

A Reporter at Large

Reporting from Nuremberg

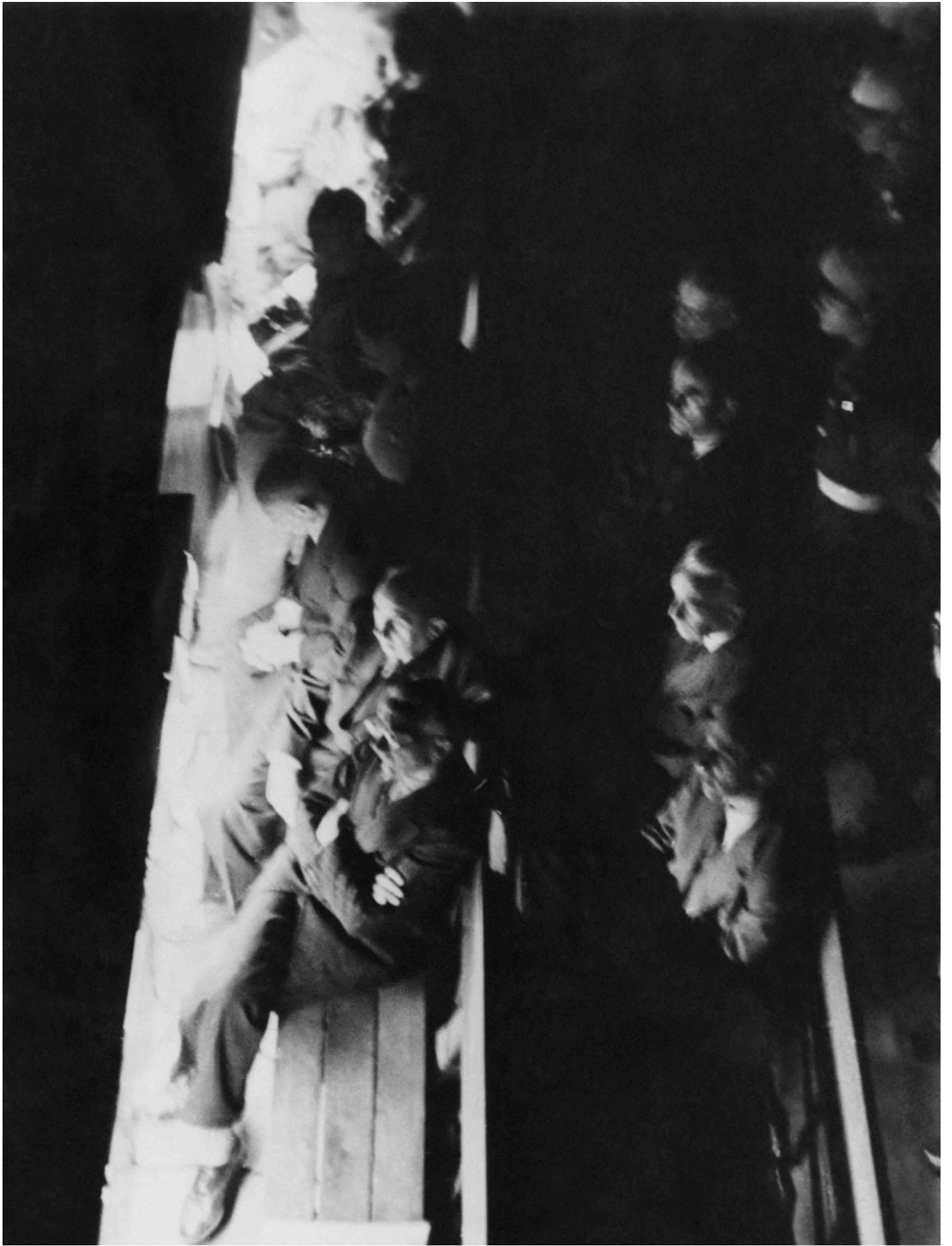
A dispatch from the trials of Nazi war criminals.

