

CHAPTER FIVE

GERMANY AND ITS VISITORS

The George Kreis

The German poet Stefan George had derived a significant legacy from the Wildean philosophy of 'L'art pour art', from the culture of 1890s 'Decadence' and from other aspects of Oscar Wilde's aesthetic.¹ But his contacts with young men were more selective than Wilde's. He gathered around himself a protective and admiring elite of disciples, the George Kreis, hand-picked as much for their good looks and 'aristocratic' mien as for their education and intelligence. Together, between 1890 and 1919, they published a cultural journal, *Blätter für die Kunst*. Not caring for an outside readership, they both wrote and read the journal for themselves. Intellectual and spiritual friendship was everything.² Young scholars who did not belong to the group hero-worshipped the Master from outside it. Walter Benjamin later wrote: 'It was not too much for me to wait for hours on a bench reading in the castle park in Heidelberg in expectation of the moment when he was supposed to walk by.'³

It is this position of George as a leader and teacher surrounded by a devoted, closed circle of disciples that all his life placed him at one remove from contact with ordinary humanity. It is as though he could be reached only through the medium of his disciples, to whom in the first place his words were addressed, for whom primarily his personality existed, and by whom his poems were more immediately comprehended.⁴ Protected and insulated by the circle around him, he came to seem out of touch with – or, if you prefer, to have transcended – the everyday. And nothing was more everyday than women or, by extension, the love of women. E.K. Bennett is definite on this point: 'the love of women plays no important rôle in the poetry of George.'⁵ Disciples who married were banished from the Kreis. Friedrich Gundolf, to whom this happened, later wrote: 'As a youth I trusted numbly, / Later gladly, to the Master, / Till one stronger came to free me.'⁶ The sense of liberation from George was not

uncommon, but it was a liberation gained at some expense and would often be described in wistful tones.

Although he kept a room in his family's house near Bingen on the Rhine for the whole of his life, George was a dedicated internationalist, living at various times in Austria, England, France, Italy and Switzerland, generally in simple rented lodgings or with friends. Even when in Germany, he tended to impermanence, living in Berlin, Heidelberg, Kiel and Munich. As a translator, he worked from English (Shakespeare), French (the Symbolists), Italian (Dante) and Spanish.⁷ He first visited Italy at the beginning of 1889 when, after a stay on Lake Geneva, he briefly passed through Milan and Turin; but it was not until the spring of 1891, when he visited Verona and Venice, that the country really caught his imagination. After that, he made sure he went to Italy at least once a year until 1913; his last trip included a visit to the ruins at Paestum. What he found in the sunny South was not heat but light – a brightness that suffuses his most intensely idealistic poetry.⁸ When he travelled to France after graduating in 1889, already thinking of himself as a poet, he met Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine and Pierre Louÿs. In Vienna two years later, he had a close encounter with the aspiring poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal, who was only seventeen. Quite what happened between them is unclear, but Hofmannsthal's father felt he had to write to George, telling him to leave his son alone.⁹ Hofmannsthal revered George as a poet, yet now and later he resisted the older man's attempts to enfold him in the embrace of the George Kreis, the elitism of which was personally distasteful to him and seemed also to be contrary to the principles of poetry, which, he felt, should spring naturally from the poet's position within – rather than above – the broader society. George, who had been trying 'to establish a salutary dictatorship in our literature', resentfully blamed Hofmannsthal for the fact that his sterile plans came to naught.¹⁰

George had a passionate interest, which he and his subsequent champions always claimed to be entirely spiritual, in teenage boys. (It is beyond doubt that they inspired his poetry.¹¹) The most notable of them, because of his ultimate effect on the poetry, was the Bavarian youth Maximilian Kronberger, twenty years George's junior, whom he met in 1902. 'Maximin', as George called him, died of meningitis the day after his sixteenth birthday in 1904. In the poetry that followed, George deified him as an icon of immortal beauty. (Mortality has a habit of bringing on immortality.) Even readers who deny a homosexual relationship have to acknowledge, however reluctantly, the equivocal intensity of the poetry. For instance, Michael and Erica Metzger write that 'George's relationship to the boy, who greatly admired the poet, was that of a friend and teacher' – which is obviously an implicit denial that he was a lover – but they later say of the Maximin poems:

The poems are passionate and poignant at once. Initially, we encounter the sense of the unseasonableness of the attachment of an older man to one much younger. This is resolved by their intellectual and emotional communion and by their mutual surrender to a friendship which is not lacking in strong sensual elements.¹²

This is slippery stuff. What the Metzgers cannot quite bring themselves to acknowledge is, as any ancient Greek could have told them, that 'a friend and teacher' may also, as in this case, be a lover. Unseasonable or not, the man-boy relationship is presented by George as achieving the highest ideal, not least in those 'strong sensual elements' which the Metzgers identify in the poems.

A year after Maximilian Kronberger's death, George established a close relationship with an Argentinian boy he had met once before, fourteen-year-old Hugo Zemik ('Ugolino'). Poems would follow; as would other boys. A pattern had been established. In the more forthcoming of his two autobiographies, the English composer Cyril Scott gave an account of what it was like for a boy to be on the receiving end of Stefan George's interest.¹³ They met in 1896, when Scott was seventeen and George twenty-eight. Scott went with a couple of friends to visit the poet, who was living in his parents' home near Bingen. Scott was the youngest of his party and the only one to arouse George's 'special interest'. Further visits followed, Scott going to Bingen and George to Scott's lodgings at Kronberg, where he 'stayed a few days each time'. It was on one of their walks in the landscape around Bingen that 'Stefan George confessed that his attachment to me was no ordinary one; though he had guessed from the beginning that I was not of the type who would reciprocate his feelings'. Although one of the friends with whom Scott first met George had warned him that 'the poet was abnormal' and that he had once been intensely attracted to Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Scott was surprised and embarrassed by the confession, and 'began to feel ill at ease in his presence as if a barrier had come between us'.

Scott takes issue with the often idolatrous approach to George by German critics, and (given their homophobia) their consequent collective refusal to deal with the fact of his homosexuality. Although he himself, as a teenager, was distressed to discover that his cultural hero 'should have propensities which in those days most normal people regarded with loathing and disgust', he did not flee the man or reject his friendship; indeed, both then and in later life, what he did reject was the notion that George's homosexuality must be recast as a purely spiritual and intellectual interest in the relations between male souls, in order to maintain his reputation as a great poet. As one who had been desired by him, Scott felt he could legitimately bear witness to George's homosexuality, but even he drew the line somewhere:

Yet let me not be misunderstood: I believe that Stefan George was too great an idealist to practise homosexuality in its grossest form. On the other hand, to pretend in these days of far greater tolerance [the late 1960s] that he was a man who merely admired youths, is to display that disregard for facts which simply turns biography into fiction . . . And, indeed, why should it be glossed over? George could no more help being a homosexual than, say, Chopin could help being a consumptive; and like many homosexuals and lesbians, he was not in the least ashamed of the fact, being almost obsessed, as he was, with Hellenistic ideas and ideals.¹⁴

The 'grossest form' of male homosexuality is usually anal intercourse. If Scott meant this, his reading of the situation seems entirely plausible. For many 'Hellenists', mutual masturbation and intercrural intercourse were just about as 'gross' as it got.

George published his last poetry in 1928. A self-imposed silence ensued. When he died on 4 December 1933 in voluntary exile at Locarno on Lake Maggiore, his friends protected his corpse from being taken back in triumph by the Nazis and interred on the sacred soil of the Third Reich. Among those who had stood vigil at George's deathbed was the twenty-six-year-old Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg, who had joined the George Kreis at seventeen, along with his brothers. Many years later, on 20 July 1944, Stauffenberg, a lieutenant colonel wounded in action – he had lost one hand, two fingers of the other and the use of one eye – would place a briefcase bomb under the conference table in Hitler's East Prussian headquarters at Wolfsschanze and leave the room. The briefcase was moved, so that when it went off Hitler was only slightly injured. All of the conspiracy's leaders were executed. In the run-up to the assassination attempt Stauffenberg had taken to reciting George's poem 'The Antichrist'. As Joachim Fest puts it, 'Stauffenberg apparently found in the poem something that moved him, as it did many of his fellow conspirators: the projection of the enemy into the realm of myth, and hence the elevation of resistance into a sacred deed.' However, 'Although Stauffenberg was a great admirer of George, he always had an eye for simpler, rougher truths, and he led the debate within the resistance back to the political realm where it really belonged. Germans found themselves in a position, he argued, where they must inevitably commit some crime – either of commission or of omission.'¹⁵

Stefan George has had relatively few non-German admirers.¹⁶ It is easy, on superficial acquaintance with his apparently sneering elitism, merely to ridicule or deplore him; and his poetry is not easily understood, let alone loved. After meeting him in Paris in 1908, André Gide declared himself 'Struck by the admirable head of St G. whom I had long hoped to know and whose work I

admire every time I manage to understand it.’¹⁷ In their libretto to Hans Werner Henze’s *Elegy for Young Lovers*, W.H. Auden and Chester Kallman have the poet Gregor Mittenhofer refer dismissively to ‘George who so primly preaches / The love that dare not speak its name.’¹⁸

Nor was the lingering association with National Socialism of much help to George’s international reputation. The great Polish poet Czesław Miłosz writes of some pro-Nazi, homosexual acquaintances of his, in Paris in 1935: ‘They celebrated the age of chivalry, sacrifices and blood, and they had the sound of clanking swords.’ One of them was Günter, who wrote poetry: ‘Above all, that heavysset blond boy was imbued with Greece as it had been conceived by nineteenth-century German professors and with Hölderlin’s nostalgia . . . His interest in Poles he justified by invoking the sacred tradition of friendship between Stefan George and Waclaw Rolicz-Lieder’, the Symbolist poet and translator of German poetry. Thus, George’s choices of his own friends determined the choices of his younger admirers many years later. (Rolicz-Lieder had died in 1912.)

