



## The End: Hamburg 1943

*Hans Erich Nossack , Erich Andres (Photographs) , Joel Agee (Translation)*

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**The End: Hamburg 1943** Hans Erich Nossack , Erich Andres (Photographs) , Joel Agee (Translation)  
*One didn't dare to inhale for fear of breathing it in. It was the sound of eighteen hundred airplanes approaching Hamburg from the south at an unimaginable height. We had already experienced two hundred or even more air raids, among them some very heavy ones, but this was something completely new. And yet there was an immediate recognition: this was what everyone had been waiting for, what had hung for months like a shadow over everything we did, making us weary. It was the end.*

Novelist Hans Erich Nossack was forty-two when the Allied bombardments of German cities began, and he watched the destruction of Hamburg—the city where he was born and where he would later die—from across its Elbe River. He heard the whistle of the bombs and the singing of shrapnel; he watched his neighbors flee; he wondered if his home—and his manuscripts—would survive the devastation. *The End* is his terse, remarkable memoir of the annihilation of the city, written only three months after the bombing. A searing firsthand account of one of the most notorious events of World War II, *The End* is also a meditation on war and hope, history and its devastation. And it is the rare book, as W. G. Sebald noted, that describes the Allied bombing campaign from the German perspective.

In the first English-language edition of *The End*, Nossack's text has been crisply translated by Joel Agee and is accompanied by the photographs of Erich Andres. Poetic, evocative, and yet highly descriptive, *The End* will prove to be, as Sebald claimed, one of the most important German books on the firebombing of that country.

"A small but critical book, something to read in those quiet moments when we wonder what will happen next."—Susan Salter Reynolds, *Los Angeles Times*

### The End: Hamburg 1943 Details

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## From Reader Review The End: Hamburg 1943 for online ebook

### angela says

A most moving book written so lyrically that a year later I still see the images Nossack paints via language. One may ask for more, but this truly is just a snapshot of an event and the aftermath. It isn't meant to be a complete historical account, but as a personal documentation of one immersed in a tragedy that is but a shard from the millions that never shall be inked. Grateful for the translation of this little book -- truly a work of prose poetry. ~

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### James says

Personal accounts like these are best when they are passionate, descriptive, and most of all, concise. "The End" accomplishes all of these goals while eloquently describing the horrific burning of Hamburg. Nossack effectively conveys his story while admitting to the shortcomings of his narrative caused by poor memory and how he is limited to only his personal experiences. Great worthwhile read that will only take you a day or two to finish.

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### Jeff Bursey says

A sombre retelling of the bombing of hamburg by someone who lived through it. Well-written with sharp visual imagery.

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### TK421 says

My heart is broken after reading this slim memoir about the firebombing of Hamburg in 1943. What makes me saddest is the realization that humanity has not learned anything from the atrocities of WWII. I pray that my children will never have to endure something like this. I wish I could pray that no child would have to experience this but I know that would be a fruitless prayer.

HIGHEST POSSIBLE RECOMMENDATION

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### Daniel Cheng says

I'm fully aware of the arrogance it takes for someone to argue that someone didn't have the "correct" perspective on the tragedy they experienced, but there is certainly something disturbing about the metaphysicality and transcendentalism in this text's recounting of the 1943 bombing of Hamburg. Nossack constantly describes the events as "eternal," an elimination of the past that makes everything appear as an act of "fate." But it is precisely this matter of fate, or rather Necessity, that constantly arises as a problematic in historicism. To deny an event its past is to make it appear as if it were fate, to destroy the linearity of the causal timeline so that events appear as expressions of Necessity. However, one of the key issues that has always existed in historicism is to take historical events as acts of Necessity and simply attempting to

retroactively construct the conditions that led to the Necessary.

But having a truly historical vision is to understand that past events were never mere steps along the teleological path to the present. Before the Event, there was always the possibility that it could *not* have happened. To call the horrific bombing of Hamburg a creation of fate or an expression of Necessity is to ignore the fact that before they happened, they could have *not* happened. We thus find in this memoir the same problem that we find in Elie Wiesel's writings on the Holocaust. To call the Event metaphysical, atemporal, and ahistorical is to say that it must have happened and thus, to deny the possibility that we could have avoided it. To continue down the path of memorialization we see in this text is to blacken out the revealing light of historicism, the light that shows us how that we always have the ability to defy the Necessary and realize a better future for humanity.

