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A *histoire croisée* of Anglo-German Relations in the 1920s to 1940s

German Books in an English Stately Home

A browse through my son's GCSE History exercise book reveals nothing surprising: the causes and battlefields of World War I, the Treaty of Versailles, the 'age of the dictator', the rise of Hitler, World War II. The topics haven't changed since I took the same course thirty-odd years ago. Then, as today, pupils are required to memorise key dates relevant to the two World Wars, know how many men were slaughtered, how many bombs were dropped, how many boats sunk. They debate long- and short-term causes of war, and discuss its rights and wrongs. "Dunkirk: a triumph or disaster for Britain?'; "Were the British right to bomb Dresden?"; "Was the use of atomic bombs in 1945 justifiable?" – these are just three of the essay titles that my son has been asked to respond to, in his scrawly, hurried hand.

The focus on war in the teaching of history in Britain's schools is as strong as it is long-standing. As a primary school child I drew diagrams to explain how the British defeated the Spanish Armada in 1588. I had no interest in military history or the fire power of ships and no-one ever explained why we needed to know in such detail what happened in this long-ago war fought by men in ruffled collars. From there we jumped to the Crimean War of 1854 and dutifully memorised the Charge of the Light Brigade. *Theirs but to do and die / Into the valley of death rode the 600*. I retained nothing of the technicalities of the disaster but only the unsettling knowledge that stupidity and power are not unlikely bedfellows. From there, briefly, to the Boer Wars, my heart weeping more for the 400,000 horses that were killed than for the 40,000 odd men (I was well into K. M. Peyton's magnificent Flambards series by this point). The move to secondary school meant a move to the two World Wars: destruction and murder on scales unfathomable.

1 Anglo-German Relations: War-based Prisms

In terms of Anglo-German relations, the focus on war has stark consequences. British children – and the adults they grow up to be – are well-versed in the nine years in which Britain and Germany were at war, but know little about the hundreds of years of peaceful relations and close cultural and dynastic ties between

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the two nations. The emphasis is amplified by popular culture: the production of new books and films with world war settings knows no end, but how many of us can name a single film or book about Anglo-German interaction that has a different historical focus? Would today's British children (or even adults) know that the British royal family was the House of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha before being renamed House of Windsor in 1917? Or that Queen Victoria was the last monarch of the House of Hanover? How many would be aware that had they walked through London 120 years ago they might have strolled along a road nicknamed the Charlottenstrasse or caught a concert at the Bechstein Hall?[1]

In academia, although research is also heavily skewed towards war, there has been something of a push-back. The early 2000s saw a raft of academic studies exploring Germany and Britain's interconnected peace-time histories and seeking to challenge antagonism-based narratives.[2] Richard Scully's *British Images of Germany*, for example, reached beyond the usual historical sources (diplomatic records, press reports, economic statistics), drawing on cultural evidence such as cartoons, travel writing, fiction, and cartography to give a fuller and more balanced picture of the nature of Anglo-German relations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[3] In vivid terms, Scully describes the bumper season for British tourism to Germany that 1914 was shaping up to be: travel companies

1 Hidden London, "Fitzrovia, Westminster/Camden", https://hidden-london.com/gazetteer/fitzrovia/, accessed 18 March 2024; bechstein.com, "Bechstein returns to London's Wigmore Street", https://www.bechstein.com/en/the-world-of-bechstein/news/bechstein-returns-to-londons-wigmore-street/, accessed 18 March 2024. A humorous account of the popularity of Germans in London is given by the German-French writer Annette Kolb: "Zum ersten: in London. Seit 1904 fuhr ich ziemlich regelmäßig hinüber. Die Phasen der Feindseligkeit während dieser Zeit waren mir sehr persönlich fühlbar geworden, ebenso deutlich der zuletzt einsetzende Umschwung. So populär endlich wie im Frühsommer 1914 — die Geschichte wird es bezeugen — waren die Deutschen seit einem Menschenalter nicht gewesen; ja, sie standen im Begriff, London im Sturme zu erobern. Ein Deutscher, mochte er auch zu Hause als ein ziemlicher Pinsel gelten, hier genoß er a priori, lediglich weil er Deutscher war, Anspruch auf Gedankentiefe und Geist. So weit war man schon." Annette Kolb, *Briefe einer Deutsch-Französin* (Berlin: Erich Reiss Verlag, 1917), p. 97. Available online at https://www.gutenberg.org/files/46550/46550-h/46550-h.htm, accessed 18 March 2024.

2 See, for example, Rüdiger Görner (ed.), *Anglo-German Affinities and Antipathies* (London: University of London Press, 2005); Dominik Geppert and Robert Gerwarth (ed.), *Wilhelmine Germany and Edwardian Britain: Essays in Cultural Affinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Colin Storer, *Britain and the Weimar Republic: The History of a Cultural Relationship* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010); Matthew C. Potter, *The Inspirational Genius of Germany: British Art and Germanism, 1850–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).

3 Richard Scully, *British Images of Germany: Admiration, Antagonism & Ambivalence, 1860–1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

were advertising newly opened hotels, and selling hiking, cycling or driving holidays in the Rhineland and the ever-popular spa towns of the Black Forest; there was a major exhibition of publishing in Leipzig, and another, on art and German workmanship, in Cologne. This last featured the brass band of King George V's own German regiment in its opening ceremony, and fêted the mayors and councillors of thirty English towns. Most poignantly of all, a squadron of four British dreadnoughts took part in the sailing regatta at Kiel in June, the German Admiralty offering "hundreds of free railway passes to the visiting English dignitaries and their families so that they could shop and see the sights of Hamburg and Berlin".[4]

If tourist travel to Germany came to an abrupt end in August 1914, the many friendships and family connections between Britons and Germans did not. Nor did travel for pleasure in fact take long to resume: by the mid-1920s, as Colin Storer explains, British artists and writers were flocking to Berlin "as the home of the avant-garde and all that was new and exciting in the arts and sciences".[5] Although the visibility of the old ties between Britain and their 'German cousins' was never restored after the First World War – the wave of erasures encompassing family names and street names, fiction, travel writing, and more – the ties themselves were far from broken. In the public consciousness, though, awareness of this centuries-old Anglo-German friendship is overshadowed by the tireless repetition in Britain of stories of war.

