

ELISABETH BRONFEN and DANIEL KAMPA, eds., *Eine Amerikanerin in Hitlers Badewanne: Drei Frauen berichten über den Krieg; Margaret Bourke-White, Lee Miller und Martha Gellhorn* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 2015), 360 pp.

Eine Amerikanerin in Hitlers Badewanne [*An American Woman in Hitler's Bathroom*] features an intriguing collection of photographs and German translations of writings by three US-American women World War II correspondents. The reports by Margaret Bourke-White, Lee Miller, and Martha Gellhorn are complemented by introductions to each woman's work and biography as well as an epilogue by Elisabeth Bronfen. As many of the compiled texts either had not been available in German at all or have only recently become accessible, one of the volume's important contributions lies in enabling a broad German-speaking public to take a special look at World War II through the lens of popular American reportage. In the process, readers can observe how formative narrative and visual patterns were created by pioneering women. These patterns would have been considered foreign propaganda in Nazi Germany. Today, their striking familiarity to a German audience reveals the extent to which they have shaped the German collective memory of World War II.

The volume makes a convincing case for the presence, persistence, and persuasive power of women correspondents who ventured into a traditionally male-centered and male-dominated space. While military action was still reserved for men, the present writings and photographs demonstrate how women lastingly influenced the international perception and understanding of the war, inverting what feminist scholars of visual culture have described as visual media's tendency to reduce women to objects for male viewers.¹ In contrast to the many women who wrote and photographed in obscurity,² Bourke-White,

Miller, and Gellhorn were not only accomplished writers and photographers but celebrities. Their carefully crafted public personae came across as patriotic heroines who bravely supported the war effort with pens and cameras rather than bombs and guns.

The first part of the volume features photographs and writings by famous *Life* photojournalist Margaret Bourke-White. In the selected excerpts, which were either taken from German versions of Bourke-White's books³ or specifically translated for this volume by Renate Orth-Guttman, she traces her journey from Moscow, where she was located when Germany first attacked the city in 1941, to North Africa, across Italy, and finally to Germany, where she visits Bremen, Kassel, Schweinfurt, Leipzig, and Dachau. Bourke-White's reports for *Life* magazine served simultaneously as documentation of the cruelties of the war, as war propaganda, as entertainment, and as blatant self-promotion.

Bourke-White describes how she strategically used her special status as an attractive, heterosexual woman in a male-dominated theater of war, creating a popular image of a female war hero that transgresses dominant gender norms without even attempting to fully subvert them. Despite having to go an extra mile to be allowed to work at the front, she still provocatively claims that she did not experience gender-discrimination, as the only question was what she should wear at the front. The problem can swiftly be solved: A special uniform and thus, metaphorically, a new social role, is custom-made for her (62-63). In her stories, her own stubbornness, determination, bravery, and sense of mission—helped by the occasional ruse—prevail against the odds (42). Some of her reports' many memorable images are painted with words, including the scene where she is given command of a Long Tom to have the best possible timing for the photographs and not only regular soldiers but a brigadier dutifully execute her orders (88-89). The scene's tongue-in-cheek humor marks this inversion of traditional gender roles as a one-time exception, making it palatable to a broad, potentially gender-conservative war-time audience.

¹ Cf. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones (2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2010) 57-65.

² Cf. Marion Beckers and Elisabeth Moortgat, "Kriegsfotografinnen: Editorial," *Fotogeschichte* 34.134 (2014): 3-6. Naomi Rosenblum, *A History of Women Photographers* (Paris: Abbeville, 1994).

³ Margaret Bourke-White, *Deutschland, April 1945 (Dear Fatherland, Rest Quietly)*, trans. Ulrike von Puttkamer (München: Schirmer/Mosel, 1979); dieselbe, *Licht und Schatten*, trans. Margaretha von Reischach-Scheffel (Munich: Droemer/Knaur, 1964).

Bourke-White's photographs, in the mode of the sublime, often use strikingly formalist aesthetics to tell atrocious stories of war. Her studies of the airstrikes on Moscow turn the bombs, which took a high toll among the population, into an awe-inspiring aesthetic spectacle. Her images and reports of the privileged Nazi officials and their families who committed suicide rather than surrender are haunted by a similar friction between the emphasis on the beauty of their bodies and the viciousness of Nazi war crimes and ideology.

The editors' careful selection of excerpts includes powerful representations of the concentration camps by all three writers. Bourke-White, Gellhorn, and Miller embed their accounts from the camps into the context of German denial and ingratiation with the allied forces. None of the three correspondents believes German claims to having been 'liberated' rather than conquered and to having been ignorant regarding the camps (182, 271). Rather, all three feel a special responsibility to witness, document, and make Nazi atrocities public. They highlight the systematic and professionalized character of the exploitation of forced labor, the brutal strategies to hasten the demise of the incarcerated, and the overwhelming numbers of victims. While Bourke-White articulates her own feelings, Lee Miller describes the consternation of Germans forced to witness the atrocities and renounce their denial. Gellhorn references the now familiar and still haunting images of piles of emaciated corpses. Whereas the suffering inflicted in the camps still exceeds representation, the present volume offers access to some of the earliest and most formative narrative and visual patterns that have shaped the German and international perception and remembrance of the Holocaust.

