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Berlin: “A Dingy City in a Marsh”

Like many other cities, Berlin has a marshy beginning. Berlin, according to Otto Friedrich (1972: 5), was “born in the thirteenth century in the mud and swamps at the junction of the Spree and Havel rivers.” Berlin was born in nature’s womb of mud, and was and is dying (and being reborn) in culture’s tomb of crud. Berlin in the 1920s was the site of and milieu for “the greatest renaissance” of the twentieth century (cited by Friedrich, 1972: 11). This history and process has been taking place out of the mud over seven centuries, culminating in the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth century. Berlin at the end of the nineteenth century was, according to Kotkin (2005: 102) “widely acknowledged as the most modern city in Europe.” Eiland and Jennings (2014: 2) concur with Kotkin that “by 1900 Berlin was Europe’s most modern city.”

By contrast, or as well, for the Nazi Goebbels (cited by Kotkin, 2005: 103) Berlin was “that sink of iniquity.” Modernity and iniquity went together as a couple in Berlin, and no doubt they do in other cities too as we have seen with Paris and London. Berlin in 1913 for Hans Flesch von Brünningen was “crazy, debauched, metropolitan, anonymous, gargantuan, futuristic ... In short: an infernal cesspool and paradise in one” (cited by Hoffmann, 2003: 18). Similar sentiments were voiced about Paris, London, and Venice as we have seen in previous chapters. Perhaps Berlin was distinctive in that heaven and hell, modernity and iniquity went together with scientific and technological inquiry and pure intellectuality in a curious, potent, and fecund German brew. In the 1920s and 1930s Berlin for Smith (2012: 254) became “the intellectual capital of Europe.” Berlin for Sloterdijk

(1987: 205 and 115) was “the principal city of the early twentieth century” as it “played its part in plunging the euphoria of the metropolis into a disenchanted light.” Goebbels was certainly disenchanted with the city, as was Hitler, that “necromancer of the lower orders” as Otto Friedrich (1972: 227) so aptly calls him. By contrast, others, such as Walter Benjamin, especially as a child, were enchanted with, and euphoric about, Berlin (as we will see later). Similarly Berlin for Friedrich (1972: xvi) “has always reverberated in my mind as a city of magic and mystery and unexpected danger.” Berlin encapsulates the paradox of modernity: iniquity and inquiry; enchanting and disenchanting; civilized and barbarian; light and dark; good and evil, all inextricably entangled in roughly equal, but inseparable measure.

Berlin for Sloterdijk (1987: 115) also “was—and is to the present day—the only German city, that as far as cheekiness goes, left no possibility unexhausted.” These are all facets of the modern industrial city and its slimy location and history. Berlin (and later modern industrial cities built in swamps), in Sloterdijk’s terms, is both cynical (“self-splitting in repression”) and kynical (“self-embodiment in resistance”) (218). The city and the majority of its citizens split themselves off from and repress their slimy beginnings; the city and the minority of its citizens embody themselves in resistance by way of “cheekiness,” the carnivalesque, the grotesque, and the monstrous, perhaps embodied and expressed in the art and culture of Weimar Germany.

Other citizens sublimate in the sublime. For Berman (1988: 66) Goethe in the early nineteenth century “sees the modernization of the material world as a sublime spiritual achievement,” but not the development of the modern metropolis that Goethe for Richie (1998: xv) “equates with the Devil’s world.” At the end of Goethe’s *Faust*, Mephistopheles (regarded by Sloterdijk (1987: 177; emphasis in the original) as “a central figure of modern aesthetics” and also “a child of the idea of *development*”) takes Faust to the top of a high mountain and tries to tempt him one last time by offering him a teeming city bustling with “activity and stench.” Faust admits to having been tempted by Mephistopheles who describes

a typical metropolis,
At center, bourgeois stomach’s gruesome bliss.
Tight crooked alleys, pointed gables, mullions,
Crabbed market stalls of roots and scallions . . .