By Rebecca West

October 19, 1946



Save this story



It was the last two days of the Nuremberg trial that I went abroad to see. Those men who had wanted to kill me and my kind and who had nearly had their wish were to be told whether I and my kind were to kill them and why. Quite an occasion. But for most of the time my mind was distracted from it by bright, sharp, smaller things. Consider the marvels of air travel. It was necessary, and really necessary, that a large number of important persons, including the heads of the armed and civil services, should go to Nuremberg and hear the reading of the judgment, because in no other conceivable way could they gather what the trial had been about. Long, long ago, the minds of all busy people who did not happen to be lawyers had lost touch with the proceedings. The daily reports inevitably concentrated on the sensational moments when the defendants sassed authority back. To follow the faint obtusions of the legal issues in the press took the type of mind that reads its daily portion and never misses, and, indeed, even a tougher type of mind than that, since this duty had to be discharged without the fear of hell as inspiration. That kind of integrity carries one irresistibly to the top of the grocery store, and almost no further. The high positions fall to people with pliant minds, who drop every habit if it is not agreeable or immediately serviceable. These were all at sea about Nuremberg, and it was a pity, for English public opinion had gone silly about it. There had surged up a wave of masochist malaise, akin to the Keynesian scorn for Versailles after the last war, which spread and split over any attempt to cope with the situation of victory. There was need for the influential to talk some sense on the subject. It was unfortunate that these responsible persons, as well as the newspaper correspondents, had to travel to Nuremberg by air. This amounted to a retrogression to the very early days of railway transport; planes carry so few passengers, and so many pilots have been demobilized. Nuremberg is between three and four hours' flight from London, but to attend a sitting of the court that began on Monday, September 30th, I had to leave on the previous Tuesday.

I was bidden by the authorities, the day before, to wait for my papers in a block of offices built on a site which, up to a few years ago, was occupied by the town house of a ducal family. I frequented it in those days, though not to visit the duke and duchess. I used to pass, on another errand, through their halls, where gold and lacquer and crystal reflections swam in the depths, a little sadder than still water, of mirrors some centuries old, and go across a patch of sour grass where lean London cats, masterless and therefore as God made them, mocked and bullied the plump ducal cats, who, as the price of love and regular meals, had suffered a certain misfortune, and finally enter a sort of outhouse, in which an old gentleman sat among an uncontrollable spilth of papers, such a spilth as would have sent one, had it been of water, telephoning right and left for plumbers. The duke was Roman Catholic; this man had been an Anglican clergyman in a village on his estates, and had been converted to the ancient faith; to provide for him, he had been given the task of putting in order the family archives. It was kindly meant, but the poor old gentleman, who was a scholar, was in the state of one who has been turned out in a forest during the autumn and been told that each fallen leaf bears a message and he must piece the leaves together. In panic, he complained to every visitor that in these papers he found chains of evidence running all through modern history to this and that event, and he could not keep them in order or deliver any neat whole to the historians. Now there were no mirrors and no cats, and no old gentleman lost among an excess of significance, but a bright civil servant in a bright office, who brightly handed me some papers. When I saw that they were my Army orders, in triplicate, I knew that I was entering a man's world, in the pejorative sense. It was decreed that I should fly from an airport half an hour from my home in the country, and I applauded that. Nothing, I said, could be more convenient. I was checked and chilled. I must, it seemed, report at an office in the heart of London, and that at six in the morning. But why? It had to be. I looked into the face of something as immutable as the will of God but not as sensible as that. Well, could I leave my bag in that office overnight? No, I could not. How was I to get a bag, at an hour when there are no taxis and no buses, to an office nowhere near a subway? They did not know. It is true that I have a husband

who can wake at any hour at will, and that we had our automobile in town. But how did authority know that? How did authority know that I am the kind of woman who, finding that neither my club nor any hotel could give me a room, would spend the night on the sofa of my club cardroom? That was not my original intention. People play bridge so late. I had hoped to use the sofa in the ladies' rest room, but I found someone else was there already. She said she had just got off a train from Milan. Gloomily, I went and waited till hearts and diamonds permitted me to wind a rug around me on the other, narrower sofa. It was hard to sleep there. I looked at the gilt pilasters of the room and remembered that this club had once been the town house of the fifth Marquess of Lansdowne, who had embarrassed the government in the middle of the last war by starting a movement in favor of peace negotiations. He was impelled to this unconventional and unpopular action, some said, because of his grief at the death of a son in battle; others said he had done it because, the bluest of Conservatives, he had seen that a prolonged war would bring down the old order in ruins. I was glad not to be visited by his ghost. Yes, the death of a young man in that abortive war has seemed, in each successive year, more tragic. Yes, the old order is in ruins; a club has trespassed on your family's house; I have trespassed on that club. But to stop fighting would not have been the answer. And what is the answer? Excuse me! I am going to Nuremberg tomorrow morning! Very early!

