**A Woman in Berlin**

**Anonymous. *A Woman in Berlin: Eight Weeks in the Conquered City--A Diary*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2005.**

An anonymous 34 year old woman has composed a diary beginning in April 1945. It is at that time that the Russians invaded Berlin, which consisted of a large female population. For eight weeks, this woman kept a daily record of her experiences as well as those around her, and she talks about the mass rape suffered by nearly all women. Her diary shows the horror war brings to women, and she speaks to many women she meets and encourages them to talk about how they were victimized. (First published in 1954. Writer’s name revealed two years after death as Marta Hillers)

“Back in the attic apartment. I can`t really call it a home; I no longer have a home. Not that the furnished room I was bombed out of was really mine either. All the same, I`d filled it with six years of my life.” (Page 2)

“But since the night I helped dig out people who’d been buried in the rubble, I’ve been preoccupied, forced to cope with my fear of death. The symptoms are always the same. First the sweat beads up around my hairline, then I feel something boring into my spine, my throat gets scratchy, my mouth goes dry, my heart starts to skip.” (Page 10-11)

“Beauty hurts now. We’re so full of death.” (Page 14)

“What’s clear is that every threat to your life boosts your vitality. My own flame is stronger; I’m burning more fiercely than before the air raids. Each new day of life is a day of triumph. You’ve survived once again. You’re defiant.” (Page 15)

“There’s a split between my aloofness, the desire to keep my private life to myself, and the urge to be like everyone else, to belong to the nation, to abide and suffer history together.” (Page 18)

“Once our role was to play the ministering angel. Scraping up lint bandages. A cool hand on a man’s hot brow, at a healthy distance from the shooting. Now there’s no difference between a regular hospital and a field hospital. The front is everywhere.” (Page 29)

“The Nazi world – ruled by men, glorifying the strong man – is beginning to crumble, and with it the myth of “Man.” In earlier wars men could claim that the privilege of killing and being killed for the fatherland was theirs and theirs alone. Today we women, too, have a share. That has transformed us, emboldened us. Among the many defeats at the end of this war is the defeat of the male sex.” (Page 43)

“I use my right hand to defend myself. It’s no use. He’s simply torn off my garter, ripping it in two. When I struggle to come up, the second one throws himself on me as well, forcing me back on the ground with his fists and knees.” (Page 53)

“He looks at the pitiful group of people come to complain and laughs, laughs at my stammering. “Come on, I’m sure they didn’t really hurt you. Our men are all healthy.” He strolls back to the other officers. We hear them chuckling quietly. I turn to our gray assembly. “There’s no point.”” (Page 54)

“But for them any woman will do, when they’re grabbing in the dark.” (Page 59)

“What does it mean – rape? When I said the word for the first time aloud, Friday evening in the basement, it sent shivers down my spine. Now I can think it and write it with an untrembling hand, say it out loud to get used to hearing it said. It sounds like the absolute worst, the end of everything – but it is not.” (Page 63)

“Before leaving he fishes something out of his pants pocket, thumps it down on the nightstand without a word, pulls the chair aside, and slams the door shut behind him. A crumpled pack of Russian cigarettes, only a few left. My pay.” (Page 64)

“I’ve never been so removed from myself, so alienated. All my feelings seem dead, except for the drive to live. They shall not destroy me.” (Page 66)

“We’re amazed to see so many women soldiers, with field tunics, skirts, berets, and insignia. They’re regular infantry, no doubt about it. Most are very young – small, tough, their hair combed back smooth.” (Page 69)

“I am constantly repulsed by my own skin. I don’t want to touch myself, can barely look at my body. I can’t help but think about the little child I was, once upon a time... who made her parents so proud... So much love... and evening prayers – and all for the filth I am now.” (Page 75)

“We have no rights; we’re nothing but booty, dirt. We unload our rage on Adolf.” (Page 79)

