

IMAGINING AND PERFORMING THE SELF IN NAZI GERMANY:
LEISURE AND TRAVEL IN THE CORRESPONDENCE OF
HILDE LAUBE AND ROLAND NORDHOFF, 1938-39

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ABSTRACT

Hilde Laube and Roland Nordhoff exchanged nearly 180 letters between May 1938 and December 1939 relating their everyday lives, discussing world events, organizing outings, and their growing relationship. This unique set of letters, made available through the public history project *Trug und Schein*, offers the opportunity to study the historical world of late 1930s Germany from the perspective of two ordinary individuals. Hilde and Roland's correspondence is particularly relevant for insight into everyday life in post-recovery, pre-war Nazi Germany. Studying the history of individuals involves discussing the processes of how people form their selves and perspectives in relation to historical events.

I argue that Roland and Hilde imagined and expressed their identities through the self-narratives created in their letters. They particularly showed how they defined themselves in their narratives of leisure and travel. They frequently incorporated their travel experiences into their narratives in order to imagine aspects of their selves and to perform their selves to one another. They made similar use of other leisure activities like film, literature, and letter-

writing. They each imagined themselves beyond their place in society, creating heroic self-narratives in which they could achieve their aspirations.

Roland expressed his status and education through his travels and his leisure activities, from recommending novels to writing about his travels. Roland expressed the status of a *Bildungsbürgertum*. Meaning far more than just middle-class, this word means a status of taste and the ability to discern the good and beautiful. Roland's letters and his leisure activities affirmed his taste, as well as his ability to teach Hilde about the good and the beautiful. Hilde expressed her aspirations for herself and their relationship through discussions of their travels and her pastimes. The narratives Hilde and Roland created reveal how they constructed their sense of self, and how these narratives changed and adapted over the course of their relationship as well as during the prelude to World War II.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, have examined a thesis titled “Imagining and Performing the Self in Nazi Germany: Leisure and Travel in the Correspondence of Hilde Laube and Roland Nordhoff, 1938-39,” presented by Elizabeth Perry, candidate for the Master of Arts in History, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“I was able to gain a little insight into your career,” Hilde Laube wrote to school teacher Roland Nordhoff on 6 August 1939 shortly after he visited her home. “The holiday is not just recreation, but also an important time for a teacher.” In addition to the “relaxation of the body and mind” and the “complete relaxation of the nerves,” he “must also have the opportunity to collect new experiences.”¹ She concluded that “good sense says that one should not completely separate the professional world from one’s vacation... Many a thought, plan, or intent born of a peaceful holiday season has brought success and advantage later in professional life.”² When Hilde wrote this letter, she continued her and Roland’s correspondence of over 140 letters since she first wrote to him on 4 May 1938. Only two months after her letter of 6 August, they got engaged. After Roland departed from his stay with Hilde and her parents, she wrote how much she missed him: “The rooms are so empty now. When I came home at ¼ of 6 my eyes searched for any trace of you.”³ As Hilde recalled their time together, she focused, not just on their vacation with each other, but also on how Roland’s leisure time supported his profession. Indeed, Roland’s vacations contributed to his status as an educated and well-rounded individual, and therefore enabled him to teach young people successfully.

This unique set of letters, made available through the public history project *Trug und Schein*, offers the opportunity to study the historical world of late 1930s Germany from the

¹ Hilde Laube to Roland Nordhoff (henceforth HL-RN), 6 August 1939, *Trug und Schein* 390806-1-1.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

perspective of two ordinary individuals.⁴ Hilde and Roland's correspondence between May 1938 and December 1939 is particularly relevant for insight into everyday life in post-recovery, pre-war Nazi Germany. The history of everyday life, or *Alltagsgeschichte*, was pioneered in Germany in the 1980s by historians like Alf Lüdtke. *Alltagsgeschichte* focuses on "the life and survival of those who have remained largely anonymous in history."⁵ Lüdtke argues that *Alltagsgeschichte* allows us to explore the "everyday historical realities" of ordinary people, enabling us to see a more detailed picture of the past where "the gaping distance between rulers and ruled is reduced."⁶ This approach particularly resonated with studies of Nazi-era Germany. Historians such as Lüdtke study how attitudes and actions on the "local level" give insight into time periods previously studied primarily through big political or military figures.⁷ Through this micro-historical view, we can see the local processes of the Nazi regime and how individuals became actors in the regime's policies.

By studying the lives of ordinary people rather than institutions, it is necessary to approach the subject differently. Studying the history of individuals involves discussing the processes behind an individual's identity, attitudes, and actions. This type of approach requires investigating how people form their selves and perspectives in relation to historical events. As Andrew Stuart Bergerson, K. Scott Baker, Clancy Martin, and Steve Ostovich argue in *The Happy Burden of History*, we are often inclined to abstract the components of

⁴ Andrew Stuart Bergerson and Thomas Mundsckick, *Trug und Schein*, www.trugundschein.org; henceforth: TuS. I had advanced access to these letters thanks to my participation in this project in digital humanities as a transcriber. All letters in this essay will be accessible online through this project. We are posting these letters online, corresponding to the dates they were written, to encourage a crowd-sourced historical analysis of these sources. To protect identities and to preserve the integrity of the crowd-sourcing project, we have changed the names of the letter-writers and abbreviated some local names.

⁵ Alf Lüdtke, ed., *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, trans. William Templer (Princeton University Press, 1995), 4.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

the self from historical context in our attempts to understand how the self operates.⁸ This way of studying the self draws on a Western tradition of self-narrative that portrays the self as heroic, masterful, and able to control his surroundings.⁹ As both Bergerson et al and Lüdtke argue, however, the self is historically grounded, and cannot be understood separately from its context.¹⁰ The processes of Hilde and Roland's self-narratives cannot be considered apart from the events and norms of their time. Indeed, the couple's very selves cannot be considered separate from the process of creating themselves in their letters – the self is created and demonstrated in the act of defining it.

Hilde and Roland began their correspondence in the midst of heightened German nationalism and increased oppression of and violence towards undesirable groups as defined by the Nazis. The German economy underwent a seemingly miraculous economic recovery, though perhaps only because it was compared to the devastating decade following World War I.¹¹ The rise of the Nazi party to government control in 1933 and the subsequent rise in German economic power reawakened German national pride. By 1938, Nazi rule and public participation in Nazi ideology tied German pride and community membership to acts of racial exclusion, resulting in ever more wild and widespread acts of violence such as the well-known example of *Kristallnacht*.¹² Hilde and Roland's letters show the extent to which they acknowledged, or ignored, these aspects of their country and political surroundings as they composed and demonstrated their self-narratives.

⁸ Andrew Stuart Bergerson, K. Scott Baker, Clancy Martin, and Steve Ostovich, *The Happy Burden of History: From Sovereign Impunity to Responsible Selfhood* (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co., 2011), 7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 7; Lüdtke, *The History of Everyday Life*, 5.

¹¹ R.J. Overy, *The Nazi Economic Recovery 1932-1938*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1-2.

¹² Michael Wildt, *Hitler's Volksgemeinschaft and the Dynamics of Racial Exclusion: Violence Against Jews in Provincial Germany, 1919-1939* (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2012), 227.

I will focus on Hilde and Roland's correspondence between May 1938 and December 1939 because these letters show how Hilde and Roland presented their selves to each other as they began their relationship. Hilde and Roland corresponded during a time when the narrative of self-mastery was dominant and well-established. They created meaning in their lives through the stories they told and performed about themselves. The narrative they constructed followed the self-mastery pattern, particularly in the case of Roland, but at times their narrative strained and struggled against the uncontrollable forces of historical and social circumstance. At other times they adapted to new circumstances and incorporated new events or attitudes into the structure of their story. As they developed their relationship in 1938 and 1939, they performed their changing self-narratives for a new audience: each other. A close examination of their narrative structure provides insight into how these selves are imagined, created, and revised.

Hilde and Roland's correspondence is particularly suited to a study of selfhood because of the nature of letter composition. In *The Converse of the Pen*, Bruce Redford asserts that a letter creates "its own coherent world," and that "the finest letter writers project an identity."¹³ Letters do not objectively record events. Instead, letters are imaginative, and can function in a variety of ways. The author of a letter can use the narrative to imagine herself in an ideal way and, because letters are correspondence, the writer will also present herself to the receiver. The letter also functions as a performance of self as the letter writer uses the correspondence to demonstrate taste, status, and intellect through choices of composition and topic.

¹³ Bruce Redford, *The Converse of the Pen: Acts of Intimacy in the Eighteenth Century Familiar Letter* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 12, 9.

In order to study how Hilde and Roland's letters address imagining and narrating the self, I will focus on the topics of leisure and work. The letters are filled with discussions of their occupations, vacations, and pastimes, and they provide insight into how Hilde and Roland used their letters to imagine and perform their selves to one another. Tourism, or traveling as a leisure activity, reflects many of the struggles of the modern self, including imagining identity and creating coherent, heroic self-narratives. As a transnational phenomenon, it is necessary to consider tourism and the development of leisure from a variety of perspectives to show tourism's significance to modern identity formation.

In his influential study of tourism, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, Dean MacCannell argues that tourist sites hold a deep "religious symbolism" for modern travelers.¹⁴ These sites exemplify the modern world view, and the search for "authentic" experiences that is characteristic of modernity and the modern problem of maintaining a coherent self in a fragmented society.¹⁵ The image of these tourist sites, MacCannell argues, is more important than the actual visit to the site, because the impressions and ideas communicated by the site claim to present meaningful and authentic truths about history, society, and identity.¹⁶ Tourist sites thus provide visitors with meanings that inform the relationship of the self to society and nation. They equip the self with meaning-making tools to imagine the self and create a self-narrative.

Other theorists following MacCannell place even more emphasis on individual agency and the imagining of self in tourism. In his book *Culture on Tour: Ethnographies of Travel*, Edward Bruner emphasizes the dynamism of modern tourism, and he portrays

¹⁴ Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (University of California Press, 1999), 2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

tourism as a social space in which historical meanings and cultural events are contested and reinvented.¹⁷ Bruner argues that tourism is an essential component of how modern culture, identity, and historical understandings are created and revised.¹⁸ The tourist is thus an active participant in forming attitudes about the relationship between the world and the self. John Urry's *The Tourist Gaze* also discusses this theme by investigating the way tourists perceive and organize what they see. Borrowing the concept of the "gaze" from Michel Foucault, Urry argues that the gaze of the tourist is socially constructed to seek meaningful experiences that are different from the world of home.¹⁹ Urry asserts that the tourist gaze is "a skilled, learned performance that visually and imaginatively works upon nature."²⁰ Tourism, like other leisure activities, is a learned social skill as well as a performance, implying that tourists use their experiences to imagine and perform their selves to others.

Much of the recent literature on tourism emphasizes how tourists use their travel experiences to create narratives about themselves and their relationships with other people. In *Tourist Cultures: Identity, Place, and the Traveller*, Stephen Wearing, Deborah Stevenson, and Tamara Young suggest that the "social value" of an experience is more important than its image, with an emphasis on how tourists interact and what meanings they derive from these interactions.²¹ The authors argue that travel is a conversation where the individual is influenced by other tourists but also expresses agency and initiative.²² In particular, travelers create their own meaning in how they narrate their experiences, and these narratives can

¹⁷ Edward M. Bruner, *Culture on Tour: Ethnographies of Travel* (University of Chicago Press, 2005), 127, 146.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁹ John Urry and Jonas Larson, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*, 3rd ed. (Sage Publishing, 2011), 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.

²¹ Stephen Wearing, Deborah Stevenson, and Tamara Young, *Tourist Cultures: Identity, Space and Traveler*, (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 11.

²² *Ibid.*, 43-45.

reveal the individual's interaction with cultural influences.²³ Tourists also add another dimension to their experience by telling the story to others, frequently with the use of photographs, as they both communicate and relive their travels.²⁴ The experience of tourism is thus related to the individual creating and revising a self-narrative within the historical, cultural, and social context surrounding them. These narratives are also performed to others because tourism, both during the experience and after, is a social activity.

Leisure, addressed more generally, is also suited to the study of imagining the self because of the imaginative nature of recreational practices – whether they involve taking an extended vacation or simply attending the theater.²⁵ Sociologist Chris Rojek argues that leisure time is defined by its activities and structure that make it distinct from the activities and structure of work.²⁶ Similar to Urry's argument concerning tourists, Rojek also contends that recreational practice “is an accomplishment of skilled and knowledgeable actors.”²⁷ Rojek argues that practitioners are aware of the social and cultural meanings present in so-called “free time,” and they navigate and “manipulate” these activities with consideration to how they portray their status, relate to their work life, and affect their relationships with others.²⁸ Rojek thus views the world of leisure as a series of “dynamic, relatively open-ended processes” where vacationers or theater-goers are active participants in shaping the meanings of these activities.²⁹

²³ Ibid., 47.

²⁴ Ibid., 47.

²⁵ While Hilde and Roland's religious participation could also be considered a leisure activity, I will be focusing secular leisure activities for the purposes of this discussion.

²⁶ Chris Rojek, *Capitalism and Leisure Theory* (New York, NY: Tavistock Publications, 1985), 26.

²⁷ Ibid., 180; Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: Pseudo-Events in America* (Vintage, 1992).

²⁸ Rojek, *Capitalism*, 181.

²⁹ Ibid.

Rojek cautions, however, that “free time“ should not be viewed as a realm of complete freedom, because leisure is still constrained by social norms and power relations. In fact, recreation functions to legitimate and reinforce dynamics of power as individuals use it to define “rules of pleasure and unpleasure“ for society.³⁰ “The conventions of leisure relations are historically structured,“ Rojek asserts. “They are tied to systems of legitimation which regulate what is permissible in leisure conduct.”³¹ Recreation is thus constrained by historical convention and social norms, but it is also a space where these norms can be tested, debated, and even transgressed. Rojek’s characterization of leisure shares attributes with the dynamism and socio-cultural significance of tourism, showing that recreation functions in how the self is imagined, performed, and influenced.

Leisure is usually placed in opposition to work, and although these categories are useful to distinguish certain types of behaviors in certain places, this dichotomy does not account for the complex relationship between the two. The division is messy at best, and they overlap so often that it would be difficult to speak of one without the other. In *Working at Play: A History of Vacations in the United States*, Cindy S. Aron argues that Americans struggled with the idea of leisure and vacation time because of the cultural force of the Puritan and republican work ethic that despised idleness. Therefore, vacations in America were usually transformed into their own form of work. Chataquas and bible camps provided a means for intellectual and spritual self-improvement, health spas restored the body, and visits to historical sites advanced the cause of citizenship.³² I will not claim to transpose an

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 32.