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### **Genjiro says**

This eye-witness account of the destruction of Hamburg, one of hundreds of cities in Germany targeted during the Second World War, is a profoundly horrifying and tragic tale of human savagery. Written with no trace of rancor or enmity, this straight-forward depiction and description of the carnage and devastation leaves no doubts as to the barbarity and blindness underlying the Allied bombings campaigns. Much like the historic baroque city of Dresden, Hamburg and its residence become helpless victims of war atrocities committed by the US and British air forces.

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### **Michael Jarvie says**

It was W.G. Sebald's *On the Natural History of Destruction* which alerted me to this book. It has a fine Foreword by the translator, Joel Agee, and incredible black-and-white photographs by Erich Andres. Nossack's account of the devastation of Hamburg has a shell-shocked quality to its prose. One recalls sporadic details such as the fat green flies, the starving cats attacking the morsels of food that they have been given or the mangled frame of a grand piano through which a rose has grown and bloomed. There is no anger here, no thirst for revenge. This is a benumbed landscape which can never be the same again. It is a very fine work.

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### **Margaret Sankey says**

Hans Erich Nossack, writer and coffee merchant, former student Communist, watched the bombing of Hamburg from a rural vacation cabin and returned to a city of rubble. His short reflection is a study of the mindset of catastrophe--why do survivors sweep the stoop in front of a collapsed building? "Just eight days previously, who would have thought that Misi and I would be standing on the street drinking from a bottle with a man we hardly knew? But actually the concept of 'street' no longer existed."

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### **Kris McCracken says**

An interesting little book that captures the feeling of returning to one's home (or lack thereof) in the immediate aftermath of destruction. The writing offers a very sparse examination of the effects of on the

remaining inhabitants and offers a number of seemingly incomplete vignettes of life.

As such, don't expect too much beyond a certain feeling or tone.

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## Mary Warnement says

This slim volume, which includes a foreword by Joel Agee (also translator) and photos by Erick Andres, packs a punch. Nossack is a writer who lived in Hamburg when it was destroyed by allied bombers in 1943. He happened to join his girlfriend at a cabin in the country--out of the ordinary for him--and thus missed the bombing. They heard the planes. I hadn't ever thought about the sound that 1800 planes make, "like an oppressive weight." (7) I hadn't realized it took more than one raid, that it happened over the course of 4 non-consecutive nights. A few months after the bombing, he wrote this account. He opens by saying he feels he's been given a mandate, that he must write about this. He repeats words like abyss, catastrophe, and calamity. Of course, he called the book "The End." He has moments of fancy, no doubt his writing style, but he's calm and objective. He criticizes neighbors who clapped when a plane was downed and says others were critical. He compares it to Odysseus chastising the old women who celebrated the suitors' deaths. "It is an unholy thing to vaunt over dead men" (11).

12 Nossack considers his own fate and Hamburg's entwined.

14 Describes a river of refugees

15 Says all of Hamburg is now "on vacation."

18 "incomprehensible belongings"

18-19 He describes help offered willingly but then begrudgingly. And theft justified--because all has been lost. He explores envy of victims.

19-25 Misunderstandings bet givers /receivers.

22-23 "We no longer have a past."

24 Misi learns their apt destroyed

25 The trivial takes precedence; obsession with a deck chair

26 "But a unique work of art or a faded photo or an old doll from one's childhood, what does all this have to do with numbers? These things have their life from us, because at some time we bestowed our affection on them; they absorbed our warmth and harbored it gratefully in order to enrich us with it again in meager hours."

29 Many refugees forced to move south

30 He and Misi didn't go to Hamburg till Saturday--the last raid would be Monday.

31 "The force that drives a murderer back to his crime." [What?]