A motorbus took the planeload of us out of London night into country dawn, passing, in the ghostly twilight, a corner where, one breezy April afternoon when I was in my twenties, I had helped Joseph Conrad chase his bowler hat across the road. He had seemed to me then an exciting exotic, writing of such unusual things as danger. Now, as the plane rose into the leaden sky, we looked down on a land that was recording, after this worst of summers, a disaster that restored one's self-respect because it was not made by statesmen or soldiers or any men at all but by nature. In the fields, sheaves that should have stood in harvest time like stocky golden girls and then been gathered in were crouched and drab, like old scrubwomen, and would never know the honor of a barn. Half-finished ricks

heeled over on their narrow bases. The pastures looked quite lustreless. Across the North Sea, in Belgium and Holland, the ditches that should have scored fine, silver lines were broad, gross troughs of sullen water. There would be much less milk this winter, fewer eggs, less meat, perhaps less bread. There would be financial disaster in these little, sodden villages, these farms standing in black smears of mud. Worse than that, there would be mental misery, a sense of guilt. I had seen on my own farm how men who had overworked throughout the war years could not stand up to this wet summer. The bombs that fell in our valley, by reason of its likeness to another, where an important research station was hidden, were realized to be the work of an enemy and taken as fair enough. But even those who did not believe in God believed that this summer was a judgment of God, a sign that they had not found favor with a force which might have been kind, which had decided to withhold, which perhaps knew something wrong in the heart and was therefore just and irrevocable. The wet summer, which showed that God was disagreeable, the lack of shoes, which showed that governments, of whatever color, were inefficient—that is what everybody would be grumbling about in the sulky land below us. Here someone would be putting a hand in the bed of wheat spread in the barn and groaning because it was hot, hot as a hot-water bottle, and so no good for seed; and here someone would be raising his foot across his knee and twisting his neck to see the sole of his boot and groaning because there was another hole and the sock inside was soaking wet. The plane seemed a fortunate molecule, immune from the dowdy sorrows beneath. It was an illusion. Nearly all the passengers except myself and another correspondent were industrialists and technicians on their way to Hamburg on important business. The airport at Hamburg was under water.

A man's world, a man's world. I was in it, all right. When I got to Berlin, grave young men said impatiently that I must get on the next plane going back to London, because they had no idea how to send me to Nuremberg. I laid my Army orders down on the table, but nobody would look at them. Nobody ever did, then or afterward. When the young men turned the other way, I got into an automobile

that had been sent to fetch another correspondent, and the pair of us went to a hotel in the Kurfürstendam which is used as a press camp, and there they knew all about me. Yes, of course I could go to Nuremberg. Either I could go by American plane from the Tempelhof airport, which was doubtful, as there was such a competition for seats, or I could go by train by way of Frankfurt, which would take about eighteen hours.

Easy in my mind, I spent the afternoon walking incredulously about the city. I had always been a social failure in Berlin. Except in a few Jewish homes, I had been considered light-minded and flimsily dressed. At a villa in Dahlem, a banker had wrestled publicly for my soul. "At the beginning of the inflation," he told me, "I was on holiday in Switzerland. When I came back, I found that my wife had sold our dog for a sack of potatoes."

"How terrible," I said.

"Terrible?" he said. "What are you calling terrible?"

"Why," I answered weakly, "terrible that you should have had to sell your dog for a sack of potatoes."

"No, no, it was not terrible," he said huffily. "Naturally, I loved my family more than I loved my dog. How fortunate it was that I was able to sell my dog and gain in exchange nourishment for my dear wife and children. It is easy to see that you in England have no real experience of national misfortune when you call it terrible that I had to sell a dog for the sake of my family."

These lumbering creatures had blown away like smoke; only a few of them now walked in the streets of their town, and they were lean and did not bellow and kept their elbows by their sides. They had had houses as coarse as themselves, gross in design and ornamented with gross sculptures. These were now austere shells. Piranesi, he who loved to draw the well-fleshed architecture of the Romans and their Renaissance descendants, was smitten in his latter years with madness

and drew only buildings stripped to the bare brick and dedicated to the harsh necessity of being prisons. Berlin is like page after page of his “Carceri.” Different towns have different modes of desolation. There is no rubble in Berlin, few waste lots, but mile after mile of purged houses scoured by the wind and rain, mere diagrams of habitation.