³² Cindy S. Aron, *Working at Play: A History of Vacations in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3.

American argument onto the attitudes of German vacationers – but, Aron’s work reveals that the norms of work and leisure influence each other. How individuals imagine the self is necessarily influenced by occupation, and attitudes, behaviors, and aspirations forged at work are reflected in how an individual approaches and narrates their leisure time.

Tourism and leisure thus have important consequences for how modern individuals understand history and culture, their relationship to others, and how they construct and communicate their identities. At the turn of the twentieth century, with the growth of the middle class in most western societies, more people began to express their status, taste, and identity through particular modes of consumption. This consumption did not only include goods, but also recreation and vacations. The sociologist Jean Baudrillard postulates the concept of signs that communicate social and cultural value, or what he calls sign-value. These signs are communicated in modernity primarily through modes of consumption. Baudrillard emphasizes that a single object or experience does not constitute sign value, but the logical grouping of consumed objects or experiences into a particular set of signs communicates a related set of values. Baudrillard notes that many people use the sign-value of commodities to communicate a bourgeois lifestyle, attaining a particular arrangement of household goods that “show how well one possesses.”³³ He also describes this organization of goods, or syntax of signs, as a “rhetoric of despair,” because most people are attempting to affirm a bourgeois status that is not actually within their reach.³⁴ Baudrillard acknowledges that, given the fluid nature of sign-value, changes in signs could reflect or even generate actual social change. But, an individual reaching for items or experiences with bourgeois

³³ Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. Charles Levin (St. Louis, MO: Telos Press Ltd., 1981), 42.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

sign-value is more often feeding an unrealized desire for a higher status.³⁵ Tourism works similarly as a commodity that communicates one's cultural and social status – Roland often exhibited these attitudes and behaviors in his letters, with Hilde as his audience. Combined with the sign-value of other leisure activities, the young teacher produced certain impressions based on the arrangement of recreation-related signs.

In addition to the dynamics of class and social status, tourist experiences and narratives are also shaped by gender. In the nineteenth century tourism was a middle-class affair defined by the tastes and interests of wealthy bourgeois men. Women, with a few exceptions, were placed outside of traditional tourist space, accorded the status of “other.” The majority of tourist sites expressed masculine interpretations of culture and history.³⁶ Despite the gendered spaces of tourism, women did travel, and studies of western female travelers find that women reported different goals and experiences from men.³⁷ In her book *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life*, Annette Kolodny found that American men traveling to the frontier wrote about the land in terms of mastery and control, as something to be fought, tamed, and controlled. In her book *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860*, Kolodny studies women's narratives of the American frontier, and finds that while women also wanted to tame the wilderness, they “dreamed... of locating a home and a familial community within a cultivated garden.”³⁸ Women's fantasies of the land consisted of “idealized domesticity”

³⁵ Ibid., 50-51.

³⁶ Wearing et al, *Tourist Cultures*, 66.

³⁷ Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 5-7.

³⁸ Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860* (University of North Carolina Press, 1984), xiii.

whereas men's fantasies focused on mastering and transforming a wild landscape.³⁹ These gender differences are reflected in Hilde and Roland's letters – each of them imagine themselves differently in their relationship to the places they visited, and create different narratives about their travels.

Other studies of gender in tourism reveal that this gender difference is frequently visible in Western tourist experiences. Rosemary Sweet investigated the writing of travelers on the Grand Tour in Italy. While male travelers typically described the galleries, temples, and works of art they had seen, women were more likely to note details of Italian society and social events as well as everyday items like the cleanliness of streets.⁴⁰ Women narrated their own experiences differently and drew their own set of meanings that were typically more focused on social space and interaction than on the sightseeing itself. Sweet's study also reveals differences in how travelers narrated their experiences in letters based on the gender of the receiver. Letters written to fathers contained "sights seen and money spent" while letters to mothers described "with whom their offspring had been mixing" and "the nature of Italian society."⁴¹ Women depicted their experiences very differently from men, and framed their travels in a home-like, domestic sense. Aspects of this narrative continued into the early twentieth century and can be seen in German advertising at the time.⁴² Kolodny and Sweet suggest that this "domestication" of travel stems from the gendered way women were conditioned to behave in the "domestic sphere," which was created as an antithesis to the public sphere in the nineteenth century. Women approached public sphere activities with a

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Rosemary Sweet, *Cities and the Grand Tour: The British in Italy, c. 1690-1820* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 34, 40-45.

⁴¹ Ibid., 42.

⁴² Adam C. Stanley, *Modernizing Tradition: Gender and Consumerism in Interwar France and Germany* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 8-9.

different set of attitudes and experiences than men, and framed these experiences, including travel, in domestic terms.

Leisure travel and the process of imagining and performing the self are intimately connected. In his book *On Holiday: A History of Vacationing*, Ovar Löfgren emphasizes vacationing as an imaginative venture, where individuals hone their skill of “daydreaming” or “mindtraveling” as they imagine and plan vacations. During and after the trip, travelers create mental “vacationscapes” formed from a mix of memories and impressions taken from media.⁴³ Imagined vacationing is so essential to modern life, Löfgren argues, that the imagination of vacations functions as a “cultural laboratory” where individuals act out and integrate their identities and relationships with others.⁴⁴ How a person imagines and plans a vacation can thus reveal how that person is using leisure time to explore or reinforce social and cultural roles. Planning and imagining are part of creating the self.

The process of imagining travel is so powerful to the self that it may have a greater effect than actual travel. Historian Kristin Hoganson has shown in her study of nineteenth- and twentieth-century domesticity that the culture of travel did not always require actually moving into a different space, particularly for women that could not travel as frequently as their male counterparts. Female travel clubs, a common fixture of middle class life in American cities and towns at the time, regularly featured guest speakers who regaled their audiences with travel stories accompanied by magic lantern slide shows. By attending such events, women might imagine a personal encounter with the foreign other and enhance their

⁴³ Ovar Löfgren, *On Holiday: A History of Vacationing* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 2.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

own status as worldly cosmopolitans.⁴⁵ Both Hilde and Roland evidenced similar imaginings and aspirations in their lengthy correspondence, frequently discussing plans for and reactions to travel experiences. Indeed their letters add an extra layer of understanding of how they used their imagining and planning of travel to perform their narratives to each other. Roland used his written “daydreaming” to express his bourgeois values of taste, education, mastery, and individualism. In contrast, Hilde wrote about travel in the context of relationships with other people and imagined travel as a more domestic experience. Tourists imagine their travels in the context of changing cultural roles and expressions of the self, and so this imagining expresses attitudes about status, gender, and nationality.

The dynamics of class, gender, identity, and consumption intersected in the growth of the German tourist industry in the nineteenth century. In Germany, as in other parts of Europe and North America, the middle class increasingly took advantage of innovations in transportation and communications technology – railroad, steam navigation, and the telegraph – that made travel more convenient and affordable. As tourism became more prevalent, local and town governments created tourism associations to maintain and promote tourism. Attracting tourists would, of course, prove economically beneficial, but tourism in Germany was also strongly tied to attitudes about the relationship between nation and landscape. The hills, mountains, and rivers were the essence of the German homeland as well as the earliest object of German commercial tourism.

Some of the first tourism associations rose up to promote Germany’s natural wonders. They used their resources to ease the tourists’ consumption of nature by carving out walking

⁴⁵ Kristin Hoganson, *Consumer’s Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1965-1920* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina, 2007), 205.

trails and building bridges and observation towers – and to ease popular adaptation to German’s relatively recent political unity without obliterating regional identities.⁴⁶ Caitlin Murdock’s study of tourism in Saxony in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries shows how these associations defined landscapes in social and political terms, as part of a culture and a nation. These landscapes were not limited to mountains and rivers, but included towns and industries as part of the built environment that defined Saxon identity. Murdock argues that these associations encouraged experiencing the Saxon landscape in order to appreciate “the local and regional while connecting them to larger state and national communities.”⁴⁷ Tourist experiences of German states, located in the political context of a larger Germany, would help transcend Germany’s regional fragmentation and give tourists an understanding of a diverse, yet reconcilable, German nation.⁴⁸ Tourism associations thus encouraged Germans to join the nation-building project by connecting tourist sites to the nation and affirming German-ness as part of their self-identity.

In the early twentieth century, the belief that geography heavily influenced the development of a nation’s culture and government held sway in German intellectual circles.⁴⁹ Political scientists in particular stressed geographic factors in the forging of history, culture, war, and national boundaries – this new discipline, pioneered in Germany, was called *geopolitics*. German geographer Friedrich Ratzel used *geopolitics* to describe nations as organisms pitted in an evolutionary struggle, an idea that became even more widely accepted

⁴⁶ Thomas Lekan, “A “Noble Prospect”: Tourism, Heimat, and Conservation on the Rhine, 1880-1914,” *The Journal of Modern History* 8, no. 4 (2009): 831, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/605487>.

⁴⁷ Caitlin E. Murdock, “Tourist Landscapes and Regional Identities in Saxony, 1878-1938,” *Central European History* 40 (2007): 592, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20457283>.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 590.

⁴⁹ David Thomas Murphy, *The Heroic Earth: Geopolitical Thought in Weimar Germany, 1918-1933* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press), 1997.

in Germany after World War I.⁵⁰ The linkage between geography and politics insinuated itself into popular culture through fiction, travel literature, and other cultural texts that elevated landscape as a source of German culture and history, revealing the depth of the relationship between German identity and the physical land.

This relationship was sometimes contradictory. While the landscape seemed reassuringly “unchanging” or timeless, there was also a popular consensus that nature could be overcome, mastered, and reshaped.⁵¹ This relationship between the viewer and the natural landscape reflects the relationship between the self and forces outside the self. The self may acknowledge the influence of outside forces, but still continues the heroic self-narrative that affirms the self’s ability to master the surrounding world. This narrative shows the presence of Enlightenment concepts of reason and man’s ability to dominate the natural world. Historian David Pan studies how the Nazis made use of Enlightenment ideas and language. The Nazis created a narrative that drew on ideas of “rational manipulation,” arguing that humanity is able to dominate the world around it through reason.⁵² These ideas affected how individuals like Hilde and Roland perceived the landscape as well as their relationship with it.

In his book *German Tourist Cultures*, Rudy Koshar argues that the tourism industry and tourists have an active relationship with national identity.⁵³ Using Germany as his model, Koshar argues that nationalism and tourism both help inform one’s identity in a larger

⁵⁰ Ibid., 7, 14.

⁵¹ David Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 3, 8.

⁵² David Pan, “Revising the Dialectic of Enlightenment: Alfred Baeumler and the Nazi Appropriation of Myth,” *New German Critique* 1, no. 84 (2001): 40, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/827797>.

⁵³ Rudy Koshar, *German Travel Cultures* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2000), 27.

community.⁵⁴ Traveling informed collective identity, but also “had a deeply personal character” and assumed some kind of “quasi-mystical relationship” between traveler and sights.⁵⁵ Koshar argues that tourism allowed Germans to explore their individual roles as consumers, as members of a nation, and as participants in culture.⁵⁶ He argues, similar to other historians of tourism, that tourism is part of a distinctly modern search for signs of wholeness, of a whole and complete nation or culture, in order to combat the fragmented experience of modernity. Tourist guidebooks offered a way to organize the potentially vast experiences of travel that highlights the relationship of tourist sights to a larger national and cultural context.⁵⁷ Tourists could thus use guided tourism to integrate this unified concept of nation and culture into their self-concept.

While Koshar emphasizes the role of guidebooks in this organization of tourist sights, his study implies that tourists are always organizing and connecting what they see to a larger narrative of both the nation and the place of their self within the nation. These processes continued into wartime – Koshar shows that during the 1940s German tourists were visiting occupied Poland, the most recent Baedeker guide in hand. Wartime Baedeker guides stressed that tourists would be visiting a place in flux, and the guide emphasized the “cultural gradient” tourists would observe as they traveled farther east.⁵⁸ German tourists viewed the landscape of occupation as an object of touristic consumption, and thus transformed invasion and occupation into a tourist spectacle. Wartime tourism was an exercise both in gazing at an excitingly different landscape and affirming the superiority and dominance of German

⁵⁴ Ibid., 50-56.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 27.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 155-156.

culture, as well as fulfilling the decades-old dream of eastern *Lebensraum* (living space) frustrated after World War I.⁵⁹

The presence of the Nazis affected tourism and leisure well before the occupation of Poland. There is little doubt among historians of tourism in Germany that the National Socialist state attempted to exploit the potential of tourism to shape identity. The Nazis were dedicated to spreading their own image of the Germans as a superior, master race that combined pseudo-genetic theory with xenophobic fears. The Nazis used many strategies to layer their ideology into everyday life, giving their ideas the appearance of normalcy. Local actors participated ever more in Nazi policies as Nazi ideas became ever more normalized and incorporated into individual views. Joshua Hagen's study of Rothenburg ob der Tauber shows how the Nazis used this medieval town as a symbol of traditional German culture, and used this traditional landscape to "frame their vision of national community."⁶⁰ The Nazis and their local supporters placed party imagery throughout Rothenburg, and used likenesses of the town in advertisements for Nazi rallies, furthering "images of historical continuity and community within Nazi ideology."⁶¹ Because of its beautiful and historic architecture, Rothenburg was a popular tourist destination, so the message of traditional German life tied to Nazi political imagery reached thousands of visitors in the 1930s.⁶² In order to take advantage of tourism, the Nazis formed their own tourist organizations. The Reich Tourism Association and the state-run tourist agency Strength through Joy (*Kraft durch Freude*) created an overtly political tourist culture that emphasized the new Nazi order and sought an

⁵⁹ Ibid., 156.

⁶⁰ Joshua Hagen, "The Most German of Towns: Creating an Ideal Nazi Community in Rothenburg ob der Tauber," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94, no.1 (2004): 208, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3694075>.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., 209.

overall “synchronization” (*Gleichschaltung*) of German society.⁶³ The Nazis and their supporters in local tourist sites like Rothenburg took advantage of the cultural significance of the landscape as well as the political and national influences of tourism to further their own agenda. Tourism and leisure influence the imagining and performance of the self, and incorporating Nazi ideas into these practices allowed them to be internalized by ordinary Germans.

I argue that Roland and Hilde imagined and expressed their identities in their letters, not only through their work, but through their methods of leisure and consumption. Roland expressed his status and education through his travels and his leisure activities, from recommending novels to writing about his travels. Roland expressed the status of a *Bildungsbürgertum*. Meaning far more than just middle-class, this word means a status of taste and the ability to discern the good and beautiful. Roland’s letters and his leisure activities affirmed his taste, as well as his ability to teach Hilde about the values of *Bildungsbürgertum*. Hilde expressed her aspirations for herself and their relationship through discussions of their travels and her pastimes. These expressions came at a time when consumption, leisure time, and leisure travel were an increasingly important part of life that was not only seen as healthy but also as modern and German – these were ways to express one’s status, group membership, and national identity. The narratives Hilde and Roland created reveal how they constructed their sense of self, and how these narratives changed and adapted over the course of their relationship as well as during the prelude to World War II.