“I couldn’t help thinking about how good I‘d had it, until now – the fact that love had always been a pleasure and never a pain. I had never been forced, nor had I ever had to force myself. Everything had been good the way it was. But what’s making me so miserable right now is not so much the excess itself, extreme though it is; it’s the fact that my body has been mistreated, taken against its will. And pain is how it responds to the abuse.” (Page 91)

“The Russians at the pump don’t spend much time sizing up us water carriers. They’ve already caught on that it’s mostly old, gnarled women who are sent to the pump. When I’m there I, too, wrinkle my forehead, pull down the corners of my mouth, and squint in order to look as ancient and wretched as I can.” (Page 108)

“Isn’t that the limit – now they’re demanding that their sexual spoils be tidy and well behaved and have a noble character to boot! Next thing they’ll be asking women to present a police affidavit testifying to their clean record before they’re allowed to bed down with the victors!” (Page 114)

“Anyway, the unbridled raping sprees of the first few days are over.” (Page 115)

“This is a new situation. By no means could it be said that the major is raping me. One cold word and he’d probably go his way and never come back. So I am placing myself at his service of my own accord. Am I doing it because I like him or out of a need for love? God forbid! For the moment I’ve had it up to here with men and their male desire; I can’t imagine ever longing for any of that again. Am I doing it for bacon, butter, sugar, candles, canned meat? To some extent I sure am.” (Page 115-116)

“...I am essentially living off my body, trading it for something to eat.” (Page 116)

“...Writing this makes me wonder why I’m being so moralistic and acting as if prostitution were so much beneath my dignity. After all, it’s an old, venerable line of work, practiced in the highest social circles.” (Page 116)

“But morality aside, could I actually slip into that profession and still be pleased with myself? No, never. It goes against my nature, it wounds my self-esteem, destroys my pride – and makes me physically miserable. So there’s no need to worry. I’ll be overjoyed to get out of this line of work, if that’s what I have to call my present activity, as soon as I can earn my bread in some more pleasant way better suited to my pride.” (Page 117)

“But our country is despondent, our people are in pain. We’ve been led by criminals and gamblers, and we’ve let them lead us, like sheep to the slaughter. And now people are miserable, smoldering with hate.” (Page 130)

“One thing is for sure: if this were peacetime and a girl had been raped by some vagrant, there’d be the whole peacetime hoopla of reporting the crime, taking the statement, questioning witnesses, arrest and confrontation, news reports and neighbourhood gossip – and the girl would have reacted differently, would have suffered a different kind of shock. But here we’re dealing with a collective experience, something foreseen and feared many times in advance that happened to women right and left, all somehow part of the bargain. And this mass rape is something we are overcoming collectively as well.” (Page 147)

“And this mass rape is something we are overcoming collectively as well. All the women help each other by speaking about it, airing their pain, and allowing others to air theirs and spit out what they’ve suffered.” (Page 147)

“Each one of us will have to act as if she in particular was spared. Otherwise no man is going to want to touch us anymore.” (Page 149)

“The heat is stifling. The smell of fire hangs over the tracks. All around is desolation, a wasteland, not a breath of life. This is the carcass of Berlin.” (Page 162)

“What’s clear is that I was there, that I breathed what was in the air, and it affected all of us, even if we didn’t want it to.” (Page 168)

“I feel that I belong to my people, that I want to share their fate, even now.” (Page 175)

“They say that millions of people – mostly Jews – were cremated in huge camps in the East and that their ashes were used for fertilizer. On top of that everything was supposedly carefully recorded in thick ledgers – a scrupulous accounting of death. We really are an orderly nation. Late in the evening they played Beethoven and that brought tears. I turned it off. Who can bear that at this moment?” (Page 223)

“The most bitter thing in the life of a single woman is that every time she enters some kind of family life, after a while she ends up causing trouble: she’s one too many, someone doesn’t like her because someone else does, and in the end they kick her out to preserve the precious peace.” (Page 228)

““Yes, ma’am” is for internal use only, a currency of no value except among ourselves. To the rest of the world we’re nothing but rubble women and trash.” (Page 248)