A man’s world, a man’s world. The bright civil servant had fitted me out with a letter of credit for forty pounds. Authority sent me next morning on a drive to a little villa, cozily red with Virginia creeper, seven miles out in the suburbs, where there was a pay office which could cash it. It couldn’t. Some new currency regulations had come into being that prevented one’s cashing anything anywhere. I needed dollars to pay for my passage to Nuremberg. I could not buy them legitimately. I had to go to another part of Berlin and buy British scrip, a kind that is valid only in the British zone, where I was not going. My instinct then told me to go and sit in a bar. When the link between alcohol and the currency regulations had declared itself and I had acquired my dollars, I realized that I was, so far as authority was concerned, going to stay in Germany for the rest of my life. It was obvious that my fares and my keep would far exceed the sum of money I had been allowed to export. I rang up the English newspaper which had sent me abroad. They told me to draw on their resident correspondent at Nuremberg. This gave me confidence for about a quarter of an hour, at the end of which time I discovered that the same new currency regulations had forbidden any correspondent to draw more than fifteen dollars a week, which is less than he could conceivably live upon. During this time of financial perturbation, I was continually being told that I would never succeed in getting on a plane to Nuremberg but would have to reconcile myself to the long train journey. In the morning, I left Berlin by a plane with five empty seats. The others were occupied by a number of currency experts, who, I gathered, were going to Nuremberg to discuss the fact that some of the new regulations—not those which had affected me—meant nothing at all. During the journey, they made the same discovery about several other regulations, which they had apparently thought till then were all right.

It is the fate of works of art to be extraordinarily poignant because they cannot be blamed. I cannot weep for the citizens of Berlin, because I always suspected that they did not know enough to come in out of the rain, even when it turned into blood, but nobody expects a statue to know when to come in out of the rain, so I can be very sorry for the statues of Berlin. They seemed, when I first knew them, to be considerably more stable than I was ever likely to be. Opposite the Brandenburger Tor, down by the Reichstag, there was a vast column commemorating the three victorious wars of nineteenth-century Germany—the war against Denmark, the war against Austria, the Franco-Prussian War. Nearby was a statue of von Moltke, and another, of a German general named von Roon, and a whole lot of a statue of Bismarck with, around the base, a lot of allegorical women with breasts like artillery pieces. In the Tiergarten, that pleasant expanse of woodland stretching away from the Brandenburger Tor, there was the Sieges-Allee, the gorgeous chaplet of dynastic piety in which, sculptured in marble as white as wedding-cake icing, in curious enclosures like marble opera loges, stood the Margraves of Brandenburg and their modern descendants among the Hohenzollerns. Among its glades there was also a rose garden, presided over by a statue of the Empress Victoria, wearing not only a marble hat but a marble veil. There was also a statue of a nude girl riding a horse, very pleasant to come upon in a walk under the tall trees, naturalistic but quite good.

All but these two women, the Empress with the marble hat and the girl with none, were picked up and moved in the middle thirties. Hitler did not want anything to remind the people of the Hohenzollerns or their servants or their victories. He moved the vast column almost a mile down the avenue, he distributed the statues of Bismarck and von Moltke and von Roon around it, and he put the Sieges-Allee in an unfrequented area of the park. This was an act of extravagance and folly which should have convinced everybody that if Hitler fought a war, he would probably lose it, but the statues gained by it; they were set deeper among the trees, they lost their smugness, they looked as if they were part of the setting of a romantic drama. They have since undergone another change, which has lifted

