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# Preface

*Almost everything we know we know incompletely at best. And almost nothing we are told remains the same when retold.*  
—Janet Malcolm<sup>1</sup>

My affection for and personal experience of Paris led me to wonder what it would have been like to live there under German Occupation during the Second World War. I remember being an especially green and curious twenty-year-old Alabaman walking along the Boulevard Saint-Germain on the Left Bank in the early 1960s. I noticed the evidence of the intense street battles that had briefly occurred in the Latin Quarter at the city's liberation in late August of 1944. I would look for traces of the impact made by shrapnel and bullets on the grand facades of those magnificent buildings that led up to the Boulevard Saint-Michel. Plaques on buildings all through the 5th and 6th arrondissements announced that some young man or other had died near that spot at the hand of retreating German soldiers or Vichy supporters. But it was not until I had read more about that war, and about the destruction of other major European cities by both Axis and Allied powers, that I began to wonder how Paris had managed to survive the twentieth century's greatest conflagration almost unscathed.

On my way to Paris to study at the Sorbonne, I had stayed for about six weeks with a family in Dijon, the capital of Burgundy. There I heard for the first time about the military occupation of France from those who had lived it. The mayor of Dijon was a cleric, Canon Félix Kir (for whom France's popular aperitif is named), who welcomed our group of young Americans to the city hall. Before we went, my host family informed me that their mayor was a hero of the Resistance; that a group of French hirelings of the Vichy government had tried to assassinate him at one point, but the wallet (some said a breviary) he carried near his heart had stopped the bullet. Every Dijonnais knew the story.

The head of my host family would take me into the woods of Burgundy to show us the place where he and his young friends used to lie in wait for German traffic. At the same time, the family and I would watch news reports of young African Americans standing courageously against the brutality of segregation. It was during this period that the Birmingham, Alabama, civil rights demonstrations were at their height. At the same time, the Algerian War, during which Algerians tried to push the French off the African continent after more than a century of colonialism, had just ended. I found myself trying to define, as a son of the state governed callously by George Wallace, what was just becoming clearer to me—namely, that the South was changing, and radically so, while my host family was explaining patiently how Algeria was really French. I was explaining the South's slow progress toward equality; my hosts were trying to justify benevolent colonialism. But we both agreed on one thing: the Nazis had been evil, and Europe and America had done well to rid that continent of Hitler and his cohort. Though blind to our own partial answers about contemporary social change, we were, on the other hand, confidently in solidarity about the German Occupation of France.

I remember, too, that while roaming France and Paris I would frequently find myself before some centrally located monument, maybe one that was topped by a stone sentinel, bearing an endless list of names of people from that community—many with the same patronyms—who had been lost during the great conflict of 1914–18. The towns and villages and cities of that epoch had officially remembered every local male who had died or disappeared during that horrendous conflict. Standing before these sad memorials, I wondered why there were not similar monuments raised to the local casualties of the Second World War. Yes, in post offices and other official buildings, in museums and some schools, we find names of those affiliated with a particular institution who died during World War II; but, more often than not, that list is tacked onto a First World War plaque or monument almost as an afterthought. Furthermore, the lists are for the most part composed of names of those who died in deportation or who publicly or violently resisted the Occupation. Rarely do you find lists of the region’s military who died during the war. One senses the lack of a widespread communal and patriotic desire to remember, as if World War II had had a much more modest impact on national and local history.

This should not be surprising. Even today, the French endeavor both to remember and to find ways to forget their country’s trials during World War II; their ambivalence stems from the cunning and original arrangement they devised with the Nazis, which was approved by Hitler and assented to by Philippe Pétain, the recently appointed head of the moribund Third Republic, that had ended the Battle of France in June of 1940. This treaty—known by all as the Armistice—had entangled France and the French in a web of cooperation, resistance, accommodation, and, later, of defensiveness, forgetfulness, and guilt from which they are still trying to escape. The word *collaboration* (the Germans first used *Zusammenarbeit*, “working together”) evolved into an epithet. One French veteran told me, with conviction, that it might have been better, at least for French memory and morale, had an armistice never been signed—had the French fought to defend Paris, then the Loire Valley, then central France, retreating, if necessary, all the way to the Mediterranean and North Africa.

But the Third Republic did sign this agreement, and it did agree to an administrative division of French territory, and it did legally vote to end the Third Republic itself, established in 1871 after an ignominious defeat by the Prussians the previous year. For the first time since the Renaissance, France in 1940 was a geographically incoherent nation.\*

\* The very northern part of France was attached to the military government of Belgium; the eastern provinces of Alsace and Lorraine (which Germany had assimilated in the Franco-Prussian War and lost in the 1918 armistice) were reabsorbed into the Reich. Sections of southeastern France were put under Italian control. But the most significant division was between what became known as the Occupied and the Unoccupied Zones (which lasted until November of 1942): the northern zone ranged from the Rhine to the entire Atlantic and Channel coasts, down to the Spanish border, and of course included Paris. The Unoccupied, Vichy, or “Free Zone” comprised essentially central and south-central France to the Pyrénées, including most of the Mediterranean coast.

