot himself and where there are still traces of the incineration of his body. Kennedy concludes his journey with a trip to Obersalzberg, where he visits Hitler's Berghof, converted from the original "Haus Wachenfeld," as well as the "Kehlsteinhaus" that had been added at the top and that the Americans called "Eagle's Nest."

At the end of his German travelogue, which did not appear in any newspaper at the time and was only made available posthumously, Kennedy talks about Hitler's "mystery." The conclusion of his notes reads as follows:

> [W]ithin a few years Hitler will emerge from the hatred that surrounds him now as one of the most significant fig-

> ures who ever lived. He had boundless ambition for his country which rendered him a menace to the peace of the world, but he had a mystery about him in the way that he lived and in the manner of his death that will live and grow after him. He had in him the stuff of which legends are made.

The last sentence is a confusing reminder of the famous stanzas in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest:* "We are such stuff / As dreams are made on." This all the more so, as Prospero's words are followed by a premonition of death: "and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep." Kennedy wrote this under the impression of visiting a cursed place—Hitler's personal residence surrounded by a majestic landscape and expressing a twilight magic. It seems that he was captivated by what Susan Sontag described in 1974 as "Fascinating Fascism," i.e., an aesthetic attraction that this phenomenon had even on people who were themselves not Nazis. Thus, Kennedy describes Berchtesgaden, the place, its guesthouse, and its environment three times as "beautiful." Hitler's Eagle's Nest is "famed" and "cleverly camouflaged." Indeed, Kennedy writes about his impressions of defeated Germany with many positive attributes. Viewing the country from the plane, he finds it "peaceful." The lake Kleiner Wannsee is "beautiful" and "wonderful," a villa there "beautifully furnished." The supply infrastructure during the air raids was "extremely well organized," the submarine production "gigantic," the construction of a shipyard "extremely clever," a bunker a "masterpiece." German boats he considers "superior," "better," "safer," "cheaper." Germans, he notes, are "good workers," "efficient." Some women he finds "very attractive."

The term "significant" that Kennedy uses to define Hitler's role in history does not in itself contain a moral valuation. It is ambivalent, interpretable. But the idea that Hitler will "emerge" out of the present "hatred" within a few years and then appar-

ently be reevaluated is misleading. The conjunction "but," which opposes the alleged "mystery about him" with the actual war guilt ("a menace to the peace of the world"), threatens to obfuscate the latter.

While the German crimes are explicitly mentioned only once in Kennedy's text (when the woman whom he is interviewing utters the term "concentration camps"), these crimes are at most hinted at whenever there are references to Hitler. Kennedy's account shows how difficult it is to come to terms with a dark fascination. For its author as for its readers, it ends with a mystery.

1963—RETURN

Back in Boston from Europe, Kennedy gives his first public political lecture on 11 September 1945 to the American Legion that is also broadcast on the same day. He talks about three countries, Britain, Ireland, and Germany, as "victor, neutral, and vanquished," offering a digest of his recent trip on the basis of his notes:

> Berlin today is a gutted ruin. Its destruction far surpassed anything that I had ever imagined. The buildings which still stand are merely shells, and where the three million people who still remain in Berlin live, is a mystery. The streets are filled with them—their faces colorless, their lips a pale tan, their expressions lifeless and dead, as though they were suffering from shock. Occasionally, and it appears incongruous, you see a dog. They won't last through this winter. The streets are swarmed with Russian soldiers who look young and stocky and tough, and grim and dirty. [. . .] The food problem is more acute in Berlin than anywhere else in Germany. The average ration runs to about twelve

hundred calories, which is below the subsistence level. The city of Berlin is being administered as a single unit, and all the citizens—no matter in which section—get the same ration. The reason for this is obvious. If the United States fed their 700,000 people better than the Russians, for example, fed theirs, hungry Berliners would swarm into the American zone. Everyone in Berlin is therefore treated alike. The Russians have not only sent back all the food and machinery which they can move to Russia, but they are transporting nearly all the able-bodied Germans between the ages of 15 and 60 to Russia as laborers.

[. . .] [T]he Russians have a long way to go before they win much support from the German people. The Russian army that first entered Berlin was a fighting army and it acted with great violence. Many Germans who might have been Communist sympathizers were thus alienated.

Given his experiences, Kennedy is able to distinguish the situation in different parts of Germany (and Austria), but overall he outlines a uniformly pessimistic view of the future:

In the western cities like Bremen, Frankfurt, and Salzburg, the people have been living very well up to now. They have had food reserves to supplement their low ration, but by winter these rations will be gone and they will be on a bare subsistence level. There will be no coal, and many of their houses have been destroyed. The Germans this winter will pay for their support of Hitler.

On the basis of these observations, Kennedy finally adds his thoughts on the emerging postwar order.