them to the heights of memorability. The trees of the Tiergarten have nearly all been destroyed. Some were burned in the raids; some were hit by Russian artillery during the battle for the city; most of the rest were cut down by the freezing population last winter. Now the great park is nothing but a vast potato patch, with here and there a row of other vegetables, and from this rise the statues, in an inappropriate prominence that is to marble what embarrassed nakedness is to humanity. Above them, the column of the three victorious wars is surmounted by the French flag, and their horizon is bounded by riddled cliffs that were once splendid villas and apartment houses. But as well as this appalling, landscape-wide humiliation, they have suffered more private troubles. The pedestals of von Moltke and von Roon, the bellies of the women who were symbolizing some forgotten thesis around Bismarck, are scrawled with the names and addresses of Russian soldiers. The Empress Victoria has lost her marble veil, her marble hat, her marble head. Decapitated, she stands among the amazed pergolas. The Sieges-Allee has suffered a peculiar loss of the same sort. Its statues and busts have been left intact; they belong to a kind of realistic art that would be greatly admired by the Russians. But each of the marble opera loges is supported on each side by a Hohenzollern eagle, and each of these has been decapitated, very neatly, and evidently by a suitable instrument. Only the naked girl on the horse is as she was, but there are marks of attempts to get her off the horse, and a friend who lives in Berlin tells me that one morning he found, under the horse, three champagne bottles, all full and unopened and of an excellent brand. There is now no statuary at all at the Brandenburger Tor, except a new memorial to the Russian troops, which is surmounted by a realistic figure that, fantastically, resembles Mussolini. The sentry who guarded it was, like so many of the Russian soldiers in Berlin, a ravishing small boy with pink cheeks and a nose that turned up to heaven with the gravity of prayer. I quite understood why they had made the statue on the memorial look like Mussolini; that nose would not have gone well in marble or bronze.

In Nuremberg, the press camp was another example of the poignancy of works of art under conquest. The camp was the *Schloss* belonging to the Fabers, the pencil manufacturers, and, according to the old-fashioned custom, which persisted in Germany long after it had been abandoned in England and in the United States, it was built beside the factory from which the family fortune was derived. It lay a mile or two outside the town, and as one drove toward it, its romantic absurdity loomed above flat fields. It stank of wealth, like the palaces of Pittsburgh, but it was twice the size of any of them, and it had a superior, more allusive fantasy. It had spires and turrets as fussy as lobster claws, winding staircases that would not like staircases but with the unnecessary ambition of the larger intestine, a marble entrance hall that was like a fusion of a fish shop and a bathroom, and somehow one knew that the architect and the man who had commissioned him had both been thinking of the *Nibelungenlied* and the *Meistersingers*. In its heyday, it must have been intolerable, particularly if one had a sense of the Fabers as human beings. A clue to them could be found in the immense grounds, which were laid out in what is known in Germany as an English park, though actually no park in England is closely planted with shrubs and trees. This was dotted with various pavilions, and the heavy cedar door of one, which was built like a temple, had been battered open. The interior was panelled with carefully chosen marbles, some the color of meat, some of gravy, and in an alcove, on a pedestal bearing the family arms, was a statue of the founder of the firm playing with a little girl and boy. On his beard, the little girl's ringlets, everybody's buttons and boots, the sculptor had worked with particularly excited care. Two chilly orange marble benches were provided for his descendants to sit on to contemplate the image and the memory of their progenitor. He looked a self-respecting old gentleman. There was nothing about him to suggest that the fruit of his loins would presently fantasticate his prudently acquired acres with a mansion dropsical in its inflated whimsy. Nor was there anything in that mansion which threatened just how bad things were to be before the night fell.

Now this mansion was punished by the presence of a crowd of correspondents, which on physical grounds alone was an offense to the genius of the mansion. The protocol of its hospitality must once have been stupendous. Only members of certain families would have been invited, and they would have arrived with valets and ladies' maids, and after a reception by the host and hostess would have been passed along the colossal corridors by clusters of servants to suites where beds banked with superfluous pillows shone with the highlights of fine linen. In the room where I slept, there were nine hospital beds. On one side of me was a French correspondent, a lovely girl the color of cambric tea, with crenellated hair that spoke of North Africa and with the bold and gracious manners of a wild princess. And on the other was another French correspondent, a girl pale and fairish, and eager but always a little tired, as is often the case with those who spent their adolescence in the Resistance movement. Nothing can have been so offensive to the mansion as the French women correspondents. The most conspicuous of them was Madeleine Jacob, with her superb, haggard Jewish face, her long black locks, so oddly springing from a circle of white hair on the center of her scalp, her tumbled white waist and pleated skirt of a tartan that was not only non-Scottish but almost anti-Scottish, her air of contentious intellectual gaiety, as of one who has been dragged backward through a hedge of ideas and has enjoyed every minute of it. She was always the first to catch the eye of the living observer in the crowded dining room; she must have been the first and the worst to any ghostly observer. The women for whom this mansion was built lived inside their corsets as inside towers; their coiffures were almost as architectural; all their contours had to be preserved by an iron poise. They would have refused to believe that these ink-stained gypsies had, in fact, invaded their halls because they had been on the side of order against disorder, stability against incoherence.