⁶³ Kristin Semmens, *Seeing Hitler’s Germany: Tourism in the Third Reich* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 190.

CHAPTER 2

NARRATING THE LANDSCAPE: MAY 1938 – DECEMBER 1938

Hilde and Roland met in 1936 at a church choir to which they both belonged. Hilde confessed that he fascinated her from the beginning, but at the time Roland was seeing another woman.¹ By May 1938, however, he was again single. Although it was unusual for a woman to initiate a relationship, Hilde sent Roland her first letter. Even though Hilde still feared she was not worthy of Roland – he was better educated than she and came from a more affluent family – she believed they could trust each other and Roland would be the man to cure her loneliness. In 1938 Roland was thirteen years older than Hilde. He was a member of the Nazi Party and the Nazi Teachers League (NSLB). Heir to a three-generation legacy of civil servants, Roland often expressed unhappiness and loneliness in his teaching work. When he responded to Hilde, he admitted that he “hardly noticed” her during their time in the choir, but he recalled her as a “hearty, respectable” woman and wanted to know more about her.² In her second letter Hilde confessed that she felt she always wore a mask to show the world while keeping her true self inside.³ Hilde, very much like her new correspondent, was unhappy in her work. Laboring each day at a factory, she yearned for someone who could understand her and show her “everything good and beautiful in life.” She believed that person was Roland.⁴ Perhaps taking heart in having a kindred spirit, Roland replied that his outward “brittleness” and cool exterior were similarly a form of protection, in a time when

¹ HL-RN, 20 May 1938, TuS 380520-2-1

² RN-HL, 16 May 1938, TuS 380516-1-1

³ HL-RN, 11 May 1938, TuS 380511-2-1

⁴ Ibid.

everyone wore emotional masks, for his “childish belief” in true love.⁵ He soothed her worries about worthiness by assuring her that social status did not matter. Roland was more concerned with “education of the heart” and her instinctual “feeling for what is right.”⁶

Hilde and Roland both created a narrative depicting themselves as unappreciated and lonely, yet with the faith and ability to control their destiny and improve their lives. In their early letters, each affirmed that they could help each other accomplish these goals. They presented their narratives and performed their imagined selves to their new audience: each other. Hilde and Roland relied on leisure activities and leisure travel to communicate attributes of their selves as well as to overcome their frustrations and create narratives where they could imagine their ambitions being fulfilled.

Many of Roland’s beliefs about the world, and many of his dissatisfactions, came from his profession as a school teacher. By 1938 Roland moved from Ob. to Li. for a temporary teaching position after having taught for 10 years, excepting one year of study in a music degree program.⁷ His letters expressed a yearning for a higher position. He felt dissatisfied with his work because he believed that his intellect placed him above his station, and his position wasted his abilities.⁸ Despite his unfulfilling job, Roland claimed he had used his position and his private study to build an intellect stronger than those beside him, or even above him.⁹ Throughout his letters Roland measured his abilities as if he were a member of an elite intellectual class, when in fact he remained only a schoolteacher. His work usually did not provide him with the material for the self-narrative he wished to create,

⁵ RN-HL, 16 May 1938, TuS 380516-1-1

⁶ RN-HL, 30 June 1938, TuS 380630-1-1

⁷ RN-HL, 9 February 1939, TuS 390209-1-1.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ RN-HL, 29 May 1938, TuS 380529-1-1.

and so he turned to activities and pursuits outside of work in order to fuel his narrative and demonstrate his imagined status to his audience, Hilde.

Roland's language and his self-narrative in his letters continually affirmed a status signified by education and taste. He scoffed at the "half-educated" and "cynical nature" of those who believed that a secondary school diploma gave them education.¹⁰ The word he used here is *Bildung*, a word that goes beyond the meaning of the English word for education and implies an innate sense of culture and taste. Roland insisted that *Bildung* was a life-long process, one that few people seemed to understand, that must be continually cultivated to feed the mind and the soul.¹¹ Sometimes, however, he acknowledged the contradictions inherent in his narrative. In one of his first letters, Roland described himself to Hilde as a "poor schoolmaster."¹² He insisted that, given his intellectual gifts, he should accomplish much more in life if only given the chance, but he remained bitter that his talents went unrecognized. This longing allowed him to connect to Hilde, who also experienced obstacles to her ambitions.

When Hilde started writing to Roland, she lived with her parents and worked at a textile (*Trikotage*) factory. She wanted to pursue training as a nurse and perhaps become a kindergarten teacher, but her parents did not have the means to provide for her education. Hilde complained that neither her work life nor home life provided her with any "intellectual food."¹³ She criticized her parents for having no zest for life. Her father had been shot through his right arm in World War I, leaving his hand paralyzed. Hilde lamented that "he

¹⁰ RN-HL, 30 June 1938, TuS 380630-1-1.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² RN-HL, 29 May 1938, TuS 380529-1-1.

¹³ HL-RN, 20 May 1938, TuS 380520-2-1.

knows nothing except his work... his physical health, and going to sleep.”¹⁴ Hilde felt frustrated by her surroundings and, like Roland, felt underappreciated by those around her. She longed for a more exciting existence than her parents, but she continually encountered obstacles to her ambitions.

Hilde found Roland’s work life far more attractive than her own. Roland’s lifestyle appeared more exciting and independent, involving frequent travel and philosophical discussion. She admired Roland’s profession, possibly stemming from her own unrealized desire for further schooling.¹⁵ The young factory woman faced far more obstacles to *Bildung* in her life than Roland due to her age, gender, and class, and in her work Hilde was unable to express her intellectual ambitions. In her letters Hilde encouraged or outright asked Roland to show her “things new and unseen,” allowing her to experience a world of bourgeois class and taste through his eyes.¹⁶ Like Roland, Hilde’s creation of *Bildung* in her self-narrative required an audience for her to perform these aspects of herself. Roland was a particularly suitable audience – he was sympathetic to her longing and frustrations as well as eager to share a conversation about longing for *Bildung*.

While their jobs failed to provide the satisfaction and status they craved, Hilde and Roland more often used their leisure activities to define their identities and their aspirations. Their pastimes, leisure activities, and vacations allowed imaginative affirmations of taste, education, and intellectual ability that could seemingly transgress the normal boundaries imposed by work. Leisure time seemed more open and freer, as if Roland and Hilde could leave behind the constrictions of work and imagine themselves into greater fulfillment. While

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ HL-RN, 5 June 1938, TuS 380605-2-1.

¹⁶ HL-RN, 12 June 1938, TuS 380612-2-1.

work served as a mechanism that defined class and gender lines, identity in the early twentieth century was increasingly tied to consumption and how one used one's leisure time. As Hilde and Roland corresponded with each other, and exchanged insights gained from leisure activities and travel, both real and imagined. They narrated their own lives and reimagined themselves in the context of their class, gender, nation, as well as their own maturing relationship. The imaginative space of leisure and vacations, as Roland and Hilde narrated their experiences, reveals how the two constructed and acted out their identities, beliefs, and place in society.

One of the elements of leisure Hilde and Roland discussed the most was travel, and their discussions and narratives of trips planned and trips taken provides a rich resource for understanding how leisure shaped their attitudes towards the nation, gender and social norms and informed their own self-manufactured identities. Much like Ovar Löfgren's theoretical "vacationscapes," the way they imagined their travels allowed each to place themselves into the travel narrative and practice performing these narratives before their travels even began.¹⁷ Upon return, Hilde and Roland recounted their trips in a similar manner by selecting events and impressions to form a coherent narrative, depicting themselves in ways that matched the story.

Hilde and Roland's vacation narratives share some notable features, particularly their frequent affirmation that travel was a physically and emotionally healthy practice. This was a common belief throughout Europe at the time, and travel advertising frequently emphasized the health benefits of vacations.¹⁸ Hilde and Roland clearly embraced this belief. After

¹⁷ Löfgren, *On Holiday*, 2.

¹⁸ Hagen, "The Most German," 209; Stanley, *Modernizing Tradition*, 165.

returning from a family trip to B. Sc. in November 1938, Roland wrote, “The change of place, of scenery, makes me inwardly free and loose.”¹⁹ Even though the journey was long, Roland claimed he had an “internal gain” from his trip. “When one moves away from work, he sees much more, and differently, than from up close.”²⁰ On another occasion, he wrote that he returned “happy and enriched” from visiting a ruined castle.²¹ Roland frequently asserted that relaxation ranked as one of the most desirable products of leisure travel. For him, and for many travelers, the vacation space stood out as a social space separate from work. Unlike the work-a-day world, travel worlds replenished, educated, and elevated the individual. Travel and vacations even seemed to have the power to alter Roland’s perception of life and living, as he claimed it enabled him to see “much more, and differently.” Thus, travel was not only healthy, but also produced a different way of seeing and perceiving.

Hilde’s letters reflected this view, as well. On 3 August 1938, Hilde wrote about returning from a short vacation to Chemnitz with her family. Although things that “perhaps evoked anger and frustration in us” could happen daily, “one cannot perceive those so sharply on vacation... but I feel so free now, superior to any adversity.”²² Like Roland, she claimed that the vacation changed her view on the world around her, implying that the change of place also led to a change of perspective. The special qualities of specifically non-work spaces allowed for different modes of perception, where one could perceive with sharper distinction. Hilde also identified vacationing as a space of freedom, where she could relax, rejuvenate, and be free of the constraints associated with work.

¹⁹ RN-HL, 17 November 1938, TuS 381117-1-1.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ RN-HL, 21 July 1939, TuS 390721-1-1.

²² HL-RN, 8 August 1938, TuS 380808-2-1.

While both young travelers imagined their cherished vacations to consist of bounded time, socially separate and distinct from the world of work, the sociologist Chris Rojek and other scholars of tourism have explained that the perceived lack of boundaries in leisure time, or so-called “free time,” is actually false. In modern times, recreation is just as mentally and socially constructed as work time, and it is only made different from work by the nature of its activities and the way it is structured.²³ Roland and Hilde wrote of leisure time as having special qualities, but these qualities did not derive from the “free” nature of leisure. Instead, the perception of freedom ironically came about as a byproduct of the ways in which the couple constructed, narrated, and created the importance of their vacations, travel, and leisure activities.

Roland traveled more often than Hilde, and he frequently wrote about his plans in his letters. When his travels included Hilde, Roland’s correspondence to her often included train schedules, itineraries, and suggestions for the kinds of activities they should do or sights they should see, and even suggestions for what she should pack. Roland showed his penchant for planning while preparing for an approximately ten day trip to the Harz, a mountain range in northern Germany, where he planned to meet Hilde partway through the journey. This kind of meeting was very unusual – they had not visited each other’s parents’ homes yet, and this trip meant that Hilde would be with Roland, unsupervised, for several days. Her parents were surprised and worried, as well as suspicious of Roland’s intentions.²⁴ Despite their worries, however, they gave Hilde their permission. Hilde and her parents demonstrated an extraordinary and unusual trust in Roland early in the couple’s relationship.

²³ Rojek, *Capitalism*, 26.

²⁴ HL-RN, 15 July 1938. TuS 380715-2-1.

This was their first multi-day trip together, so Roland sent her multiple letters concerning his plans. His most detailed letter concerning the trip included a brief itinerary for each day: “Day 1: Naumburg (cathedral), Day 2: Kyffhäuser, Barbarossa’s Cave, Day 3: Nordhausen. Day 4: take the train through the Harz to Wernigerode. Day 5: Wernigerode. Day 6&7: Goslar: from here a daytrip to the mining region Klausthal-Zellerfeld and possibly an ascent of the Brocken.”²⁵ Roland imagined himself as Hilde’s guide for this trip. He had an excellent chance to display his knowledge, communicate his travel narrative to Hilde, and educate her on the art of travel.

Roland planned for Hilde to meet him in Goslar on the sixth day. With her parents’ permission, Roland wanted to take her through the mountains and show her the lovely sights of Goslar while they spent time getting to know each other. In order to entice Hilde, Roland waxed poetic about the sights in Goslar. He described the imperial palace “leaning charmingly against the Harz” and views from “the legendary Blocksberg,” the highest of the north German mountains.²⁶ Not only would they experience these well-known sights, he wrote, but would also encounter the beautiful valleys, other scenery, and “diverse little experiences” that cannot be planned.²⁷ Roland intended to show Hilde the sights that were worth seeing during their trip, as well as introduce her to the delightful “experience” of travel. His didactic letters represented an invitation for her to engage in his imagined “vacationscape” and to invent a set of shared stories and mutual emotions that would be forged by their travel together.

²⁵ RN-HL, 16 July 1938, TuS 380716-1-1.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

In an undated letter, lacking any of the salutations or structure of a letter, Roland also wrote a more detailed itinerary. He included information about which ticket Hilde should buy, which train connections she needed to make, and a more thorough plan for their time together. After touring Goslar, Roland planned for them to visit the Oker Valley including the summer resort town of Harzburg. Then they would take the local train from Harzburg to Ilsenburg and then Wernigerode. From Wernigerode they would visit the Brocken (or Blocksberg), which he declared easily done in five hours with good weather, and then a stop in the nearby resort town of Schierke. Roland then scheduled a rest day in Wernigerode where they would visit the hotel “Lindenberg” and take in the serene views from an observation tower, the *Kaiserturm*. Next, Roland included an excursion to Thale to see Burg Regenstein, a group of tall sandstone formations near Blankenburg in the Bode Valley, and the *Hexentanzplatz*, a high plateau offering a breathtaking panorama of the valley.²⁸ Roland continued his role as Hilde’s guide, demonstrating his status as a cultured traveler and furthering his heroic self-narrative as an individual capable of navigating and categorizing his surroundings.

Many of the sites designated on the itinerary consisted of physical, built environments accorded significance in German history and literature – for instance, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote about the Brocken as a home of witches in *Faust*, reflecting popular legends about the mountain.²⁹ But it was nature, especially mountains and forests, that ranked as Roland’s favorite vacation haunts. These have a long German tradition as sites for travelers, stemming from Romantic fascination with the sublime in nature. Indeed, Germany’s first

²⁸ RN-HL, c. 19 July 1938, TuS 380700-1-1 Reiseplan.