2 "Affairs in Berlin": A German-Themed Exhibition at Sissinghurst Castle Garden, UK

It is against this backdrop that we staged a five-month long exhibition, "Affairs in Berlin: Harold in Germany, Vita in Love" at Sissinghurst Castle Garden in 2022/23. This National Trust property in rural Kent was purchased in 1930 by Vita Sackville-West and her husband Harold Nicolson and is home to one of the largest book collections in the National Trust.[6] It was one of the books in this collec-

4 Scully, *British Images of Germany*, p. 78.

5 Storer, *Britain and the Weimar Republic*, p. 4.

6 davidjohnlewis, "Book Conservation at Sissinghurst Castle", in *Baseline Magazine Blog*, https://baselinemagazineblog.wordpress.com/2014/10/31/book-conservation-at-sissinghurst-castle/, accessed 18 March 2024.

tion, a 1931 translation of Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies*, translated by none other than Vita herself, that had caught my eye. As a translation studies scholar, I am always on the look-out for translations that seem unexpected, indications as they are of some kind of intercultural contact. The *Duino Elegies* fell firmly into that category. How had this aristocratic English woman, most famous for her creation of a quintessential English garden (her affair with Virgina Woolf coming a close second), come to translate this mystical and notoriously difficult cycle by an Austrian-German poet, during that period that our history books know as 'inter-war'?

This question marked the beginning of a research project that took me and my collaborator, the Rilke expert Lesley Chamberlain, deep into the Sissinghurst book collection. The library holdings were our primary historical sources, and our methodology was straightforward, if somewhat unconventional. It consisted in surveying the German-language books and the German-English translations in the Sissinghurst collection and asking, simply: How did these books come to be here?

In terms of methodology, such an approach represents a combination of library history and *histoire croisée*, a framework that emphasises interconnections and crossing points. First elaborated programmatically by Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmerman,[7] *histoire croisée* belongs to a group of approaches that seek to weaken the national grounding of historiographies and to historicize the concept of national culture. Its methodology is above all "inductive and pragmatic",[8] starting with the empirical object of research and allowing that object of research to determine both the direction of research and the scale that is adopted. Crucial to our own project is *histoire croisée*'s emphasis on rejecting the "generic and pre-established nature of context,"[9] instead building a picture from the bottom up, or in other words from the artefacts themselves. In practice, this implies a delicate, multi-directional balancing act: knowledge of context informs interpretation of the object of study, but the object of study is also used to interrogate the context itself. In Werner and Zimmerman's words, "*histoire croisée* integrates into the operation of contextualization carried out by the researcher the referential dimension of the objects and practices analyzed".[10]

In line with Werner and Zimmerman's emphasis on empirical objects, our methodology had a strong material dimension. In this, it was close to approaches

7 Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison: *Histoire Croisée* and the Challenge of Reflexivity", *History and Theory*, 45 (2006), pp. 30–50.

8 Werner and Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison", p. 46.

9 Werner and Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison", p. 47.

10 Werner and Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison", p. 47.

favoured in Book History, which traditionally studies books as physical objects rather than as abstract texts. We thus treated each of the five-hundred or so German books in the Sissinghurst holdings as material items and endeavoured to discover how they had come to be at Sissinghurst. Had Harold or Vita bought the book? If so, where? Had it been given to them, perhaps by the German author? We inspected the books for physical clues such as dedications, inscriptions, and annotations – each one a tangible trace of travel, friendship, cultural appreciation, or occasionally disagreement.

Through the books, we were able to build up a picture of how Germany and the German language had featured in Harold's and Vita's lives. Although much of this information is scattered through the various biographies, diaries and volumes of letters on which we also relied, the library holdings gave depth and personal touch to what are often only passing mentions, and in some cases revealed undocumented friendships.

Exhibitions are ephemeral: the books that we featured have been returned to their shelves, the information panels thrown onto the skip. The licences to project footage of 1920s Berlin onto the heavy drawn curtains of the library have expired; the old telephone on which visitors could dial a number to hear Harold's and Vita's voices (and which younger visitors to the exhibition were not sure how to use) has been repurposed. Through this paper, I hope to preserve something of the exhibition for a little longer, giving readers a taste of the Anglo-German sympathies and allegiances that prevailed through the war and 'interwar' periods.

3 Background: Harold Nicolson (1886–1968) and Vita Sackville-West (1892–1962)

To give shape and chronological coherence to what follows, it will be helpful to first sketch out Harold and Vita's biographies, as they relate to Germany.

Harold

Like all schoolboys of his generation, Harold learnt Greek and Latin rather than modern languages at school. After university, having set his sights on following his father into a diplomatic career, he spent two years in France and Germany, cramming for the rigorous Diplomatic Service exams. By the time he passed in September 1909, he was fluent in French and German and also had a good command of Italian and Spanish.

Harold's first diplomatic postings were to Constantinople (1912–14) and Tehran (1926–27). In the intervening years he worked for the Foreign Office in London and was part of the British delegations to the Paris Peace Conference (1919) and to Lausanne (1923). From 1919–20 he was seconded to the League of Nations. Harold made no secret of his view that the peace imposed on Germany in 1919 was unjust, and anticipated that it would have terrible consequences in the years to come: "it will be too awful," he wrote to Vita from Versailles in March 1919, "if, after winning the war, we are to lose the peace".[11]

In October 1927, Harold was posted to the British Embassy in Berlin. With his fluent German, and his outspoken criticism of the Treaty of Versailles, Harold was seen as a friend of Germany, and was able to consolidate excellent diplomatic relations with the German foreign minister, Gustav Stresemann. In his despatches from Berlin, Harold repeated his earlier sentiments about the terms of the peace imposed at Versailles, stressing that severe economic depression would ensue if reparations liability payments were not reduced.[12]

In addition to being seen as a political ally, Harold was also appreciated in Germany as a literary man and something of a celebrity: his book *Some People*, a thinly disguised series of humorous vignettes about friends and acquaintances, was published simultaneously in Britain and America in 1927, to great acclaim. It appears that the ambassador, Sir Horace Rumbold, capitalised on Harold's literary fame by sending him on a lecture tour – envisaged, presumably, as a kind of cultural diplomacy, and coinciding with the publication of Harold's book in German translation in 1929 (as *Miss Plimsoll und andere Leute*). The tour was certainly successful: in Frankfurt, Harold reports that he "saw in every [...] bookshop window a picture of himself prominently displayed",[13] and in Hamburg, he lectured to an audience of 500 people. In Cologne, he was hosted by the future German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and in Munich he had tea with the great German novelist Thomas Mann, who became a friend, as we will see below.