This administrative and geographical division would be replicated as a moral and psychological division for decades after the war as collective memory endeavored to rewrite history. In what



ways did Paris in 1940 pass from being a city known for its freedoms to a closed, uncanny, unfamiliar place? What effect did the open-endedness of the Occupation, the uncertainty of its duration, have on Parisian daily life? And how did this “uncanniness” affect both Parisians and their occupiers? Films and novels, memoirs and diaries, photographs and letters of the period, all make some reference to how the atmosphere of the City of Light changed with the arrival of German soldiers and, soon afterward, of the Nazi bureaucratic apparatus. To the Parisian, the Germans might have been ethnic “cousins,” but they were not French, and they certainly were not Parisians. Not since the late Middle Ages, during the Hundred Years’ War, had the city had so many unwanted military visitors for such an undetermined spate of time. That, coupled with factors such as curfews, food shortages, air raid drills, a lack of automobiles, and the “repedestrianization” of a modern metropolis, turned the city into a quiet, eerie warren of sinister places and anxious citizens. Questions and facts such as these have guided my research and the story I relate.



Since the sixteenth century, Paris had become the standard by which other European cities—and, eventually, other world cities—measured themselves, both in terms of its aesthetic qualities and its political shenanigans. It was a very old capital city, attaining its permanent status as such at the beginning of the sixth century during the reign of Clovis I. Every French monarch since then had enhanced his reputation by spending lavishly on marking Paris as a major cultural and commercial center. Beginning in the Renaissance, French became the lingua franca of the European intelligentsia, gradually replacing Latin. French adventures abroad had shown that the nation could mount formidable obstacles to the incursions of their neighbors. The French had established massive colonies in America and had followed the Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch as international entrepreneurs and colonial capitalists. For more than three hundred years Paris had created the impression that it was the European center for luxury, fine living, subtle diplomacy, advances in science, and innovations in philosophy. It became a beacon for all those who were “trapped” in less progressive nations. During the European Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Paris’s philosophes had shown that the city, though under the rule of an absolute monarch, was a center of progressive ideas, and this well-deserved reputation had mesmerized the world. From around 1750, to go to Paris for study and conversation was a sign of intellectual adventure and seriousness. On the other hand, Paris was a city that seemed addicted to revolt if not revolution; it had to put its ideas into action.

Largely because of this history, Paris was, of all of the capital cities that suffered during the Second World War, the most beloved, most familiar, and most mythical in the eyes of the world. Warsaw, Oslo, Amsterdam, Brussels, and Prague—all fiercely occupied by the Nazis—were not as much in the world’s concerned gaze. To watch as the Luftwaffe bombed London in 1940–41 evoked massive anger on behalf of those who treasured the cultural patrimony of that large city; though relentlessly attacked, London would never be occupied. Leningrad would be surrounded, starved, and bombarded for almost a thousand days, but never occupied. Moscow would be within hours of being seized before Stalin finally eked out a vicious defense. But by mid-June of 1940, the Germans—the Nazis—were strolling comfortably through the boulevards and gardens of Paris. The fear that Paris, too, might be bombarded had waned, but the images of its Occupation evinced, from Buenos Aires to Shanghai, a different sort of visceral protectiveness on behalf of Europe’s urban jewel.

The historian Philippe Burrin describes three approaches to writing a history of military occupation: the first is to elucidate through comparison—that is, to use a variety of examples that will illuminate constants and differences; the second is to describe “the structural effects of occupation on the occupied society’s environment and living conditions”; and the third is to call on what he describes as “the face-to-face interaction between occupiers and occupied people, dealing with both groups on the level of...lived experience and symbolic representation.”<sup>2</sup> *When Paris Went Dark* falls within the third group and has cousinship to the second. This narrative aims to give an account of how the Parisians viewed the Germans and vice versa; of how the Parisian figured out a code of daily conduct toward his nemesis and effected it; of how the citizen of the Occupation handled his psychological and emotional responses to the presence of a powerful enemy; and of how each side perpetuated real and symbolic violence on the other. A prominent French historian of the “black years” noted that “an occupation is not defined alone as the imposition of a foreign authority over individuals. It is first and foremost the investment\* of a

space, taking possession of a place, the affirmation of a presence by its signs and its symbols.”<sup>3</sup> Are we capable of imagining and describing the claustrophobic trauma of living in a familiar environment that has suddenly become threatening? One chronicler of the period, writing in 1945, thinks not: “[The psychological atmosphere] of Paris during the Occupation...changed from one year to the next, one month to the next, and, in critical periods one hour to the other. No one, no matter his or her learning or his or her intuition, is capable of evoking that atmosphere if he had not himself breathed it.”<sup>4</sup> This is the challenge to the contemporary chronicler: how to depict the intangible qualities, often inarticulately expressed, of a military occupation. Improvised hiding places, prison cells, hotels, doorways, elevators, apartments, cemeteries, schools, convents, theaters, offices, nightclubs, bomb shelters, sewers, Métro stations, restaurants, cabarets, bordellos, bookstores, arcades, department stores, small shops, automobiles, public parks, public bathrooms— all demanded a new ecology of the Occupation, underlining how systemic such an event was.