²⁹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1986), 124, 127.

tourism associations concentrated their attention on managing the nation's natural attractions.³⁰ By elevating the beauty of the countryside, Roland elevated his own identity as a man of taste and erudition whose vacation preferences spoke volumes. *Bildungsbürgertum* had a particular notion of taste and the ability to discern, and the way that Roland planned and toured affirmed his discernment abilities.

Thus, as Rojek argues, the term “free time” is really a misnomer, particularly in Roland's case. Leisure and vacation time are in no way less constructed or scheduled than work time, at least in this particular way of using vacation time. Much of Roland's organization of his itineraries and his language concerning the sites is reminiscent of the increasingly popular tourist guidebooks. Although there were a variety of guidebooks by the 1930s, the oldest and one of the most popular was the Baedeker, from a company started by Karl Baedeker in 1827. By the twentieth century these little red books were synonymous with travel, and aimed to show their primarily bourgeois audience what places and events were worth seeing. The Baedekers affirmed middle-class attitudes toward travel, such as defining the worth of tourist sights on middle-class standards of taste and encouraging an individualist approach to travel by assuming that a person could easily navigate their destinations with a Baedeker as their guide.³¹

Although Roland does not mention any particular guide it seems unlikely that he was not exposed to them at some point. He fit the typical bourgeois audience of the Baedekers, and his detailed plans and schedules for the Harz are similar to the day by day itineraries outlined in the 1905 *Nordwest-Deutschland* Baedeker and the 1920 *Der Harz* Baedeker. All

³⁰ Thomas Lekan, “A “Noble Prospect”,” 827.

³¹ Koshar, *German Travel Cultures*, 27-28.

of the sights Roland included in his plan were also included in these Baedekers, and even appeared in the same sequence. His Harzburg-Ilseburg-Wernigerode plan was the same basic plan as the one outlined in the *Nordwest-Deutschland* Baedeker. The only major difference is that Roland referred to the observation tower in Wernigerode as the *Kaiserturm* (Imperial Tower), whereas the Baedeker merely called it the *Aussichtsturm* (Observation Tower).³² Roland's language, especially his reference to "doing" particular sites – it would take them five hours to "do" the Brocken, he estimated – echoes the language of tourist guides.³³ Roland seemed to assume, as a tourist guidebook or other tourist literature perhaps told him, that there is a particular way to "do" a site, and that the experience could be accomplished within a standard amount of time. Tourism, when done properly, is thus scheduled, organized, and relatively predictable. Roland also assumed that, as a reasonable individual, he would be able to navigate these places easily on his own, affirming his individual ability.

Roland solidified his membership in the *Bildungbürgertum*, not only through his selection and design of his touring itinerary, but also through his belief that there was a proper way to tour. He not only chose travel sites that linked his self-identity to cultural notions of refinement and good taste, but which set him apart from and superior to the average, run of the mill tourist. After meeting with Hilde in Dresden in June 1938, Roland stopped in We. to hike up to the Bastion. This group of sandstone formations, perched on the hills like castle spires, was tied together by walking trails and stone bridges which allowed

³² *Nordwest-Deutschland: Handbuch für Reisende* (Leipzig, Verlag von Karl Baedeker, 1905), 205, 209.

³³ RN-HL, c. 19 July 1938, TuS 380700-1-1 Reiseplan; John F. Sears, *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 22.

visitors to enjoy views of cliffs, forests, and the nearby Elbe.³⁴ Fatigued, Roland arrived at the top and spent two hours enjoying the view. In his letter to Hilde afterwards, though, Roland expressed his dismay. At one time walking trails like the Bastion were “a great business,” and although Roland claimed he did not scorn others for riding buses rather than walking, he criticized the “mass feeding” that travel had become. Tours of fifty people or more arrived all at once, he lamented, and “all true pleasure flees.”³⁵ In Roland’s view, pleasure could only be derived from travel under particular circumstances. “True pleasure” could not coexist with massive tour groups. His choice of words, especially the phrase, “mass feeding” belied an underlying assumption that modern tourism, with its emphasis on crowds and commodification – quantity rather than quality – subverted the purpose of travel. According to Roland’s methods and comments, the correct way to tour consisted of solitary travel, with long periods for him to contemplate and appreciate the landscape.

Roland did not directly acknowledge the fact that he was still participating in a framework of mass consumption by his reliance on walking paths, observation towers, and mass transportation in order to reach and appreciate his vacation escapes. Romantic writers in the previous century had in fact lamented the arrival of travelers like Roland, and criticized guidebook users that patronized walking paths to consume views of the German landscape.³⁶ The irony, of course, was that Roland shared these criticisms even as he participated in mass consumption through his use of tourist services and travel guidebooks. Products of the tourist industry like the Baedeker guidebooks created the illusion that that its readers constituted an

³⁴ “Herzlich willkommen im Kurort Rathen in der Sächsischen Schweiz,” Kurort Rathen, last modified Feb. 13, 2013, <http://www.kurort-rathen.de/de/>.

³⁵ RN-HL, 23 June 1938, TuS 380623-1-1.

³⁶ Lekan, “A “Noble Prospect,”” 824.

elite and highly cultured breed of vacationers who registered as tasteful travelers rather than participants in a crasser mass tourism. Roland's narrative similarly allowed him to remain confident in his elite status by insisting that his travels distinguished him as cultured, rather than a member of the "mass feeding."

Roland's planning and imagining process for his travels demonstrated his education, taste, and self-identification with the *Bildungsbürgertum*. Hilde, by contrast, framed her vacations with a different set of priorities. Whereas Roland placed his travels in a modern, Romantic-inspired narrative of contemplative venture, Hilde imagined her travels socially and focused on the interpersonal aspects of foreign spaces. On 5 June 1938 Hilde wrote describing her plans for a day trip with her friends later that month. Initially they planned the trip for B. Sc., a spa town in Saxony. Hilde related her excitement to Roland, since he would be on vacation in B. Sc. at the same time, and perhaps they would have a chance to meet.³⁷ At this point Hilde and Roland had only been exchanging letters for a month and had not told anyone about their potential relationship, so any meeting would involve Hilde sneaking away from her group.³⁸ The plans changed, however, and Hilde informed Roland that they planned to travel instead to Ra., a town on the Elbe south of Dresden. Hilde gave Roland their itinerary. Her group planned to arrive at ten in the morning and stop at the hotel "Erbgericht" where they would have lunch and then free time until two o'clock. They also visited the Bastion, where Roland lamented the "mass feeding" of modern tourism, while they were in Ra.³⁹

³⁷ HL-RN, 5 June 1938, TuS 380605-2-1.

³⁸ HL-RN, 11 June 1938, TuS 380611-2-1.

³⁹ HL-RN, 19 June 1938, TuS 380619-2-1.

Hilde's letter afterward recounted the trip mainly so she could explain why she was late to meet Roland after her group visited the Bastion. They had an unplanned stop at a café and waited an hour in front of the ornate Zwinger palace waiting for their guide. She confessed that she was hardly able to think of anything besides knowing that he was going to meet her there, and yet they only got to meet for half an hour. When Hilde recounted the trip her narrative was mostly colored by her anxiety over meeting Roland and she gave almost no description of what she saw. Hilde only mentioned the Bastion to say that they made good time from there to Ra., even after the other delays. Perhaps if the meeting had gone better, or if she had not met Roland at all, Hilde would have provided more detail on her trip. Perhaps, though, Hilde viewed this trip differently than Roland did his. Once Roland wrote that he could meet her in Dresden, it appeared that this meeting became the focus in Hilde's mind. Hilde's experience focused more on interaction and relationships, and how she furthered these relationships during her travels.

After touring Dresden and meeting Roland, Hilde and her friends took a steamboat up the Elbe to Dresden where two "touring cars" took them to Frankenberg, another city west of Dresden. "There the main part begins, our social evening."⁴⁰ This different type of tourism, where Hilde and her friends came together for an evening, was the "main part" of the trip.⁴¹ Hilde focused less on the historical or natural sites she saw during her travels because she was more concerned about creating a narrative focused on the importance of meeting with Roland and spending time with her friends. She actively brought social relationships into the

⁴⁰ HL-RN, 12 June 1938, TuS 380612-2-1.

⁴¹ Ibid.

spaces of travel by emphasizing travel as a social activity. Hilde was then able to frame her travel experiences with Roland as part of their growing relationship.

Hilde's narrative of her trip to Dresden was not unique. She responded similarly when she and Roland met for a Sunday outing the next week. Hilde wrote afterwards that she was excited by the sights they saw as they hiked, and she loved the way that he explained the places and views they visited. Again, she did not ignore the sights they saw, but she did not describe them specifically. Instead, Hilde recalled in her letters their interactions and their experience together – how she felt when she saw the sights, how she felt being with him, and how she enjoyed listening to him as they walked.⁴² She also replied to Roland's Harz trip proposal by emphasizing what the trip would mean to the evolution of their relationship. She had to ask her parents' permission, and she noted that they worried about what the trip would mean in light of the fact that Roland was significantly older than Hilde, and came from a different background. Given the fact that they would be traveling together, unsupervised, after only exchanging letters for a couple months, it is surprising their plan went forward at all. Hilde's mother worried that, even if Roland's intentions were noble, his parents would not approve of Hilde because of her working-class background.⁴³ Hilde no doubt enjoyed reading about Roland's lifestyle and frequent travels, and wanted to encourage him to reveal more of that to her, but she interpreted the meaning of his correspondence primarily in the context of their relationship.

Hilde and Roland had different ways of imagining and narrating their travel experiences, and these varying attitudes also affected how they portrayed the sites and views

⁴² HL-RN, 4 July 1938, TuS 380704-2-1.

⁴³ HL-RN, 15 July 1938, TuS 380715-2-1.

that they saw, or imagined seeing. They each portrayed the German landscape differently, and these views reflected their differing attitudes toward travel and the purposes of leisure time. Roland's letters reveal how he established his selfhood in relation to the landscape, placing himself in physical settings that fit his heroic self-narrative. As he carried out the first part of his journey to the Harz, alone without Hilde, he sent more letters to her describing his experiences. Most of Roland's narrative of his trip consisted of the scenery he viewed. He only briefly mentioned his accommodations to note that they were expensive and noted only in passing that he sampled some of the local wine in Naumburg. The rest of his narrative centered upon what he saw. Roland described how he walked along the Saale River, a "piece of scenery with its own charm." He described the cathedral in Naumburg as one of the oldest in Germany – built in 960, repeatedly expanded over the years, and famous for its sculptures. The postcard he sent to Hilde had statues of two founders of the cathedral, a fact he pointed out in his letter. Roland aptly demonstrated the ability of the learned tourist to not only consolidate particular viewable objects, such as the river, a monument, or a ruined castle, into the artistically composed definition of a "view", but also to identify the views that registered as worthy of viewing .⁴⁴

Roland demonstrated his ability to consume in a manner befitting his status. He appreciated the "piece of scenery" that was the Saale River. Man-made structures, in contrast, particularly the ruined castles, seemed to merit mention merely as elements of the scenery because Roland gave them no other context. Roland thus followed a protocol typical of modern, bourgeois tourism, an approach taught to readers of Baedeker's and other popular guidebooks, that encouraged consumption of the infamous "view" – akin to the way a

⁴⁴ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 110.

masterpiece painting might be consumed by an educated museum patron with a tasteful eye.⁴⁵ While the Baedeker guides and Roland might disagree over whether the views in Ilsenburg or the Bode Valley were more beautiful, they both affirmed that one of the central points of travel was to visit and gaze upon scenes of natural splendor.⁴⁶ Town squares, marketplaces, cathedrals, and statuary stood out as interesting but less meaningful sights.

Roland also affirmed his membership in the German nation through his selection of sites. After visiting Naumburg, he took the train to the Kyffhäuser, a series of hills leading to the Harz. There he beheld a forest of beech trees “bearing a castle ruin and a monument to Kaiser Wilhelm I.”⁴⁷ Roland did not mention that this structure also contains a monument to Frederick Barbarossa.⁴⁸ By noting this monument, Roland established that he was not observing just any landscape, but a German landscape. He subtly contextualized his observations within a particularly German space through the sites he decided to describe to Hilde. His most thorough description of any particular site is his description of the cathedral in Naumburg. He wrote a little of its history and why the cathedral was a noteworthy site to visit. Roland not only demonstrated his good taste in sites, but also grounded this site in a story of historical continuity by emphasizing how the cathedral had stood for a thousand years. Viewing sites was not only enriching through the beauty of the sites, but also through their ability to connect viewers to the history of Germany. Romantic and tourist tradition had inextricably tied the landscape to the German nation, and viewing it conferred upon Roland knowledge of what it meant to be German.

⁴⁵ Sears, *Sacred Places*, 49-50.

⁴⁶ *Nordwest-Deutschland*, 207; *Der Harz: Handbuch für Reisende* (Leipzig: Karl Baedeker, 1920), 84.

⁴⁷ RN-HL, 18 July 1938, TuS 380718-1-1.

⁴⁸ *Nordwest-Deutschland*, 223.

Roland only mentioned other people once during his trip narrative. While he was staying in Naumburg and eating at his hotel's restaurant, he noticed a Japanese couple trying to order from the menu.⁴⁹ Although the comment seems random, the fact that Roland decided to mention it to Hilde makes it significant. The couple is notable first of all because they are foreigners, and one of the goals of the Nazi government's Reich Tourism Association was to increase Germany's international appeal. Part of this process involved attracting international travelers by making its natural beauty and culture available to others. Roland's comment is especially notable given the couple's nationality. As Roland was undoubtedly aware, Japan joined Germany in the Anti-Comintern Pact in November 1936, and by 1938 Germany's growing political alignment with Japan was common knowledge. For Roland, the sighting of a Japanese couple at an iconic German historical landmark, marked a merging of the local and the global, the national and the international.

This small component of Roland's narrative provides a glimpse of how he was continually revising his self-concept, including his perception of national identity. Roland saw his national identity affirmed in the landscape around him, confirming an internalized set of beliefs about his connection with the German nation and reinforcing his participation in the nation. As the context of national identity shifted around him due to larger political events, Roland also adapted his self-concept. He incorporated new events and relationships, even on an international level, in order to maintain a coherent self-narrative. He most likely felt a sense of pride, perhaps even self-importance, reporting his encounter with two grassroots representatives of Germany's emerging Asian ally to Hilde. She would no doubt be impressed with his personal involvement in matters of global import.

⁴⁹ RN-HL, 18 July 1938, TuS 380718-1-1.

Unfortunately, by the time Roland reached Nordhausen he was feeling ill. He became so sick that he had to cancel meeting Hilde in Goslar, so we cannot know about Hilde's potential travel narrative.⁵⁰ Roland's narrative, however, revealed much about how he affirmed and negotiated his self through travel. His decisions about what to include in his letters from his Harz trip were deliberate and show conscious consideration of what he deemed noteworthy about what he did or saw. He intended to communicate certain values and attributes to Hilde in order to demonstrate his taste and his German identity.