How much easier would we journalists have found our task at Nuremberg if only the universe had been less fluid, if anything had been absolute, even so simple a thing as the sight we had gone to see—the end of the trial. And we saw it. With observation whetted by practice and our sense of the historic importance

of the occasion, we let nothing that happened in the court go by us. We formed opinions about it with edges sharp as honed razors. We knew, when the judges issued a decree that the defendants were not to be photographed while they were being sentenced, that it was a silly and sentimental interference with the rights of the press. Yet about that our opinions were perhaps not so definite as appeared in the talk of the bar. The correspondents who had been at Nuremberg a long time were not so sure about this decree as those who had come for just these last two days. The correspondents who had been in Germany a long time did not appear to like to talk about it very much. It seemed that when one has never seen a man, one does not find anything offensive about the idea of photographing him while he is being sentenced to death, but that if one has seen him often, the idea becomes unattractive. It is not exactly pity that takes one. One would not alter the sentence of death. The future must be protected. The ovens where the innocent were baked alive must remain cold forever; the willing stokers, so oddly numerous, it appears, must be discouraged from lighting them again. But when one sees a man day after day, the knowledge of his approaching death becomes, in the real sense of the word, wonderful. One wonders at it every time one thinks of it. I remembered that I did not care at all the first time I heard William Joyce sentenced to death, but that the second time I was stirred and astonished, and that the third time I knew awe. The day he was hanged, I found myself looking at my hand and thinking in perplexity that someday it would not move because I willed it, and that on that day I would have no will, I would not be there; and Joyce was a kind of partner in my thought, not an object for pity. It is an intensification of the feeling we have in the fall, when the leaves drop. The leaves are nothing to us, but the melancholy, the apprehension grows.

It was like that in other parts of Nuremberg, where the lawyers lived who had seen every session of the court. They had all been waiting for this day when the judgment would be delivered and the defendants sentenced, for it meant that they would turn their backs on the moldy aftermath of murder and get back to the business of living. But now that this day had come, they were not enjoying it. All

automobiles were stopped now on the main roads for search and scrutiny of the occupants by the military police. At one barrier, two automobiles were halted at the same time, and a visitor travelling in one saw that in the other was the engaging wife of one of the English judges, a tall Scandinavian with that awkwardness which is more graceful than grace, that shyness which is more winning than any direct welcome. They exchanged greetings and the visitor said, "I shall be seeing you in court tomorrow." The other looked as if she had been slapped across the high cheekbones. "Oh, no," she said. "Oh, no. I shall not be in court tomorrow." She had attended almost all other sessions of the court. Around the house of another judge, a line of automobiles waited all through the evening of the day before the judgment session, and passersby knew that the judiciary was having its last conference. The judge's wife came to the window and looked out over the automobiles and the passersby and far into the suburban woods that ring the house. She has kept into maturity the delicate and self-possessed good looks of a spirited girl, and ordinarily she refuses to let her appearance betray what she is thinking or feeling. But as she stared out into the darkening woods, it could be seen that the boredom she was suffering had something ghastly about it, and that she was living through a patch of time comparable to the interval between a death in the house and a funeral.

There was another house, still further away from Nuremberg, where this aversion to the consequences of the trial which was not disapproval of it could be experienced. This, like the press camp, was a villa an industrialist had built beside his factory, but it was smaller and not so gross and had been the scene of a war of taste in which some of the victories had fallen to the right side. The industrialist who had built it, and furnished it in the style of a Nord-Amerika liner, had had two sons, and one had married a wife who was still in the house and who silently acted as a butler to the conquerors who had requisitioned it. She was, in fact, though she told no one for a very long time, half Lorrainer and half French, and she had a deep love and knowledge of Greek art. So here and there in the rooms, along with the family busts and the whacking great Japanese bronzes, realistically

mustachioed, that all German bourgeois households cherished, were torsos and heads that, in the Greek way, presented the whole truth about certain moments of physical existence. There was a torso which showed how it is with a boy's body, cut clean with training, when the ribs rise to a deep and enjoyed breath. There was the coifed head of a girl who knew she was being looked at by the world and, innocent and proud, let it look. In this room, parties of people concerned with the trial held glasses of good wine in their hands, talked generously of pleasant things and not of the judgment and the sentences, and every now and then looked at these sculptures as if they were earnest of another and better life. About this house, and all the houses where the legal personnel lived, armed guards paced through the night, and searchlights shone into the woods, falling fiercely on the piebald trunks of the birch trees, the compactly contorted pines, the great pottery jars, overflowing with red nasturtiums, that marked the course of the avenues. Down through the strong brightness there slowly drifted the yellow birch leaves, all night long.

