Giblett, Rod. "Chicago: "Built in the Midst of a Great Level Swamp"." *Cities and Wetlands: The Return of the Repressed in Nature and Culture*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. 225–238. Environmental Cultures. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781474269858.ch-014>>.

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Chicago: “Built in the Midst of a Great Level Swamp”

Chicago is an iconic city of modernity because it combines many archetypal aspects of modernity, such as the place of birth of both the skyscraper and the American garden suburb. Chicago is not only a swamp city and marsh metropolis but also an industrial city whose activities and location spawned an extensive literature from among its local observers, principally Upton Sinclair in *The Jungle*, and from European writers, such as Bertolt Brecht who never visited the city but created an imaginary Chicago of the mind on the shores of Lake Michigan. Chicago is also the birthplace of the American garden suburb fathered by Frederick Law Olmsted following in the grandfatherly footsteps of Ebenezer Howard’s garden city.

The founding site of Chicago for Robert Herrick in his 1898 novel *The Gospel of Freedom* “had none of the natural advantages found in great cities elsewhere around the world: built in the midst of a great level swamp, it had no fertile valleys, no great harbors, no broad rivers” (cited by Cronon, 1991: 14–15). The great level swamp was, in fact, a decided disadvantage. Yet many of the great cities built elsewhere around the world were built in the middle of a marsh or beside a swamp. Indeed, Berlin, for instance, was also built in the middle of a great level swamp. Chicago is the American Berlin.

Chicago did, however, have the national and geographical advantage of being “on the boundary between East and West,” as Cronon (1991: xviii) puts it, of the continental United States of America. For Cronon this is largely a political and cultural boundary, whereas for Pacyga (2009: 8) the area was botanically transitional as “to the east lay vast woodlands and to the west

almost endless grasslands.” The boundary between east and west is not only political but also botanical. The boundary was also aquaterrestrial as it lay between the two botanical provinces and was marked in the Chicago area, as Pacyga puts it, by “a swamp on the shore of an enormous lake where a small, sluggish, foul-smelling river wound its way across the flat prairie and through the small forests.” More precisely, as Pacyga goes on to relate, Chicago “rose haphazardly on the mud flat near the intersection of the river and the lake” (20). For Pacyga it seems that there was not even a confluence of the river and the lake where the former flowed into the latter. For him they seem to merely intersect. Not surprisingly, given the location, mud as Pacyga saw it was “a perennial problem” and inevitably “sanitation presented a problem” as it did for many cities set in swamps (21).

Chicago was thus located and founded on “a boundary between open and flowing waters,” as Cronon (1991: 23) puts it, between Lake Michigan and the Chicago River. It was also located on a boundary between the still and closed waters of the lakeside and riverine wetlands, as well as the open waters of the lake, and the flowing waters of the river, which was described by a visitor in 1848 as “a sluggish, slimy stream” (cited by Cronon, 1991: 33). Pacyga perpetuates the sluggishness of the stream, though dropping the pejorative slimy. Platt (2005: 92) repeats “a sluggish, slimy stream,” but also goes on to quote the same visitor further that the city is situated “upon a level piece of ground, half dry and half wet, resembling a salt marsh.” In other words, the city was situated in a wetland. The same visitor also described the site as “a hopeless swamp” (cited by Platt, 2005: 93). He may as well have called it “a dismal swamp” or “a slough of despond” in keeping with what I have called nineteenth-century standard “swamp-speak” (see Giblett, 1996).