On the other hand, Miłosz also speaks of Stefan Napierski (Mark Eiger), a Jewish, homosexual aesthete and poet from a wealthy background, who translated Stefan George, Rainer Maria Rilke and Georg Trakl, and ‘moved in elegant circles that took their cue from Weimar, Berlin or Paris.’ He was eventually shot by the Nazis. Miłosz’ language is no better than theirs when summing up this unfortunate man: ‘Mark was the degenerate scion of a family of wealthy capitalists, owners of cement factories. He had all the earmarks of Middle Eastern Europeans of his type: money, a knowledge of foreign languages, a large collection of books, a neurosis, and homosexuality. In comparison with this pale, thin rodent in glasses . . . I was a specimen of vital, primitive strength.’¹⁹

One of the earliest enthusiasts in Britain for the idea of the George Kreis was the Oxford don Maurice Bowra, who may have been introduced to George’s work by Edward Sackville-West. He was not impressed by the poetry – ‘It all seems much of a muchness to me’ – but he did like the idea of creating a sort of Bowra Kreis in Oxford. Indeed, he had done the ground work already. He told John Sparrow – also a don, also gay – ‘I thought I would write to [George] and say that there is a circle of young man [*sic*] chosen for their looks who study his works in Oxford.’ Unlike George, Bowra was able to take a light-hearted approach to lofty matters, but he was completely serious in admiring George’s having revived and put into practice, in modern Germany, ancient Greek ideas. As Bowra’s biographer puts it, ‘Here were rules, Greek in origin, that offered some hope that the crucial values of the ancient world would not be lost and that poetry would always be a force in men’s lives.’²⁰ Between 1928 and 1933, Bowra made frequent trips to Germany and even once caught sight of George

in Heidelberg. Less fleetingly, he met several members of the Kreis and became especially close to one of them, Ernst Kantorowicz. They actually met in Oxford, when the German was a visiting professor at All Souls. It is possible that they were lovers; they certainly became lifelong friends. Bowra went to Germany to help Kantorowicz escape the Nazis, and later helped him land an academic post in the USA.

In Munich at the beginning of 1911 to improve his German, Rupert Brooke met Karl Wolfskehl, a member of Stefan George's circle, 'in appearance like a Bavarian Lytton Strachey'.²¹ Wolfskehl attended George's salon and in turn would convene his own salons to pass on the master's wisdom. Brooke read some Swinburne at one of these latter events; George would doubtless have loved the look of him. In his autobiographical novel *In the Purely Pagan Sense* (1976), John Lehmann recalls his friend William speaking of a German boy for whom George's poetry appears to have been a necessary adjunct to his sexuality: 'He used to go about reciting the poems of Stefan George all day, believe it or not. He'd even go on reciting while he was doing it [that is, making love] – there's devotion to culture for you!'²²

When the San Francisco poet Robert Duncan met fellow poet Jack Spicer in 1946, one of their first conversations was about Stefan George's Maximin cult. Duncan had been having an affair with Werner Vordtriede, who had had childhood connections with the George Kreis. As it happens, Spicer was studying medieval history with Ernst Kantorowicz. Spicer saw in Duncan an opportunity to set up an American version of the Kreis. Duncan moved into a communal household at 2029 Hearst Street, Berkeley, where nocturnal poetry readings and workshops were soon instituted.²³ On a visit to Berkeley, E.M. Forster called in on 2029, but he was unresponsive to the young poets until they served him tea and gin.²⁴

The Berlin Scene

In the 1931 census, Berlin recorded a population of 4,288,700. It was the third-largest city in the world, after London and New York. According to the French novelist Dominique Fernandez' reading of Europe's gay cultural history, 'The role played by Naples, Sicily, and North Africa at the beginning of the century passed, during the brief life of the Weimar Republic [1919–33], to a land in northern Europe' – namely Germany.²⁵ This is true, if not quite true enough. The fact is that, much as the name of Oscar Wilde acquired mythic status and came to stand for the type of the homosexual, so Weimar Berlin came to stand for urban homosexuality in both its identities, as both a place where dreams come true and a city of dreadful night. Its underworld was close to the surface

and could easily be joined by interested parties or observed by fascinated outsiders, both friendly and hostile. It was a place that could change people's lives, for better or worse. Karl Heinrich Ulrichs' sister exclaimed, in response to his coming-out, 'Oh, if only you had never gone to Berlin!'²⁶

A character in Stefan Zweig's novel *Confusion* (*Verwirrung der Gefühle*, 1927), while studying in Berlin, visits 'the underworld of the city' and has apparently homosexual encounters 'on dark street corners, in the shadows of railway stations and bridges' and in 'gloomy beer cellars whose dubious doors opened only to a certain kind of smile'.²⁷ The atmosphere of darkness, shadows and gloom in this brief sketch suggests furtive pleasures hidden away from the daytime streets, but gay life in Berlin was more varied and could be much more visible than this. To be sure, it had its share of clandestine spaces, indoor and out, its arcane penetralia, and its anonymous encounters and spurts of anti-gay violence; but there was also a gay political and social subculture in which the rights of homosexual individuals were argued for and law reform (repeal of the repressive Paragraph 175 of the penal code) was demanded. Homosexuality was being subjected to serious and intense scrutiny by sympathetic scientists, and openly discussed in many publications. There was also a vibrant tourist scene, in which visitors to the city could witness enactments of the 'decadence' for which the city was becoming famous. Looking back in 1976, Charlotte Wolff remembered the atmosphere of Berlin in the 1920s as having no boundaries: 'All the men came to these clubs and they loved lesbians. No nonsense. There were also masked balls at the Academy of Arts. I danced with women, I danced with men. We didn't think anything about it. You loved somebody or you loved nobody but you looked upon everything with delight.'²⁸

In Alfred Döblin's great novel of Weimar life, *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929), Franz Biberkopf has his attention drawn to the city's homosexual population by the proprietor of a news-stand on the Hackesche Market in front of Oranienburger Strasse, from whom Franz is hoping for gainful employment. The old man thrusts a bundle of gay papers into Franz' arms and gets him to attend a public meeting the same evening, called in agitation against Paragraph 175 – 'Franz might hear something about the wrong done to a million people in Germany every day.' Although reluctant – 'A fellow might feel sorry for those boys, but they're none o' my business' – Franz allows himself to be taken to the meeting by the news vendor. In the hall they find 'almost nothing but men, mostly very young, and a few women, who sat apart in couples'. Embarrassed and self-conscious, Franz endures as much as he can bear of the meeting – 'it was too ridiculous for words, so many nancies in a bunch' – before making his escape. The last thing he hears as he leaves is a discussion of a new police ordi-

nance in the city of Chemnitz: 'This forbids all inverters to go on the streets or use the public lavatories, and, if they are caught, it costs them 30 marks.' In the morning, notwithstanding his apparent lack of interest in the meeting, Franz settles down to read the gay newspapers still in his possession.

Döblin follows this sequence with the brief narrative of a married man who encounters a good-looking boy in the Tiergarten and is soon under his spell. Although 'he has noticed these things before', the man has apparently had no experience of them until now. More knowing than he looks, the boy gets the man to take him to a small hotel – 'You can give me five marks, or ten, I'm quite broke' – where they are shown to a room which is fitted with peepholes. Once the man has done enough to be blackmailed for, the hotel proprietor and his wife reveal themselves as blackmailers. He thinks of killing himself, but instead ignores the whole matter, hoping it will go away. However, he has been denounced to the authorities, and his wife and daughters get to hear of the case. In court, the man pleads his case with innocent eloquence – 'I went to a room, locked myself in. Is it my fault if they have those peepholes? . . . Did I steal anything? Did I commit a burglary? I only broke into a dear boy's heart. I said to him: my sunshine. And so he was' – and is, implausibly, acquitted.²⁹

These two fragmentary glimpses of gay life are characteristically unspectacular in a novel that concerns itself with the daily routines of ordinary people. Döblin moves on. But one important point has been made: the lives of homosexual people take shape not in the scandalous cabarets and nightclubs, where stretching the boundaries of the permitted is a crucial component of a style directed at an excitable audience, but in the attempts by ordinary individuals to establish their own private lives. Hoping to bring love into their homes, they have to seek it where they can.

The novel *The Hustler* (*Der Puppenjunge*, 1926), by 'Sagitta', depicts fragments of the gay scene in 1920s Berlin while telling the story of a year in the life of a young male prostitute. 'Sagitta' was John Henry Mackay, who was brought up by his mother in her native Germany after his Scottish father died when he was two. He spent most of his adult life in Berlin. An anarchist much influenced by the philosopher Max Stirner, of whom he wrote a biography, early in the new century he embarked on a series of *Sagitta's Books of the Nameless Love* (*Die Bücher der namenlosen Liebe von Sagitta*), books including poetry, fiction and non-fiction, which, although subjected to a ban in Germany, were republished abroad in 1913. In one of the scenes in *The Hustler*, two men dressed as women celebrate one of their birthdays at a table in the Adonis Lounge, cheerfully dispensing champagne and schnapps to the boys who cluster around them. Two other men, inexperienced out-of-towners not wishing to be left out, run up a massive drinks bill to get themselves and two of the boys drunk. As

the evening progresses the dancing begins and the Adonis Lounge delivers its tawdry magic. Men get boys and boys get money.