Then boulevards and spacious squares
 To flaunt aristocratic airs;
 And lastly, with no gate to stop them,
 The suburbs sprawl ad infinitum. (Cited by Richie, 1998: xv)

Goethe was an unlikely and early critic of suburban sprawl, of wide bourgeois boulevards, and of narrow lower class slums, all three the typical components of all modern cities locked in mutual dependence on each other. Goethe's "typical metropolis" for Richie is "a mythical place, but it could well have been based on Berlin—which Goethe loathed . . . and summed up in a single word: 'crude'" (xv). Richie cites Goethe as the epigraph to her history of Berlin and calls the city, and her book, *Faust's Metropolis*.

Yet the sublime spiritual achievement of the development of the modern city comes at the cost of the slimy shame of the draining of swamps. Goethe's (1969: 269) Faust recounts in his dying speech in the final act of *Faust* the Faustian project of discipline and drain:

A marshland flanks the mountain-side,
 Infecting all that we have gained;
 Our gain would reach its greatest pride
 If all this noisome bog were drained.
 I work that millions may possess this space,
 If not secure, a free and active race.
 Here man and beast, in green and fertile fields,
 Will know the joys that new-won region yields,
 Will settle on the firm slopes of a hill
 Raised by a bold and zealous people's skill.
 A paradise our closed-in land provides,
 Though to its margin rage the blustering tides;
 When they eat through, in fierce devouring flood,
 All swiftly join to make the damage good.
 Ay, in this thought I pledge my faith unswerving,
 Here wisdom speaks its final word and true,
 None is of freedom or life deserving
 Unless he daily conquers it anew.

Faust (and Goethe) reject the modern city and embrace the bucolic country, but both involve the draining of wetlands. The Faustian metropolis and

Faustian agriculture are both based on drainage. "The legend of Faust" for Richie (1998: xviii) "can serve as a metaphor for the history of Berlin," including, I would add, its history as a city founded in marshes and swamps with both the draining of the wetlands to make the city possible and the erection of the city in the drained wetlands.

Both the Faustian metropolis and Faustian agriculture were part of what Blackbourn (2006: 11) refers to as "the conquest of nature," which was "a kind of Faustian bargain." New land was created and threatening waters tamed by draining wetlands on the North German plains in the eighteenth century (as Blackbourn documents). Yet, as the founding of Berlin and Hamburg in the thirteenth century shows, this process began before Frederick the Great came on the scene in the eighteenth century and "drained more marshland and fen than any other ruler of the time" (5). In doing so, he was merely participating in, acting upon, and culminating current thinking. For Blackbourn "on no other aspect of the natural world was there such agreement within enlightened opinion as there was on the need to drain marsh and swamp" (49). Yet the negative associations of wetlands did not begin in and with the Enlightenment, but go back to classical Greek times, such as in Plato's *Phaedo* and by Aristotle (see Giblett, 1996).

Nor did the negative associations of wetlands end there as Blackbourn (2006: 251–309) describes how the Nazis not only made racist associations with wetlands and associated reclamation with Aryan supremacy, but also figured other races in pejorative wetland terms. Blackbourn also relates how the Nazis failed to drain the Pripet Marshes in Eastern Europe that "covered some 100,000 square miles and formed (as they still do) the largest wetlands in Europe" (251). Difficult terrain, such as wetlands, is not only where the "conquest of nature" reaches its limits, but also where resistance to the conqueror finds a refuge and base. Wetlands were places of resistance against the conquerors, from the Britons against the Romans and Normans, to the Seminoles and Vietnamese against the Americans (see Giblett, 1996). The Pripet Marshes were no exception with resistance against the Nazis during World War II. In 1943 the marshes became what Blackbourn (2006: 309) calls "a site of resistance and survival" for tens of thousands of partisans as the marshes were "easy to defend and hard to conquer," as a German geographer put it in 1939 (cited by Blackbourn,

2006: 308), merely echoing von Clausewitz, the theorist of war, a century before (see Giblett, 1996: 205).