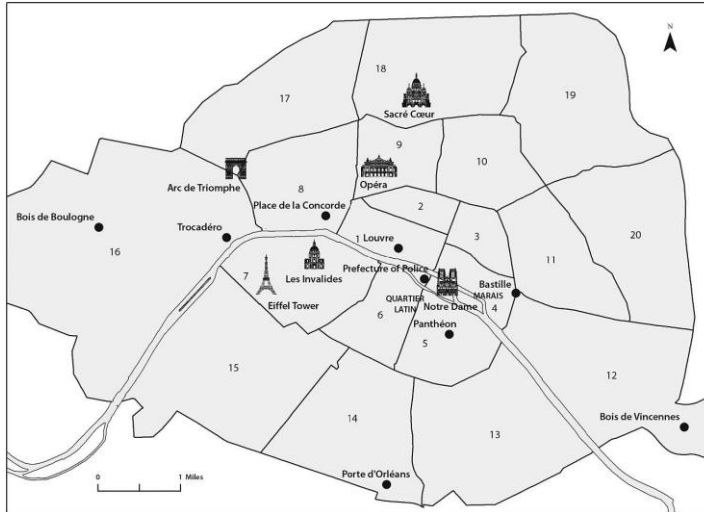


In order to help my readers learn about Paris's topography, then and now, I have cited specifically the quarters, neighborhoods, and arrondissements (administrative sections) of the city in which the events occurred. Parisians know the personality, the history, and the social identity of each of these divisions. The Occupation authorities' intention—though often haphazardly implemented—was to reduce spatial freedom. An occupying force cannot allow the free use of public spaces, and it makes every effort to restrict the liberties one expects in private spaces. Spatial disorientation brought the disintegration of psychic comfort, thereby multiplying the oppressive effect of being occupied. As one astute teenager noticed: “The silence caught you by the throat, made sadness press into your thoughts. The houses had grown too tall, the streets too wide. People were separated from each other by spaces that were too big. Even the air which flowed down the

\* *Investment* is an underused English term for a military blockade or the imposition of a controlling authority.



## Arrondissements of Paris



empty streets was furtive and kept its secrets.”<sup>5</sup> The natural rhythms of life in rural settings—e.g., seasons, diurnal and nocturnal changes, large open spaces—can sequester daily living from constant surveillance and interruption, but those patterns do not pertain for an urban existence. Early twentieth-century sociologists of everyday city life attempted to isolate and define the perpetual discomfort that can prevent one from feeling at home in a modern city. Many of their observations pertain even more so to a city under military, cultural, and political control by an outsider.

My sources include diaries, memoirs, essays, newspaper articles, histories, letters, films (fictional and documentary), archives, interviews, photographs, maps, novels, songs, paintings, drawings, and anything else that helped me understand what it was like to “live the Occupation.” My hope was to create a framework for understanding the heartbeat, the intangible rhythms, of life during a period of sustained urban anxiety. As a consequence, I have been obliged to bring a



mixture of interpretive strategies to bear: close reading—often between the lines—of texts, drawing conclusions that others have been perhaps too cautious to make, and using archival and historical data for purposes other than establishing or repeating facts. This is a work of reasonable interpretation, of reasonable judgments that I trust will enable readers to question assumptions, bromides, and received theories about what happens when a city is “occupied” by strangers, armed or not.





I do not claim the mantle of historian but rather of storyteller and guide; I have perused with care what others have written and have teased out stories that have always been there but had settled under the dust of memory and history. I have plumbed the extraordinary archival work done by others and done some of my own, always looking for fissures in texts that allow for a richer reading of a traumatic period in European history. Here are the famous and unknown voices of adolescents and adults, Germans and French, men and women, Jews and non-Jews, visitors and residents, collaborators and patriots, novelists and historians, journalists and diarists, the still living and the gone. Some appear repeatedly, some occasionally, and some only once. I have interviewed men and women who lived in Paris at the time. They offered anecdotes that became bright tiles in a vibrant mosaic that reveals more clearly how a familiar and beloved city became, even temporarily, threatening and uncanny. As one person raised in Paris during this period answered when I asked if her parents ever discussed the Occupation: “It [the memory of the Occupation] was like a secret garden whose gates were always closed to us.” *When Paris Went Dark* makes an effort to look over that garden’s walls.