A far more varied economy is portrayed in the activities taking place, by day, in 'the Passage', a shopping arcade between Unter den Linden and the Friedrichstrasse. According to Sagitta's account, the Passage is alive with 'Crowds of the curious and indifferent, the casual and the occasional, as well as the seekers, amateur and professional in these matters – the native and the stranger.' Alongside the respectable routines of everyday life, 'Vice and inexperience, swindlers and racketeers of all kinds, carried on their business there ... [T]here was no questionable livelihood that did not find its way there.' Penniless youngsters go there to barter their bodies for a meal and a bed for the night; 'apprentices and errand boys' go there to augment their meagre wages; boys who are not yet interested in girls go there to make friends or even lovers; schoolboys go there to make some pocket money or just to make fun of the 'queers' ... This commerce of compatible interests goes on from early in the morning until late at night, when the Passage is locked, the schoolboys are in bed, as are many of the rent boys and their clients, and the remains of the day's cruising must happen elsewhere.³⁰ When W.H. Auden spoke to a rent boy in the Passage to arrange an assignation, he said he pictured himself as Proust's Baron de Charlus. In 'The Nowaks', one of the sections of *Goodbye to Berlin*, Christopher Isherwood writes about a boy called Pieps, a pickpocket who plies his trade on the Friedrichstrasse, 'not far from the Passage, which was full of detectives and getting too dangerous nowadays'. Isherwood makes it look as if he is referring to a crackdown on pickpockets, whereas it is more likely that the detectives are there to cut down on incidents of prostitution.³¹

Klaus Mann wrote about this same world in his novel *The Pious Dance* (*Der fromme Tanz*, 1925), the central character of which is a young teenager, Andreas Magnus, who leaves home and makes his way to Berlin. The usual encounters with low-life and bedbugs lead, eventually, to a minor role in a nightclub cabaret. From there, he goes on to frequent the haunts of his new friends, the rent boys in downmarket gay bars. These places serve as the boys' best refuge from the vastness of the city and, to some extent, as the last line of defence against the worst forms of exploitation. Above all, they provide the companionship of other disadvantaged boys. It is the infrastructure of the gay scene that keeps them from the streets – at the same time as it makes them more safely available to the men who patronise the bars. (More safely for both the boys and the men.) The men in whose arms the boys make their meagre living often offer to 'rescue' them from this communal life, but Andreas is never tempted by such offers. He always manages to preserve his own independence.

One of the more interesting aspects of this narrative is the way in which Klaus Mann represents Andreas' self-education as a homosexual man. Working

in the bars and cabarets he soon becomes streetwise about how the scene and its denizens operate. Yet there is more to a mature identity than the necessary accumulation of that kind of defensive knowledge. There is also, for those boys with the appropriate intelligence and inclination, homosexual culture to be learned. After a long break, and for the first time since he left home, Andreas again gets into the habit of reading. His bibliography is both international and gay: he devours Knut Hamsun, Walt Whitman and Stefan George; then Hermann Bang, Paul Verlaine and Oscar Wilde. From each he draws profound conclusions about love and, given the nature of the age, about suffering. It is clear that the author, himself from a phenomenally bookish background, regards this period of placid introspection among heaps of books as equipping Andreas with the strength of character to survive the vicissitudes that merely being homosexual is likely to inflict on him. The scene and the culture, together, will enable him, above all, to tell false love from true.

Magnus Hirschfeld

The scientific curiosity, bureaucratic method and sexual experimentalism of Germany in general and Berlin in particular became fused in the most practical way under a single roof: that of Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Science. It was a research centre, museum, library, guest house, social centre, campaigning organisation and therapeutic clinic – all, ultimately, to be destroyed by hostile ideologues.

Hirschfeld's first publication on homosexuality was an essay entitled 'Sappho and Socrates: How can one explain the love of men and women for people of their own sex?' It was published by Max Spohr of Leipzig in 1896.³² Hirschfeld was in his late twenties at the time, with a questing intelligence and already reasonably well travelled. (He had been on a five-month trip to the United States, Morocco, Algeria and Italy in 1893 and 1894.) Before shooting himself on the eve of his marriage, a patient of Hirschfeld's had written to him, asking him to publicise his case – that of a human being cursed by homosexuality. The 1896 essay was the first of many pioneering contributions with which Hirschfeld may be said to have carried out the suicide's wishes, but it does not present homosexuality, male or female, as a curse. When speaking of the recent Wilde case, Hirschfeld does some familiar name-dropping:

Oscar Wilde, this genius of a writer, who loves Lord Alfred Douglas with a passionate love, has been put into prison in Wandsworth. And this because of a passion which he shares with Socrates, Michelangelo and Shakespeare.

By now, Wilde was in Reading, not Wandsworth, and it is hard to imagine these three eminent boy-fanciers ever falling for Bosie Douglas. (Shakespeare, perhaps – but Socrates?) Regardless of the details, this is a restatement of a common position at the time (and, indeed, quite a common one ever since). The concentration on major artists and the concentration on love rather than sex (the pertinent matter in the case) follows Wilde's own attempted self-defence when on trial; and, although Hirschfeld would continue to repeat this argument throughout his career, he would soon turn his attention in a more undissembling fashion towards sexual desires and activities. In this same essay he refers to lesbians as 'those courageous "manly" women of high intelligence, rhetorical gifts and natural leadership', thereby engaging in a similar argument, which evidently leaves no room for lesser specimens, or even for the feminine lesbian. At this early stage, it was important not to cloud the issue with unrecognisable examples; a handful of stereotypes would be extremely useful for the time being.³³

On 15 May 1897, Magnus Hirschfeld, Max Spöhr and Edward Oberg drew up the Articles of Association of an organisation called the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee (*Wissenschaftlich-humanitäre Komitee*) whose main brief was to campaign for the repeal of Paragraph 175 of the 1871 Imperial Penal Code. (The paragraph stipulated a maximum sentence of five years' imprisonment for sex between men.) A petition they submitted to the Reichstag later the following year had 2,000 names on it, including those of Frank Wedekind, Rainer Maria Rilke and Heinrich and Thomas Mann (but the latter subsequently withdrew his). A tireless empirical researcher, Hirschfeld visited homosexual homes, bars and hotels in Berlin, and published his findings in *Berlin's Third Sex* (*Berlins drittes Geschlecht*, 1904). In December 1903 he sent sexual orientation questionnaires to 3,000 male students; in February 1904, to 5,000 metalworkers. Objecting to questions they did not want to answer, six of the students took him to court; found guilty of propagating obscene enquiries, he was fined and ordered to pay costs. (Of the students who did respond to the survey, 1.5 per cent were homosexual and 3.19 per cent bisexual.) By 1904, the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee had 365 members. One of these, who signed up in 1902, was the Baron Hermann von Teschenberg who had been a close friend of Oscar Wilde's when living in exile in England; he subsequently became Wilde's German translator. After the 1895 scandal, he had left London for Paris, and then returned to Berlin, where he spent the rest of his life fighting for homosexual rights. He died in Naples in 1911.

Even at this early stage in his career, Hirschfeld had to get used to being attacked, both as a corrupter of public morals and as a Jew. Because he was trying to maintain a reputation as an objective doctor and scientist, he was not

generally known to be homosexual himself. If there were those who felt that his empathy for homosexual people amounted to the fellow feeling of identification, they seem to have been few. Anti-Semitism was probably always the greater threat to him and his work. After a sequence of attacks in 1908, he travelled south for a spell in the warmer atmosphere of Italy. Even in doing so, his identification travelled with him – he never ceased his investigations for anything so self-indulgent as a holiday – and he visited the grave of Johann Joachim Winckelmann in Trieste on his way home. Over the great art historian's bones he read out the passages in the *Italian Journey* (*Italienische Reise*) where Goethe heaps praise on Winckelmann. Such a cultural tribute obviously meant a great deal to Hirschfeld, and the more he learned about the history of men who loved other men, the more care he took to make connections between his own work and the lives of men he regarded as his cultural predecessors. So when he next went to Italy, in the spring of 1909, he chose to visit Aquila in the Abruzzi because that had been where 'Numa Numantius' (Karl Heinrich Ulrichs) had retired in 1882; he also made a pilgrimage to Ulrichs' grave.

Hirschfeld's international reputation was greatly enhanced by an address he delivered, accompanied by 150 slides, at an International Congress of Physicians convened in London by the British Medical Association in August 1913. He was especially impressed by suffragist demonstrators who livened up the proceedings in the Albert Hall with their shouts of 'Votes for women!' It was at this event that he met both Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter. The following year, he finally published his major work – 1,068 pages, based on 10,000 case histories – *Homosexuality in Men and Women* (*Die Homosexualität des Mannes und des Weibes*, 1914). Having thus established his credentials as at least one of the world's leading authorities on the topic, he did not allow himself to pause for breath. Nor did the outbreak of war permit him to do so. One task he set himself was to give homosexual men who had been turned down for active service a sense of collective purpose. (Too old at forty-six for the call-up himself, he was in any case a pacifist.) Whether he succeeded to any significant extent is doubtful, but his strategy of delivering as many lectures and writing as many articles for popular outlets as he could must have provided a degree of succour to the men he was talking about. The message was simple: that they sought, and deserved, equality with other men.

Early in 1919, he acquired the mansion at In den Zelten 10, Berlin, which became the world's first Institute for Sexual Science. Above the door he raised the inscription – in Latin, of course – 'Sacred to Love and Sorrow'. The fact that there was a need, and demand, for such a place seems proven by its first year's statistics: 4,000 people visited it, and within it no fewer than 1,250 lectures were

given. Hirschfeld's younger lover, Karl Giese, whom he met soon after acquiring the building, had living accommodation on the same floor as the director's consulting room. Not surprisingly, even before the first year was over, it was clear that more space would be needed; so, in 1921, Hirschfeld bought the house next door, number 9A. On 2 February 1924, he handed over the Institute to the German State as the Dr Magnus Hirschfeld Foundation. It is a measure of the official respect accorded his work that the ceremonial occasion to mark the transfer was attended by the Minister of Justice, the Finance Minister, and the Minister for Art and Science.