The city was founded in 1830. In contrast with the ideal “city upon a hill” like the heavenly Jerusalem and to which Boston attained, Chicago was what Platt (2005: 95) calls “a city upon a marsh” like a hellish necropolis. By 1840 the booster Joseph Balestier could relate how “the miserable waste of sand and fens which lay unconscious of its glory on the shore of the Lake was suddenly elevated into a mighty city” (cited by Cronon, 1991: 32). On the one hand, the unconscious of the slime was sublimated into the city of the sublime; on the other, the slimy wetlands of river and fens were desublimated into the solid city. Like a number of other cities set on the shores of the Great Lakes, such as

Toronto, Chicago was not only erected “out of swampy air” as Cronon puts it, but also erected on and out of swampy land and water (34; see also 47). The city sublime sublimated slimy wetland into the gaseous heights of abstraction and intellection and desublimated slimy air into solid matter. Chicago for Pacyga (2009: 4) was the first city of the skyscraper, for Flint (2006: 28) “the home of the skyscraper,” and by the 1890s for de Landa (2000: 92) “the world capital of the skyscraper,” “an original urban form unique to the United States,” but later exported around the world. The skyscraper began as masonry structures before morphing into steel-framed and later reinforced-concrete structures. Not surprisingly, “the highest masonry structure ever built,” the sixteen-story Monadnock Building (1889–92) was, as Smith (2012: 193) says, “so heavy that it began to sink into Chicago’s boggy ground.” The sublime skyscraper was being consumed by, and returning to, the slimy swamp in which it was built; the sublimated and desublimated was being resublimated and slimed.

The boundary between east and west in the continental United States is obviously an arbitrary point. More precisely, when it was founded Chicago was the frontier between metropolis and wilderness, city and country. Rather than the city being where the frontier ended as in Frederick Jackson Turner’s famous “frontier thesis,” it was where the frontier began according to Cronon (1991: 32). Either way, both revolved around Chicago as “the city that had arisen out of the swamp” as Cronon puts it (47). The frontier city of Chicago, like the baroque cities of St. Petersburg and Washington, was founded in a swamp. The modern city is a swamp city. Frontier and wilderness for Cronon “turn out to be two sides of the same coin” and “city and country are inextricably connected” (51) around what Raymond Williams called livelihood. Frontier and wilderness are two sides of the same coin not least in the modern colonial city often founded in a swamp. City and country are connected in their bioregion and should be interconnected in bio- and psycho-symbiotic livelihoods in bioregional home habitats of the living earth.

In the case of Chicago, its bioregion is what Cronon (1991: 57) calls “poorly drained . . . marshland and wet prairie threaded by meandering rivers.” This was hardly an auspicious location for a city as “the location was [not only] poorly drained . . . [but also] disease ridden,” as Pacyga (2009: 42–43) puts it. Whether a location *per se* can be disease ridden is a moot point. A marshland may house water-borne pathogens or air-borne vectors of pathogens. More to the point,

as Pacyga goes on to indicate on the same page, “the young city, situated on a marshy flood plain suffering from poor drainage” meant that water-borne diseases, such as cholera, struck Chicago. A cholera epidemic swept through Chicago in 1854 killing 1549 people “to say nothing of those lost to concurrent plagues of smallpox, scarlet fever typhus and typhoid,” as Platt (2005: 80) goes on to relate, “making the town the unhealthiest place in the United States.”

Chicago not only “suffered” passively from poor drainage because of its location but also actively created poor drainage itself as it did not improve drainage until it was forced to do so by what Pacyga (2009: 44–45) calls “the awful mix of human and industrial waste” in “the fouled” and “the stinking” river. The marshy floodplain on which the city was founded was not only “poorly drained,” but so also was the city itself with the result that “the Chicago River became the city’s giant sewer,” as Pacyga (2009: 46) goes on to relate and ultimately the “River of Death” (Platt, 2005: 144), the Styx, the river of the underworld, and a slimy marsh for Dante ([1314] 2006: 63; see also Giblett, 1996: 27–29) in *The Inferno* (VII, 103–130). For Upton Sinclair ([1906] 2003: 28) in his novel *The Jungle* the cattle streaming into the slaughterhouses of Chicago were also “a very river of death.” From the chimneys of these slaughterhouses “the river of smoke [was] streaming away to the end of the world” (25). Chicago was an apocalyptic cityscape and timescape, and not just a landscape, of the end of life and the end of the world.