“The Last Time I Saw Paris,” written in 1940 by Oscar Hammerstein and Jerome Kern and played frequently on the radio late that year, summed up not only the nostalgia that the world had already developed for the City of Light but also the effects that the Occupation itself must have been having on Parisians themselves:

*A lady known as Paris, Romantic and Charming,  
Has left her old companions and faded from view.  
Lonely men with lonely eyes are seeking her in vain.  
Her streets are where they were, but there’s no sign of her.  
She has left the Seine.  
The last time I saw Paris, her heart was warm and gay,  
I heard the laughter of her heart in every street café.  
The last time I saw Paris, her trees were dressed for spring,  
And lovers walked beneath those trees and birds found songs to sing....  
No matter how they change her, I’ll remember her that way.  
I’ll think of happy hours, and people who shared them....  
And those who danced at night and kept our Paris bright  
'Til the town went dark.<sup>6</sup>*

Paris is the primary protagonist of this narrative. A city is unable to speak for itself, but we can take from the written and oral memories of others how it was changed by, how it adapted to, and how it survived the German Occupation of 1940–44. This book brings those memories, real and imagined, back to light, offering a narrative that, in the best of worlds, Paris herself might tell.

# WHEN PARIS WENT DARK

## Introduction

nach paris!

—*“To Paris!” Signs plastering German railroad cars carrying the Kaiser’s troops to France, 1914–18*

### *Faux Paris*

Paris is and always has been obsessed with itself—its place within France, within Europe, within the world, and within the imaginations of those who have visited it or who want to. As a consequence, even though the city has in modern times survived siege, civil disorder, and military occupation, the French, and especially the Parisians, retain a magical belief that the City of Light is impervious to destruction. Exceptions to this fantasy cause bewilderment and generally incoherent or confused responses. When, in the last year of the First World War, German artillery, in the guise of Krupp’s gigantic howitzer, Big Bertha, began dropping enormous shells on the city with considerable destructive force, the first reaction was outrage. Earlier, rather ineffectual bombing at night from zeppelins, and even from the more accurate Gotha aircraft, had inured the Parisians to occasional disruption from above. In the first quarter of 1918, when the Germans made their last great attempt at a breakthrough to reach the French

capital, more than two hundred bombs had been dropped from aircraft on Paris in order to break the city's morale.

But the most terrifying bombardments appeared out of nowhere and capriciously peppered the city beginning in late March of that year. The 260-pound shells seemed to fall most often on the quiet streets of the comfortable 7th arrondissement: the Rue du Bac, the Rue Barbet-de-Jouy, and the Rue de Vaugirard. (It was later discovered that the Germans were using Notre-Dame Cathedral as their major orienting target; thus many of Big Bertha's shells landed in the city's center.) Where were they coming from? There were no airplanes, no air raid alarms; they were just falling from the sky. No artillery shell was known to travel more than twenty-five miles or so, and the German army was almost a hundred miles away.

The population was much more disoriented by these mysterious bombardments than they had been by the air raids; and when it was discovered that the shells were indeed coming from more than seventy miles away, Parisians suddenly felt a vulnerability they had not felt since the early days of the war.\* And then on Good Friday, one of the gigantic shells landed atop one of Paris's oldest churches, Saint-Gervais, in the Marais. More than 150 worshippers, including foreign dignitaries, were killed or injured. A historian of Big Bertha's late-World War I impact writes:

The place was crowded. It was just 4:30. Suddenly the hundreds of kneeling worshippers were startled by a terrific crash overhead, an explosion. A projectile had struck the roof. Those looking up quickly saw a stone pillar crumbling, beginning to fall. Scores of tons of stone, some blocks weighing a half ton, were pouring upon the mass of people.<sup>1</sup>

Even after the cause was discovered, and the French were able to target the howitzer and the rail tracks needed to move it, Parisians would remember that distinct feeling of helplessness.

In fact, for some time before the war ended, French military leaders had begun planning how to dupe German reconnaissance airmen who, in a time without radar or any sort of sophisticated night vision equipment, had to use rail tracks, reflections off the river, and the lights of Paris to find their targets and guide their new and powerful artillery.

\* French astronomers, engineers, and the artillery corps began using a combination of guesswork, physics, geometry, and air reconnaissance to discover the site from which the Germans were lobbing these shells.

By 1917 the French army had already begun looking for an area near Paris that, from the air, might be mistaken for the capital. They found one such site northwest of the city, near Saint-Germain-en-Laye, where the Seine makes a deep loop on its way to the English Channel, similar to the well-known curve that it creates as it passes through Paris. False train stations, tracks, and streetlights were constructed; plans were made to enhance this *faux* Paris, but the end of the war interrupted them and they were but desultorily continued for a few years afterward. Yet only two decades later, the fanciful idea of constructing another Paris as a protection for one of the world's most famous cityscapes would be reborn. For in occupying the capital of France, the Germans themselves would try to invent a *faux* Paris, one that would serve as an example of Nazi benevolence while, behind the facade, they pillaged a grand treasure house.