In 1919, Hirschfeld had been approached by the film-maker Richard Oswald with a suggestion that they put together a film on the topic of homosexuality. The successful outcome was *Different from the Rest* (*Anders als die Andern*, 1919), starring Conrad Veidt. It included a performance by Hirschfeld himself as a doctor speaking out against blackmail and Paragraph 175. It was first screened on 24 May. Despite the superficially liberal atmosphere of the Weimar Republic, in this case manifested in positive responses to the film by a number of senior politicians, a campaign was successfully waged against it (by, among others, the sexologist Albert Moll) and by August 1920 it had been banned. From now on, those who opposed Hirschfeld and the work of the Institute seem to have sensed the vulnerability of the whole sexual health movement. They certainly learned that they would be able to wound it quite easily. When he gave lectures, Hirschfeld now had to get used to being heckled. Stink-bombs were often thrown into the halls in which he was speaking. After one lecture in Munich, a bunch of thugs spat in his face and then beat him unconscious. (No action was ever taken against them.) Although he came round in hospital, the wires carried news of his death across Europe. When he lectured in Vienna on 4 February 1923, Hirschfeld was interrupted by young Nazis, throwing stink-bombs and firing live rounds. Some audience members were beaten up, but this time Hirschfeld survived unhurt. A softer kind of attack had often come from other directions: his seriousness about sex was, after all, ripe to be satirised. René Crevel always mocked him and his Institute, and in his novel *Etes-vous fous?* (1929) lampooned him as the charlatan Dr Optimus Cerf-Mayer. Klaus Mann scolded Crevel for this lese-majesty.

In 1926 Hirschfeld accepted an invitation from the Soviet government to visit the USSR, taking the trip as an opportunity to observe the effects of Soviet sexual laws; he refrained from delivering any outright criticism while he was there. In the meantime, the internationalisation of the movement was gathering momentum. At a congress presided over by Hirschfeld, Havelock Ellis and August Forel in Copenhagen in 1928, the World League for Sexual Reform was founded. The next congress was held at the Wigmore Hall in London in

1929; Hirschfeld delivered the presidential address. The congress of 1930 was held in Vienna. Spreading his message further afield, Hirschfeld went to New York after the Vienna meeting, and then carried out an extensive lecture tour across the USA, receiving generous publicity all the way. By the time he left the USA on 1 March 1931, he had earned enough money to return to Germany the long way, by way of a world tour. He spent six weeks in Japan, then a further ten in China. There he met a twenty-three-year-old called Tao Li, who offered to travel with him as his interpreter. The boy's father, who had twenty-one other children, formally handed him into Hirschfeld's care. Tao Li went with him, far beyond the limits of his range as an interpreter, all the way home to Germany.

On 4 July, they set sail together for the Philippines; then, on the 10th, they went on to Bali. Like his earlier travels, for all its incidental pleasures, this was no holiday. Hirschfeld was both teaching and learning all the way. Even on the steamer to Bali, the *Tjinegara*, he gave a sexological lecture to the officers and first-class passengers. (Someone must have objected to the lower orders hearing about such matters.) He spent six weeks with Tao Li in Java, flew to Singapore – where they stayed, of course, in the Raffles Hotel – and took another steamer to Ceylon. On 8 September, while still on board ship, Hirschfeld gave the hundredth lecture of his tour. From Ceylon, they crossed to India. In Calcutta, where he delivered five lectures, they called in on the great poet Rabindranath Tagore. At Benares, although disturbed by what he regarded as Hindu fanaticism, Hirschfeld bathed in the Ganges. In Allahabad, they were met at the station by Jawaharlal Nehru, in whose house they stayed; Hirschfeld was allocated the bedroom Mahatma Gandhi had slept in. But in Agra, where the two lovers visited the Taj Mahal, Hirschfeld was bitten by *Anopheles* mosquitoes and subsequently developed malaria. Undeterred, he went on travelling and lecturing, usually in English. On 15 November they embarked for Egypt, via the Suez Canal, with Hirschfeld feverish most of the way. In Cairo, purely in the interests of science, he tried hashish. They went up the Nile to Luxor and Aswan, then down to Alexandria. Five weeks followed in Palestine, two of them in Jerusalem, where they stayed in the King David Hotel. As a Jew, Hirschfeld took a particular interest in this leg of the journey; he was especially concerned to find signs of developing tensions between Jews and Arabs. On 14 March 1932, the two men embarked on the *Byron* from Beirut, heading for Athens, where Karl Giese met them.

Giese's news was unwelcome. He had to warn Hirschfeld that he would not be safe if he returned to Berlin. For a brief moment, the three men enjoyed Athens together – as Charlotte Wolff puts it, 'With Karl Giese his beloved companion on one side, and his devoted pupil Tao Li on the other, life was still good for Hirschfeld' – before Giese returned to Berlin to run the Institute and Hirschfeld went to Zurich for a month.³⁴ In September, he went on to the fifth

congress of the World League for Sexual Reform, which that year was held in Brünn (Brno), in Czechoslovakia. There was another trip to Italy early in the new year, before he returned to Zurich where he stayed for a while with both of the men he loved. This was no idyll, however, for Giese had just witnessed, in Berlin, between 6 and 10 May 1933, the sacking of the Institute by Nazi thugs and the public burning of all its unique records and the contents of its library. Some 20,000 books and 5,000 images were destroyed, and the Institute's list of names and addresses was seized, putting many lives and livelihoods in danger. The conflagration was also witnessed by Christopher Isherwood, who, many years later, briefly recorded the event, as usual referring to himself in the third person: 'A few days after the raid [on the Institute], the seized books and papers were publicly burned, along with a bust of Hirschfeld, on the square in front of the Opera House. Christopher, who was present in the crowd, said "shame"; but not loudly.'³⁵ There was a wave of copycat burnings around the country, mainly concentrated on the destruction of books by Jewish authors. Not until the development of Alfred Kinsey's institute for sexual research at Indiana University would any equivalent resource of sexual information be gathered in one place. The buildings were confiscated by the Nazis, and with them went that apparently safe space in which marginalised people had felt they could meet each other or read about themselves, and to which so many foreign visitors were attracted in order to affirm their sense of belonging to their own kind.

While Karl Giese took a three-week break in Locarno, Hirschfeld moved to Paris, where in April 1934 he founded the *Institute des Sciences Sexologiques*; Giese joined him there. The old man was shown a film of the destruction of the Institute in Berlin. However, by the autumn it was clear that the new Parisian institute was failing, and Hirschfeld moved to Nice, intending to stay for good. Giese went to London, meaning to qualify as a doctor, but moved on to Vienna instead; Tao Li went back to Zurich to complete his studies. On 14 May 1935, Hirschfeld had a stroke and collapsed on his doorstep, went into a coma and died. Karl Giese gave the funeral oration, calling his lover 'a gentle fanatic' (*ein weicher Fanatiker*).³⁶

Visitors to Berlin

Returning to Greece after three months in Russia in 1927, the Greek writer Nikos Kazantzakis found when he paused in Berlin and Vienna, either that 'The world had changed' or that he was now looking at it differently:

The brazen dances, barbaric modern music, mascaraed women, mascaraed

men, the cuttngly ironic smile, the lust for gold and kisses – everything that

had formerly seemed so strange and enticing to me, now called forth nausea and horror. I saw that they were portents of the end. An oppressive stink hung in the air, as though the world was rotting. Sodom and Gomorrah must have smelt the same.³⁷

His chapter on an earlier sojourn in Berlin mentions none of this, whether 'strange and enticing' or not. Only when it seems ominous does he think it worth mentioning; but he only does so, now, very briefly. His literal journey is part of a metaphorical, spiritual one – the substance of his book – and the odour of materiality is not his point. Although his three masters are Christ, the Buddha and Lenin, it is the Old Testament he invokes, and the Cities of the Plain, to anathematise the modern pleasure-lovers of Berlin and Vienna. Also visiting Berlin in the late 1920s, but from Vienna, Elias Canetti wrote:

Anything went. The taboos, of which there was no lack anywhere, especially in Germany, dried out here. You could come from an old capital like Vienna and feel like a provincial here, and you gaped until your eyes grew accustomed to remaining open. There was something pungent, corrosive in the atmosphere; it stimulated and animated. You charged into everything and were afraid of nothing . . . Any attempt at shutting yourself off had something perverse about it, and it was the only thing that could still be regarded as perverse.³⁸

Like Kazantzakis, Canetti was heterosexual, but even homosexual visitors could be shocked by the city, if only on first acquaintance. After initial doubts, the English writer Michael Davidson found Berlin 'the most exciting town one could conceive of: Babylon, Gomorrah, Rome in decay'. He first went there in 1928 and soon began to frequent Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute. He noticed that the cruising in the streets began as early as at nine in the morning. He found the authorities indulgent: seeing him in an argument with an aggressive youth, a policeman once said to him, 'You know, you should be very careful about what boys you pick up – there are some bad ones about.' With his Berlin lover, Werner, he explored the scene. He mentions such places as the Nüremberger Diele and the Kantdiele, where 'middle-aged stockbrokers danced with elegant pansies'; a bar called the Schnubart Diele, the moustache café, 'where men with magnificent moustaches went to meet other men with moustaches'; the Mikado, for cross-dressing women and men; an unnamed establishment 'devoted to plump, elderly men who came in little short knickers and sailor suits'; the Monte-Casino, full of teenage boys; and Davidson's own

personal favourite – ‘because, I suppose, it was so touching, and tore at my

mother’s heart’ – the Adonis-Diele with its bored and hungry boys, all looking for a meal and a bed for the night.³⁹

Robert McAlmon went to Berlin in the early 1920s and later described returning home from riotous nights, arriving ‘at my huge room at eight in the morning accompanied by a retinue of various sexes.’ He was both excited and disturbed by the street scenes that so many visitors commented on:

At nights along the Unter den Linden it was never possible to know whether it was a woman or a man in woman’s clothes who accosted one. That didn’t matter, but it was sad to know that innumerable young and normal Germans were doing anything, from dope selling to every form of prostitution, to have money for themselves and their families, their widowed mothers and younger brothers and sisters.⁴⁰