With conflicting feelings, Harold resigned from the Foreign Office at the end of December 1929. Back in England, he entered journalism and then politics, working all the while to promote rapprochement between Germany and Great Britain. He was a member of the Anglo-German Association,[14] and also belonged

11 Letter from Harold to Vita, 24 March 1919, in *The Harold Nicolson Diaries 1907–1963*, ed. by Nigel Nicolson (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004), p. 20.

12 James Lees-Milne, *Harold Nicolson: A Biography*, vol. 1: *1886–1929*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1980), p. 321.

13 Lees-Milne, *Harold Nicolson*, p. 362.

14 The AGA's president was Rufus Isaacs, Marquess of Reading, the first practising Jew to hold a Cabinet position in the UK. The AGA is often presented as the anti-Nazi counterpart to the pro-

to the elite Anglo-German club, a social club next to the German Embassy in London, whose president was the former Ambassador to Germany, Viscount D'Abernon.[15] During these crucial years, Harold was recognized as an authority on Germany, and his facility with German gave him a degree of insight into German politics that many other British politicians did not have. In particular, he saw early on the extent of the danger posed by Hitler, and took a prominent stand against appeasement. He used what leverage he had to support German friends who found themselves the target of Nazi violence. These included Kurt Wagenseil, a translator whom Harold and Vita had met in Berlin. Kurt was arrested in 1935 after bringing a copy of an anti-Nazi book back to Germany from a visit to Paris.[16] As a homosexual and a translator of works labelled 'degenerate' by the Nazis, Kurt was an obvious target for Nazi oppression, and was sent to Dachau concentration camp without trial. In his recent book, *The Glamour Boys,* Chris Bryant reports that when Harold heard about Kurt's internment, Harold "stormed off to the German Embassy and demanded to see Bismarck. They should either put Kurt on trial, he told him, or else release him immediately".[17] Following Harold's intervention, Kurt was released, and on 5 January 1936 he wrote to Harold, thanking him in carefully veiled terms. The letter has been preserved in the Princeton University Library archives and is a moving record of the debt that Kurt owed to his well-connected friend.[18]

Harold's status as a friend of Germany endured throughout his life. Harold's biographer, James Lees-Milne, reports that on a visit to Munich in 1955, he was "greeted by a bevy of Bavarian dignitaries", given a banquet by the Bavarian government, and lectured at the Bavarian State Bank to an audience of 600 people.[19] On 3 December 1958, shortly after his 70th birthday, Harold was presented with the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany (Das Verdienstkreuz mit

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Nazi Anglo-German Fellowship, but its membership encompassed a range of opinions about Hitler, eventually leading in 1935 to 'tensions so extreme that the only solution was to dissolve'. See Charles Spicer, "Ambulant amateurs": the rise and fade of the Anglo-German Fellowship', PhD thesis 2018, p. 31.

15 Spicer, "Ambulant amateurs", p. 32.

16 "Kurt Wagenseil 1904–1988", https://www.angelfire.com/wa2/wagenseil/kurt.htm, accessed 20 June 2024.

17 Chris Bryant, *The Glamour Boys: The Secret Story of the Rebels who Fought for Britain to Defeat Hitler* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), p. 167.

18 Harold Nicolson Papers, C0913, Manuscripts Division, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library, Firestone Library [mss]: Box 2, Folder 20. The letter can be viewed on the "Kurt Wagenseil 1904–1988" website cited above.

19 James Lees-Milne, *Harold Nicolson: A Biography*, vol. 2: *1930–1968* (London: Faber and Faber, 2012), pp. 284f.

Stern).[20] Established in 1951, the Order recognised those whose achievements served the rebuilding of the country and the peaceful rise of the Federal Republic of Germany. It is apt that the medal was awarded to Harold by Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, whom Nicolson had met as a diplomat in 1929, when Adenauer was Mayor of Cologne.

Vita

Vita learnt some German as a child, as we will see below, but she never had as fluent a command of the language – or love for it – as Harold. Her appreciation of German literature and culture also played a more limited role in her life than it did in Harold's, her primary interests being in English, French and Italian literature. Nevertheless, Vita's encounter with Germany in the late 1920s, during Harold's posting to Berlin, would prove important for literary trends on both sides of the national divide.

From early childhood on, Vita was a writer. Her first volume of poetry, *Poems of East and West,* was published in 1917, inspired by the time spent in Constantinopole during Harold's first diplomatic posting. This was rapidly followed by novels (*Heritage* (1919), *The Dragon in Shallow Waters* (1921), *Grey Wethers* (1923), *Seducers in Ecuador* (1924)), short stories (*The Heir* (1922), travel writing (*Passenger to Tehran,* 1926), and non-fiction (*Knole and the Sackvilles* (1922) as well as further volumes of poetry (*Orchard and Vineyard* (1921), *The Land* (1926)). By 1927, when Harold was posted to Berlin, Vita's success as an author was firmly established: in that year, she was awarded the Hawthorden prize for *The Land,* a cycle of poems documenting the fast-disappearing traditions of Kentish rural life and farming.

Vita's reaction, on discovering that Harold was to be posted to Berlin, was despair: she wrote to her lover, Virginia Woolf, "in a hurry and a furious temper" to tell her the news, exclaiming "Berlin for 3 years! Good Lord deliver us."[21] Vita felt like a fish out of water in diplomatic life and for most of the period remained in England, visiting Berlin only for short stretches ranging from a week to a couple of months. Whilst there, however, she made friends with other independent, sexually liberated female writers and artists, including the Modernist painter

20 Wikipedia, "WikiProjekt Bundesverdienstkreuz/1958" https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProjekt_Bundesverdienstkreuz/1958#3._Dezember_1958, accessed 20 June 2024.

21 Letter from Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf, 14 October 1927, in *The Letters of Vita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Louise A. DeSalvo and Mitchell A. Leaska (London: Cleis Press, 1985), p. 240.