Part two introduces model-turned-photographer Lee Miller's reports from France and Germany, where she visited Aachen, Leipzig, Nuremberg, Dachau, Munich, and Salzburg.⁴ Miller, who worked for *Vogue* for a total of 26 years, became British *Vogue*'s official war correspondent in 1942. Whereas Bourke-White mostly focused on the front, Miller at first turned toward the traditionally most 'femi-

⁴ The excerpts are from: Lee Miller, *Krieg: Mit den Alliierten in Europa 1944-1945, Reportagen und Fotos* (Berlin: Klaus Bittermann, 2013).

nine' space of the war zone, i.e. the field hospital. Her descriptions and photographs of the injured empathetically portray both the toll the war takes on human bodies and lives and the commitment of the people working long hours under harsh conditions behind the front lines. Her reports are pervaded by a blend of admiration and sympathy for their protagonists—except for the Germans.

Of the three correspondents, Miller most persistently expresses hatred for Germans, despising herself for feeling pity for injured German soldiers (145). Yet the conviction of superior US-American standards of humanitarianism makes her accept the fact that they are treated just like the allied injured in the field hospitals (145). Regarding the residents of Aachen, the first bigger city to be administered by a military government, she reports that they lack taste and pride, albeit not self-interest and a penchant for deception. The moral decay manifests itself olfactorily in the foul stench of decaying bodies (185-86). It is beyond her to understand why Germans started the war and she hardly believes that they will ever learn from the experience (200). When she famously visits Hitler's Munich apartment, her colleague David E. Scherman photographs her in Hitler's bathtub, both providing a cover photo and inspiring the title for the present volume. Yet, her staged irreverence notwithstanding, she keeps struggling to comprehend the reasons for the atrocities committed during World War II. She describes Hitler's apartment as exceedingly mediocre (197), lacking elegance, charm, and inspiration. Whereas the piano is out of tune, the radio, symbolizing the uniformity enforced through Nazi control, is a masterpiece of technology (198).

Martha Gellhorn's reports, presented in the third part of the volume, are excerpts from a 2012 German edition.⁵ While Gellhorn gained international fame as Ernest Hemingway's third wife, she was a successful writer in her own right who reported on overall nine wars and covered the Second World War from Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, and France for *Collier's* (215). Her essay on the daily routine of a Royal Air Force base impressively captures its human and emotional dimensions and makes palpable

⁵ Martha Gellhorn, *Das Gesicht des Krieges: Reportagen 1937-1987* (Zürich: Dörlemann, 2012).

the strain and concentration of bomber pilots waiting for their flights during the night. Gellhorn finds powerful words to lend meaning and experiential texture to otherwise lifeless military jargon. She brings the Eighth Army's secret advance from central Italy to the Adriatic coast within three days to life by describing roads pulverized by floods of trucks, tanks, jeeps, motorbikes, and ambulances, wrapping everything and everyone into dust (243). Out of the three featured writers, Gellhorn most convincingly addresses the challenges of representing war from the perspective of an observer. She demonstrates how it is impossible to see, remember, or understand the tumultuous and (often deliberately) confusing battles (246-47). Historians, she states, will create a narrative for the larger war, but participants and observers of the war see only the next steps (249).

Elisabeth Bronfen's epilogue places these photographs and writings in a productive conversation not only with each other but also with their historical contexts and the larger body of each woman's work. She highlights how Bourke-White, Miller, and Gellhorn's special role as pioneering women at the front allowed them to develop distinct perspectives and to portray contexts and people that were either not accessible to or overlooked by their male colleagues (305). Bronfen provides close readings and intriguing interpretations of selected photographs and texts, demonstrating, among other things, how the war transformed both Lee Miller's fashion photography and the public images of fashionable women. By exposing numerous intertextual and inter pictorial references to these women's work in popular culture, including Alfred Hitchcock's *Lifeboat* (1944) and Mitchell Leisen's *Arise My Love* (1940), she reveals the tremendous cultural impact of their war coverage and public personae.

The volume's outreach to a general, German-speaking audience rather than scholarly readers is particularly laudable as a sound and nuanced memorization of World War II remains crucial in the current political moment in Europe. En passant, the collection makes a case for key concerns of the field of American Studies. It not only reminds its readers of the inextricable trans-Atlantic entanglements between German and U.S. history, public memory, and identity. It also makes a persuasive—and entertaining—case for the cultural impact of female World War

II correspondents. These women's particular perspectives provide a valuable addition to recent publications in the wake of the seventieth anniversary of German capitulation. From an academic perspective, more information on the historical context, the publication formats, and the existing scholarly literature would have been welcome. For instance, these correspondents' special status was not only characterized by their often-praised heroism but also by their gender-based exemption from military service and by the fundamental, albeit mostly unacknowledged, privileges of Whiteness that lent them agency within the context of the segregated military forces.⁶ As the picture magazines, *Life* in particular, have a history of downplaying the war-time sacrifices of minorities,⁷ the repeated use of racializing and racist language (e.g. 74, 232, 236, 244) might have been problematized from a present-day perspective. Minor errors, such as the claim that Margaret Bourke-White founded *Life*,⁸ do not diminish the volume's merit of providing insights into and animating questions of war, gender, and visual culture as well as the personal experiences of three exceptional women who have significantly shaped our collective memory of World War II.

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⁶ On the "twofold dynamics of tension between memory and forgetting" in the commemoration of World War II, see: Birgit Däwes and Ingrid Gessner, ed., *Commemorating World War II at 70: Ethnic and Transnational Perspectives*, spec. issue of *American Studies Journal* 59 (2015).

⁷ Sally Stein, "Mainstream-Differenzen: Das unverwechselbare Aussehen von *Life* und *Look* in der Medienkultur der USA," *Diskurse der Fotografie: Fotokritik am Ende des fotografischen Zeitalters*, ed. Herta Wolf (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007) 161.

⁸ It was Henry Luce; see Cara A. Finnegan, *Picturing Poverty: Print Culture and FSA Photographs* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2003) 169.