In 1924 Edward Sackville-West went to Freiburg to be psychoanalysed with regard to his homosexuality by one Dr Marten. Other homosexual friends were there, enjoying each other while trying to imagine enjoying women. Not surprisingly, Eddy liked Germany. He stayed in Dresden from the autumn of 1927 to the following spring. Christmas was spent with Harold Nicolson in Berlin: ‘The night life of that city,’ Eddy said, ‘is really very strange indeed.’⁴¹ He gave an account of that strangeness in a letter to E.M. Forster, and later he went back for more: he returned to Berlin for the winter of 1928–29. One evening in 1929, as if he had never been before, Nicolson got a detective to show him around Berlin’s gay bars, but they depressed him. In a letter to his wife (12 April 1929) he commented, ‘I do not like other people’s vices.’⁴² In November 1924, the novelist Hugh Walpole went to Berlin to hear his friend the Danish tenor Lauritz Melchior singing at the Opera, and found the city ‘dirty and exceedingly wicked.’⁴³ The English painter Glyn Philpot visited the city in 1931, perhaps in large part because he was having a relationship with a young German, Karl Heinz Müller. According to one account, ‘The inspection of the Berlin underworld celebrated in [his painting] *Lokal, Berlin* . . . was certainly a shock to his somewhat idealistic view of life and may well have induced a certain amount of self-examination.’⁴⁴

W.H. Auden first travelled to the city in October 1928. Apart from brief visits home, he would spend ten months in Germany, seven of them in Berlin. Christopher Isherwood visited him there for a fortnight in March 1929. On a Saturday – the 16th or 23rd – they visited Hirschfeld’s Institute, had a meal with John Layard, and ended up at the Cosy Corner, a bar at Zossenstrasse 7, in the working-class district Hallesches Tor. There Isherwood found a boy

in the working-class district, Hahnsches Tor. There Isherwood found a boy called 'Bubi' and fell for him as if this were the real thing, the love of his life.

Auden watched them playing table tennis. He wrote in his diary, 'The sense of bare flesh, the blue sky through the glass and the general sexy atmosphere made me feel like a participant in a fertility rite.'⁴⁵ He also wrote a poem, 'This One', in which he casts a sceptical eye over Isherwood's self-delusive yearning for true love. Famously, it begins: 'Before this loved one / Was that one and that one.' John Sutherland says of Auden's attitude to rent boys: 'one paid them not for sex, but to go away after sex and leave one in peace to the more important business of writing.'⁴⁶ Although in *Christopher and His Kind* (1977) Isherwood claimed that 'To Christopher, Berlin meant Boys', Norman Page has counter-claimed that, in actuality, 'Isherwood went to Berlin primarily to work' – that is, to write *The Memorial* and to earn his crust by teaching English.⁴⁷ He was also, of course, learning German – for the sole purpose, he later claimed, of talking to his sexual partners. He wrote:

For him, the entire German language – all the way from the keep off the grass signs in the park to Goethe's stanza on the wall [of Hirschfeld's Institute] – was irradiated with Sex. For him, the difference between a table and ein Tisch was that a table was the dining-table in his mother's house and ein Tisch was ein Tisch in the Cosy Corner.⁴⁸

In his autobiographical novel *In the Purely Pagan Sense* (1976), John Lehmann wrote about having been taken by Isherwood to the same bar, the Cosy Corner. He spoke of this as 'a sensational experience' and 'a kind of emotional earthquake'. His first sight of the place offered opportunities he had never dared imagine: 'The place was filled with attractive boys of any age between sixteen and twenty-one, some fair and curly-haired, some dark and often blue-eyed, and nearly all dressed in extremely short *lederhosen* which showed off their smooth and sun-burnt thighs to delectable advantage.' As soon as they arrived, Isherwood (here called William) sent him off to the toilets for a further lesson in availability: 'I was followed in by several boys, who, as if by chance, ranged themselves on either side of me and pulled out their cocks rather to show them off than to relieve nature as I was doing. I don't think a drop fell into the gutter from any of them; but many sly grins were cast in my direction.' When he went back to their table, he and William were joined by two other boys. William told him to put his hands in their pockets. 'I put one hand into the outer *lederhosen* pocket of the one on my left, and my other hand into the outer pocket of the one on my right. They were both now snuggling up to me. I had a shock of more than surprise when I found that the pockets had been cut off inside, and

my hands went straight through to their sex.' He began to kiss both boys, but 'out of a shyness that I had not yet overcome' did not take either of them home.

He and William went on to several other *lokals*, but it was to the Cosy Corner that his thoughts kept returning. 'I was in a daze, my head swimming with pretty boys' inviting smiles and inviting thighs.'⁴⁹

Other, more lavish establishments, were designed to cater for the needs of tourists from the provinces and abroad. Isherwood generalises about these lucrative joints in *Christopher and His Kind*:

In the West End there were also dens of pseudo-vice catering to heterosexual tourists. Here, screaming boys in drag and monocled Eton-cropped girls in dinner-jackets play-acted the high jinks of Sodom and Gomorrah, horrifying the onlookers and reassuring them that Berlin was still the most decadent city in Europe.⁵⁰

This was a 'decadence' staged to give an adequate frisson of transgression without the audience's having to mix with real transgressors; and, of course, they paid for this privilege. In *Goodbye to Berlin*, Isherwood concentrates these enactments of vice into the portrayal of a single nightclub, which we are to understand as being typical:

The Salomé turned out to be very expensive and even more depressing than I had imagined. A few *stage lesbians* and some young men with plucked eyebrows lounged at the bar, uttering occasional raucous guffaws or treble hoots – supposed, apparently, to *represent* the laughter of the damned. The whole premises are painted gold and inferno-red – crimson plush inches thick, and vast gilded mirrors. It was pretty full. The audience consisted chiefly of respectable middle-aged tradesmen and their families, exclaiming in good-humoured amazement: 'Do they really?' and 'Well, I never!' We went out half-way through the cabaret *performance*, after a young man in a spangled crinoline and jewelled breast-caps had painfully but successfully executed three splits.⁵¹

Although a mere visitor to the city himself, Isherwood was more than theoretically involved in the city's gay scene with particular gay Germans, and was actually living amid the social realities of Hirschfeld's Institute for a while. To the subjective objectivity of his camera-I, the Salomé's display of display is unbearable. Its portrayals of same-sex desire have nothing to do with the real lives of gay Berliners. The heterosexual audiences it caters for experience not desire but the satisfying superiority of their own judgemental tolerance. Not

much will have to change before they decide that the tolerable is intolerable, after all.

On 7 November 1932, in Berlin, Count Harry Kessler had dinner with the French novelist Roger Martin du Gard, among others. Kessler recorded the Frenchman's impressions in his diary:

It is his first visit and what fascinates him most is the life in the streets, '*la Rue de Berlin*'. The people he sees there seem to him quite different from those in Paris; the future is reflected in their looks. The new man, the man of the future, is being created in Germany ... Martin du Gard is much impressed with the fine appearance of the German race. The handsome boys and beautiful young girls are, to him, a reincarnation of ancient Greece.⁵²

Earlier in the year, in Paris (26 August 1932), Kessler had found the French mesmerised by developments in Germany – and not just the politics: 'Murky factors like bathing in the buff ("*le nudisme*")', dives where pretty boys substitute for girls, and the reassessment of moral factors among German youth have their part in the almost pathological interest taken in Germany.'⁵³

Martin du Gard reported back to André Gide on the wonders and delights of Berlin, where he had found the young involved in 'natural, gratuitous pleasures, sport, bathing, free love, games, [and] a truly pagan, Dionysiac freedom'. He spent most of his time there wandering around 'the less salubrious districts of the city', noticing (relative to Paris) the many prostitutes of both sexes and the ready availability of pornography.⁵⁴ Encouraged by such reports, André Gide visited Berlin no fewer than five times in 1933. He, too, was delighted by, and seriously interested in, what he found there, although he did concede to Robert Levesque that Paris itself was slowly becoming more Berlin-like even if at the same time (to use that most erotically evocative of geographical terms) more 'southern'.⁵⁵ The two writers coincided in Berlin in October, Gide arriving for a fortnight, Martin du Gard for five weeks. They did their best to avoid each other on their forays into the sexual underworld, but always dutifully compared notes on what they had seen and experienced. They disagreed, for instance, on guesswork statistics concerning how many of the male prostitutes on the streets and in the clubs were actually homosexual.

Martin du Gard posed as a specialist in matters sexual in order to attend interviews with homosexual men at Hirschfeld's Institute. He also toured the gay clubs, nominating as his favourites the *Hollandais* and the *lesbian Monocle*.