Martel Schwichtenberg and the expressionist writer and gay rights campaigner Else Lasker-Schüler, later described as a "Lady Gaga of the early twentieth century".[22]

As a prize-winning English writer, this was an exciting time for Vita to be in Germany: there was keen interest in contemporary British literature, and many works were appearing in German translation, including Vita's own: *Seducers in Ecuador* was published in German in the leading literary magazine *Die Neue Rundschau* in 1929,[23] and translations of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and *To The Lighthouse* were published by Insel Verlag in 1928 and 1929. "You are the idol of the Berlin intelligentsia", Vita wrote to Virginia from Berlin in February 1928.[24]

Interest in contemporary literary works flowed in both directions, and found its most tangible expression in Vita's life in the form of her translation of Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies*. It was in early 1928, on her first extended stay in Berlin, that Vita discovered Rilke's poetry, which was much in vogue in Germany following the poet's death in 1926. Although her German was not as fluent as she would have wished – Vita told Virginia that reading Erich Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* in German was like an elephant trampling on her brain[25] – this did not prevent her from becoming enthralled by Rilke's intensely lyrical poetry. The translation work appears to have been something of an oasis for Vita, unhappy as she was in the role of diplomat's wife. During her first winter visit, Vita holed herself up in the warm Berlin flat, away from the freezing east winds: "I give standing orders to the servants that I am always out if anybody calls; and I make myself happy with Rilke, who is a damned fine poet".[26] On her summer visit in August 1928, Vita took the translation with her to Potsdam, where Harold had rented an apartment overlooking the Holy Lake [Heiliger See]. Vita would see her sons Ben and Nigel "dwindling in size" as their tutor rowed them out to the middle of the lake, watching as "two naked white bodies" splashed into the water

22 Rick Fulker, "Else Lasker-Schüler: 'Mein Herz'", *Deutsche Welle*, 6 October 2018, https://www.dw.com/de/else-lasker-sch%C3%BCler-mein-herz/a-45427549, accessed 20 June 2024.

23 For a detailed analysis of this translation and its wider cultural context, see Alison E. Martin, "Bloomsbury in Berlin: Vita Sackville-West's Seducers in Ecuador on the German Literary Marketplace", *Modernist Cultures*, 13.1 (2018), pp. 77–95.

24 Letter from Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf, 29 February 1928, in *The Letters*, ed. by DeSalvo and Leaska, p. 258.

25 Letter from Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf, 6 February 1929, in *The Letters*, ed. by DeSalvo and Leaska, p. 318.

26 Letter from Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf, 14 March, 1928, in *The Letters*, ed. by DeSalvo and Leaska, p. 263.

before returning to Rilke: "I live entirely in the company of angels and of obscure but tragic figures from the Italian Renaissance", she told Virginia.[27]

In the end, the translation was done in collaboration with three other people: Vita's short-lived lover, Margaret Goldsmith (of whom more below), her cousin Eddy Sackville-West, and an unnamed student[28] who was tutoring Vita and Harold's two sons during the Potsdam holiday in summer 1928, and who – as Vita told Virginia – "happens to love Rilke and has devoted the past two years to studying him".[29] Officially, only Eddy was named as co-translator, probably because he made the most substantial contribution to the finished product. A writer himself, Eddy had excellent German and extensive knowledge and appreciation of German literature and music. He and Vita each signed five of the Elegies, and the finished translation was produced in a special arts and crafts edition in Germany and distributed in England by the Hogarth Press. As Lesley Chamberlain argues:

> As a business venture it failed. But it transformed British awareness of Rilke, still today probably the most loved of German poets in English. In 1942, Vita wrote to Harold: "Darling, I listened to a talk on Rilke at the very odd hour of 9.20 this morning , and it said that Edward and Victoria Sackville-West had been the means of starting Rilke's vogue in England".[30]

Vita did not translate any further works from German; to the best of my knowledge, neither did she return to Germany nor develop any lasting interest in German literature herself. As a writer, however, her popularity in Germany during her lifetime was greater than in either France or Italy, countries with which she felt far more affinity.[31]

Having sketched in rough terms the connections between Harold and Vita and Germany, we now turn to the books in the Sissinghurst library, with the aim of giving a more colourful sense of some of the friendships and connections that have their traces there, and which also illuminate some of the rich traditions of exchange between Germany and Britain.

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27 Letter from Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf, 21 August, 1928, in *The Letters*, ed. by DeSalvo and Leaska, p. 277.

28 Probably John Sparrow, later to become Warden of All Souls, Oxford. See Lees-Milne, *Harold Nicolson*, pp. 345f.

29 Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf, 21 August 1928, in *The Letters*, ed. by DeSalvo and Leaska, p. 277.

30 Lesley Chamberlain, "Publication and Reception", in Kathryn Batchelor, Lesley Chamberlain and Alison E. Martin, "Harold in Germany, Vita in Love: Stories from Sissinghurst's Library", *UCL Discovery, 2022*, https://doi.org/10.14324/000.wp.10156167, accessed 1 July 2024.

31 Martin, "Bloomsbury in Berlin", p. 79.

4 Hermine Hall

For a long time, we didn't know how Vita had come to learn German: unlike Harold, who had undertaken multiple long trips to Germany before and after university, cramming the language for his examinations for the diplomatic service, Vita had travelled only to France and to Italy, and her biographies emphasised her acquisition of those two languages. At Sissinghurst, we found a German-language novel by W. Heimburg, *Doktor Dannz und seine Frau,* dating from 1905, with a handwritten inscription inside the front cover: "Zu Weihnachten, für meine liebe Vita, Hermine". The National Trust catalogue temporarily sent us on a wild goose chase with its suggestion that this might be an inscription from the author.[32] However, there was no trail in the secondary literature linking a young Vita to Berta Behrens (1850–1912), the author behind the W. Heimburg pseudonym, and on physical inspection the inscription was definitely signed "Hermine" not "Wilhelmine". Who had given this book to "dear Vita" for Christmas, when she was roughly thirteen years old? Scouring the biographies of Vita one more time, we found a passing reference to a governess, Hermine Hall.[33] Although the biography does not supply information about Hermine's nationality (and in fact refers to her as "Mademoiselle"), the dedication and the book leave us to suspect she was German. German governesses were much in vogue in this period, the trend having been set in motion by the royal family, with the appointment of Louise Lehzen (later Baroness Lehzen) as governess for Princess Victoria in 1824. By 1876, there were so many German governesses in England that a *Verein deutscher Lehrerinnen* was founded to support them.[34] *Doktor Dannz und seine Frau*, with its tender inscription, thus brought into focus a tradition of Anglo-German contact that was in place for the better part of a century but which has now largely been lost to view. On a more personal level, it gave us a glimpse of the young Vita's home life and education, for it was surely no accident that Hermine had chosen a novel by a woman as a gift for her young charge. By the age of thirteen, Vita was already a keen writer, and we know from her diaries that her parents were not always encouraging of this activity. It was at around this time that Vita noted: "mother scolded me this morning because she says I write too much,

32 Library Hub Discover, "Doktor Dannz und seine Fraue : Roman / von W. Heimburg", https://discover.libraryhub.jisc.ac.uk/search?q=doktor%20dannz&rn=2, accessed 18 March 2024.