## Sequestering Medusa

On a clear morning, April 26, 1937, the citizens of a small Basque town in northern Spain and their neighbors from the countryside were doing what they habitually did on Mondays: shopping,

bargaining, and exchanging gossip in an open-air market. When a low, droning sound first entered their consciousness, theirs was not the automatic response that would soon become common throughout Europe—to look toward the skies for danger. Rather, they looked around to find the source of that loud, unfamiliar mechanical noise. Before they could protect themselves, warplanes from the Luftwaffe and the Italian air force began indiscriminately dropping concussive firebombs and splinter bombs on the town. After five raids, the allies of Franco's army had left Guernica three-quarters devastated and had killed between four hundred and one thousand civilians. (Historians still debate the final figures.) News of the event and its aftermath, thanks to a trenchant article by George Steer of the *New York Times*, flashed around the world. Steer's piece made one especially salient point, unrecognized then as being predictive: the bombing was meant to demoralize the populace, for the little town had no military value. For the first time, indiscriminate bombing of civilian populations was a reality, whereas before it had been but a theoretical assumption. "In the form of its execution and the scale of the destruction it wrought, no less than in the selection of its objective, the raid on Guernica is unparalleled in military history."<sup>2</sup>

The Spanish Civil War, particularly the bombing of Madrid and Barcelona, along with the devastation of Guernica, forced museum curators and protectors of all cultural treasures to think about how to protect their patrimony from arbitrary destruction. It also warned military commanders that they should pay more attention to protecting their cities from the air. After Guernica, the bombing of Madrid, and with the destruction of two great cities in 1939 and 1940 (Warsaw and Rotterdam), Europeans were learning from relentlessly replayed newsreels that war was no longer a matter just between armies\* and that their historical confidence in the general impregnability of large metropolises had been misplaced. During the First World War, most of the casualties were soldiers; but it became clear this time around that civilians would not be spared the fury of combat. This new type of warfare was erasing the boundaries, as fragile as they had been, between the battlefield and the home. Indeed, the phrase "home front" would soon become a cliché.

The Occupation of Paris during the Second World War has provided us with a rich array of photographs, many of which have been repeatedly reproduced. Often, they provide unintentionally ironic commentary on the complexities of urban life when a foreign enemy threatens a familiar city. A photograph of curators emptying the Louvre in 1938 only two years before the Germans arrived does just that. A nation's material culture has always been the target of opposing nations and peoples, and this period in French and German history was

\* Warsaw had been bombed into submission in 1939. On May 14, 1940, the Luftwaffe conducted a devastating air raid on Rotterdam, Europe's largest port. The old center of the city was destroyed; hundreds were killed and tens of thousands made homeless. The Dutch government surrendered the next day. The scenes of shattered cities were thereafter embedded in the minds of Europeans under Nazi threat.

no exception.<sup>3</sup> The protection of national treasures had begun in Paris in the late 1930s: sandbags were used to surround public statues, monuments, churches, and other buildings; many public statues were dismantled and put in safe places; precious stained-glass windows were covered



with wire or removed. Found more often than not in the centers of its cities, Europe's great museums—the National Gallery and Tate Gallery in London, Paris's Louvre, Leningrad's Hermitage, the Rijksmuseum of Amsterdam, and the Royal Museums of Fine Arts in Brussels, to name only the best known—were like sitting ducks, vulnerable to bombardment, fire, and air attack, so they had to be emptied as thoroughly as possible. Soon their walls were denuded. And there was another threat: looting. It was an open secret that the Reich sought to repatriate any painting or sculpture that it felt belonged to Germany—any work that had been itself looted over centuries of war or even sold legally. Small groups of German curators and art historians had fanned out all over Europe in the late 1930s, using their academic credentials to discover what museums held that might be called Germanic. The Third Reich was primed to reveal what it believed to be the lies and fantasies of provenance.

A first glance at the photograph shows a group of men struggling to pull a very large canvas through a door of the museum. On closer

*Géricault, The Raft of the Medusa. (Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY)*



*Géricault, The Raft of the Medusa. (Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY)*

investigation, we see that the painting is none other than Théodore Géricault's mammoth *Le Radeau de la Méduse* (*The Raft of the Medusa*), painted in 1819 and exhibited in the Salon of that year. Much has been said about the relationship between this painting's subject—a terrible



ERVL1772307 Paris, France: Interior of the Louvre Museum. One of the rooms in the Louvre after all the paintings have been removed and placed in safe hiding in the provinces. 1939  
image © Roger-Viollet / The Image Works  
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shipwreck—and the dark, romantic style of its fabrication. It shocked many who saw it, both artists and the public, and amazed many as well because of its forthright depiction of communal solidarity at its weakest point. Some wrote then, and have argued since, that the painting was Géricault's critique of the failure of the Napoleonic experiment, which was followed by the hasty reinstatement of the Bourbon monarchy in 1815. Others have seen it as a dour commentary on the slave trade, which France did not abolish in its overseas colonies until 1849: "Much has been read into this painting: an allegory for a wounded France, the fatherland at the moment of its mortal failure, the disarray of a lost generation....But aside from these political meanings, is not 'The Raft' above all a representation of horror?"<sup>4</sup> This magnificent canvas, one of the largest in the Louvre, had hung on the museum's walls for more than a hundred years as a reminder of moral, political, and personal despair and humiliation.\*