The founding of cities, especially capital cities, in wetlands, such as Berlin, was the first move in, and the headquarters for, the draining of wetlands in the country. Berlin is a city founded not merely in “the middle of all this sand” of the Mark Brandenburg as Stendhal (cited by Richie, 1998: 1) complained, but also in “a long sweeping plain dotted with pine forests, marshes and swamps” as Richie puts it on the same page. Berlin’s location is striking for her as “Berlin seems to have come from nowhere, wrenched from the sandy soil [and wet land] by some hidden force” as if the city arose from underground and was thrust upward by a volcanic force, as if the city founders forcibly extracted the city from the earth and did not allow the earth to give birth to the city autochthonously, out of the earth, or more precisely, out of the water-earth (aquaterra). A similar comment or conclusion could also be made about some other swamp cities and marsh metropolises, such as Chicago, another endocolonial city in the middle of a national or continental landmass.

Berlin for Karl Scheffler (cited by Richie, 1998: 1) “developed ‘artificially’” and was “a ‘colonial city’ made up of the dispossessed and uprooted.” It was also a colonial city of the endocolonization of plains, forests, marshes, and swamps. This manifestation of a Faustian will to power is not merely linked to Berlin’s beginnings but is for Richie linked to its history with “the longing to make something out of the flat, windswept landscape . . . still reflected in the remnants of Berlin’s grimy brick slums” (xvi). The slums and the swamps are both considered as nothing or nowhere out of which the Faustian engineer and town planner can make something and somewhere. In doing so, he has not merely made a pact with the Devil and sold his soul but has become like God who makes something out of nothing *ex nihilo*.

Like Goethe, other nonresidents, such as Mark Twain visiting Berlin and writing about in 1892, were disappointed by it. For Twain Berlin was “the German Chicago,” another swamp city, though he did not make the connection. As Twain ([1892] 2009: 191) described:

I feel lost in Berlin. It has no resemblance to the city I had supposed it was. There was once a Berlin which I would have known, from descriptions

in books—the Berlin of the last century and the beginning of the present one: a dingy city in a marsh, with rough streets, muddy and lantern-lighted, dividing straight rows of ugly houses all alike, compacted into blocks as square and plain and uniform and monotonous and serious as so many dry-goods boxes. But that Berlin has disappeared. It seems to have disappeared totally, and left no sign. The bulk of the Berlin of today has about it no suggestion of a former period. The site it stands on has traditions and a history, but the city itself has no traditions and no history. It is a new city; the newest I have ever seen. Chicago would seem venerable beside it; for there are many old-looking districts in Chicago, but not many in Berlin. The main mass of the city looks as if it had been built last week, the rest of it has a just perceptibly graver tone, and looks as if it might be six or even eight months old.

Yet, like Berlin, Chicago was “built in the midst of a great level swamp” (Herrick cited by Cronon, 1991: 14–15). Twain ([1892] 2009: 192) comments on “the absolutely level surface of the site of Berlin.” Although Twain calls Berlin “the European Chicago” (192), never to my knowledge did he note the similarities between the two cities and make the connection between the two cities that both were swamp cities, nor with New Orleans as a swamp city about which he also wrote (as we will see in later chapters). If Berlin is the European Chicago, then Chicago is the American Berlin.

Perhaps it is no surprise that Bertolt Brecht, that quintessential Berlin playwright, was fascinated with what Otto Friedrich (1972: 246) calls “that fabulous land of Chicago gangsters,” which he never visited, but in which he set such plays as *In the Jungle of the Cities* and *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*. Chicago for Brecht was a kind of distorted allegorical mirror in which he could reflect back Berlin to his fellow Berliners and by which he could mount a political critique of Nazism as gangster culture (most directly in *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*). Upton Sinclair first published his novel about Chicago and its meat industry, *The Jungle*, in 1906 (to a discussion of which I return in Chapter 14) while Brecht set his play, *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, in the Chicago stockyards. Chicago was the epitome of the gangster city for Brecht and Germany under the Nazis for Fallada (2015: 70) was the epitome of what he called “gangster culture,” who he regarded as “a right bunch of gangsters.” Berlin, as the epicenter of gangster culture, grew out of its contradictions in

the nineteenth century. Berlin for Richie (1998: xix) was not only perhaps “the most militaristic city in Europe” but also “one of the greatest centres of intellectual life.” Yet this potentially oxymoronic combination of the militaristic and the intellectual was not enough, or perhaps was the reason, for Walter Benjamin dubbing Paris “the capital of the nineteenth century,” and not his native Berlin.