There came the day of the judgment and the day of the sentences, and I was again aware that I was in a man's world. Life in Nuremberg was difficult in any case, because of transport. The city is so devastated that the buildings used by the authorities are a vast distance apart, and one cannot walk. Cars are old and rapidly falling to pieces, and the drivers have been out there too long and care about nothing except going home. But when the great day came, there was added a new exasperation in the extreme congestion of the Palace of Justice. It was obviously possible that some Nazi sympathizers would try to get into the court and assassinate the counsel and the judges, and it was obvious that the authorities would have to take special care in scrutinizing the passes of the correspondents and the visitors. I had seen myself having to stop at the entrance of the court and show my pass, whereupon a trained scrutineer would examine it under a strong light. Nothing so simple happened. Authority jammed the corridors with a solid mass of military policemen, who again and again demanded passes and peered at them in a half light. These confused male children would have been quite

incapable of detecting a forged pass if they had been able to see it, but in this deep shadow it was difficult to read print, much less inspect a watermark. This congestion of pass-demanding military policemen occurred at every point where it was necessary for correspondents to move freely, to look around and find their seats, to get in touch with their colleagues. At the actual entrance to the gallery, there was posted a new official, to whom I took a savage dislike because he infringed on a feminine patent. Although he was male and a colonel, he had the drooping bosom and careworn expression of a nursing mother, and he stared at my quite obviously valid pass minute after minute with the moonish look of a woman trying to memorize the pattern of a baby's bootee. Was I irritable? Yes. I and all England, all Europe, are irritable because we are controlled by and sick of organization. And perhaps he was slow and awkward because all people in organization not of the scheming and tyrannic sort are sick of exercising control on resentful subjects.

What did we see in the courtroom? Everybody knows by now. It is no longer worth telling: it was not worth telling if you knew too little; it could not be told if you knew too much. The door at the back of the dock shut on the last of the prisoners, who had worked their final confusion by showing a heroism to which they had no moral right, who had proved that it is not true that the bully is always a coward and that not even in that respect is life simple.

Then the court rose, rose up into the air, rose as if it were going to fly out of the window. People hurried along the corridors into each other's offices, saying goodbye—goodbye to each other, goodbye to the trial, goodbye to the feeling that was like fall. That was if they were the great, of course, for only the great could get out of Nuremberg. The lesser would have to wait at the airport or the railway stations for days as the fog took a hand in the congestion and the planes could not leave the ground safely in the mornings, and more and more people tried to go home by train. On the floor of every office there were packing cases: the typewriters had to go home, the stationery had to go home, the files had to go

home. The greater bent down to say goodbye to the lesser, on their knees beside the packing cases; the lesser beamed up at the greater. It was a party; it was like going off for a cruise, only in childhood, when nobody doubts that it is good when the school term comes to an end. Yet if one could not leave Nuremberg, this gaiety did not last intact after the sun went down. Then one heard words that brought back what one felt about the end of the trial, when one did not turn one's mind away from it. A man said, "Damn it all. I have looked at those men for ten months. I know them as I know the furniture in my room. Oh, damn it all. . . ."