Apocalyptic Chicago was made from the mixing of the four elements of earth, water, fire, and air. Fire and air were mixed in smoke, and earth and water were mixed in mud. The elements were not in their own proper place but mixed improperly with another element. Chicago’s streets in the 1840s for Cronon (1991: 57) were “turned into morasses during wet seasons of the year” whereas “at other seasons they were little less than quagmires.” Similarly Chicago’s streets for Platt (2005: 98) in similar vein were “a foul-smelling quagmire of mud, urine, manure and trash.” During “the reign of mud” in “the mud season” wagons were “mired,” horses struggled knee-deep in mud, visitors from the country avoided coming to Chicago, and residents paved “the morass” with planks “beneath which lay an untold depth of black mud” (Cronon, 1991: 57–58; Platt, 2005: 101; see also Pacyga, 2009: 22–23). The swamp on which the city was founded resurfaced onto city streets, a phenomenon we have seen previously in Paris. Chicago was known as the “Paris of

the Midwest" (Pacyga, 2009: 1), but presumably not for these reasons. Beneath the pavement and planks was the black mud, to rephrase the Situationists in relation to Chicago. Beneath the surfaces of the city, the depths of the swamp lived on (for a time, and still live on in metaphor as we will see later). Chicago also wanted to be known as the "Venice of the West" "because of the canal-like branches of the river that ran through it" (Platt, 2005: 104, 107, and 117). Chicago was like Venice as it was founded in a swamp, which made it possible to canalize the swamp successfully.

Moreover, as with Paris, the city streets of Chicago became open sewers. A visitor in 1848 described how "under these planks, the water was standing on the surface over three-fourths of the city, and as the sewers from the houses were emptied under them, a frightful odour was emitted in summer, causing fevers and other diseases" (cited by Cronon, 1991: 58). This visitor, in keeping with the times, subscribed to the miasmatic theory of disease in which, as Platt (2005: 110) simply and baldly puts it, "if it smelled rotten, it was bad for your health." Rotten smells equal disease. Chicago's solution to the problem of its "bad drainage" was to "raise the city" as Cronon (1991: 58) puts it, or more precisely, raise the city higher as the city had already been raised out of the swamp. It was a matter of raising the city higher both out of its own "man"-made or artificial swamp and out of the "natural" swamp in which it had already been raised. In slightly different terms, it was a matter of raising the feral quaking zone of disease-ridden sewers, raised out of the native quaking zone of a slimy swamp, into a clean, shiny, and sublime city. The effect, as Cronon puts it, was "to lift the city a dozen or more feet out of the mud" (58). This was a truly Herculean labor to cleanse the Chicagoan streets of rottenness and to kill the monstrous morass. This was just like heroic Hercules who cleansed the Augean Stables of manure and killed the anally sadistic and monstrous Stympalian swamp birds for defecating on fields.

Sinclair's Chicago

Chicago for Platt (2005: 15), using a term of Asa Briggs's, is "a shock city" that provokes "horror and fascination," precisely the terms in which I following Freud define the uncanny. A shock city is also an uncanny city. Chicago is an

uncanny city, like London and St. Petersburg, as they all have a dark underside that enacts a return of and to the repressed. Upton Sinclair ([1906] 2003: 23, 28) in his classic novel of Chicago, *The Jungle*, repeatedly uses “uncanny” both as an adjective and as a noun. This seems an appropriate term, as the uncanny for Freud primarily addressed the sense of smell (as we have seen in Chapter 9) and the city of Chicago in the nineteenth century assailed this sense (as we have seen) as *The Jungle* notes (as we will see shortly).