Roland also affirmed the intellectual and educational prowess of his class through how he viewed the landscape. Roland chose to highlight the educational aspects of many of his travel experiences. He enjoyed visiting museums and gave a thorough description of the museum on philologist Gotthold Ephraim Lessing he visited in Ka.⁵¹ But Roland had a much broader view of travel's intellectual benefits, extending farther than studying the history of a site. In his letter of 6 August 1938, Roland responded to Hilde's praise of his comments on the sights from a previous outing. Roland was actually embarrassed that he was so "chatty." He explained that he always tried to instill a sense of "mental agility" in his students.⁵² Those with the proper mental faculties should assume proper appreciative silence when encountering a beautiful sight. "Only people with no sense will then babble."⁵³ Roland continued to stress the importance of mental agility for another paragraph. It was necessary to obtain the "goods of education" and remain competitive in any discipline. He closed the

⁵⁰ HL-RN, 25 July 1938, TuS 380725-2-1.

⁵¹ RN-HL, 11 April 1939, TuS 390411-1-1.

⁵² RN-HL, 6 August 1938, TuS 380806-1-1.

⁵³ Ibid.

paragraph by stating that “all education is in some sense domination.”⁵⁴ This “domination” reflects the influential language of the Enlightenment, often appropriated by the Nazis, that emphasized man’s power to reason and manipulate the world.⁵⁵ Roland readily incorporated this language into his narrative, again showing how he adjusted and revised his self-concept in response to larger political events and narratives.

Roland gave an example of his “domination” by describing how he went to the tower of Meissen Cathedral and took a “survey” of the landscape. “I could bring this mass of hills and valleys and villages into order, could show Oschatz, Riesa, Dresden...and therefore exercised in a certain sense dominion over this land. Mental activity is especially evident in the written and spoken word.”⁵⁶ For Roland, dominion over the landscape was achieved not only by viewing it, but also by means of the spoken and written word: by describing, labeling, and ordering the landscape. In this respect, Roland was an active presence rather than a passive receiver in the meaning-making process. He brought the landscape into his ordered worldview and he exercised control, rather than simply letting the landscape influence him. He touted his agency, or “mental agility,” to the young woman who was becoming one of the most important elements in his emotional and intellectual life.

Roland not only ordered his experiences through his decisions of what to describe to Hilde, but also demonstrated awareness that his interpretation and mental organization of his experiences served to display his elevated intellect and taste. His compositions affirmed the value of his education through his ability to properly appreciate, order, and “dominate” the landscape, as well as his ability to discern the beauty of sites like monuments and cathedrals.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Pan, “Revising the Dialectic,” 40.

⁵⁶ RN-HL, 6 August 1938, TuS 380806-1-1.

Roland also demonstrated his passion for labeling and order when it came to photos of his travels, which he often sent to Hilde with his letters. His descriptions of the photographs provided another method for him to reflect on and communicate his travel experience, and also gave him an opportunity to demonstrate his skill in locating and framing aesthetically proper views.

After recovering from his illness following his trip to the Harz, Roland sent four pictures to Hilde from his trip, unfortunately not preserved in their personal archives. He described the first three with identifiable landmarks: the towers of the Naumburg cathedral, a view of the market in Naumburg in which he also specified that the church in the background was not the cathedral, and the checkerboard fields at the foot of the Kyffhäuser. The fourth image he described as “a meaningless image, a dud [*Blindgänger*, literally “going blindly”], now do not know what the place is called.”⁵⁷ Since he consciously sent the picture to Hilde, whom he hoped to impress, it is unlikely the picture was accidental or unrecognizable. Roland was, for some reason, drawing a distinction between the other photos with readily identifiable scenery or landmarks and this photo that he could not label. Roland perceived a significant relationship between what he saw and his ability to order it through language. He connected the landscape to his intellect, and therefore his status, by asserting his ability to shape it. Thus, photography also facilitated domination. Roland used the camera to control his views of the landscape, and thus to “dominate the world.”⁵⁸

Hilde’s more domestic and relationship-driven narratives also extended to her descriptions of nature and the landscape. Writing in September 1938 after a family trip to the

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Isabel Capeola Gil, “The Visuality of Catastrophe in Ernst Jünger’s *Der gefährliche Augenblick* and *Die veränderte Welt*,” *KulturPoetik* 10, no. 1 (2010): 68.

Saxon town Hohenstein, she described everyone going out to the porch, singing under the starry sky, and looking out at the countryside. “At such moments, the meaning of the word “home” becomes so obvious to me.”⁵⁹ Hilde described her experience of viewing the landscape as home, not foreign, in contrast to Roland’s more detached descriptions. In a letter from July 1938 she recounted taking a walk through the woods near Ob. and seeing the forest as a “dear friend” that has seen times of “joy” and “suffering.”⁶⁰ Rather than control or order, Hilde framed the landscape in terms of kinship and familiarity, seeing it as a friend or, again, a symbol of home. Hilde wrote to Roland after their trip to Bohemia in March 1939: “All... of what I discovered outside in nature, it made me feel so happy and grateful.”⁶¹ Nature was “discovered” rather than mastered. Interaction, rather than imposing order, was the focus.

Like Roland’s, Hilde’s letters were often accompanied with photos and the visual images corresponded to her narrative. Hilde took her own photos during her travels, sending some to Roland, while keeping the ones he sent in an album. When she wrote to Roland in August 1938 with some of her pictures attached, she wrote about her album:

Although my parents – and perhaps also later acquaintances may have a glance in it [the album]... I alone know and appreciate the big and little stories and events shrouded in these images. Once I’m older... I will often browse this album and the beautiful time of my youth will come to life again.⁶²

The act of a tourist taking photographs of a landscape creates an object symbolic of the tourists’ experience. The combination of images and text, photographs and reflective

⁵⁹ HL-RN, 18 September 1938, TuS 380918-2-1.

⁶⁰ HL-RN, 25 July 1938, TuS 380725-2-1.

⁶¹ HL-RN, 29 March 1939, TuS 390329-2-1.

⁶² HL-RN, 3 August 1938, TuS 380803-2-1.

narrative, make up the process of placing meaning on the tourist experience.⁶³ For Hilde, the photos provided a physical representation of her experiences used to relive, not architectural or historical landmarks, but “stories” and “events.” When she discussed photographs, the photos became a piece of her experiences that could take her back in time to remember other people and her travels with them. Hilde engaged in a process of ordering her experience through photographs, but it was not the same kind of ordering Roland practiced. Hilde portrayed her experiences in a way that emphasized her connections with people rather than intellect or education.

In emphasizing the social aspect of travel, leisure, and the landscape, Hilde may have been mimicking the popular travel narratives of her time which emphasized the Western female traveler’s role in the “domestication” of travel and consumption. According to historian Adam C. Stanley, the dominant image of women at the time, particularly in advertising, depicted women as sharing in the benefits of modern times, but in a way suited to the domestic vision of the female gender. Women had access to new labor-saving technology, as long as it was inside the home. Women could pursue higher education or take a job, so long as she did not neglect her duties at home. Whereas advertising also depicted women on vacation, it prescribed that most women confine their traveling adventures to family settings, with children and husband nearby.⁶⁴

Hilde was exposed to this narrative of women’s roles, and may have internalized this narrative as she expressed her leisure in home-like terms. Communicating this narrative affirmed Hilde’s place as a “good woman” as well as her ability to share Roland’s

⁶³ Wearing et al, *Tourist Cultures*, 47.

⁶⁴ Stanley, *Modernizing Tradition*, 162.

intellectual yearnings in a socially acceptable way.⁶⁵ This is not to say that Hilde blindly followed social conventions such as those depicted in advertising, for Hilde behaved in ways contrary to the image of a passive, domestic woman and expressed aspirations beyond it. Hilde was excited about the opportunities Roland could provide for her intellectually – she wanted to learn from Roland, and he was more than happy to take the role of teacher. She complimented the commentary he gave during sightseeing: “You have a particular way I like of devising tours and many sights clearly, to make them understandable.”⁶⁶ Before they met for the first time in Dresden she wrote on 12 June “I already know that this future Sunday under your leadership will open up the new, beautiful, and unseen to me.”⁶⁷ Hilde wanted experiences outside of her small world in Ob. and she craved intellectual stimulation beyond the drudging lives of her parents. Her narrative was nonetheless shaped and constrained by the structures and expectations surrounding her gender. Thus, as a woman traveler, Hilde felt compelled to negotiate between her own aspirations and the expectations placed upon her.

As Roland and Hilde demonstrated in their correspondence, the German landscape could hold a variety of powerful meanings for its viewers, and in the 1930s the National Socialists attempted to harness this power and direct it to their own ends. Tourism in Germany already intersected with national and regional politics, and the Nazis used tourism to further the image and legitimacy of the party as well as to unite German national identity beyond regional differences.⁶⁸ Nazi imagery was undoubtedly present in the places Hilde and Roland visited, particularly urban spaces like Dresden, but neither Hilde nor Roland spend

⁶⁵ Ibid., 8-9.

⁶⁶ HL-RN, 4 July 1938, TuS 380704-2-1.

⁶⁷ HL-RN, 12 June 1938, TuS 380612-2-1.

⁶⁸ Semmens, *Seeing Hitler's Germany*, 190.

time in their letters describing any of this Nazi imagery or tying the Nazi party to their experiences as tourists. Throughout their letters, Hilde and Roland rarely referenced politics generally, and only reference the Nazi party in relation to a few leisure activities, such as films and the Nazi tourist organization *Kraft durch Freude*, which organized vacations and day trips for working-class Germans. It is extremely unlikely, however, that the couple would not have seen or noticed Nazi imagery during their leisure travel. Chances are that the imagery had become normalized to the point that it seemed not worth mentioning.

Historian Kristin Semmens argues that achieving the illusion of normalcy was a significant objective for Nazi tourism officials and agencies, though this goal was not unique to German tourism.⁶⁹ Semmens describes two types of tourism in Nazi Germany: the first type is overtly Nazi tourism that placed the party and its history at the center of the tourist experience, whereas the second type of tourism is “normal”, at least in appearance. Some popular tourist destinations, like the Black Forest, did not appear to change significantly under Nazi rule, but Semmens argues that a lack of swastika flags draped everywhere does not signify a lack of Nazi influence. Sites like the Black Forest were not any less “Nazified” just because they did not have a strong emphasis on Nazi Party history, but they did contribute to the feeling of normalcy and continuity that the Nazis sought to create through tourism.⁷⁰ Seeing the nation in the landscape was common, and because the Nazis were tied to the state and German identity, they were therefore tied to the landscape. While Semmens’ model places 1930s German tourism into a rather limiting, dichotomous model, her concept

⁶⁹ Other tourist organizations encouraged normalization of imperialist goals, such as tourism promotion in Hawaii and Spanish Revival tourism and architecture in the American Southwest. Scott Laderman, *Empire in the Waves: A Political History of Surfing* (University of California Press, 2014); Phoebe S. Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place* (University of California Press, 2006).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 88-89.

of so-called normal tourism indicates how the Nazis wove their ideals and symbolism into everyday life until the presence of the Nazi party was not only felt throughout German life, but also was considered a normal part of German life. The Nazis furthered this type of normalcy through tourism, and Hilde and Roland were part of the receiving audience of these efforts.

Hilde and Roland used their descriptions of their leisure time and travels in their letters to represent themselves to one another, and their lack of attention to the Nazis indicates that they did not see the party as a significant way to construct their correspondence. Their lack of description does not mean that Hilde and Roland rebuffed the Nazis – rather, the party did not have the power to communicate the signs that Hilde and Roland wanted to portray to one another. Their mutual desire for *Bildung* was the building point of their relationship, and this desire was not adequately reflected by Nazi politics. Roland described his own difference of opinion June 1938, as he and Hilde discussed the issue of their class difference in their relationship. Roland acknowledged the validity of theories concerning “race” and “hereditary health and disease,” but he believed that the greater issue was education. He disdained the “arrogance” that stemmed from “partial education,” because true education, true *Bildung*, came from a lifelong commitment to study.⁷¹ Roland did not express any obvious disagreement with the racial basis of Nazi ideas, noting dismissively that such ideas are not new, but he used education to justify his judgments of himself and other people rather than race.

Travel was not the only leisure activity that Hilde and Roland discussed in their letters. Hilde, who traveled far less of the two, devoted much of her leisure time to other,

⁷¹ RN-HL, 30 June 1938, TuS 380630-1-1.

less expensive pursuits – and indulged in hours at the cinema. Roland, who may have associated movies with working class culture, never admitted to having attended the popular theater – at least not in his letters to Hilde.⁷² Hilde, in contrast, seems to have used movie going to compensate for her lack of travel related stories. With less access to actual travel, she was able to travel more often through film due to easy access and low cost. She had no stories of vacations to the mountains that she could use to respond to Roland’s stories about his own travels, so instead Hilde expressed her pastimes by describing the films she saw. As she constructed her letters to Roland, Hilde likely chose to mention certain films because they represented particular aspects of her taste.

In a letter of 12 September 1938, Hilde mentioned that she went to see the film *Heimat*, starring Zarah Leander, with her friend Luise. Hilde wrote that the film was “wonderful,” that Leander had a “unique voice,” and that Roland must see it when he had the opportunity.⁷³ Leander was one of Germany’s most popular actresses in the Nazi-controlled film industry, and she was considered to be a substitute for other popular actresses like Marlene Dietrich and Greta Garbo. Unlike many other National Socialist depictions of “chaste, subservient” women in film, Leander’s image was sultry and glamorous. In her films, however, she never “got the man” and “was famous for her ability to portray resignation and sacrifice as much as passion.”⁷⁴ The film *Heimat* reflected this theme – Leander’s character leaves her city lifestyle to return to her family’s home in the countryside,

⁷² Aron, *Working at Play*, 35.

⁷³ HL-RN, 12 September 1938, TuS 380912-2-1.

⁷⁴ Robert C. Reimer and Carol J. Reimer, *Historical Dictionary of German Cinema* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008), 185-186.

thus “reinforcing the conservatism of National Socialist values of family and homeland.”⁷⁵

Hilde’s choice of films reveal some clues to her self-presentation and her reception of mainstream film culture. Leander was a very popular actress, able to present audiences with a sexy, Hollywood-style star while still promoting National Socialist values. Similar to the way she narrated her vacations, Hilde made no note of a Nazi-specific presence in the films she saw. In this way, state-approved popular films might reinforce the normalization of Nazi rule that took place in the touristic arena, and her incorporation of the film *Heimat* into her self-narrative may actually demonstrate her personal response to cultural and political change.