33 Victoria Glendinning, *Vita: The Life of Vita Sackville-West* (London: Penguin), p. 15.

34 Anne Hill Fernie, "Thinkers or Junkers? Germans in England 1860-1920", *Ragged University*, https://raggeduniversity.co.uk/2018/09/15/germans-in-england-1860-1920/#SLIDES_46_47_GOVERNESSES_AS_SPIES , accessed 18 March 2024.

and Dada said he did not approve of my writing".[35] Against that backdrop, the governess whispers a note of encouragement: here is a book by a female author, and not just any female author at that – "W. Heimburg" was a prolific and hugely successful German writer whose popular novels had also met with great success abroad, in particular in America, where some of them had been published in multiple different translations.[36]

5 Annette Kolb

Another female writer whose books made their way into Vita and Harold's possession was the Franco-German Annette Kolb. Kolb was an acclaimed author who wrote for the most part in German, winning the prestigious Fontane prize for her first novel, *Das Exemplar*, in 1913. She would go on to write further novels as well as political essays and biographies, winning the Gerhart-Hauptmann-Preis in 1931 and the Goethe Prize in 1955, as well as the Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur in 1961. Kolb was politically active, a life-long peace-campaigner who played an important role in 1920s efforts to cement peace via cultural cooperation, notably as part of the Vienna-based *Verband für kulturelle Zusammenarbeit*. For her literary works, Kolb won the admiration of such prominent figures as Rainer Maria Rilke and Thomas Mann. The Sissinghurst library holds four of her books, three of which contain inscriptions from the author. These inscriptions bear witness to a friendship that grew for a while in intimacy and lasted several decades:

> For Vita Nicolson / love. Annette Kolb / January 1929" (inside *Daphne Herbst*, Berlin 1928)
>
> For Vita with love from Annette / Nov. 30 (inside *Kleine Fanfare*, Berlin 1930)
>
> For Harold and Vita Nicolson from Annette Kolb. I do remember and hope to see you again! (inside *Le roi Louis II de Bavière et Richard Wagner*, Paris 1947).

There is nothing in the various biographies, diaries and collections of letters by either Harold or Vita or Annette herself to tell us what it is that Annette remembered; as far as we were able to discover, there is nothing in the historical record to even suggest that the three of them were friends.

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35 Glendinning, *Vita*, p. 26.

36 See Lynne Tatlock, *German Writing, American Reading: Women and the Import of Fiction, 1866–1917* (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 2012).

Yet the Sissinghurst library holds tangible evidence of a friendship that lasted more than thirty years: as well as giving Harold and Vita copies of her own books, Kolb gave them five beautiful editions of German literary works in 1914: three by Goethe (*Torquato Tasso, Faust* and *West-östlicher Divan*), one by Schopenhauer (*Aphorismen zur Lebensweisheit*) and one by Heinrich Heine (*Buch der Lieder*). That these were gifts from Kolb is clear from the book labels that are pasted inside them. The labels themselves are personalised to the Nicolsons, with an armorial on the left-hand side and their initials, VN&HN, intertwined on the right.[37] On each one someone has written "From Annette Kolb, 1 Oct 1914". The writing is not Annette's, and there is nothing in any other historical sources that might explain these gifts. It is left to us to deduce what we can from the circumstances: 1 October 1914 was Harold and Vita's first wedding anniversary, an anniversary for which paper was and is still traditionally given, both in Germany (the Papierhochzeit) and England. It is thus plausible to assume that Annette gave these books to Harold and Vita to mark their first wedding anniversary, though pinpointing exactly when and how she got to know them prior to this date – not to mention how she got these German books to them in the early months of the First World War – has so far proved impossible.

Nevertheless, although the details of how these beautiful anniversary gifts came to be at Sissinghurst is lost to time, their presence there speaks of a world in which, for the upper classes, the main divisions ran not along national lines but along lines of class. Vita and Harold had far more in common with their aristocratic friends from elsewhere in Europe than they did with English people of the lower orders; they spoke their languages fluently, travelled to visit them, and received visits from them in return. They and their friends wrote books and gifted them to each other; they translated each other's works or opened up routes to publication, and reviewed each other's books in the press. If we were to draw a map of Harold and Vita's friendships and social networks, it would overlap with those of the Franco-German aristocrat Annette Kolb from several different directions. The list of their mutual friends is long and varied and resolutely European: it includes Mechtilde Lichnowsky (also a writer) and her husband Prince Karl Max Lichnowsky, German ambassador to London and a friend of Harold's father; Richard von Kühlmann, who had represented Prussia at the Bavarian royal court before 1914 and knew Harold via his work as a diplomat; Count Harry Kessler, another Franco-German, who worked with Kolb in Switzerland during and after the First World War on cultural cooperation and diplomacy projects, and whose

37 Two of the labels carry a third set of initials, BN: these are the initials of their son, Benedict Nicolson, born in August that same year.

innovations in printing and the arts would bring him together with Vita on the Rilke translation project; the author Thomas Mann, an admirer of Kolb and fellow Fischer Verlag author, and who would become a friend of Harold's in 1929; the sculptor Rodin, a close friend of Vita's mother; the list goes on. Sissinghurst is the sole holding library in the UK for books by many of these individuals. Annette herself was a regular visitor to England between 1899 and 1914, moving in the same elite circles as Vita's family. The first direct contact with Vita and Harold might have come at a dinner or house party of any of their mutual acquaintances, who included Dorothy Heneage and Lady Violet Savile.