Christopher Isherwood was at Hirschfeld's Institute on the day that Gide was

Christopher Isherwood was at Christopher Isherwood on the day that Gide has given a guided tour, Gide 'in full costume as The Great French Novelist, complete with cape'. Retrospectively calling him a 'Sneering culture-conceited

frog!' from the safety of the mid-1970s – and in doing so sounding like a rather uptight, Francophobic D.H. Lawrence – Isherwood failed to consider that Gide's pose might have been a way of giving Hirschfeld's project the serious imprimatur of a symbolic cultural visit, to which the cape and the performed 'greatness' were essential embellishments.⁵⁶

The English novelist William Plomer's wealthy friend Anthony Butts took him to Europe in May 1930. When they reached Berlin a friend of a friend showed them around the gay scene. In his memoir *At Home* (1958), Plomer would write of pre-Hitlerite Berlin: 'the then notorious night life was something well worth seeing. Blatant impudicity on such a scale was certainly exciting to youthful senses, but there was something desperately sad about it – and at times something grotesquely funny.' At times, he found, it was neither sad nor funny. In a club called The Sign of the Cross the floor-show included an enema display that he thought simply disgusting. On one occasion, Plomer and Butts encountered André Gide, 'apparently taking his pleasures with his usual seriousness.'⁵⁷ The travellers moved on to Venice and then Athens, but Plomer would later go back to Berlin in his fiction.⁵⁸

One of the protagonists of Plomer's 1952 novel *Museum Pieces* is Toby d'Arfey, a standard (if heterosexual) aesthete in the Anthony Blanche mould (see Chapter Six), based on Tony Butts. One character says of him, 'He's an aesthete, but he's tough. He has a feminine streak, but the nicest men often have, don't you think?' When she first sees him, the narrator, Jane Valance, thinks his face suggests 'a man who loved pleasure although he saw through it'. What she thinks of as his 'Feminine ruthlessness', she comments drily, 'is not one of the qualities I like in a man'. He has a tendency to notice the lesbians around him – as when a distant female cousin's legacy goes to what he calls 'an ambiguous, or perhaps I had better say an *unambiguous* female companion, a burning Sappho from Ilfracombe, by all accounts' – or to invent them – as when the housekeeper says to his mother, 'When I'm with you I feel just as I used to with my husband.' On his travels he has spent some weeks in Harlem. He reads Ronald Firbank and Vernon Lee. He thinks a school containing boys 'of all ages' from eight to eighteen is 'Very irregular. It must be a hotbed of vice.' He has a close relationship with Lydia Delap, a woman ten years older than he, who at the end of the Great War was in London, mixing with 'would-be aesthetes, and half-baked intellectuals, for the most part male, or ostensibly male, rather than female, though she had for a time an ambiguously close friendship with a young woman of striking appearance, who died of taking

drugs. She then moved to Paris, where 'She had a fatal attraction for the more effete of the younger American expatriates, to whom she became a sort of broody, fascinating, and corruptive elder sister.'⁵⁹

It was in Paris, surrounded by these 'lost generation' nonentities that Toby first met her; and it is with her that he travels to Berlin, at roughly the moment of Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin*, when Communists and Nazis are vying for possession of the streets. The idea of the trip came from Lydia, but the narrator explains why it appeals to Toby:

Berlin had the reputation at that time of being 'gay' with a freedom else where unknown and in some ways unprecedented. Of course he knew, as every thoughtful person knew, that it was gaiety and freedom of a kind that could not last, because it was morbid, desperate, and precarious; but the very precariousness and perversity of the 'life' it notoriously offered to the moneyed and enterprising visitor was an attraction to one who, like Toby, had at once a rage for life and a foreboding of finality.⁶⁰

Jane's use of 'gay' is meant not in the specifically homosexual sense, restricted at the time she is speaking of to a fairly narrow range of speakers, but in the more general sense of an openness to pleasures which might, indeed, verge on the scandalous. The 'unknown' and 'unprecedented' gayness of the place would include nocturnal clubs and cabarets, including strip-shows catering to heterosexual men, jazz clubs frequented by both African and American Negroes, as well as the queer haunts of homosexual women and men and cross-dressers of all the genders. Whether the sense of foreboding emanates from the relative primness of Jane Valance or from the hindsight of William Plomer, is not immediately obvious. Jane does not yet know – or rather, she shows no sign of knowing – that the streets are violently contested. (Toby will write to her later about 'nasty attacks by gangs of political yahoos' from left and right.⁶¹) She has no real reason to suggest that 'every thoughtful person' must be aware that the gaiety of Berlin cannot last. But Toby, seeing the place at first hand, might get an inkling of this possibility – if he really is as 'thoughtful' as Jane suggests.

We readers do not see Toby's Berlin at first hand; we receive it third-hand, from Jane, via a long letter she receives from Toby. He reports that Lydia, who 'finds romantic what some people would find absurd or repulsive or merely pointless', has discovered 'a Lesbian League' – 'She isn't one herself, of course', he adds – which is 'organized like a sort of YWCA, with hostels, a magazine of its own, and so on.' But she is 'more interested in the male counterpart of all that, which is very much in evidence'. They want to visit 'a Lesbian *lokal*' together, and then 'the other sort'. Outlandishly, they decide that in order to do

so without looking like heterosexual tourists, one of them must go to each venue in drag – he as a woman to the lesbian bar, she as a man to the gay male one. Toby describes the lesbians they encounter:

154

HOMINTERN

Such an extraordinary assembly of women you can't imagine – all shapes and sizes and classes and nationalities, one might almost add 'and all sexes' – some beautiful, others monstrous . . . On the whole their behaviour was decorous, even prim. The atmosphere seemed to me sad and somehow terribly respectable . . . They were like actresses determined to go through with roles they hadn't chosen. Some of them were obviously enjoying themselves, while even the sad ones had a sort of dedicated look.⁶²

For all its brevity, this sketch offers a version of homosexual subculture that makes familiar claims: internationalism, the mixing of the classes, the coexistence of a range of types, all adding up to an impression of the tolerance within the subculture that it does not receive from without. Even 'all the sexes' are represented here, so long as none of them is male – or, for that matter, heterosexual. As far as Toby can see – and he is, after all, only a one-off visitor with decidedly partial vision – this is an exclusive subculture that bars its doors to outsiders – men and unswervingly heterosexual women – but is open to all types within its own catchment. Whether any bar really was as 'open' within lesbianism as this seems to him is questionable; but, given so limited an observer as Toby, Plomer is only conveying an impression of an impression. The truth of the place is beyond both Toby and his correspondent.

Toby has found what he wanted in the 'extraordinary assembly' and some of the outlandish individuals with it. (There is, for instance, a suitably grotesque 'hunchback Hungarian countess in jodhpurs *and spurs*' – Toby's emphasis – whom I removed from the quoted description of the assembly.) But after the initial shock of entering such a place, a major aspect of which is merely to be in a club where no men are present (other than the observer himself, in drag), ultimately Toby is disappointed. They usually are, such tourists. They go looking for the outlandish and then, even when they have found a little of it, see the mundanity behind it; the normality, even. Toby goes looking for a den of sin and finds his admittedly 'extraordinary assembly' behaving well. They may be lesbians, but they are just socialising with each other. This explains, I suppose, the yoking of two assessments in his next sentence: 'The atmosphere seemed to me sad and somehow terribly respectable.' The sadness is his, but he wishes it on them for having disappointed him. The respectable homosexual is always a let-down.

On the following night it is Lydia Delap who cross-dresses and Toby takes her to a 'notorious' *lokal* called the *Iugendquell*. He encloses a snapshot for

Jane: 'As you'll see from the photograph, she made a decidedly queer man, but as we were going to a resort of queer men, that didn't matter much'. No detail is offered of this place. (Was Plomer, in 1952, less willing to make an exotic and

humorous spectacle of his fellow homosexual men than of lesbians?) One detail, though, is of interest: 'There were several English present. I was introduced to a man who lives in Berlin and is writing a book. If it's as good as his conversation, it ought to be very good. He looked very quizzically at Lydia, who hardly spoke, and then at me. I feel deeply compromised.' (The watcher senses he is watched.) Doubtless, this is William Plomer's version of what it felt like to be captured by the fishy lens of Christopher Isherwood, as he made notes for *Goodbye to Berlin*.⁶³

After all these accounts, written in letters and diaries at the time or retrospectively in memoirs and autobiographical fiction, it comes as a surprise to hear that the occasional visitor found the Berlin scene surprisingly tame. Duncan Grant, for instance, was disappointed when taken to some of Berlin's famous gay cafés in the summer of 1924. He wrote to Vanessa Bell: 'It was interesting to see but as you might imagine extremely proper and rather slow[,] not unlike a Cambridge party at a rather shabby undergraduate's rooms. The only thing that was a little bolder was that the pictures on the walls were sometimes photos of nude young men with horses – very teutonic.'⁶⁴ Even more surprisingly, perhaps, it was completely possible to overlook the notorieties of the sexual Berlin, if you had other things to do. In his memoirs, the art historian Kenneth Clark wrote: 'I made my way to Berlin, where I spent my time in museums and galleries, and so saw nothing of the ferocious depravities which made so great an impression on [his friend] Eddy [Sackville-West], and later on Stephen Spender.'⁶⁵

Spender had travelled to Germany from England in 1930, attracted to its definitively modern environment and encouraged by Auden, Isherwood and others. He arrived in Hamburg in late July. Isherwood visited him there from Berlin in August, and Spender paid return visits to Berlin in September and December. In a famous passage in his memoir *World Within World* (1951), he wrote:

Modernism in this Germany was (within certain limits of which I was not then aware) a popular mass-movement. Roofless houses, expressionist painting, atonal music, bars for homosexuals, nudism, sun-bathing, camping, all were accepted, and became like bright, gaudy, superficial colours in which the whole country was painted. Surrounded by this superficiality there were also serious artists, indignant Protestants, vengeful

nationalists, Communists, many private tragedies, and much suffering. But such intense expressions of will and feeling were obscured by the predominant fashionableness of advanced attitudes. It was easy to be advanced. You had only to take off your clothes.⁶⁶

Temporarily released from the post-Victorian inhibitions of England, he wanted to take part in the advance – in both of its aspects, superficial and serious. In a letter to Roger Senhouse (27 December 1930), Lytton Strachey reported that Spender ‘Thinks of living in Germany with a German boy, but hasn’t yet found a German boy to live with.’⁶⁷ Later, on the eve of war in September 1939, Spender wrote a diary entry looking back with rather hyperbolic fondness of his stay in Hamburg:

I used to bathe, and I went to parties of young people. I had never enjoyed parties before and I never have since, but these were like living in the atmosphere of a Blue Period Picasso. Everyone was beautiful, and gentle, everyone was poor, no one was smart. On summer evenings they danced in the half light, and when they were tired of dancing they lay down in the forest, on the beach, on mattresses, on the bare floor. They laughed a great deal, smiling with their innocent eyes and showing well-shaped, but not very strong, teeth. Sometimes they let one down, sometimes the poorer ones stole, for example, but there was no Sin. I am not being ironic. There really was no sin, as there is in this kind of life in Paris or London.⁶⁸

The need to distinguish Hamburg and Berlin from the likes of Paris and London is related to Spender’s idealism and his sense of future possibilities, as distinct from the risqué, Wildean past of the Naughty Nineties. He was not seeking the freedom to be immoral, or even amoral, and his sense of sexual freedom was of a sunnier disposition, less moodily nocturnal, than the pleasures he associated with the *fin de siècle*. He was far less interested in the cabaret scene, with its self-conscious exhibitionism, than in cosy corners where relationships could be forged, even if initially on a commercial basis.