The photograph of the complicated attempt at removing the painting captures, predictively, what the next four years of the German Occupation of Paris would entail. Here we see the curators of France's national museum methodically trying to remove and hide an artwork that had represented the French nation at another political low point. Themes of the Occupation are present in the painting: a sense of abandonment; false hope for succor; struggles among fellow sufferers; the implacability of the enemy (in this case, the ocean, thirst, and hunger); the betrayal of nature itself; death and humiliation. The Louvre's curators would be more successful at protecting the nation's patrimony (they moved Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* all over France to keep it out of German hands) than would the Third Republic at protecting the nation's geographical, military, and political integrity. Like the Parisians who would soon follow it in their exodus before the arrival of the Germans, Géricault's canvas would seek refuge in unfamiliar and restricted spaces, in this case, some dusty room in an even dustier château. Yet more hauntingly, the sequestering of this great canvas was itself a terrifying revelation and prophecy of what was



to come.

\* What was the historical event that had occasioned this work? A French naval vessel, the *Méduse*, had foundered off the coast of western Africa. Crew and officers had escaped onto a hastily built raft with only enough water and food to last a few days. Although the men had intended to float to shore, the improvised raft moved farther out to sea. Before long there was a mutiny against the officers, who were killed. Many of the rest died before the raft was finally rescued. A subsequent trial brought out horrible stories of desperate attempts to survive, including murder and cannibalism. These published accounts tarnished the reputation of the French navy and the legacy of the French Revolution: *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*.



## Paris Was Different

Paris's arrogance made it a metropolis more difficult to "occupy" than any of the other European cities the Nazis controlled by force between 1939 and 1945. Nevertheless, Adolf Hitler brought German civilians and German soldiers by the thousands to the city, attempting to colonize it culturally, using it as a model for the greater Berlin that the Reich would soon begin building. Parisians themselves tried to avoid as much as they could the fact of the Occupation, presenting a "city without a face," accepting—some say too "collaboratively"—but not welcoming the presence of a confident enemy in their midst. For four years, both sides—the Germans, with their French collaborators, and the average Parisian—lived in this *faux* Paris, attempting to create a lure for the other, a trap or decoy in which to snare an antagonist.

*Der Deutsche Wegleiter für Paris: Wohin in Paris?* (The German Guide to Paris: What to Do in Paris) began publication within a month of the Occupation (July 15, 1940). At first it was only sixteen pages long, but it would grow to more than one hundred pages by its last issue, two weeks before the Liberation. The purpose of the guide was to "offer" Paris to the thousands of soldiers who would be visiting the capital for the next four years.\*

For the majority of us, Paris is an unknown land. We approach her with mixed feelings: superiority, curiosity and nervous anticipation. The name of Paris evokes something special. Paris—our grandfathers saw it at the time of the war that offered the imperial crown to the kings of Prussia [the Franco-Prussian War of 1870]. And in their mouth, the word "Paris" had a mysterious, extraordinary sound. Now we are there and we can enjoy it at our liberty.<sup>5</sup>

\* The guide contained information about Paris's most chic shops and services, Métro maps, lists of French phrases, cultural advice (e.g., how to deal with Parisian police), and many, many ads for bars, restaurants, and cabarets (even those featuring Gypsy music; while their fellows were murdering Romanians in eastern Europe, the touring soldiers would line up to hear Django Reinhardt and other "approved" Gypsy musicians).

But the author of this little article also warns the soldier not to be seduced by this untrustworthy city. Remember, it intones, that there are many other beautiful places you will visit as a Wehrmacht soldier, so "in the middle of the sweet and easy life of the City of Lights...keep in your heart, as every German should, a motto: 'Don't fall into sentimentality; the strength of steel is what we need now; direct yourself to clear and sure goals; and be ready for combat.'"<sup>6</sup>

Guardians of Nazi morality would remain concerned that the world's most attractive city would turn its soldiers into the same decadent military that they had defeated during the Battle of France.

Hitler had several reasons for breathing a sigh of relief that Paris had fallen with nary a shot fired even before the Armistice had been signed. First he wanted to enhance the image of National Socialism worldwide — to show that he and his cohort were a sophisticated and cultured race, worthy of continental leadership. In addition, he sought to mollify the bellicose Winston Churchill, for Germany was still desperately seeking a cessation of hostilities with Great Britain now that France had been subdued. Perhaps allowing a retreating British Expeditionary Force to escape from the port of Dunkirk had been one of the Führer's signals to the English; treating Paris with respect was definitely another. But a stubborn Churchill refused to read such signals favorably. And so the Occupation of Paris would last for more than fifteen hundred nights, much longer than any of the parties had foreseen.