The garden city and suburb built in a swamp returned to the swamp as a rich source of metaphor to figure its dark underside, its industrial slums. As with a number of other “swamp cities,” Chicago was not only founded in a swamp, but writers about the city also figured the dark underside of the city in pejorative and cognate terms, most famously in the trope of the jungle as in Upton Sinclair’s ([1906] 2003) socialist realist novel of that title. More precisely and pointedly, “the sewers” under the city and over which the inhabitants live are figured as “the cess-pools and fens of the jungle” (152). Pacyga (2009: 2 and 4) calls Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* an “epic novel” and says that it is about “the city’s slaughterhouses” and their surrounding districts, in which the hero, or antihero in this case, makes an obligatory descent into the underworld, but from which he does not emerge triumphant, unlike his heroic epic counterpart, even in the novel, such as Hugo’s *Les Misérables*. *The Jungle* depicts what Pacyga goes on to call “the horrors of American industrial capitalism and a Social Darwinian reality on muddy streets” that “Sinclair exaggerated to make his point.” Pacyga does not provide any evidence drawn from nonexaggerated sources against which to assess Sinclair’s exaggerations. Pacyga even concurs with Sinclair at one point. The commonplace that Pacyga (2009: 22) and others repeat that Chicago’s streets in the spring were turned into bogs and the mud would be so deep that the wagons would sink up to hubs is to be found in *The Jungle* (Sinclair, [1906] 2003: 93).

The Jungle, according to Earl Lee in his “Foreword” to the “uncensored version,” uses “the plot of John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* as its model” (Sinclair, [1906] 2003: 1). In keeping with its model, *The Jungle* is complete with a slough of despond—that is, of the slums and streets of Chicago into which the pilgrim is sucked while on his pilgrimage. Yet unlike Bunyan’s Pilgrim, Sinclair’s pilgrim never makes it from the city of destruction to the celestial city. Also by contrast, Bunyan’s slough of despond is a native quaking zone

used to figure sin and despondency whereas Sinclair's Chicago is a feral quaking zone of urban and industrial destruction. *The Jungle* describes "great hollows full of stinking green water" in the "roadway," "the mud of the streets," "the swarms of flies [. . .] blackening the air, and the strange, fetid odor which assailed one's nostrils, a ghastly odor, of all the dead things of the universe." This odor was described previously as "a strange, pungent odor . . . Some might have called it sickening . . . You could literally taste it, as well as smell it . . . It was an elemental odor, raw and crude; it was rich, almost rancid, sensual and strong" (20). Later the odor is described as "a sickening stench" (32) that was "almost overpowering" (36). Still later "the stench was [strong] enough to knock a man down" (93). Finally "the fetid, sickening stench smelt like craters of hell" (255). The sense of smell and the "sickening stench" rendered the city uncanny, both horrifying and fascinating at the same time, in the same place. Like the soldiers traveling to the western front in World War I, the pilgrims traveling to Chicago could smell the city before they saw it (20). The sense of smell can convey sensations across a longer distance than the sense of sight. The swarming flies (93) and the swarming people (160) in Sinclair's *The Jungle* are an abomination in terms of the Levitical interdiction (as we saw in Chapter 3). Swarming flies belong to the mixing of the elements in the Chicagoan slaughterhouses and slums.

The urban odor in *The Jungle* is constituted as "it," as a thing with a life of its own. The "Thing" for Kristeva (1989: 13) is "the real that does not lend itself to signification, the center of attraction and repulsion, the seat of sexuality from which the object of desire will become separated . . . The Thing is an imagined sun, bright and black at the same time." The Thing is monstrous; it is what she called "signifiant"—that which defies and resists signification. "Signifiance" is her term for embodied, nonsensical, and playful processes of cultural production (see Kristeva, 1984: 17). It does not make sense; it does not make meanings. As *The Jungle* puts it, "it was a thing as tremendous as the universe" (Sinclair, [1906] 2003: 35).

The sun of Chicago in *The Jungle* was not only signifiant but also what Nerval (cited by Kristeva, 1989: 140) called "the black sun of melancholia" as "the river of smoke" rising from the chimneys of the slaughterhouses was "black and brown and grey and purple in the sunset light. All the sordid suggestions of the place were gone—in the twilight it was a vision of power . . .