What is the future of Germany? Some people believe that Germany should be split up into principalities or divided

> into zones of control as she is now. The objection to this solution, as Bismarck realized, is that Germany forms a geographical and economic unit. [. . .] Others say leave the Germans alone to work out their own salvation, they are too weak to ever menace us again. But Germany is in no position to build any kind of democratic government, and I do not think that it is particularly desirable for the United States to leave Germany a political vacuum which the Russians might be only too glad to fill. I believe that we should keep some measure of control indefinitely in Germany. The German people will never forget nor forgive this defeat. The French did not in 1870, and whether Nazi or anti-Nazi, there is no reason to believe the Germans will after their defeat in 1945. Their scientific experiments particularly must be carefully supervised, because science is fast learning the secret of annihilation.

When Kennedy returns to Germany in 1963, these considerations of 1945 form the unspoken background to his last journey. Today's collective memory of the Germans on the US president, who was assassinated a few months after his visit to West Berlin, essentially revolve around this trip and his much-quoted sentence, "Ish bin ein Bearleener," with its affirmation of the freedom and security for the city surrounded and menaced by Soviet totalitarianism. Would this sentence have been said without his engagement with Germany that dates back to his experiences in 1937, 1939 and 1945?

Kennedy knew Germany quite well. He undertook these trips as a tourist interested in European culture but also as a future elected official engaging in political and strategic studies as well as economic and social developments. Through his encounters with Germans he developed an empathy for them. He got to know them as a vacationer, yet perhaps learned to like or even "love" them. He saw people living in ruins, and he tried to un-

derstand them as he grappled with their abject support of Nazism, puzzling over Hitler and his uncanny myth or "mystery."

However, he never mentions in his many statements during his state visit that he had been to Germany several times before. He is shown around Cologne, Frankfurt, and Berlin, and even enters the Cologne Cathedral, as he had done in 1937. His hosts make references in their statements that Kennedy could have picked up, such as the mayor of Frankfurt mentioning instances of former presidents traveling to the city before assuming political office. Kennedy could have contrasted what he saw in 1937 with the new democracy, and what he saw in 1939 with the peaceful German present. But he kept silent.

In a statement at the Frankfurt Römerberg, the president refers in passing to a visit he made to the city as a member of the House of Representatives during the Berlin Blockade. It is only in his toast to Willy Brandt, the mayor of West Berlin, that he mentions his earlier journey: "I came last to Berlin in July of 1945 and I saw a ruined city. So when I see these bright and shining buildings and, much more importantly, these young bright and shiny faces, I am not fooled that this has been an easy 18 years."

Only when he stands with Brandt in front of the walled-off Brandenburg Gate does Kennedy confide to him privately that he had been to Berlin before the war, on the other side of the new Wall and as a guest at the famous Hotel Adlon. In his public speeches, however, his three earlier trips are at most very indirectly alluded to. Thus, in front of West Berlin's town hall in Schöneberg, he urges the representatives of a new isolationism to travel to Berlin themselves. Experiencing Berlin, he argues, would change their attitude and their view of the Soviet dictatorship: "Let them come to Berlin." By repeating these words in subsequent statements to create emphasis, he resorts to a four-part epiphora: "Let them come to Berlin." The individual components of this rhetorical figure can stand for the repeated

journeys that have furthered his own political development: "Let them come to Berlin." With the concluding element, the speaker as traveler switches to the foreign language, as if he were now relating what he has said to himself and his own German experience: "Lust z nach Berlin comen" (according to a jotted note in his phonetic German).

Those who do not understand the contrast between the "Free World" and Communism, Kennedy says, those who believe that Communism brings economic progress, and who perhaps even think that Communism is the future, should come to Berlin—that is, see for themselves at the Wall the aggressiveness, the violence, and the failure of this system. And before one of the largest and most enthusiastic audiences he has ever addressed, the president even goes so far as to claim that this also applies to anyone who considers even cooperation with communism possible at all. In short, the son of an advocate of Appeasement had become a Cold Warrior. He announced his antitotalitarian program in the country that had led him to form his attitude.

Finally, he left behind one further hint to his earlier travels, this time during a reception by Georg August Zinn, the minister president of Hesse, in the spa center (Kurhaus) of Wiesbaden on June 25, 1963: "When I leave the office of the White House, whenever that may be, I am going to leave an envelope in the desk for my successor, and it will say 'To be opened only in saddest moments.' It will have only the words written: 'Go visit Germany!'"

As Kennedy left Germany on the following day and said farewell to Chancellor Adenauer at Berlin's Tegel Airport, he came back to this idea and advice ("Go to Germany!"). He extends the "saddest moments" to a "a time of some discouragement" that a visit to Germany may put an end to. However, he then supplements his remarks by a sentence about himself. It looks as if he wants to recall the experiences of his earlier visits, pull out his notes of those trips, and announce that he himself will

return: "I said yesterday that I was going to leave a note to my successor which would say: 'To be opened at a time of some discouragement.' And in it would be written just three words: 'Go to Germany!' I may open that note myself one day."