6 Margaret Goldsmith

Most significant amongst the friendships that Vita made in Berlin was the one with the American-German Margaret Goldsmith. Margaret was a translator and literary agent who had previously worked at the American Embassy as assistant trade commissioner. Like Vita, Margaret was in Berlin with her husband: Frederick Voigt was a British journalist born to "wine-merchant German émigrés in Hampstead",[38] and was the Manchester Guardian's Berlin correspondent. Margaret and Vita began an affair.

The affair was both physical and intellectual, though ultimately one-sided: Margaret was an admirer of Vita's writing, and the affair inspired her to write two novels of her own, one of which makes frequent flattering references to the poetry of a certain 'Vita Sackville-West'. Vita, on the other hand, was quick to move on, and even in the midst of the affair with Margaret was still in love with Virginia and was also having an affair with Mary Campbell.[39] The novels that Margaret wrote in response to the love affair, *Belated Adventure* (1929) and *Patience geht vorüber: ein Roman* (1931), are both in the Sissinghurst library. The National Trust catalogue listed two copies of the first novel, and on an early visit to Sissinghurst we were able to view one of them. The other copy, the Sissinghurst team explained, was boxed up in a storage cupboard, the ceiling from Vita's Writing Room – where it was usually kept – having fallen in. It wasn't until much later that Eleanor Black, Sissinghurst House Manager and co-curator of the exhibition,

38 Philip Oltermann, "Nazis, fear and violence: when reporting from Berlin was dangerous," in *The Guardian*, 12 July 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/membership/2021/jul/12/guardian-200-nazis-hyperinflation-and-violence-when-reporting-from-berlin-was-a-dangerous-job , accessed 18 March 2024.

39 On the affair with Mary Campbell and its overlap with Margaret, see Glendinning, *Vita*, p. 191.

took me to the storage cupboard to try and track this copy down. We weren't expecting to find anything particularly exciting – the first copy had already yielded a dedication to Vita and an inscription from Margaret, making it an excellent object for the exhibition, and our feeling was simply that we wanted to be sure that we weren't missing anything. We picked our way around boxes and stretched over shelves to get to the place where the relevant shelf-marked books were packed away. When Eleanor finally retrieved the volume, it was much larger than we were expecting: this was not a published book, but the partly typed, partly hand-written original draft, much of it scrawled onto the reverse side of Manchester Guardian letterheaded paper. There were numerous crossings-out and rewritings, insertions of pages of different sizes, all numbered manually. That this manuscript ended up in Vita's possession, rather than Margaret's, is intriguing: was it a gift from Margaret to Vita, or did it end up with Vita accidentally? We know from Vita's biography that Margaret read parts of the novel to Vita in the flat in Berlin in March 1928,[40] and the presence of the manuscript at Sissinghurst suggests that Margaret probably worked on it further when she visited Vita at Long Barn later that same year. Whatever the details, the manuscript's presence at Sissinghurst points to Vita having had a hand in the editing, or at very least having given her views on this first draft. That Vita was familiar with the book's contents is clear, since she informed Virginia Woolf that Leonard was not to ask her to review it. "It's partly about me," she explained to Virginia, "and so I couldn't possibly do it".[41]

Vita's love for Margaret cooled swiftly after the first passionate coming together in Berlin: by the time Margaret visited Vita in England in May 1928, Vita was reporting to Harold that Margaret was getting on her nerves – a stark change from the declarations of love and longing that she was making whilst in Berlin back in March. The change in temperature found its way into the published version of *Belated Adventure* in the form of a poem by Stefan George, dedicated to Vita and reproduced in the original German. "For Vita Sackville-West," it reads, "*Du teuer uns, doch rätsel, das uns martert*".[42]

40 See Glendinning, *Vita*, p. 191.

41 Letter from Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf, 7 February 1929, in *The Letters*, ed. by DeSalvo and Leaska, p. 319.

42 Olga Marx and Ernst Morwitz translate this as "we cherish you and yet you are a riddle which tortures us". See Stefan George, *The Works of Stefan George, Second Edition*, trans. Olga Marx and Ernest Morwitz (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1974), p. 147. For the full epigraph, see Lesley Chamberlain, "Vita's German Garden," *Angermion*, 16 (2023), pp. 1–10 (p. 10).

7 Thomas Mann

One of the most prominent German authors whose books are in the Sissinghurst library is Thomas Mann. As noted above, Harold met Mann in 1929, whilst touring Germany giving lectures on contemporary English literature. Mann's reputation as a novelist was well established; he would be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature later that same year. This was a period of peace and relative optimism, a time when it seemed, so Harold recalled later, "as if the Weimar Republic, guided by Stresemann and assisted by a rich inflow of American loans, would after all be able to establish itself as a calm and not inefficient Social Democracy".[43]

The clouds were of course very soon to darken. Nicolson and Mann would not meet again in person until 1947, but throughout the 1930s and 40s, they followed each other's speeches and writings, citing each other to mutual reinforcement. The writerly nature of their friendship was summarised succinctly by Harold in 1955: "I can scarcely claim any personal acquaintance with [Mann] [...] But Thomas Mann the writer is, I can positively assert, one of my most intimate friends."[44] In the late 1930s, when Nicolson was serving as an MP in the British Parliament, and Mann was in exile in the United States, that intimate friendship was to find frequent public affirmation. Both Mann and Nicolson were outspoken opponents of appeasement, Mann drawing large audiences at his lectures in the United States, and Nicolson a key figure in a small but vocal minority in British parliament, with frequent appearances on British radio and in the press.

In the Sissinghurst library, there is a copy, in German, of Mann's 1938 essay, *Dieser Friede*. Written in mid-October 1938, and based on a speech given on 25 September to some 20,000 people in Madison Square Garden, New York, Mann expresses his conviction that the only way to save peace is to defeat Hitler: "Hitler must fall," Mann stated in Madison Square, "This and nothing else will preserve the peace".[45] Harold's speeches from the same months strike a similar note and are marked by the same bitter disappointment over Chamberlain's repeated capitulations to Hitler. In a speech given on 1 October 1938 in the wake of the 29 September Munich agreement, for example, Harold argued:

43 Harold Nicolson, *The Spectator*, 30 May 1947, cited in Joachim Lilla, "Mehr als 'that amazing family': Harold Nicolson und Thomas Mann", *Thomas Mann Jahrbuch*, 19 (2006): 23–49 (p. 36).
44 Harold Nicolson, "Geburtstagswünsche für Thomas Mann", cited in Joachim Lilla, "Mehr als 'that amazing family'", p. 49.
45 The New York Times, "20,000 in Garden Cheer for Czechs", in *The New York Times*, 26 September 1938, p. 4.