Benjamin certainly had affection for some aspects of Berlin, and he figured both Berlin and Paris as a woman’s body. For the young Walter Benjamin (1979: 330–331; 1999b: 623) who chronicled on a couple of occasions his own childhood in Berlin around 1900 the city of Berlin is transformed into the body of servant girls. He relates how

the dream ship that came to fetch us on those evenings must have rocked at our bedside on the waves of conversation, or under the spray of clattering plates, and in the early morning it set us down on the ebb of the carpet beating that came in at the window with the moist air on rainy days and engraved itself more indelibly in the child’s memory than the voice of the beloved in that of the man—this carpet beating that was the language of the nether world of servant girls, the real grownups, a language that sometimes took its time, languid and muted under the grey sky, breaking at others into an inexplicable gallop, as if the servants were pursued by phantoms. The courtyard was one of the places where the city opened itself to the child.

The languid and muted language of the servant girls is not only their spoken language but also the sensuous body language of their carpet-beating that was vaguely arousing and sexually enticing for the young Walter with its overtones of sadism that he imputes to the servant girls and of masochism on Benjamin’s part. The courtyard, rather than being an entry into the private domestic space of the home, was a passage going out into the public space of the city, and into the female body, and, as with Freud on his walk in an Italian town, into the uncanny.

Benjamin was a great admirer of the writing of Robert Walser, who, in 1910 in a short piece on “Berlin and the Artist,” gendered Berlin as androgynously both masculine and feminine. For Walser ([1910] 2012: 61) “a city like Berlin is an ill-mannered, impertinent, intelligent scoundrel, constantly affirming the things that suit him and tossing aside everything he tires of. Here in the big

city you can definitely feel the waves of intellect washing over the life of Berlin society like a sort of bath.” Walser goes on to reflect on the following page that, as well as intellectual stimulation, “the metropolis contains lonelines of the most frightful sort, and anyone who wishes to sample this exquisite dish can eat his fill of it here. He can experience what it means to live in deserts and wastes” (62). The city built in a swamp whose “bottom-most level of criminality,” for Walser (2010: 50) (as we saw in Chapter 1), is “a sort of swamp” becomes, like Paris for Balzac and Hugo, a desert. Yet the two Parisians are referring to a physical place in Paris when they figure it as a desert, whereas Walser the Berliner by birth is referring to a personal space when he figures Berlin as a desert. The swamp has been drained physically and personally to leave a desert in its place. Yet “after approximately five or six years have passed, the artist . . . will feel at home in the metropolis” as if he had been born there. Furthermore, the artist for Walser ([1910] 2012: 63) “feels indebted, bound, and beholden to this strange rattling, clattering racket. All the scurrying and fluttering about now seems to him a sort of nebulous, beloved maternal figure.” The great swamp mother becomes the great city mother.

Along similar lines to Walser, Benjamin in a radio talk remembers being read the stories of E. T. A. Hoffmann at a boarding school when he was fourteen years old. In another radio talk entitled “Demonic Berlin” presented in 1930 Benjamin recalled Hoffmann’s penchant for what Benjamin (2014: 24) described as “the bizarre, the unconventional, the eerie, the inexplicable,” all of which could be summed up in one word, “uncanny,” and which he reiterates two pages later as “the eerie, spooky, uncanny” (26). Benjamin was following in the footsteps of Freud ([1919] 2003: 141) for whom Hoffmann “is the unrivalled master of the uncanny in literature.” Hoffmann for Benjamin is specifically the unrivalled master of uncanny Berlin in German literature. In another radio talk presented later in 1930 Benjamin (2014: 50) referred to “the uncanny Berlin of a century ago”. Hoffmann for Benjamin “could be called the father of the Berlin novel” (27) that “comes alive again [in] Doblin’s *Alexanderplatz*” (27) and “the only writer who made Berlin famous abroad” (29). As with Baudelaire and Paris, Hoffmann for Benjamin is “a physiognomist of Berlin” (27) whose “physiognomic seeing” (29) traced the character of the city in its appearance, especially in such stories as “My Cousin’s Corner Window” (Hoffmann, 2008: 377–400).