While the darkness swallowed it up it seemed a land of wonder, with its tale of human energy, of things being done” (Sinclair, [1906] 2003: 25).

The “it” or “thing” of the sickening stench of the city of destruction is consumed by the orally sadistic and monstrous darkness and sublimated into the celestial city in the pilgrim’s imaginary, whereas in reality “a black shadow hung” over Jurgis, the central character, as he struggled in the slough of despond of Chicago where “it was rotten, rotten as hell—everything was rotten” and where he was “working in the steaming pit of hell” that “smelt like craters of hell” (Sinclair, [1906] 2003: 30, 49, 128, and 255). The elements of air, water, and fire were mixed in this hell. The “black volcanoes of smoke” and “the river of smoke” blackened the sun over the city and “the streets were sewers of inky blackness” (160). Darkness was upon the face of the earth, the water, and the sky. In this regard, Chicago was the wetlandscape of primordial chaos of Genesis 1:2 created in the beginning by godlike city fathers, whereas the city sanitarians were the god of Genesis 1:4–7 who divided the land from the water, night from day.

Chicago’s sickening stench was hardly surprising as the land on which the city was built was what Chicagoans called “made” land (Sinclair’s scare quotation marks), “made,” as the narrator of *The Jungle* goes on to relate, by “using it as a dumping ground for the city garbage,” what came to be euphemistically called “sanitary landfill,” which was invariably unsanitary wetland filling. This “‘made’ ground was in the process of making” (Sinclair, [1906] 2003: 24). Sinclair seems to have been unaware of the swampy beginnings of the city, only of its swampy aftermath. “Gaining ground,” as Seasholes put it in relation to Boston by building a city in a swamp and by draining the swamp, was followed by “making land” by filling the land with garbage with the result that “the great sore of a city . . . spread itself over the surface of the prairie” (23).

The ultimate slough of despond into which Sinclair’s ([1906] 2003: 152) pilgrim descends is the city jail where he encounters “the drainage of the great festering ulcer of society” in which “all life had turned to rottenness and stench” and where “humanity was festering and stewing and wallowing in its own corruption” and “in this wild beast tangle.” The prisoners embody the worst features of the city that *The Jungle* had enumerated previously. They are the drained pus of the great sore of the city, and they smell like the city for they are the embodiment of the city. Sinclair’s pilgrim descends into the underworld of

the belly of the beast of the orally sadistic and monstrous city itself. Although Sinclair's pilgrim is discharged from jail, unlike the epic hero who kills the monster and emerges triumphant and Bunyan's pilgrim who escapes the slough of despond and travels on to the celestial city, he never escapes the city of destruction despite his conversion to the gospel of socialism.

Brecht's Chicago

Brecht never visited Chicago but created the "gigantic city Chicago" out of his imagination from reading Sinclair's *The Jungle* and gangster novels of the 1920s set in what his friend Walter Benjamin (2014: 142) called "the infamous and storied underworld of Chicago." Brecht (1966: 9; 1991: x) also created his imaginary city from reading Rimbaud's *A Season in Hell* and Schiller's *The Robber*. Two of Brecht's plays, *Jungle of Cities* and *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, are obviously indebted to Sinclair's *The Jungle* and include many of the same concerns and tropes as *The Jungle*. In the former play one character refers to "that stench" (Brecht, 1966: 15) and in the latter another character describes "the familiar contaminated air" (Brecht, 1991: 11). The "meat king" describes how he "produced the biggest stink in the world" (85). Later in *Jungle of Cities* another character describes how "they've drained a river from below here, and at night the place is swarming with the ghosts of all the rats that drowned" (Brecht, 1966: 30). This pronouncement indicates that Brecht not only had some knowledge of the history of Chicago but also had a fascination with its dark and slimy physical and metaphysical underside.