I was twenty in those days, and I was caught up mostly with the idea of Friendship – *Freundschaft*, which was a very significant aspect of the life of the Weimar Republic. This, if it was frank, was also idealistic. It was not cynical, shame-faced, smart, snobbish or stodgy, as so often in England. It was more like Walt Whitman’s idea of camaraderie.⁶⁹

Flirting with Fascism

It was all too easy to be seduced by fascism – as, indeed, by other tyrannies – if you did not live under its yoke and only judged it by its pageantry. With its polished leather, its gonfalons and its high-kicking chorus lines, Nazism provided the visitor to its formal parades with an uncommon spectacle, all the

more exciting for its superficial contrast with the drabness of the Depression. It allowed you to imagine that a whole people could be enthusiastically *marched* into prosperity. Well, so it may have seemed. Some visitors were beguiled, and some of those eventually saw sense. A few examples should suffice.

The American architect Philip Johnson was an internationalist from the start, since his family's wealth enabled them to travel frequently. There was an extended trip to France in 1919, when Johnson was thirteen; then, in his late teens and early twenties, a second trip to Europe in the summer of 1925; a stay in England, where he studied a number of the cathedrals, in 1926; Heidelberg in 1927; and a family tour of Algeria, Egypt, Greece, Italy and France in 1928. It was on this last holiday that he first had a sexual encounter – with a guard in the Cairo Museum. Back in the United States he had his first affair, with an actor from Kansas City. He went to Heidelberg again in 1929, and during a fortnight in London enjoyed a brief flirtation with Noël Coward (never consummated). On the same trip he discovered Berlin, where he felt able to enjoy himself sexually, unencumbered by the guilt he always felt back home. He said of the city, 'It was a very open town because they'd lost the war . . . And that still rankled, of course. The defeated parties have to be sort of, "Well, I'm being fucked. I'm fucked. So I better make money doing it." And I enjoyed the payment part of it. They were Germans. They were boys. Very nice. Every summer I had a different friend.'⁷⁰ It was in Berlin, too, that he first started designing buildings (in the first place, merely, alterations to various Johnson family properties back home). He visited the Bauhaus in Dessau and met Walter Gropius. Not that his enthusiasm for Modernism in architecture precluded an interest in the Baroque, the best examples of which he studied in Dresden and Prague. One evening he sat next to the sixty-year-old Siegfried Wagner, son of the composer, in the Festspielhaus at Bayreuth, and was taken aback when the older man's hand began to explore the length of his thigh.

In 1924, Johnson's father had given him stocks in Alcoa, the Aluminum Corporation of America; by the time he graduated from Harvard in the spring of 1930, he was a millionaire in his own right. By now he was having a passionate affair with the would-be poet Cary Ross, whom he had met through friends associated with the new Museum of Modern Art in New York. Ross was said to have been a friend of Hemingway and the Fitzgeralds in Paris in the 1920s. They resumed the affair, with a little less frenzy, in Paris in the summer. They took to spending a lot of time with an architecture scholar, Henry-Russell Hitchcock.

also gay. In Berlin, which he visited twice in the same year, Johnson met Mies van der Rohe, who was at that time the Director of the Bauhaus. Back in New York, he proposed that the Museum of Modern Art stage an exhibition of modern architecture. It did so in February 1932, and the exhibition subsequently

toured thirteen US cities, introducing Americans to the concept of the International Style. In that same year, Johnson co-authored with Henry-Russell Hitchcock *The International Style: Architecture since 1922*. It was in the summer of 1932, in Berlin again, that German politics first impinged on his consciousness. A friend took him to one of Hitler's rallies, outside Potsdam; Johnson was thrilled to see 'all those blond boys in black leather'. This initial erotic enthusiasm would grow into a more perverse involvement in right-wing extremism as the decade wore on.

In New York, Johnson now ran with a smart young crowd of artists, many of them gay, working in a range of different art forms, but mainly in music. Virgil Thomson, whom he had found penniless in Paris and loaned the cost of his passage home, introduced him to John Cage in 1934; there was also Pavel Tchelitchev, Lincoln Kirstein, Thomson's lover Maurice Grosser, and Aaron Copland. Johnson and Cage had a fling together, which ended when Johnson failed to invite Cage to a society party at which Cage felt Johnson felt Cage did not belong. In the same year, Johnson had what he considered the first of his 'serious' relationships, with Jimmy Daniels, a black café singer he had met in Harlem. His association with the Museum of Modern Art saw its high point in the influential exhibition 'Machine Art'. He resigned from MoMA in December.

When Hitler came to power in 1933, Johnson was excited by German resurgence, and paradoxically fascinated by the National Socialist opposition to the Modernism to which he was himself committed. Over the next few years he did more than flirt with fascism; they seemed, for a while, to be made for each other. He and Alan Blackburn, an old school friend, founded something they called the National Party in 1934, holding informal meetings in Johnson's New York apartment. His friends in the arts were, for the most part, disturbed and embarrassed by this development. During the 1936 presidential election, which was won by Franklin D. Roosevelt, he worked with the Roman Catholic priest Charles E. Coughlin of the Union Party, in New London, Ohio. Then, in 1937, he and Blackburn founded the Young Nationalists, a band of youths who gathered mainly from backgrounds in the Ku Klux Klan, the German-American Band, and other right-wing groups. He kept on visiting Berlin, of course, still to sample its sexual opportunities, but now also to study fascism seriously. He attended the Nuremberg Rally celebrating the fifth anniversary of the Nazis' accession to power.

His 1938 trip to Germany was followed by visits to Poland. According to

His 1939 trip to Germany was followed by a visit to Poland. According to his biographer, 'The Polish tour only reinforced Philip's preconceptions of backwardness among the Poles and the Jews, while reminding him of the superiority of German society and the German military force.' It really seems he had no sensitivity to the personal situation of those around him. For instance, when

he was in Brno, in Czechoslovakia, he decided to call in on the architect Otto Eisler. It had not occurred to him to consider the consequences of the fact that Eisler was both a Jew and a homosexual; as it happened, he had been in the hands of the Gestapo just days beforehand. Eisler spoke to him only briefly. Johnson's American friends put up with staggering attitudes. Lincoln Kirstein, who was also both Jewish and homosexual, wrote of him in 1944, 'In his most rabidly fa[s]cist days, he told me that I was number one on his list for elimination in the coming revolution. I felt bitterly towards him, and towards what he represented.' When Britain and France declared war, following the invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939, the German Propaganda Ministry formally invited Johnson to follow the Wehrmacht to the front. He did so with enthusiasm, and blandly wrote home: 'We saw Warsaw burn and Modlin being bombed. It was a stirring spectacle.' He published five articles in *Social Justice* in 1939 (24 July, 11 September, 16 October and two on 6 November), all expressing his own anti-Semitism and approving of German politics. By June 1940, the US Office of Naval Intelligence had begun to investigate him as a possible German spy.⁷¹

In 1933, the American journalist Janet Flanner ('Genêt') travelled around Germany with a small group of other lesbian women, including her lover, Solita Solano, and another woman, Noel Haskins Murphy, with whom she had recently fallen in love. By now, there were plentiful signs of the repressive nature of the National Socialist regime. The women had to rein in their behaviour somewhat, and in public places lower their voices. On one occasion Solano was ordered to change out of the trousers she was wearing. Yet Flanner was slow to recognise what was happening under the Nazis. In 1935, having written a two-part profile of Queen Mary for the *New Yorker*, she then agreed to write a three-parter on Adolf Hitler – as far as possible, avoiding politics! When it was published in 1936, she was surprised to find that her piece was welcomed in Germany as being pro-Führer. (Malcolm Cowley of the *New Republic* called her a fascist to her face.) Sent to Berlin in the summer to cover the Olympic Games, she wrote of the Minister of Propaganda, Hermann Goering, that he was 'apparently the most liberal official patron of the arts in Germany today'. Her biographer adds: 'and she wasn't being ironic.'⁷² As late as 1938, Flanner and Noel Haskins Murphy took their annual trip to the music festivals in Germany and Austria.

After the outbreak of war, Flanner and Solano went to New York on a previously planned visit. They had paid their rent in Paris up to April 1940, intending to return, but in the event they stayed in the USA. (Noel Haskins Murphy, on the other hand, decided to stay in France, even after the German invasion. She was interned by the Germans as an enemy alien in September 1942, once the

United States had finally entered the war. She was released in December.) Flanner went on trying to be 'neutral' about fascism; indeed, she managed to perform the peculiar contortion of supporting both Pétain and de Gaulle at the same time. From the safety of Manhattan, she published *Pétain: The Old Man of France* (1944). She went back to Europe to work as an official war correspondent for the *New Yorker*. In Paris, which by then had been liberated, she met up with Noel again. For both print and broadcast media – she was now recording despatches for the Blue Network, later to become ABC – she sent reports to the USA from the front at Royan, then from various locations across Germany, including Cologne and the newly liberated concentration camp at Buchenwald. Yet even after the war had ended and the full extent of the Nazis' atrocities was becoming apparent, Flanner's attitudes could be strangely ambiguous. For instance, in 1946, while covering the Nuremberg trials, she shocked a group of women journalists and stenographers by asking them over breakfast which of the Nazi defendants, if necessary, they would have slept with. She did, however, write an admirable series of campaigning essays about the fate of displaced people, after visiting the devastated cities of Vienna, Prague, Warsaw and Berlin in March 1947. The French made her a knight of the Legion of Honour in 1948.