Hilde also presented her taste by criticizing film. In a letter of 13 June 1938, Hilde briefly mentioned seeing the film *Dreiklang*. The film is set during the Great War, starring Lil Dagover and directed by Hans Hinrich, and depicts a soldier and his son who both fall in love with the same woman.⁷⁶ Hilde thought that the plot was too “sentimental,” though she enjoyed the music – she still remembered the Beethoven sonata from the film.⁷⁷ In contrast to Leander’s film, which portrayed a beautiful, sultry woman sacrificing by returning to her family, Hilde was not so taken with *Dreiklang*, where the female lead continuously caused strife and duels for her affections.⁷⁸ Hilde took part in a modern society where gender norms were increasingly influenced by mass consumer culture. The films presented Hilde with particular views of German women, and although Hilde was likely influenced by what she saw, she did not accept all interpretations. She preferred *Heimat* over *Dreiklang*, perhaps because of the presence of celebrity Leander, or because of the more heroic and self-

⁷⁵ Ibid., 119.

⁷⁶ “Dreiklang (1938),” Rare Films and More, accessed 23 February 2014, <http://www.rarefilmsandmore.com/dreiklang-1938#.UtrGL7TnbIU>.

⁷⁷ HL-RN, 13 June 1938, TuS 380613-2-1.

⁷⁸ “Dreiklang (1938)”

sacrificing portrayal of Leander's character. On June 5, Hilde wrote that she also saw *Olympia 1. Teil - Fest der Volker*, the first part of a film by Leni Riefenstahl about the 1936 Olympic games in Berlin. She planned to return to see part two.⁷⁹ *Olympia* received international acclaim, and mentioning it possibly showed that Hilde was abreast of the best in film. By writing about these films to Roland, Hilde was able to demonstrate her own artistic taste and fit her activities into her self-narrative of *Bildung*.

After mid-1938 Hilde stopped mentioning films in her letters, perhaps because they met more frequently and attended entertainment together. Roland only wrote about seeing one film in early 1939, *Der Schritt vom Wege*, an adaptation of the 1895 novel *Effi Briest*.⁸⁰ The novel is a story of adultery and tragedy by Theodor Fontane, who is often considered the precursor to influential German novelist Thomas Mann.⁸¹ Roland was much more likely to mention books he had read, and he often made book recommendations to both Hilde and her mother. In a letter of 6 July 1938, he recommended the 1858 novel *Friedemann Bach* by Albert Emil Brachvogel about Johann Sebastian Bach's son. The novel depicted the main character as an egotistical artist, a common trope in late Romantic literature.⁸² Sometime in June 1938, Roland recommended the novel *Viktoria* by Norwegian author Knut Hamsun, considered the leader of the neo-Romantic movement at the turn of the century and master of the "wanderer" narrative.⁸³ In a letter of 25 August 1938, Roland recommended the book *Segen der Erde*, also by Knut Hamsun. Roland wrote that it was very different from *Viktoria*, and like many other "modern" novels does not have a proper conclusion, but merely "tears

⁷⁹ HL-RN, 5 June 1938, TuS 380605-2-1.

⁸⁰ Reimer, *Historical Dictionary*, 132.

⁸¹ Daniel Coogan, introduction to *Effi Briest*, by Theodor Fontane, (Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1966), xi.

⁸² David Schulenberg, *The Music of Wilhelm Friedemann Bach* (University of Rochester Press, 2010), 13.

⁸³ Theodore Jorgenson, *History of Norwegian Literature* (Haskell House Publishers Ltd., 1970) 390.

off” at the end. Roland demonstrated his intellectual lifestyle once again by showing that he was widely read and able to discuss the best of contemporary literature – Knut Hamsun won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1920 – as well as fine examples of nineteenth-century Romantic and realist German literature.⁸⁴ Roland again became Hilde’s guide. Like his traveling, Roland used his pastimes to broadcast his imagined status as well as to reinforce that status by demonstrating it to Hilde and guiding her taste.

Hilde and Roland’s correspondence itself was, of course, a leisure activity. Like their other modes of leisure, they incorporated letter-writing into the self-narratives displayed in their letters. In a letter of 15 October 1938, Roland wrote that he was re-reading Hilde’s letters from the past year. He also had many photos from her, and he noted that the letters gave a “clearer” picture of her than the photos.⁸⁵ Both Roland and Hilde carefully composed their letters, but this letter is one of the few instances where Roland acknowledged the importance of this composition. Letters were not simply a means of communication – they ranked as pieces of literature. Roland mentioned on one occasion that the letters of many great men and women had been published. He even owned collections of letters by Frederick the Great and Otto von Bismarck. “It is its own unique charm to read such letters,” he wrote. If one only knew Frederick the way history knew him, he was a ruler and general, whereas his letters reveal he was “a delicate, sensitive person” of a “brooding, ambiguous nature.”⁸⁶ Roland found it common for letters to be published, and so he composed his letters mindfully, with an eye to the art of such composition. Roland also believed that an

⁸⁴ “Knut Hamsun – Biographical,” The Official Web Site of the Nobel Prize, accessed 28 February 2014, http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1920/hamsun-bio.html.

⁸⁵ RN-HL, 15 October 1938, TuS 381015-1-1.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

individual's letters held deeper truths about the person, details and nuance about the writer's personality that would escape the larger narrative of history. The heavy construction of the letters revealed truth rather than concealing it.

Roland thus seemed confused when the letters he received from Hilde did not always seem to correspond to Hilde's presence when they met. In a letter of 23 January 1939, Roland admitted to Hilde that, in the beginning of their relationship, he felt a divide between the Hilde he knew from the letters and the Hilde he knew in person. "For a while I saw a difference between you and the writer... wisdom, understanding, sensitivity, I found them in your written words rather than in your [spoken] words."⁸⁷ He maintained, however, that this was in the past, and he now knew he could tell her everything. Hilde and Roland rarely acknowledged how they constructed their letters to each other, and yet these letters were carefully composed. They could search for the proper wording, mull over sentence placement, edit their work, and write multiple drafts before sending their letters. Conversations could not be edited. The world Hilde created in her letters was deliberately constructed according to how she wanted to portray her world to Roland, and vice versa. Letter-writing as a leisure activity was part of their self-narratives, as well as the social act allowing them to display these narratives.

By the end of 1938, Hilde and Roland had exchanged nearly eighty letters and in the process spun their complex self-narratives. They frequently incorporated their travel experiences into their narratives in order to imagine aspects of their selves and to perform their selves to one another. They made similar use of other leisure activities like film-going, reading, and letter-writing. Roland imagined and performed his self-narrative as a cultured

⁸⁷ RN-HL, 23 January 1939, TuS 390123-1-1.

member of the *Bildungsbürgertum*. Hilde focused on the social and domestic aspects of travel as she negotiated between norms of German womanhood and her desire for *Bildung*. They each imagined themselves transcending their given places in society, creating heroic self-narratives in which they could achieve their aspirations. Through their letters, Hilde and Roland displayed and performed these narratives for each other as they began their relationship. Both of them also continually revised their self-narrative in response to political and cultural changes, integrating aspects of an overarching German, and Nazi, narrative into their self-concepts. In 1939, the political influence in Hilde and Roland's letters intensified, and their narratives were driven more by their relationship, but the pattern of imagining, revising, and performing self-narratives remained.

CHAPTER 3

WORK, LEISURE, AND BOHEMIA: JANUARY 1939 – DECEMBER 1939

“It is necessary, and it is fortunate, that the holidays make it possible to refrain from action and production, and to look at other points of view.”¹ In his letter of 8 April 1939, Roland reiterated his frequent claims on the importance vacations and devoting time to leisure. In contrast to the previous year, though, he and Hilde more often discussed the intimate connection between work and leisure, particularly its effect on physical and mental health. Hilde noted in August 1939, in the letter quoted in the introduction, that she understood how Roland’s travels affected his productivity – vacations fostered his intellectual alertness and worldliness that supported his expertise as a teacher. Recreation was not just a relaxing getaway, but a crucial component that helped balance the rest of his life. This was a modern idea – many believed leisure and travel could fulfill these many functions, from improved health to a sharper intellect. In addition, leisure could create a unified sense of German-ness.² Notably, leisure required effort and cultivation, because the choices one made concerning recreation heavily influenced other areas of life.

Roland particularly made connections between work and leisure time, though he was quick to emphasize the importance of the latter. Work could not fulfill his desired status as a *Bildungsbürgertum*, so he often argued that leisure activities were more important to life as a whole in order to resolve his tensions with work. Roland, in fact, noted that leisure was such an important and delicate task that it could actually become a source of anxiety. After Hilde returned from her Christmas vacation, he wrote that he was sorry she had to return to work.

¹ RN-HL, 8 April 1939, TuS 390408-1-1.

² Hagen, “The Most German,” 208.

He then launched into a critique of the improper use of leisure. People have become such slaves to work, he complained, that they do not know what to do with a holiday, to the point that they dread having any free time. Then, when they retire, they “sicken and die” because they have not cultivated their leisure time with purposeful and fulfilling activities.³ Roland seemed to believe that work did not guarantee health or fulfillment on its own. Work as well as life-long health must be supported by well-cultivated leisure time.

Roland continued that his father was anxious about retirement because he was unable to enjoy peace and quiet, unable to stand more than a week of vacation, and worried what he would do with no work to sustain him. Unable to escape his own criticism, Roland also admitted that he felt this way in the first years of his teaching career. When on vacation he felt restless and dreamed of returning to school. He asserted that he had overcome this obstacle and was able to forget about school during his vacations – “Now I forget school within a day” – although he noted that he still felt “indifferent” at times, to the point that he felt unable to “pick up a novel and follow the leadership of a poet.” But, Roland reassured, he no longer feared his holidays – “Boredom does not torment me.” Instead he filled his vacation time with music, literature, and philosophy.⁴ His narrative showcased how he overcame his struggles with work, succeeded in cultivating his leisure time, and struck proper balance in his life. Despite his heroic victory, Roland’s self-concept was still disrupted by continued tension between his desired status and his work, and these anxieties are sometimes visible in his narrative.

³ RN-HL, 4 January 1939, TuS 390104-1-1.

⁴ Ibid.

Roland disdained leisure that did not, to his mind, have any purpose, but he was not always able to avoid it. He complained to Hilde about a festival his school hosted in June 1939, with a puppet theater, the bustle and noise of children, “sausages and bread, ice cream, fish sandwiches.” Roland attended as an employee of the school, but maintained that his heart was not in it – “I can only be devoted to what I see as rewarding and worthy of zeal.”⁵ He triumphantly noted that he refused to help create “propaganda” for the festival, despite his boss’s enthusiasm for the festival and the fact that Roland still had to attend – one small victory, at least. In this situation, the young teacher could neither appeal to his work, as a sponsor of the festival, nor leisure, as he disliked the festival itself, to support his narrative of cultivation. Instead, he distanced himself from both in order to maintain the integrity of his self-concept.

Like Roland, Hilde wrote about her work more often in 1939 as well as its relationship to leisure and health. In May 1939, she complained that some factory workers were being chosen to go work on farms in order to fill in for agricultural workers while they worked in factories or went to school. Calling it a “rags economy,” she wrote that she would protest if she were picked. “Imagine if I had to work the whole year for a farmer!”⁶ She fumed over the idea that “we,” factory workers, would have to go do “their” work.⁷ Hilde obviously felt that she should not be forced to work on the land, perhaps from a sense of superiority. Although she was not as experienced as Roland, she was a competent and educated tourist. She saw the landscape as a series of views to see and trails to walk. Farmers and agriculture were part of a quaint backdrop for her vacations. Despite her class and gender

⁵ RN-HL, 22 June 1939, TuS 390622-1-1.

⁶ HL-RN, 14 May 1939, TuS 390514-2-1.

⁷ Ibid.

working against her, Hilde aspired to the culture of a *Bildungsbürgertum*, and the *Bildungsbürgertum* toured and enjoyed nature – they did not work in it. She was thus appalled that, as a reasonably educated and experienced tourist, she might be forced to do such work.

Hilde quickly noted, however, that she was not against city people helping out during a busy harvest, and at the very least it would be “healthy for us.”⁸ She was not picked for this service, but her opinion on the situation vacillated between two positions. She was upset that she might have to do the work of a farmer, yet in the same paragraph Hilde admitted that such work would be healthy. She obviously believed that being in nature was healthy and enjoyable – she took frequent walks in the forest near Ob. and loved the scenery she viewed on trips with Roland. More significantly, Hilde undoubtedly saw numerous propaganda depictions of hearty, healthy Germans in an agricultural setting. She was thus often exposed to the idea that Germans connecting to the land was healthy.⁹ Nazi propaganda concerning the *Volksgemeinschaft* (national community) also idealized agricultural work, particularly for women, as part of supporting a strong German nation.¹⁰ Hilde integrated some of these ideas into her self-narrative, but as she did so she struggled with her desires for a higher status.

Despite their larger focus on work, Hilde and Roland still devoted many letters to planning and reflecting on leisure travel. Their narratives of travel in 1939, however, show how they were affected by the growing political tensions in Germany. In September 1938, the Munich Agreement between Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain of the United Kingdom

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Stanley, *Modernizing Tradition*, 162.

¹⁰ Leila J. Rupp, *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda, 1939-1945* (Princeton University Press, 1978), 46.

and Adolf Hitler allowed Nazi Germany to annex the Sudetenland. This portion of Czechoslovakia contained a significant minority of ethnic Germans, who the Nazis and Sudeten Germans demanded be incorporated into the German state. Despite the protests of the Czechoslovak government, Chamberlain hoped that appeasing Hitler would prevent a conflict that could echo the scale of the Great War. Hitler, however, had no intention of being appeased, and invaded Czechoslovakia only a few months later in March 1939. The Nazi war machine moved forward as Hitler continued expansions of the army and navy, and in April 1939 Hitler ordered the start of plans for an invasion of Poland.¹¹ In this atmosphere of fervent nationalism and constant threats of war with the Western powers, Hilde and Roland planned their next vacations.

In early February 1939, Hilde and Roland planned an outing to a new destination, their first outside of Germany. On 13 February, Hilde wrote about how much she was looking forward to Pentecost in late May, when they planned to visit Bohemia. She could hardly wait to see the “Bohemian landscapes and Bohemian people” that Roland wanted to show her.¹² She focused her enthusiasm, not on particular places that she wanted to visit in Bohemia, but on some quality apparently possessed by Bohemian landscapes and people that would mark them as distinctly Bohemian. As sociologist John Urry argued, this process is characteristic of the modern tourist – the tourist gaze seeks places and landscapes that depict an essence of where they are touring, a Bohemian-ness that is less about its constituent parts

¹¹ Martin Kitchen, *A World in Flames: A Short History of the Second World War in Europe and Asia, 1939–1945* (New York: Longman, 1990), 12.