> We have betrayed a valiant little country and a great democratic idea. There are many people who feel that in so doing we have achieved peace for a generation. They are wholly mistaken. We have not achieved peace for a generation: we have achieved it for only eight months.[46]

During this tense period, Nicolson and Mann followed each other's interventions closely: "Rede Nicolsons sehr gut," Mann notes, for example, on 25 October 1938,[47] and Harold's copy of *Dieser Friede* is heavily marked up. In June 1939, Harold discussed Mann's Madison Square Garden speech in his own pamphlet, *Is War Inevitable?*, creating a public dialogue between the two men that appeared in both English and German. (Mann's *Dieser Friede* was published in 1938 in English by A. Knopf as *This Peace*, whilst Nicolson's *Is War Inevitable* appeared in German in 1939 as *Ist der Krieg Unvermeidlich?*, published, like *Dieser Friede*, by the exiled Bermann-Fischer Verlag in Stockholm.) Nicolson opens his pamphlet with Mann's diagnosis of Britain's failure: "Für die britische Regierung ist es zu spät, den Frieden zu retten; sie hat eine Gelegenheit dazu nach der anderen versäumt".[48] Taking into account all that has happened in Britain since Mann's speech, Nicolson argues that Mann would change his diagnosis were he writing in June 1939: he would see that the majority of people in Britain have realised that there is only one method for taming violence – namely by countering it with a more effective violence.[49]

Harold returned to *Dieser Friede* again in 1947, when he composed a long Marginal Comment piece for *The Spectator* reporting on a visit by Thomas Mann to London. Harold writes: "I have before me a pamphlet which [Mann] wrote at Princeton in October 1938, and which was published in the same year by the Fischer Verlag in Stockholm [...]. 'In opposing a thing like Hitler', he wrote in his pamphlet, 'a man is universally right'".[50] This sentence is underlined and starred in Harold's copy of *Dieser Friede* in Sissinghurst: "gegen etwas wie Hitler, behält man immer recht".

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46 The Manchester Guardian, "Mr Harold Nicolson and the Results of the Munich Conference. An Unnecessary Surrender", in *The Manchester Guardian*, 3 October 1938, p. 11.

47 Lilla, "Mehr als 'that amazing family'", p. 27

48 Harold Nicolson, *Ist der Krieg unvermeidlich?*, (Stockholm: Bermann-Fischer, 1939), p. 7. I cite the German version of this pamphlet as the English one is unobtainable.

49 Nicolson, *Ist der Krieg unvermeidlich?*, p. 12.

50 Lilla, "Mehr als 'that amazing family'", p. 37

8 Luise and Erich Mendelsohn

As taught in British secondary schools today, the late 1930s is cast as a battle between Chamberlain and Churchill. Chamberlain: the appeaser (was he wise, was he foolish, what should he have done?). Churchill: the one whom history would prove right. Two British men, deciding whether or not to declare war on Germany. What gets forgotten, in these simplified retellings, is that there were many German voices on the side of Churchill: appeasement versus war was not a debate that divided along national lines. Similarly, the people in Britain who were listening most anxiously to the radio broadcasts that reported on Chamberlain's visits to Hitler were often Germans who had already fled their own country. The letters of Luise and Erich Mendelsohn, other friends of Harold and Vita's from their Berlin days, evoke this reality most powerfully. Erich was a renowned architect – designer, amongst other things, of the Einsteinturm, the Mossehaus, the Universum Kino and a host of department stores in Berlin and other German cities. Luise was a cellist, who also played a crucial role in securing commissions for her husband, drawing on her extensive social network.

The personal connections between Harold and Vita and this dynamic couple find their own traces in the Sissinghurst library, in the form of books by Erich Mendelsohn, given to Harold and Vita. The earliest, *Amerika: Bilderbuch eines Architekten* (Berlin, 1928) is inscribed "To Mr. Nicolson – the first English friend of the new architecture", and a further three books follow. The final one, published in Berlin in 1932, is inscribed to Harold and Vita "as a sign of remembrance", though of what, exactly, we do not know. In the spring of 1933, Luise and Erich – a Jewish couple – fled to Britain. At the time of the tense events of early autumn 1938, Erich was in Jerusalem, and Luise in Britain. Writing to her husband on 3 October 1938 from a hotel in Wales, Luise describes the devastation that she and her close friend Hede Vasen – another Jewish German – felt on hearing about Chamberlain's deal with Hitler:

> [A]ls wir am Freitag früh die frohe Friedensnachricht bekamen waren wir selig – und warten gespannt auf Chamberlains Rückkehr, um seine Ankunftsadresse am Radio zu hören. Immer noch herrschte Glück u. Freude vor – bis der 2. Teil kam – das agreement mit Hitler. – Väs'chen und ich sahen uns wie vom Blitz getroffen an – und ich fühlte tatsächlich den Boden, auf dem ich stand, sinken. Nun war alle Freude aus. Wir verzogen uns aus dem Raum, in dem alle Gäste hier jubelten und liessen in unserem Zimmer unseren Herzen Luft. – Was werden nun die Folgen dieses letzten Versuches der kapitalistischen Welt sein?

> Es ist überall dasselbe – das dumme Volk wird irre geführt – ihre Friedenssehnsucht missbraucht.[51]

The image of these two German women feeling the ground shifting under their feet whilst their fellow hotel guests celebrate, is powerful: already victims of Nazi oppression, Luise and Hede knew that Hitler's promises were nothing but deceptions. In the same letter, Luise encloses Harold's speech of 1 October – presumably in the form of the article published in the Manchester Guardian on 3 October – and tells Erich that she will be listening to Harold's weekly speech that evening: "Er ist so mutig und famos. Ich freue mich darüber."[52]

9 War, Differently

When we began our project, we were keen to avoid making war our point of reference. We wanted to portray German-British friendships and mutual cultural appreciation in all their richness, and to bring late 1920s Berlin vividly to life, on its own, exhilarating terms, without seeing in it the foreshadowing of what was to come. But the more we learned about Harold's life, the harder this became. Here was a man who was actively present at so many of the events that are familiar to us, all those dates and turning points of our school history books:

- 4 August 1914, Britain declares war on Germany: it is Harold, then a junior secretary at the Foreign Office, who hand-delivers the declaration of war to the German Ambassador.
- 1919, the Treaty of Versailles: Harold is part of the British delegation to the peace negotiations, keeps a diary, and publishes it alongside his own analysis of the peace process to great acclaim in 1933 as *Peacemaking 1919*.
- 1933–39, the rise of Hitler: Harold, as we have seen, is an outspoken opponent of appeasement.
- 1939–45, the Second World War: with his excellent German, experience at the Embassy in Berlin, and his extensive knowledge of German politics and culture, Harold is a key figure in British politics during these years. He writes books and pamphlets explaining to British soldiers and the public why Britain is at war.