We shall see how Nazi ideology was quite ambivalent about urban centers: they imagined

building cleaner, more idealized city environments so as to reduce the filthy, the foreign, and the aberrant. When confronted with a site such as Paris they were truly befuddled. But had they not occupied other major metropolises, other centers of art and the gay life? What was different about Paris? The difference resided in the place Paris had in the world's imagination—that and the fact that it was the capital of one of Germany's most powerful and traditional foes. Now the German Occupation of Paris sought to freeze Paris, to make it static, less dynamic, and to reduce it to a banal tourist site. For a great lot of the Germans, the city remained a sort of El Dorado. Many had visited Paris as tourists before the war; a substantial number of the elite had studied there. Many of the upper echelons of the Occupying forces spoke excellent French. Those who only knew the city secondhand still recognized it as the ideal city of freedom, charm, and beauty.





Nevertheless, Paris confronted Hitler with a conundrum that he and his acolytes would never completely solve. How does an occupier vigorously and efficiently control a city while maintaining the appearance of a benevolent trusteeship? By its very nature, a metropolis is difficult, if not impossible, to govern predictably. The Occupation authorities had organizational problems; these were evident from the day the first German motorcyclist entered the city. In his study of the period, the American historian Allan Mitchell explains that the administration of the Occupation never fully recovered from early mistakes, despite the myth of German precision and efficiency: “The basic problem was that the German command itself was in virtual chaos. The first phase of the Occupation was therefore characterized by a welter of titles, acronyms, ill-defined prerogatives, and overlapping duties as the German bureaucracy struggled to adapt itself to the particular circumstances of occupied France.”<sup>7</sup> As France’s civic and cultural capital, Paris demanded a more flexible and entrepreneurial management than its occupiers were prepared to develop. Their administration of the capital was more layered and confusing than elsewhere in France, particularly because of German bureaucracies overlapping with their Vichy counterparts. The Nazi government’s concern for its image as the new custodian of the world’s most recognized city added further complications. The occupiers were organizing to take material advantage of a conquered city while ostensibly protecting an important part of the world’s patrimony. They also had to ensure that they not appear beguiled by Paris, for such lack of martial attention might encourage restless residents of other occupied cities.

The history of the Occupation is, in part, a melodrama about an often feckless bureaucracy attempting to remake an iconic city into a Potemkin-like hamlet. City planning, as any urban historian will confirm, is an oxymoron. There had been no greater example of planned urban reconstruction than that effected by Baron Haussmann, under the aegis of Napoleon III, between 1852 and 1870. Yet in 1871, the forces of the Paris Commune (the world’s first communist government), in retreating before the French army could crush it, would use the city’s modern accoutrements (fountains, cobblestones, lampposts, kiosks, benches, and other street furniture) to construct barricades across widened boulevards. They also set this new Paris afire. So the Nazis had occupied a city steeped in the blood of revolt and massacre, of civil strife, and had somehow convinced themselves that they could succeed where even the French themselves had failed. They were both seduced and apprehensive.

But they were not fools: they knew that to occupy was to establish relations with sympathetic and ambitious citizens as well as those who feared and loathed them, and they were quite adept at it. Cities under occupation demand new urban identities of their stressed inhabitants. Often those identities can take on attributes of the occupier; those individuals, for whatever reason, become integral to the confidence of the “foreign” visitor. In writing a history of this period, one needs regularly to remember that there are many less visible lines of demarcation between “occupier” and “occupied.” Language and uniforms are but the most obvious markers of “otherness”; the less obvious—the occasional, accidental, and coincidental acts of “cooperation” and “accommodation”—remind the student of this period that his effort can only suggest the complexity of human relations in such a stressed environment. Daily life was—is—always a matter of accommodation to unexpected and noxious events; the Occupation inflected the small and large decisions that constitute daily life in myriad ways. It imposed an attuned sensitivity on the French that raised moral issues that, to their credit, are still being debated.

A citizen of a city as robustly occupied as was Paris must “accommodate” himself continuously to an unpredictable reality. Just obeying Nazi and Vichy injunctions was an



example of such accommodation; but was answering the occupiers' innocuous questions or having affective or sexual relations with them or selling them bread or shoe polish also a form of collaboration? Is there a hierarchy of activities that makes one a collaborator rather than just an accommodator? Is a quick date or a one-night stand more "accommodating" than selling coffee to the same officer day after day and even occasionally offering him a free croissant? These are questions that demand thoughtful answers, and thoughtfulness, as we will see later, was not prevalent in the postliberation period. Jean Dutourd's astutely satirical novel *Au Bon Beurre* (*The Best Butter*, 1952), written less than a decade after the events it describes, was a bestseller in France even though it satirized the compromises made by many Parisians. The owners of a dairy shop adapt themselves to every change that occurs in Paris during that period, but they do so to benefit from opportunities to make money, not for ideological reasons. "In exceptional times, exceptional actions," reasons Monsieur Poissonnard, the grocer.<sup>8</sup> Living under surveillance for four years stymied and disfigured earlier ethical certainties; all decisions demanded new justifications.