Yet another character in *Jungle of Cities* sums up the general feeling when she comes to the conclusion, "what a terrible city this is!" (Brecht, 1966: 39). The gigantic city is also an orally sadistic monster when one character warns another, "Don't let that great maw devour you" (54). The poor residents of Chicago live in "this state of abject misery" (76). The jungle city of Chicago is a place not only of stench, but also of noise, of "the everlasting roar of Chicago" (81) and of "the black addiction of this planet" (81) of hating others. "Hell is other people," as Sartre (1989: 145) said, and as Brecht seemed to be saying a long time before him. Brecht wrote most of this play when he was living in Augsburg and took long walks by the "black water" (10) of its moat. The two

places of blackness seem to have coalesced in his imagination into the black water of the swamp on which Chicago was built and into the black addiction of hatred he saw manifested in novels set there. The white noise of the everlasting roar of modern cities replaces the black noise of the eternal murmuring of premodern swamps. The white light of cities overcomes the blackness of black waters and the darkness of the heart of darkness. Chicago was known as “the magical White City” (Hall, 2014: 203). The white magical city is founded in black magical marshes. The feral quaking zone of the modern city replaces the native quaking zone of the premodern swamp. One character in *Jungle of Cities* accuses another of having “lost the ground from under your feet” (Brecht, 1966: 87) just as Chicago lost the swamp from under its feet.

Saint Joan of the Stockyards follows suit in similar vein. One of the workers in one of “the big [meat-] packing plants” describes how “this plant has been a hell to us and only / The cold terrors of Chicago / Have kept us here” (Brecht, 1991: 5). Saint Joan is a modern Dantean Marxist epic hero and secular Joan of Arc who undertakes a “descent into the depths” of “the misery of the stockyards.” Chicago for Brecht is not only the city of stockyards and slaughterhouse but also the city as stockyard and slaughterhouse in which the slaughterhouse is a trope for the city, and indeed the world. For Joan “in our cities the turmoil never ceases” and “such a world” resembles a slaughterhouse (7). Joan descends into “the lowest depths” (12) of this modern urban hell. Her Christian colleagues warn her against “striving downward” and that if she does so she will “vanish in the muck” (13) not only of the physical city but also of the metaphysical city. For Joan, she is descending into “the thickets of baseness” (23) and into “the dark and hidden places” (37) of the city, into the stockyards, whereas for the broker “the people of the stockyards” are “the scum of the earth” (23) and “cities like this . . . are burning underneath” (44). For the “meat king,” “in these burning / Cities . . . the headlong streams of people / [are] Bellowing [like cattle in a slaughterhouse] as they tumble down to hell” (44). Joan goes missing in the belly of this beast, and the broker states that “it’s as though / Black, bellowing Chicago had swallowed her up” (58). Chicago is an orally sadistic, monstrous, and terrified beast. Joan is indeed “in the swamp / Of the stockyards, going down / Lower and lower, hoping to transfigure the muck” but ending up being “engulfed by the swamp” (83). The native swamp on which Chicago was built is transformed into the feral

swamp of its dark underside. The repressed history and geography of the city set and founded in a swamp returns in tropes for the city.

One of the meat-packers accuses “the meat king” of being “the monster” “making merchandise / Of nature itself, selling the air we breathe” (Brecht, 1991: 15). The capitalist commodifies nature. Chicago is not merely “nature’s metropolis” as Cronon suggests but also commodified nature’s metropolis. The meat-packer goes on to state of the meat king that “so consuming is his greed” that “his unnatural passion” has become “second nature” to him (15). The commodification of nature in and by the city of Chicago applied not only to its foundation and industry, but also to its later suburbs, such as South Park, and their town planning and architectural landscaping.