¹² HL-RN, 13 February 1939, TuS 390213-2-1.

and individual tourist sites than about the unified, identifiable, preferably photogenic whole that the tourist constructs from the sites she has viewed.¹³

It is notable that Hilde and Roland identified their planned outing as a specifically Bohemian venture, as opposed to Czechoslovakian, providing a political dimension to their travel. By 1939, many German nationalists and ethnic German residents of Czechoslovakia had long agitated for parts of the country, particularly Bohemia, to be incorporated into the German state. They argued that ethnic Germans carried the same excellent genes and superior culture, yet they were marooned outside their proper nation. Both Hilde and Roland consistently stressed that they planned to visit Bohemia particularly, even before Germany's invasion in March 1939, possibly indicating that they had internalized certain ideas about Germany's continuing expansion advanced by the Nazis. They assuredly would have seen propaganda concerning the quest for *Lebensraum* and the creation of a greater German state that would unite all ethnic Germans. Tourism, as a method of viewing, organizing, and dominating the landscape, easily became its own form of invasion and occupation in the politically charged area of Bohemia.

Hilde and Roland expressed some concern about the threat of war, but did not specifically express opposition to Germany's expansion. Hilde approached most of Germany's expansion with some caution. She was pleased with the Munich Agreement once it was clear that Germany had avoided war over the Sudetenland. She wrote that "many disasters have been averted... Perhaps this peace will last."¹⁴ Roland was even more intimately acquainted with the event. His brother Hellmuth was stationed in Löbau in

¹³ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 15-16.

¹⁴ HL-RN, 2 October 1938, TuS 381002-2-1.

Saxony, less than 20 kilometers from the Czechoslovak border, during the negotiations over the Sudetenland. Just a few days after the agreement he was stationed in Chrastava (Kratzau) in Bohemia.¹⁵ Roland, and by extension Hilde, were connected to Germany's expansion through secondhand experience of the invasion. He, however, seemed less concerned – he wrote that he was so excited he nearly traveled to Munich to witness the historic proceedings.¹⁶

By the time Nazi forces invaded Czechoslovakia on 15 March 1939 and Hitler declared the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, Hilde was worried that Roland might become involved if the conflict dragged on.¹⁷ She made note of it in her letter on the same day of the invasion: “A thick headline in today’s newspaper report: Czechoslovakia is no more!” On 19 March, Hilde wrote that there she saw a “dark cloud” despite the triumphant news. “Can we still back away?” she wondered.¹⁸ Despite her fears, Hilde never objected to planning a trip to Bohemia, before or after the invasion. She was perfectly happy to tour the newly invaded area, and Roland was also ready to visit Bohemia as soon as they were able.

Hilde and Roland’s decision to treat Bohemia as a vacation destination seems staggering in the context of the fear and violence of the Nazis’ rapid expansion. In his study of U.S. tourism in Latin America, historian Dennis Merrill discusses the concept of “soft power,” or how travelers advanced their own interests through interactions throughout the empire. “Along with consumer power, tourists and the industry that served them possessed the power to interpret and invent cultural identities – that is, the power to define the social

¹⁵ RN-HL, 7 October 1939, TuS 391007-1-1.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ HL-RN, 15 March 1939, TuS 390315-2-1.

¹⁸ HL-RN, 19 March 1939, TuS 390319-2-1.

meaning of self, other, and empire.”¹⁹ Travelers normalized the story of imperialism and exercised their soft power as agents of empire by possessing colonized spaces as tourist destinations. Hilde and Roland became agents of Nazi imperialism. This does not mean that they functioned as an arm of the state; the couple had their own interests in play. But, as they accepted conquered Bohemia as a vacation destination, Hilde and Roland accepted, at least implicitly, the narrative of imperialism and *Lebensraum* spun by the Nazis.

As it turned out, Hilde and Roland did not visit Bohemia at Pentecost – they visited several weeks earlier. On 23 March, just a little over a week after the invasion, Roland wrote to Hilde with a surprise plan for their weekend. On Saturday he had to attend a National Socialist Teachers’ League meeting in Pirna, so he would already be close to Dresden, and he had purchased tickets to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in Dresden for the two of them. Then, he wrote, it looked like the weather on Sunday would be perfect for their trip to Bohemia. They could visit the *Tanzplan*, a small mountain outside of Sebnitz in Saxony, and then continue into Bohemia. Still early in the spring, the “wintry splendor” of the area would be intact.²⁰ Roland viewed the newly-invaded area as a tourist destination that would offer beautiful winter landscapes. Neither of them seemed to think that the political changes should affect their plans, so they visited Bohemia on 26 March 1939, a mere eleven days after Germany’s invasion.

Hilde recalled their trip afterward in a letter of 29 March. First, she wrote about going for a walk in Ob. She described the beautiful spring weather, “the smell of the soil, the

¹⁹ Dennis Merrill, *Negotiating Paradise: U.S. Tourism and Empire in Twentieth-Century Latin America* (University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 12.

²⁰ RN-HL, 23 March 1939, TuS 390323-1-1.

sunshine, the birds chirping and the warm breeze,” and how much she wished that Roland was there to walk with her. She then contrasted this experience with their trip:

How things change, a week ago I trudged through knee- high snow with you – today I walk lightly over moist, fragrant earth. All of what came my way today, what I discovered out in nature, made me feel so happy and grateful. I missed you today.²¹

Hilde included few details of the places she saw in Bohemia, choosing to focus on the weather and the fact that Roland was not with her in Ob. Several months later, on 12 June, she wrote about the pictures she received from Roland of their trip. As she described when she talked about her photo album in 1938, she used the pictures to recall their moments together in Bohemia. “When I look at them, everything comes back and is palpable to me.” She described the pictures of them at the church in Dubice in the Sudetenland, and “our mountain,” probably the Tanzplan, in the background.

I close my eyes and I see a dark forest, a meadow wet with dew and topped by soft moonlight; protruding around the black mountains in the sky, it is as if there is no life. But far below, at the foot of the hill, there is a wide, bright band: the river – there is life, lights blinking and movement continues. Above, two people embrace as the world opens around them as their Wonderland...²²

Hilde spent no time describing the significance of Germany’s takeover of Czechoslovakia as she recalled their tours of Bohemia. Her earlier worries about the potential consequences vanished. She also made only sparing notes of specific sites, and did not describe any particular contrast between her experience and the “Bohemian landscapes and Bohemian people.”²³ Instead, Hilde’s recollections are dominated by the beauty of the landscape as a lovely background for their time together. Anthropologist Edward Bruner argues that tourists are often less concerned with the meanings of what they see than with the relationships they

²¹ HL-RN, 29 March 1939, TuS 390329-2-1.

²² HL-RN, 12 June 1939, TuS 390612-2-1.

²³ HL-RN, 13 February 1939, TuS 390213-2-1.

can build with other tourists.²⁴ Hilde focused primarily on the significance of the trip within their relationship. But, her continual use of the term Bohemia rather than Czechoslovakia implied that, on some level, she was thinking of the area in terms of a restored Germany composed of the old members of the Holy Roman Empire. She was also willing to visit Bohemia very soon after the invasion, a strong indication that she did not seriously oppose to Germany's expansion as long as it did not adversely affect her life.

As the Nazis stomped through Czechoslovakia, they immediately went to work setting up a new regime. They hunted down "enemies of the Reich" including Jews and Czech nationalists.²⁵ Many Nazi officials set about determining which Czechs were German enough to be included as citizens of the Reich. The often indeterminate state of Czechoslovakian national identity would, in fact, become an unending source of frustration for those attempting to order the new Protectorates according to the Nazi racial order.²⁶ Despite the extreme likelihood that Hilde and Roland would have seen or been aware of the violence and control of their country's takeover, they utterly ignored these aspects of their destination in their correspondence.

Roland did not write to Hilde in detail about their visit with each other, but he visited Bohemia again with his brother, still stationed in Bohemia, on Good Friday. They went to Schluckenau, a town annexed with the rest of the Sudetenland after the Munich Agreement in October 1938. Similar to his trip with Hilde, he and his brother climbed a mountain beforehand – the Picho in Saxony – and then went on to Schluckenau. Roland noted that Good Friday was a working day in Bohemia, "factories and shops were open." They visited a

²⁴ Bruner, *Culture on Tour*, 17.

²⁵ Chad Bryant, *Prague in Black: Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism* (Harvard University Press, 2007), 1.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 5.

church and he described it in detail: "... on the altar table was the monstrance (the sacred container in which hosts are kept) illuminated by a wreath of electric bulbs... Before the grave, kneeling and praying, were two altar boys (as choir boys are called by the Catholics).” He wrote about the people coming and going, “men in their work clothes, women with shopping bags, they did their prayer. It was pious and solemn.”²⁷ Roland’s narrative of his experience in Bohemia emphasized particular details – a different religion, the fact that Good Friday was not a holiday, and how the people visited the church as they went about their daily business. His observation of an everyday scene became part of his tourist narrative because it was different from home. He noted these everyday events because they fit into a narrative of Bohemian-ness and Catholic-ness that he confirmed with his own narration. For Roland it was nearly the same as viewing a performance – he sought and recognized the signs that expressed the essence of Catholic Bohemia, and this is the story he presented to Hilde.

Roland’s narrative, however, completely ignored the upheaval of the Nazi attempts at control that must have been present as he toured. He was even touring Bohemia with his brother, who participated in the invasion, yet Roland made no mention of the military or Nazi party presence. Instead, he created a narrative that adapted the conquered territory into his model of cultivated travel. He normalized conquered Bohemia under Nazi rule by actively ignoring the less pleasant aspects of what he likely saw and focusing instead on depicting local sites and traditions as if narrating a guide book. As Roland established in 1938, viewing landscapes and tourist sites was a form of domination – while he did not specifically reference the military presence as he toured, he acted out Germany’s new imperialist

²⁷ RN-HL, 11 April 1939, TuS 390411-1-1.

relationship with Bohemia through what he did, and did not, include in his letter. Roland adapted his narrative to the conflicts and new order, accepting them as an opportunity to further his own interests in travel.

After describing his trip to Schluckenau, Roland wrote about another performance. He recalled his Easter Sunday when he viewed the “Easter ride” to Marienstern Abbey in Saxony. It was “an old tradition, perhaps from pagan antiquity.”²⁸ Farmers and their sons rode their horses in procession around the fields until they reached the abbey. Roland described the “crimped manes, decorated bridles, and fine saddle blankets.”²⁹ Together the farmers sang to “implore growth and prosperity for their fields.” Participants from several villages rode together in a “stately train,” 76 pairs in all, with the leaders carrying “processional banners, a crucifix, holy pictures.” By 3 o’clock the riders arrived at the monastery, hailed by the ringing of bells. Roland concluded that it was “a beautiful custom, an annual attraction for visitors from all parts.”³⁰ He noted that the monastery was a “truly Easter place” – he had seen the procession five times, and the event and place held the essence of Easter for him.³¹ The procession was meant to spread the message of Jesus’ resurrection through the surrounding parishes, and the earliest mention of the tradition was in the fifteenth century, although it is possible that parts of the ritual are pre-Christian.³²

According to Bruner’s study of cultural tourism, tourists actively construct the meaning of tourist sites along with those constructing or performing the actual sites, and so these meanings are fluid and negotiated through the cultural process of being performed and

²⁸ RN-HL, 11 April 1939, TuS 390411-1-1.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² “Saxon horseback riders spread Easter message,” *The Local*, last modified March 31, 2013. <http://www.thelocal.de/20130331/48857>.

viewed. Roland built his own set of meanings around this event through his narration. Similar to his portrayal of the cathedral in Naumburg during his trip to the Harz in 1938, he depicted the continuity of the site, and thus located the event in a seemingly unchanging landscape, a symbol of culture that had stood through the centuries. This time, however, Roland was viewing a performance by other people, rather than a building or stationary view. He mastered the language of the tourist by placing this event in the category of a “tourist site” and described the site in a way that removed it from its modern context. Yet, as Bruner would point out, even though Roland appeared to be extracting this apparently ancient event from its modern surroundings, his process and motives are very modern. His portrayals of the Easter ride, of sites like the cathedral in Naumburg, and the German landscape indicate how he saw Germany. Roland saw cultural and religious continuity with the German past through the perceived authenticity of the Easter ride that had supposedly continued unchanged since “pagan antiquity.” His letter weaves together ancient and Christian tradition from his viewing of a modern performance, and he unified these themes in his narrative. This process of unification through viewing culture and landscape constituted standard tourist practice, and Roland was certainly an experienced tourist. He also expressed enthusiasm for the way in which the ritual attracted numerous observers, an enthusiasm at variance with his typical complaints about mass tourism. The visitors viewing the Easter ride, however, hailed “from all parts” and came together to view this event, demonstrating how the Easter ride could unite people from different regions of Germany.

Hilde’s narratives, by contrast, do not focus on detailed descriptions of sites or performances. She recollected in impressions and emotions, rather than in specific details

seen. Hilde made one exception when she went on a group bus tour in June 1939. She listed the towns they drove through – Limbach, Glauchau, Crimmitschau, Ronneburg, Gera – before they reached “the event of the day,” the “fairy grottoes” at Saalfeld. From there they had lunch at the medieval town of Schwarzburg, then went to Rudolstadt, a town along the beautiful Saale River, by horse. Afterwards they took the bus to Hohenstein and had a “social evening.”³³ Hilde was rarely a tourist without Roland, and so it made sense for her to describe what she had seen in a format similar to the way he related his travels to her. She also shared Roland’s opinion on bus tours. Although she wrote that the scenery was all very charming, the rush and “bondage to a few hours” made the trip lose its appeal. She concluded that she would have preferred just to go with him. By this time Hilde was well acquainted with Roland’s views of travel, and she shared his desire to exhibit *Bildung* in her life, and so she tastefully agreed with his views that it was not proper touring to travel by bus.

This type of narrative, however, was the exception for Hilde. Similar to her description of their trip to Bohemia and of other trips in 1938, she primarily depicted traveling as a social activity. While Hilde sometimes constructed these narratives in order to emphasize her status, as when she sprinkled her travel notes with her complaints about potential farm work, her discussions of travel experiences remained focused on her and Roland’s growing relationship. In a letter of 28 January, she wrote to Roland that “I feel as if I were taking a trip in a fairyland, and in this country blooms a flower – our love...”³⁴ Hilde used the metaphor of travel for their relationship, and as she wrote about their trips, they became an essential part of the narrative she fabricated for their relationship.