The attraction to Nazism was often superficial, based on surface aesthetic factors whose allure soon wore thin. Luchino Visconti seems to have associated the political movement, romantically, with the German people – their language, their culture, their looks – and then transferred that impression back home to Italian fascism, before eventually seeing through, and fighting against, both. Artistically literate from an early age, he developed a passion for the opera when he was seven, and as a Milanese he was able to indulge it as often as he wished in the family box at La Scala; but it was during his teens that family connections began to bring him into contact with people who were or who would become major figures in the Modernist revolution. At nineteen, for instance, in 1925, he met Diaghilev, who had called on Donna Carla Visconti with his new protégé Serge Lifar.

However, as he entered his twenties, two factors interrupted Visconti's life as a leisured and well-heeled aesthete. In 1926 he joined the cavalry school at Pinerolo in Piemonte; his military service lasted until 1928. Then, on 30 September 1929, he had an accident which would affect him permanently. He

crashed his new Lancia Spider on the way to Monza to race it, killing the family chauffeur, who had been reluctant to go on the trip. Visconti did not drive again for twenty years, and he continued to support the chauffeur's family for the rest of his own life. As an immediate reaction to the disaster, he went into retreat for two months in the Tassili mountains in the southern Sahara. When

he re-emerged, he consciously tried to quicken his emotional recovery. Intending actively to change his life, he travelled to Paris. There he met Serge Lifar again, as well as, among others, Jean Cocteau and Marie-Laure, the vicomtesse de Noailles. Coco Chanel took a fancy to him and they had an affair – for thus far in his life his sexual interests had been shared equally between women and men – but, although he had fluent French, he tended to remain silent in the face of Chanel's loquacity. One of only a few Italians under Fascism to have a passport, he compensated for the devastation of the car crash by launching himself into a life of rather frantic toing and froing; he was virtually commuting between Milan and Paris, but also made trips to London, Munich and Berlin. His great passion was for keeping racehorses. Not until the mid-1930s did his artistic involvements relegate the stud and the turf to the status of a mere interest.

Gaia Servadio's account of Visconti's travels in the early 1930s identifies another respect in which his interests were divided:

Much as he was attracted by Paris, by the disorderly explosion of ideas, by sexual freedom and freedom of expression, his puritan side, his admiration for discipline and for the glorification of the body and youth ideally attracted him to the new Nazi regime.

His sister would recall his having attended a Nazi rally, probably in 1934, after which 'he described the discipline and strength of handsome youths who were carrying something, a huge pole, I think'. He later confided to a friend that he had watched with intense longing the ranks of uniformed, blond, sadistic boys. He was also an admirer of *Triumph of the Will*, Leni Riefenstahl's film of the Berlin Olympics. By contrast with National Socialism, he found Italian Fascism vulgar and parochial.⁷³

Meanwhile, in Paris, Luchino Visconti made the reputation of an emporium selling smart luggage, when he bought all their suitcases stamped with the firm's initials, LV – Louis Vuitton. It was clear he had a lot more travelling to do, and no intention of travelling light. He went down to the Riviera for a while to stay in Coco Chanel's villa, La Pausa, between Roquebrune and Cap Martin. Here, at various times, other visitors included Cocteau, Lifar, Jean Marais and Francis Ford Coppola. But the affair with Chanel had ended, and in

marais and Francis Poullenc. But the affair with Chanel had ended, and in February 1935 he suddenly declared that he and a woman called Irma Windisch-Graetz had decided to get married. A conflict arose, since her father wanted them to wait until Visconti had found himself a profession, whereas Visconti was in a hurry to tie the knot at once. The fact was that he had fallen in love. The urgency came from the less convenient fact that it was not his

prospective wife he had fallen in love with, but (for the first time) a man: the German photographer Horst P. Horst, whom he had met when lunching with Marie-Laure de Noailles.

It was from this time that Visconti could be regarded as predominantly homosexual; presumably, the relationship with Horst enabled him to recognise and accept this. Before long, he had given up his fiancée and, although he was still hiding his love for Horst from his friends, to his own satisfaction he had rejected bourgeois convention once and for all. There was an aesthetic and (eventually) professional pay-off, too: Horst taught him about photography. At the time they met, as Horst later recalled, Visconti wandered around with two books in his pocket: Mann's *Death in Venice* and one by Gide. He was still, by convention or habit, a fascist. Horst, though, had left Germany because of Nazism – he went to study architecture under Le Corbusier before turning to photography – and his personal influence soon began to change Visconti's view on the matter.⁷⁴ At the same time, a new political outlook was beginning to affect him via his unexpected involvement in film-making. In 1935 he had met Jean Renoir and taken the opportunity to observe him at work; both he and Henri Cartier-Bresson assisted Renoir in the making of *Une partie de campagne*; by 1936 he had been taken on as an unpaid member of Renoir's crew. This association accelerated his political awakening. His new friends introduced him to the films of Eisenstein; he also realised, at last, that to the Nazis and the Italian Fascists he and others like him were mere perverts.

Although his social whirl diminished slowly, Visconti threw himself into film work and, later, into the resistance to Fascism. Jean Renoir had suggested he film James M. Cain's 1934 novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice*; Visconti did so. When he showed its first rough-cut to Jean Marais, the film was called *Ossessione*. This magnificent debut was not welcomed by the Church in Rome, or by the Fascists, for reasons which Servadio makes clear in her account of a film

which showed human weakness as a natural factor and recounted squalid episodes concerning unheroic characters. There was even a homosexual in the script, the Spaniard, who was depicted as a sympathetic character. The theme of male companionship as a better alternative to passion was offen-

sive. The fact that a whore was a purer figure than Giovanna [the central character] was also at odds with contemporary ideas . . . The homosexual was the symbol of liberty.⁷⁵

When the Allies landed at Salerno in September 1943, the King and Pietro Badoglio, who had taken over from Mussolini, fled Rome to evade the Germans.

GERMANY AND ITS VISITORS

163

Visconti likewise left the city, heading up into the Abruzzi, then turning southward with a group of Allied ex-prisoners of war. Circumstances forced them to turn again and, having escaped a brief spell of imprisonment by the Germans, they made their way towards Rome, where they arrived in February 1944. Having to remain in the city, Visconti started to work for the Resistance. On 15 April 1944, he was arrested and repeatedly beaten up, but not otherwise physically tortured. He was, though, among a group who were subjected to a mock firing squad. He was released on 3 June 1944, by which time the Germans had commenced their retreat from the city. Not long afterwards, the Americans marched in.

As we shall see in Chapter Seven, a tenuous line of causation between homosexuality and the excesses of Nazism was often claimed, for propagandist purposes. Quite apart from the equation of Nazism and homosexuality, there is the contrary argument whereby the lax morals of the Weimar Republic could be used to justify, or could be blamed for, not only the Nazis' crackdown on homosexuality that followed – the closing of the clubs and pornographic bookshops – but also the labour camps and even the Second World War itself. In his novel *Funeral Rites* (*Pompes funèbres*, 1948), Jean Genet perversely yokes Nazism to homosexual history as the cold turkey from an opiate: before the Second World War, he writes, 'Germany, stunned and staggering, was just managing to recover from the deep, rich drowsiness, the dizziness, the suffocation fertile in the new prodigies into which it had been plunged by the perfumes and charms emitted slowly and heavily by that strange curly poppy, Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld.'⁷⁶ On the other hand, Genet also brings into occupied Paris an Adolf Hitler who is himself an addiction, political and sexual, an enemy ripe for the most intimate fraternisations.

In the anglophone world, it was Christopher Isherwood's very narrow version of Weimar Berlin and its eclipse that caught on and endured. A gay author's choice of a narrator of unspecified sexuality (based on himself) whose supposedly objective, camera-like curiosity surveys the scene without involvement, while his friend Sally Bowles stands in for him as a wholehearted participant in the pleasures the city afforded – albeit involving prostitution and an abortion – seems, objectively speaking, an unlikely narrative to have lastingly captured people's imagination. Having a sequence of German boyfriends,

Isherwood was much more involved in German society than he was able to make his narrator, even though he lived in Berlin for just four years (1929–33). Perhaps this was to the benefit of his writing, which could only offer a pared down, narrowly subjective impression of the rise of Nazism – so pared down, indeed, that the narrative has a mythic simplicity amenable to apparently endless reworking and adaptation to other genres.

In truth, it is not so much *Goodbye to Berlin* itself as the later sequence of bastardisations of it that have fixed this view of Berlin. In 1952, John Van Druten dramatised Isherwood's story 'Sally Bowles' as *I Am a Camera*. The play was a success, but he and Isherwood argued over the balance of their respective shares in the royalties. Later in the decade, when Victor Chapin tried to turn the Berlin stories into a musical, Isherwood had the idea of getting W.H. Auden and Chester Kallman to write it. Auden was enthusiastic – he decided that the Isherwood character 'ought to be quite overtly queer'⁷⁷ – and Arthur Laurents told Isherwood that the Broadway producer Hal Prince was interested in the show. Isherwood wrote the treatment and Auden wrote some verses, but the project eventually failed and was shelved. Meanwhile, Isherwood was working on the book that would become *Down There on a Visit* (1961).

When *Cabaret*, the musical version of Van Druten's play, opened on Broadway in November 1966 it ran for 1,165 performances. (It was written by Joe Masteroff, with lyrics by Fred Ebb and music by John Kander.) Isherwood declined to see it, but his lover Don Bachardy went and said it was awful. On the other hand, they both liked Bob Fosse's 1972 movie version of the musical.⁷⁸ Liza Minnelli's Sally Bowles settled a particular phrase in the popular memory: 'divine decadence'. It is notable how few of the visitors to Berlin I have consulted referred to the experience as 'decadent'. That was still a word more closely associated with the *fin de siècle* of London and Paris.⁷⁹