Paris during the Second World War survived many grievous injuries, but its most serious were not the visible wounds left behind by air raids, bombardments, fires, and disease. There were subtler marks, more difficult to evaluate, easier for history to ignore. These effects were often deeper, more traumatic. An occupation numbs a city's vitality, the vitality that makes urban life attractive. Soon the citizen begins to feel alienated, disconnected from a familiar environment; though he is still physically engaged with the city, his emotional attachment to it weakens. Previously confident of his urban sophistication, which had allowed him to navigate a complex environment, he becomes tentative, anxious, angry, and impatient as he wonders how long before "his" city returns to him. One of the ironies is that an occupied city brings its citizens closer together physically—in lines, in movie houses, in cafés for warmth, in smaller living spaces, in crowded buses and trains—but separates them emotionally and sentimentally. Suspicion becomes the norm; openness diminishes. Generosity turns to covetousness; racial and ethnic markers become clearer and thus more compelling; objects—things—take on almost ethical value: "If I can't have my city, then at least I can grab part of it, find something to call mine."



There are eloquent examples of French people who lived not in Paris or Marseille or Lyon but in small towns and villages accommodating themselves to the sudden proximity of those with power over their daily lives. In her stunningly prescient novel *Suite Française* (1942, but unpublished until 2004), the French-Russian novelist Irène Némirovsky gives us a view of how intimate the Occupation became in rural settings: "The Germans had moved into their lodgings and were getting to know the village. The officers walked about alone or in pairs, heads held high, boots striking the paving stones....They inspired in the inhabitants of the occupied countries fear, respect, aversion, and the amusing desire to fleece them, to take advantage of them, to get hold of their money."

Another book, the novella *The Silence of the Sea*, distributed clandestinely during 1942, was credited to a certain author named Vercors (in reality, Jean Bruller, a writer and member of the Resistance). A young woman and her uncle, who narrates, are forced to accept as a tenant a German officer who makes every effort to befriend them. Deciding early to resist the only way they can, they provide every courtesy to their tenant except to speak to him. Finally von Ebrennac, an anti-Nazi but proud German officer, decides that honor demands he ask to be transferred to the Eastern Front—in other words, to probable death. He announces this to the old man and his niece, and tells them:

“I wish you a good night.” I thought he was going to close the door and leave. But no. I was looking at my niece. I stared at her. He said—murmured: “Adieu.” He did not move. He remained completely still, and in his still and tense face, his eyes were even more still and tense, connected to the eyes—too open, too pale— of my niece. This lasted, lasted—how long?—lasted until finally, the girl moved her lips. Werner’s eyes shone. I heard: “Adieu.” You had to look for the word in order to hear it, but finally I heard it. Von Ebrennac heard it too, and he stood up straight, and his face and his whole body seemed to relax as if he had just had a restful bath. And he smiled, so that the last image that I had of him was a happy one. And the door closed and his steps disappeared into the depths of the house.<sup>10</sup>

French programs on BBC Radio would read *The Silence of the Sea* on the air with touching enthusiasm. Those who had not signed on to the Vichy experiment believed that it presented a France that still had the wherewithal to struggle against apparently impossible odds. It boldly put forth the ethical questions that would haunt France for decades: Which actions, exactly, constitute collaboration and which constitute resistance?

Living in cities, where so many serendipitous encounters occur, is different from living in more intimate villages and towns. Knowing a city by maps alone cannot explain or contain the on-the-ground facts of that city; too much is unseen by the innocent visitor, even less by an occupier. Not only cul-de-sacs and alleys but also the daily lives of a city’s inhabitants are invisible to the mapmaker. *Stadtluft macht frei* (city air makes one free): a totalitarian regime can only partially rule a metropolis. Conquerors tend to forget this age-old belief.

Perhaps the most informative and moving accounts of the war in Europe came from the dispatches and journals of A. J. Liebling, correspondent for *The New Yorker*. Liebling stayed in Paris until forty-eight hours before the arrival of the Germans. Throughout the war, he traveled to the United States, to North Africa, and England; he landed at Normandy on D-day and was one of the first journalists to enter the liberated city. For four years, though, he had been frustrated about not knowing what was going on in his beloved Paris. His only information came from tales brought back by escaped prisoners and from the dozens of little newspapers published clandestinely in France during those years. Reading those scraps of information was as if “one were to try to piece together a theory of what is going on behind the familiar facade of a house across the street where a friend is held prisoner by a kidnap gang. These tiny newspapers are like messages scrawled on bits of paper and dropped from a window by the prisoner.”<sup>11</sup> I know how he felt, for even though we have learned much about what was going on since the war, there remain so many contradictory stories and theories, so many attempts at explanation and exculpation, that unraveling them seems at times to be an exercise in frustration. But the stories themselves are worth remembering, for they speak of a period and a place—Paris— that still demand our sentimental and intellectual attention.