³³ HL-RN, 19 June 1939, TuS 390619-2-1.

³⁴ HL-RN, 28 January 1939, TuS 390128-2-1.

Hilde was thus much less likely to write about specific sites or activities during her travels, because she used her descriptions to focus on how it felt to experience travel with Roland. In July 1939, after returning from visiting Roland in Lichtenhain, she poetically described their departure at the Dresden station:

...our eyes lay on our parting place again, the great Dresden concourse with its colorful bustle and goings-on. When we move through the pressing stream of travelers, happily arriving through the gate out toward the platform, and stand and wait by one another until the signal for boarding sounds, then all emotion pushes forward. Everything seems so important and must still be said on the lips...³⁵

The train station, the gateway to travel, became a point in their relationship, “our parting place.” Hilde measured her time away from home, not in mountains climbed or scenery viewed, but in the people seen and relationships built. This does not necessarily mean that she took less notice of such sights or that she did not appreciate them, but instead that she had different goals from Roland when she engaged in travel. Hilde put it best when she quoted Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s novel *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (*Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*): “The world is empty if one thinks only of mountains, rivers and cities; but to know a soul here or there who agrees with us, makes the earth for us an inhabited garden.”³⁶

Roland did not have quite the same appreciation for other people during his travels. He complained about crowds and preferred to travel by himself. He even differentiated between travel undertaken for personal growth, like his journey to the Harz in 1938, and travel for social purposes. In a letter from 11 April 1939, he wrote that “A trip to a friend is always an effort. We walk, conduct tiring conversations. For me it is always like reporting on

³⁵ HL-RN, 13 July 1939, TuS 390713-2-1.

³⁶ HL-RN, 16 January 1939, TuS 390116-2-1.

the last few months.”³⁷ Socializing was only “reporting” and did not give him a chance to experience the kind of quiet contemplation that he desired and expected from travel. In another letter in April 1939, Roland blamed Hilde for his lack of desire to travel, because all traveling took him away from her. He ignored the significant amount of traveling that he and Hilde did with each other, and instead portrayed his wish to be near her as a conflict between their relationship and his traveling. Despite these protests, Roland traveled more often with others than by himself, and he traveled more and more with Hilde as their relationship grew. He was proud of the level of taste he had cultivated, but he also wanted to demonstrate his mastery of taste, and that required an audience.

By 1939, as their relationship deepened and as Germany careened toward global war, Roland increasingly acknowledged the importance of travel to his emotional bond with Hilde. In August, he compared meeting in their hometowns and parents’ houses to meeting in a third place such as their outings in Dresden. In the latter they could be “unattached” and “free,” while in the former they were in “all the bars, bindings, and biases of life.”³⁸ Roland concluded that the former was more “genuine” and “illuminating” because there “we must have to prove ourselves” and “confirm the authority of our bond.”³⁹ But, the solitary time in a third space, a space that was neither his home nor hers, still served the purpose of “creating and building,”⁴⁰ that is building their own narrative of themselves as a couple. They both worried about the gossip and stares they received when they were together, particularly

³⁷ RN-HL, 11 April 1939, TuS 390411-1-1.

³⁸ RN-HL 5 August 1939, TuS 390805-1-1.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

because of their age difference.⁴¹ In one letter Roland explained to Hilde that travel freed them from “side glances and loose words.”⁴² In short, in an anonymous setting away from home they might not only have time together, they could nurture and protect their growing love for one another. They might then return and cope more easily with the stresses and strains of home. Leisure travel provided an escape from everyday life, but it simultaneously supported the spaces of home and work.

Roland acknowledged what he and Hilde had long assumed – their travels, this “third space” outside of home and work, held special qualities that allowed them to imagine their lives differently. They sometimes imagined travel space as a fantasyland without boundaries where they could be free and where they could aspire to *Bildung* that was normally barred from them. Leisure and vacation time were imaginative playgrounds where possibilities seemed unlimited, and they could put aside their age or class difference in favor of their relationship. But, the imagination at work here was still shaped by other influential forces, such as gender, nationality, and social status. Vacations could be a place where these forces were discarded momentarily, though not rebelled against completely. Leisure travel over the long run in fact reinforced norms and identities.⁴³

When Hilde and Roland narrated their experience in the “third space” to each other, they not only communicated their experience, they also used the narratives as methods of self-construction and self-presentation. They created themselves in the context of what they could provide for each other. In a letter of 1 November 1939, Roland wondered if what he could provide for Hilde, what he had shown her over the past year and a half, would be

⁴¹ RN-HL 11 June 1938, TuS 380611-1-1; HN-RL 26 June 1938, TuS 380626-2-1.

⁴² RN-HL 13 July 1938, TuS 380713-1-1.

⁴³ Löfgren, *On Holiday*, 7; Aron, *Working at Play*, 80.

enough. He could provide “a journey, a few concerts and plays, a few books and notes: I think I’m almost at the end of my art. Dearest, will you be satisfied?”⁴⁴ For a man fond of exaggerating his own pedigree, the candor appears to have been genuine. For many months he had used stories of his travels and learned diversions to elevate his status and demonstrate his ability to please her, provide for her, and connect with her. Now, after becoming engaged to be married in December, he wondered if what he had shown her was enough.

Under the constant threat of war in 1939, Roland and Hilde only occasionally reported changes in holidaymaking. In May, Roland wrote that a scheduled trip through the Nazi tourist organization *Kraft durch Freude* (KdF) had been cancelled, resulting in “long faces” everywhere.⁴⁵ At the same time Hilde wrote that the trip scheduled for Ob. was also cancelled.⁴⁶ In late June she reported a rumor that all KdF trips would be cancelled by July.⁴⁷ Neither of them wrote much about KdF – Roland only mentioned it once when he attended a local welcome celebration for KdF guests in June 1939 – and neither ever specified one of their trips, concerts, or other leisure activities as KdF-sponsored.⁴⁸ In any case the KdF’s intended audience was the working class, and so the KdF’s activities were not aimed at people of Roland’s status – or at least, the status he so often affirmed. The changes that did take place in the KdF’s programming did not affect them directly. Despite Hilde and Roland’s lack of participation in the KdF, both of them believed that these cancellations were worth mentioning. They demonstrated that vacationing and leisure was important in their

⁴⁴ RN-HL, 1 November 1939, TuS 391101-1-1.

⁴⁵ RN-HL, 20 May 1939, TuS 390520-1-1.

⁴⁶ HL-RN, 22 May 1939, TuS 390522-2-1.

⁴⁷ HL-RN, 26 June 1939, TuS 390626-2-1.

⁴⁸ RN-HL, 22 June 1939, TuS 390622-1-1.

lives, and in the lives of others, so the cancellation of these services could only indicate dire circumstances.

The day after the Nazi invasion of Poland, Roland expressed his shock and dismay at the events, and expressed a sense of wonder that “the carefree, happily sunny days” that he had associated with travel might come to an end. They were stopped, “hard and sudden,” he wrote, “by the wild days of this week.”⁴⁹ The invasion intruded, at least momentarily, on a normal and valuable part of Roland’s life. Nearly a week later, Hilde replied and described her ride back to Ob. from Chemnitz. She noted that all of her traveling companions had their vacations cut short by the invasion, and in the next sentence she wrote that ration cards were being distributed in Ob. The disruption of regular vacations was tied to the disruption of other parts of everyday life. The political situation entered more and more persistently into their lives – so much that it began to affect their ability to visit their “third space” very often.

Despite obstacles, Hilde and Roland continued traveling, meeting occasionally in Dresden or Chemnitz and visiting each other’s homes. While the onset of war changed some of their traveling habits, it did not end their trips. Some of their travels were actually enabled by the political situation, such as their outing in the Sudetenland and Bohemia. Despite the concern they both expressed about Germany going to war, Germany’s expansion also offered new vacation possibilities. Hilde and Roland managed to maintain many similar vacation habits even after September 1939.

⁴⁹ RN-HL, 2 September 1939, TuS 390902-1-1.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Tourism in Germany did not end with the beginning of the war. As Hilde and Roland demonstrated in their trips to the Sudetenland and Bohemia, war could actually make new destinations possible, and they were happy to visit newly conquered areas. The “touristic view” of Germans toward invaded spaces continued with the invasion of Poland, where soldiers and eventually tourists leveled their gaze on a landscape tied to a “racial war of annihilation.”¹ War-time tourism reinforced racial attitudes towards Poland by reflecting the language of racial war, such as Baedeker tourist guides to occupied Poland referring to certain areas as “cleansed.”² Hilde and Roland revealed little exposure to racial modes of tourism in their letters, but some of their travel narratives linked tourism with other, related ideas of German expansion and *Lebensraum*. They worried how war might affect their lives, but these worries did not prevent them from enjoying the touristic benefits of Germany’s expansion.

These connections, however, remained in the background of Hilde and Roland’s letters after Germany’s invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939. Their letters show less time spent in that “third space” outside of home and work. Roland did not take any more solo trips like the ones he described in the past year and a half. The invasion also disrupted their mostly stable work lives. Roland was not drafted until several months later, but his school opened and closed sporadically, so he took a job at the Ka. city hall working on tax documents.³

Rationing started immediately after the invasion and Hilde complained that her factory was

¹ Koshar, *German Tourist Cultures*, 156.

² Ibid.

³ RN-HL, 9 September 1939, TuS 390909-1-1.

struggling to get the material needed to continue textile production. She added hopefully that the stockpiles of food were impressive and it appeared that the “state of 1914” would be avoided.⁴ Roland’s younger brother Siegfried went into Poland with the invasion, but over a week later Roland wrote that he was in a field hospital in Germany with a stomach virus. He hoped that the quick pace of the invasion and the apparent reluctance of the Western powers to intercede meant that peace would soon be restored.⁵ Hilde berated herself for being selfish and hoping that her soon-to-be fiancée would be able to stay and not go into the fight like his brother.⁶ Their letters predictably focused on the political situation affecting their lives and on exchanging their worries, hopes, and bits of news. They put aside travel discussion, at least for that week.

Only a week after the invasion Hilde vowed that she would make it to Sc. to visit Roland, although it took her several more weeks to do so. She was easily able to continue one of her leisure activities in the meantime – taking walks near her home. In a letter of 15 October 1939, she wrote her musings on the meaning of fall as she reflected on one of her walks. After the beauty of spring, fall brought a “deeply solemn feeling” as summer faded away, but Hilde wrote that everything that grew had given its best, as was its “primordial essence” given from God.⁷ Nature, like people that have fulfilled their lives, looks back not with “bleak despair but devoted, humble satisfaction” that the world will continue to be “noble and good” through their children.⁸ Nature still functioned as a symbolic space for Hilde to compose her self-narrative, but this time her reflection centered on the state of

⁴ HL-RN, 10 September 1939, TuS 390910-2-1.

⁵ RN-HL, 9 September 1939, TuS 390909-1-1.

⁶ HL-RN, 10 September 1939, TuS 390910-2-1.

⁷ HL-RN, 15 October 1939, TuS 391015-2-1.

⁸ Ibid.

people and nation in general rather than only her and Roland. The international political conflict intruded into their lives, but she expressed quiet hope for the future. She continued to adjust her narrative in the face of new situations, maintaining the hopeful nature of the heroic self-narrative.

Roland recalled their meeting in late September, specifically their walk together in the park. “If any experience should overwhelm or shake me, or should I lose the ground under my feet” he wrote, “I will find it again in the camaraderie and regularity of the two old, faithful feet.”⁹ He had often written about his enjoyment of walks, of how he was able to feel close to nature, to see worthy sights, and to contemplate mountain views as he demonstrated his excellent taste. In late September 1939, the walk became a comforting fixed point, a place where Roland could always return if he felt disoriented or depressed. His travel and leisure had always worked as an escape, to a certain extent – he was dissatisfied with his station at work and used his leisure time to imagine himself into what he thought was a more fitting position for his intellect. In late 1939, Roland continued to rely on this space as an escape where he could affirm his self-narrative as a cultured traveler even as Germany and Europe seemed poised to descend into a hellish nightmare. He wrote in November that the world seemed “fluctuating and uncertain,” and his reprieves from these feelings came in the old familiarity of a good walk and thinking of Hilde.¹⁰

The situation around them changed and the content of their letters shifted, but the invasion of Poland did not stop Hilde and Roland’s discussions of holidays and travel. Instead of traveling to third spaces, they focused on traveling to meet each other and to see

⁹ RN-HL, 25 September 1939, TuS 390925-1-1.

¹⁰ RN-HL, 15 November 1939, TuS 391115-1-1.

their families. This shift was likely caused by more than the political situation. Roland and Hilde were serious about their relationship and celebrated their engagement in December. As their relationship changed, the travel habits in which they built their relationship also changed. On 28 September 1939, Hilde wrote that she felt much more comfortable as a couple. She could visit church with Roland without feeling the same anxiety she felt before.¹¹ They no longer relied on traveling to protect their relationship. Perhaps, as Roland indicated, it was time to test their relationship among home and family, outside of the third space where their relationship had grown. Both the political situation and their changing relationship led to a greater emphasis on home spaces in their letters as they traveled primarily between each other's and their parents' homes.

Travel spaces, despite being less prominent in the couple's lives during these months, but they did so as shared memory rather than as shared experiences. They in fact spun a narrative that travel had served as the foundational for their engagement, their pending marriage, and their future together. In a letter of 13 December, Hilde wrote, "Do you remember our first trip together in Bohemia's beautiful country? For the first time in my life we were both happy, intoxicated, enthralled at the gate to the great joy of love. I knew even then that I could never leave you!"¹² Their moment of outing in essence became permanent as memory, a bond that would endure any political crisis as well as the trials and tribulations of their everyday lives together. Hilde's memory of their travels continued the narrative of the world she and Roland constructed through their letters.

¹¹ HL-RN, 28 September 1939, TuS 390928-2-1.

¹² HL-RN, 13 December 1939, TuS 391213-2-1.

Due to the ongoing nature of the *Trug und Schein* project, I have only begun Hilde and Roland's story. We are still processing their correspondence, which extends many more years, in order to continue posting transcriptions to trugundschein.org. From our current knowledge, Roland was drafted and went into training in early 1940. He eventually served as a company clerk (*Kompanieschreiber*).¹³ During this time he and Hilde excitedly planned their wedding and even began to pick furnishings for their home together.¹⁴ By October 1940 Roland was stationed in Schleswig-Holstein along the Baltic, and he and Hilde wrote to each other almost on a daily basis. As we continue to transcribe and catalog these letters, I look forward to seeing their story unfold.

¹³ RN-HL, 2 November 1940. TuS 401102-1-1.

¹⁴ HL-RN, 31 March 1940. TuS 400331-2-1.

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VITA

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