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51 Letter from Luise Mendelsohn to Erich Mendelsohn, 3 October 1938, *EMA – Erich Mendelsohn Archive/Correspondence of Erich and Luise Mendelsohn 1910–1953,* http://ema.smb.museum/en/letters/?id=2635, accessed 18 March 2024.

52 Letter from Luise Mendelsohn to Erich Mendelsohn, 3 October 1938.

Many of the books in the Sissinghurst holdings bear witness to Harold's involvement in these events: his collection of political books about Germany is considerable, and includes a 1935 German edition of his own book *Peacemaking 1919*, published in a school textbook edition by Velhagen & Klasing in Leipzig, as well as a collection of essays honouring the village of Lidice, on which he collaborated with Thomas Mann.[53] At the same time, however, our microhistorical, *histoire croisée* approach gave us a very different perspective to the one that is preferred by the school history books. At every turn, in these events that pitted Britain and Germany against each other, long-standing German-British friendships and appreciation were also present. The 4th of August 1914 serves as a case in point.

10 Prince Karl Max and Princess Mechtilde Lichnowsky

When Harold delivered the declaration of war to the German ambassador on the night of 4 August, the ambassador, Prince Karl Max Lichnowsky, replied with the words "Please remember to give my regards to your father".[54] As fellow diplomats, Prince Lichnowsky and Harold's father, Sir Arthur Nicolson, had frequently worked alongside each other, developing a decades-old friendship that was anchored in mutual respect, if not always agreement. When Harold himself saw Prince Lichnowsky again some thirteen years later, it was above all peace and friendship that the Prince wanted to remember:

> Ten years afterwards, when at the embassy in Berlin, I spent a Sunday with Prince Lichnowsky in his country house at Kuchelna. We drove together on a sleigh through the snow-clad forests. He talked of England, and of his London friends, and of all his happiness there, and of the Treaties of Peace.[55]

The Sissinghurst library holds a copy of the Prince's memoirs, *Auf dem Wege zum Abgrund: Londoner Berichte, Erinnerungen und sonstige Schriften* (1927), as well as *On the Leash* (1930), an English translation of his wife Princess Mechtilde Lichnowsky's own reminiscences of their London days. Mechtilde was an established author and art collector, another of Harold and Vita's acquaintances who

53 The Czechoslovak P.E.N., *Lidice: A Tribute by Members of the International P.E.N.* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1944).

54 Harold Nicolson, "Outbreak of 1st world war; Tonight, twenty-three years ago", *BBC National Programme* 1937-08-04, BBC archive T10542RC3.

55 Nicolson, "Outbreak of 1st world war".

moved in those very European literary circles that characterised aristocratic life in the early twentieth century, and in which women were extremely active. She was a friend of Rilke, and a collector of Picasso; after her husband's death, she married her first love, the British diplomat Sir Ralph Harding Peto, taking British citizenship in 1937.[56] A family visit to Germany in September 1939 would result in her spending the Second World War under house arrest in Germany, designated an internal enemy. Once again, we find friendships – and in this case also a marriage – that do not respect the national lines that our history books would have us always bear in mind.

11 Conclusions

At every turn, then, running alongside the familiar dates and tragedies of the first half of the twentieth century, weaving its way through them in a way that only negligence and silence can unpick, we find that strong seam of German-British friendship. In our exhibition, we tried to bring that seam into view, but this was at best just one small, local effort to change the way these most frequently narrated years of Anglo-German relations are depicted. What would it take, I find myself wondering, to unsettle those patterns of depiction in more radical ways? How might our school children be encouraged to carry out *histoire croisée* alongside – or even instead of – all that history that is taught using grand, nationalist narratives? What would a history syllabus look like that emphasised peace, rather than war?

These are not just academic or pedagogical questions.

All of us who lived through the Brexit referendum and the tumultuous politics that followed could not help noticing the frequency with which images of the Second World War were evoked. Boris Johnson and others in his camp never tired of invoking notions of *surrender* in the debates over the EU withdrawal bill; Remainers were labelled *traitors* and accused of *colluding with foreign powers*.[57] Johnson was accused, amongst others, of "inflam[ing] hatred and division"[58] in

56 Anna Jozefacka, "Princess Mechtilde Lichnowsky (born Countess Mechtilde Christine Marie von Arco-Zinneberg)", *The Modern Art Index Project* (April 2017), Leonard A. Lauder Research Center for Modern Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, https://doi.org/10.57011/EDDJ7759, accessed 18 March 2024.

57 Matthew Leggett, "Brexit and war rhetoric: an electoral strategy?", *Observatoire de la société britannique*, 25 (2020), pp. 49–64.

58 MP for Birmingham Yardley, Hansard 26/9/2019, cited in Matthew Leggett, "Brexit and war rhetoric", p. 16.

the aftermath of the murder of fellow MP Jo Cox, and defended himself by arguing that military metaphors had a time-honoured place in British politics.[59] He certainly never tired of drawing on them, and was happiest, it seemed, when comparing himself to Churchill.

The Brexit vote and the 2019 General Election showed that this appeal to Second World War narratives played on British nostalgia to great effect, at least among many in the older generations. But these narratives were themselves skewed and partial, amplifying the cohesiveness of the "imagined communities"[60] of 'British' on the one hand, and 'Germans' on the other. All forgotten were the allegiances that cut in different directions, and the contributions of Germans like Thomas Mann to speaking, in Harold's words, "on behalf of all humanity".[61]

59 Leggett, "Brexit and war rhetoric", p. 1.

60 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, Revised Edition* (London and New York: Verso, 2016).

61 Harold Nicolson, *Geburtstagswünsche für Thomas Mann*, cited in Lilla, "Mehr als 'that amazing family'", p. 49.