That vague, visceral mournfulness, that sympathy felt for the doomed flesh as for the frosted flowers, settled on the mind steadily during the days that passed after the return from Nuremberg, as the executions drew nearer. It was dispersed suddenly by the news of Göring's suicide. A dozen emotions surprised me by their strength. The enormous clown, the sexual quiddity with the smile that was perhaps too wooden for mockery and perhaps not, had kicked the tray out of the hands of the servant who was carrying it; the glasses had flown into the air and splintered, the wine of humiliation we had intended him to drink had spilled on the floor. It was disconcerting to realize that the man's world in which Nuremberg had had its being had in effect been just as crazy as it had looked. All to no purpose had the military police fallen over my feet and had I fallen over theirs, all to no purpose had the colonel with the bosom brooded pendulously over my pass. The cyanide had freely flowed. I felt fear. Whether this romantic gesture would revive Nazism depended on the degree to which the people in the waterlogged Europe I had seen from the plane were preoccupied with the spoiled harvest and their lack of shoes. If their preoccupation was slight or desperate, they might equally play with the idea of restoring the Nazi regime. I remembered the incidental obscenities of Nuremberg, such as the slight smell that hung round the door of the room that housed the atrocity exhibits—the shrunken head of the Polish prisoner, the soap made from concentration-camp corpses, and the like; I remembered the vigor of some of the defendants, and the passivity of the German people in the streets, blank paper on which anything could be written. But also

there came a vague, visceral cheerfulness, applause for the flesh that had not accepted its doom but had changed it to something else that made a last proof of its strength, such as one might have felt for a beast that has been caught in a trap and that, when its captors come, arches its back and makes a last stand. All the people I had seen fleeing from Nuremberg, who would be halfway across the world now, trying to forget the place, would be straightening up from whatever they had been doing and saying with a laugh, before they could check themselves, “Oh, that one! We always knew he would get the better of us yet.” ♦

Published in the print edition of the October 26, 1946, issue, with the headline “The Birch Leaves Falling.”

More: [Berlin](#) [Germany](#)

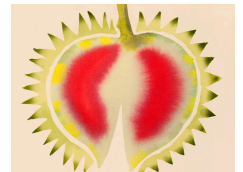
Read More

Fiction

“Enough for Now”

She flipped through the diary, looking for her name. Was she hoping not to find herself, or did a perverse part of her want to?

By Cassandra Neyenesch



Fiction

“Rate Your Happiness”

How natural it is to fail, to fail to decide, to remain in meaningless motion.

By Catherine Lacey

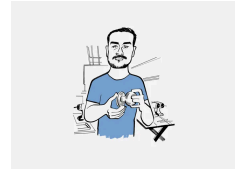


D.I.Y. Dept.

How to Be Your Own Super

Doorknob troubles? No sweat—an Upper West Side handyman is helping the helpless, with a beginner’s class on how to fix your (many) apartment problems.

By Diego Lasarte



The Weekend Essay

My Unrequited Love Story with J.F.K., Jr.

I knew John F. Kennedy, Jr., not that well and not that long, but enough to have experienced the gravitational pull he exerted, like some great big moon.

By Jeffrey Eugenides

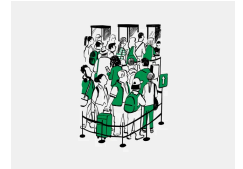


Between the Lines

Whose Line Is It Anyway?

Queuing up is the new normal, especially when it comes to the T.S.A. Fifty minutes, two hours, half a day—how much time is a flight (or a cronut or a ticket to a Harry Styles show) worth?

By Zach Helfand



The Boards

Between Sting and the Deep Blue Sea

The Police front man’s 2014 musical, “The Last Ship,” was inspired by his gritty working-class childhood in England. Now a revamped production—featuring Shaggy—is docking at the Metropolitan Opera.

By Sarah Larson

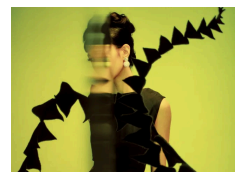


Fiction

“My Balenciaga”

It could have been an experiment by the master. An early draft. A failed caprice.

By Han Ong



Winging It

Geese, Cooked

As bird flu hits the Hamptons, Long Island's fanciest beaches are becoming mass graves for felled fowl.

By Emma Allen



Books

Who Bankrolled the American Revolution?

Our history too often sidesteps the question of finances. But sonorous ideals don't keep an army supplied with uniforms, guns, and grub.

By Adam Gopnik



The Weekend Essay

My Season of Ativan

Both of my parents were in hospice, on opposite coasts. Then I found out that I had breast cancer.

By Amanda Peet



Postscript

Remembering Calvin Tomkins, a Master of the Profile

For nearly seventy years, he captured the lives of modern artists for *The New Yorker*.

By David Remnick



Poems

“Theodore Roosevelt Taylor”

“In short, he slid metal on string till the devil / got tickled and laughed up the Blues.”

By Tyehimba Jess