31 The survivors' conversations resemble those recounted in Diary of a Woman in Berlin; a shared experience

32 They feel the war is over for them. Really thought it would be a matter of days for the whole thing to end

33 "impotence of the state"

34 He says there was no general feeling of hatred toward enemy or wish that it had happened to others. Why should others suffer. "All this mss be said once and for all; for it redounds to the glory of man that on the day of reckoning he experience his fate with such largeness of spirit. Even though it was just for a brief period; for in the meantime the picture has become confused again."

36 Why he's writing--though he said at the beginning he felt he had to: "why go on? I mean, why record all this?"

36-37 Considers future readers: "what if they read it only to enjoy something strange and uncanny and to make themselves feel more alive."

38 Like tourists

38-9 cemetery

41 "Everything that men have to say about this is a lie. It is not permissible to talk about it except in the

language of women" I don't really know what he means? Talk of domestic matters?  
43 The numbers and "the Reich"  
44 "worthless eagle chiseled"  
47 Where was his office. A magazine? They save a typewriter and hide others.  
50 They didn't look for friends. Too upsetting.  
51 cats  
53 The loss of everything, not heavy but incomprehensible  
54 He sounds modern as he writes, "The stupid notion that women want to be possessed."  
58 His journals lost [although translator says in foreword that he didn't lose manuscripts]  
59 Fate  
63 "The truly sad thing is the mind, because it thinks it has wings, but it keeps falling back to earth."

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### **Brittanie says**

This book has beautiful word choice and descriptions of one man's experience during and after the Hamburg bombing by the Allied forces in 1943. Originally written in German and kept from a widespread audience for years, this offers a rarely seen apolitical point of view from "the other side" of WWII - the Germans'. It also includes many photos taken around the destroyed Hamburg that only adds to the narrative. I would recommend this for anyone interested in WWII history.

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### **Diego González says**

Pequeña crónica de la desolación moral y psicológica que siguió a la destrucción sistemática de Hamburgo por parte de la Royal Air Force en 1943. Murieron cuarenta mil personas, pero eso no lo sabía el autor cuando vio como la ciudad ardía hasta los cimientos desde un pueblo cercano. Tras constatar la destrucción de su casa (y de toda la manzana, el barrio y la ciudad) el autor se convierte en refugiado, y en ese viaje se asoma al alma destruida de los que, como él, lo han perdido todo, pero también a la hipócrita sociedad que les dio de lado y renegó de ellos precisamente por haberlo perdido todo. El ser humano es el mismo en todas las épocas y todos los lugares.

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### **Colleen says**

Detailing Operation Gomorrah, the decimation of Hamburg by the Allies in 1943, this brief memoir is ... hard to stomach, beautifully written and an absolute testament to the horrors of war.

"Dresden, Hamburg, Hiroshima and Nagasaki" is what I texted [my friend who sent it to me] in regards to WW2 and the Allied annihilation of civilians.

I can't give this work more weight; it is heavy. So heavy.

"Even today [3-4 mos after the bombing] we are still unable to listen to music, we have to stand up and go away. When I say music I mean Bach's Air or something like that. There is something consoling in it, but it is precisely that consolation that makes us feel naked and helpless, at the mercy of a force that wants to destroy us."

## **bj combs says**

A fascinating book (63 pages)...The translation by Joel Agee is in itself quite remarkable. The German author shares his reflections on the firebombing and all but total destruction of Hamburg by RAF and US firebombing over the period of a week in 1943. He wrote the book three (3) months after this event. Much of the text deals with how people cope with total loss of everything in their lives,; their homes, possessions and often family members and friends. The book is a short book and delves a great deal into the feelings of the author and people he met coping with the devastation of their lives after this singular event. Much of the psychology and reflections might well mirror the thoughts of those who have lost their homes, possessions, family and friends after contemporary fires, floods, and hurricanes.

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## **Steve Scott says**

I didn't appreciate Nossack's surrealistic musings about what he saw and experienced. I found it tedious and at times incoherent.

Understand that this is a reflection of my tastes in literature. You might find it just zippy.

In any case, a starker, more grounded set of observations might have moved me more. At times Nossak does this, as when he describes the thirty-seven people who were trapped in a bomb shelter that was directly adjacent to a coal bin that had caught fire. They roasted.

But no...he turns inward and talks about himself and his experiences much more. He loses my sympathy very quickly.

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