Olmsted’s Chicago

Platt (2005: 41) describes “the twin birth of the industrial slum and the garden suburb” in Manchester, but it applies equally to Chicago with Frederick Law Olmsted (as we will see later and as Platt neglects to mention). One is not possible without the other; the industrial slum is the repressed of the garden suburb; and the swamp is the repressed of both. Platt relates how

the speculators who chose the swampy ground at the southern end of Lake Michigan as the up-and-coming place perfectly expressed this bold optimism [of erecting a profitable city on a landscape of natural abundance] in the official seal of their local government: “*Urbs in Horto*,” the Garden City. To make their dream real, Chicagoans would have to find a way to lift their budding metropolis out of the mud. (77)

The garden city and suburb had to be lifted out of the swamp. Chicago was “the garden city” built in what Platt calls the “mudhole in the prairie” (78).

Chicago for Flint (2006: 28) was “a model for American city-building a century ago” as it was “home to the skyscraper and the central business district and, at the same time, to some of the country’s first pastoral suburbs,” such as South Park. Flint does not point out that all of these icons of modernity in Chicago were built in swamps. Chicago was an American model for building a modern city in a swamp; South Park in Chicago was an American

model for building a pastoral suburb in a swamp. Olmsted (1997: 50, 292; also cited by Rybczynski, 2003: 328) described South Park as “a flat alluvial site” part of what he also called “the low, flat, miry and forlorn character of the greater part of the country immediately about Chicago.” No wonder that Beveridge and Rocheleau (1998: 72) conclude that Olmsted found “the soggy, windblown prairie section of the site [of South Park] unappealing and later referred to the marshy area behind the lakeshore dunes as ‘a swamp without beauty.’” A swamp may have beauty, but not this one so it had to be beautified, or perhaps more precisely pastoralized.

As “the land beside the lake was low-lying and marshy,” as Rybczynski (2003: 300) puts it, “the unifying motif of South Park was water. Olmsted (1997: 166) and his partner Vaux proposed dredging the swampy land next to Lake Michigan to create an intricate system of lagoons and waterways for boating and swimming.” In accordance with the dictates of landscape architecture, swampy land could not be left as it was; it had to be dredged or drained and made into something else, a park (as in Central Park in New York), or lagoons (as in Boston and Chicago), or a garden suburb (such as South Park in Chicago so that it might then become the Venice of the West).

Olmsted was following in the footsteps of Ebenezer Howard who is for Hall (2014: 91) “the single most important character in this entire tale” of the intellectual history of urban planning and design since 1880. In Howard’s garden city there was no room for swamps and other wetlands, just as there had not been for Olmsted in his design for Central Park, New York, though there had been for his design of the Back Bay Fens in Boston. For his garden city Howard envisaged a flat, dry site, a *tabula rasa*, on which to inscribe his bucolic vision of a pastoro-technical utopia, and he did not envisage the flat or hilly swampy sites on which most cities took place. Howard (1902: 2) saw the garden city as combining the best of the country and the city in what he called “a healthy, natural and economic combination of town and country life,” though the country for him was construed in narrow terms as “the bosom of our kindly mother earth” (unp.). There was no room in Howard’s country for the womb of our great mother earth of wetlands, who sometimes kindly creates and sometimes unkindly destroys.

Howard’s mother earth fed a land flowing with white milk and golden honey and was not a wetland stagnating with fertile and fecund black

water. Although Howard (1902: 4) acknowledged on his diagram of the “Ward and Centre Garden-City” that the “plan must depend upon the site selected,” the concentric circles of the street layouts embrace “allotments” and “dairy farms” and are ringed by “larger farms.” The site selected would not be a wetland. The garden city combines the city with the agricultural country and not with the wild country of marsh and swamp. What Howard called “the general plan of concentric rings” (5) does not mention wetlands, nor any other natural feature for that matter. The garden city would enable the city-dweller to experience what Howard calls “the fresh delights of the country—field, hedgerow, and woodland—not trim parks and gardens merely” (95), nor presumably fen, marsh, and swamp and their fresh and decaying delights. The garden city and the country swamp are antithetical to each other.