In another radio talk presented probably even later in 1930 Benjamin (2014: 57) highlighted that “Berlin has been a military city” since the fifteenth century. He goes on to argue that it was a product of “Prussian military culture [which] was so dreadfully inhumane.” This culture gave rise to what Alfred Behne (cited by Benjamin, 2014: 61) called “rental barracks” with the result that for Benjamin “Berlin is the biggest tenement city on Earth” and “our misfortune” (56). Benjamin goes on to lay the blame for this collective misfortune squarely at the feet of Frederick the Great, who,

unlike his father who enlarged the capital horizontally ... extended it vertically up into the sky. He used Paris as a model, but this was unwarranted. Paris was a fortress; the city could not expand beyond its forts and bastions. And since its 150,000 citizens made it Europe’s largest city, the Parisians had no choice but to construct buildings of many stories. Berlin in Frederick the Great’s day, however, was even less of a fortress than it is now. Thus, the city could easily have been extended horizontally. When the Emperor of China at that time was shown images of buildings of such unusual height, he said disdainfully: “Europe must be a very small land indeed if the people have so little space on the ground that they must live in the air.” (57–58)

The result of Frederick the Great’s extension of the city vertically into boxes in the sky is that residents of the tenements did have very little space in which to live in the air.

Benjamin (2014: 61) goes on in his radio talk to critique “the egoism, short-sightedness and arrogance that gave rise to the rental barracks [which] was the order of the day almost everywhere in Berlin until the [First] World War.” Furthermore, he goes on to contrast “how grim, severe, gloomy and military the rental barracks look in comparison to the peaceful houses of the garden plots, which are so amicably juxtaposed to one another” compared to the tenements so hostilely antagonistic to each other. He elaborates on Alfred Behne who calls “the rental barracks the last of the castle fortresses. Because, he says, they arose from a few landowners’ egotistical, brutal struggle over the land that they would dismember and divide among themselves. And this is why rental barracks have the shape of fortified and warlike castles, with their walled-in courtyards” (61). The walled-in courtyards of the rental barracks contrast with the opening-out courtyard of the stand-alone

house of Benjamin's privileged youth in Berlin. Private landowners dismembered the living body of the earth, parceling it up into morsels that morcelled the earth and terrestrial space into commodified and edible chunks. This parceling out of space reached its apotheosis in what Benjamin goes on to call the "completely new form of American skyscraper" of "long tenement blocks ... that are set on their short end so that they project upward" (61). Horizontal space is colonized and militarized in the draining of swamps and vertical space colonized and militarized in the erecting of tenements and skyscrapers (as we will see with Chicago and New York).

Berlin for the hero of Joseph Roth's 1927 novel *Flight without End* is "this city" that "does not draw its supplies from the land. It obtains nothing from the earth on which it is built. It converts this earth into asphalt, bricks and walls. It shades the plain with its houses ... It is the very embodiment of a city" (cited by Hoffmann, 2003: 13). The city of Berlin for Roth is not even a parasite on the country surrounding it. The city is a killing machine for transforming living earth into dead matter. The city also transforms nature into commodity, pictures into views, sites into sights, things into representations. In an article first published in 1921 Roth (2003: 25–27) describes how,

at the edge of the city, where I have been told nature is to be found, it isn't nature at all, but a sort of picture-book nature ... On the outskirts of our cities, in place of nature, we are presented with a sort of idea of nature. A woman standing at edge of the woods, shielding her eyes with the umbrella she has brought just in case, scanning the horizon and seeing a spot that seems familiar from some painting, exclaims: "Isn't this just so picturesque!" It's the degradation of nature to a painter's model ... Our relationship to nature has become warped ... It no longer exists for its own sake. It exists to satisfy a function ... We have Baedeker-ized nature ... The day that nature became a site for recreation was the end.

The end of what? Of nature? Nature has become a tourist site, and sight, reduced to an entry in a tourist guidebook. Roland Barthes (1973: 74) was to make a similar critique of the *Blue Guide* in the 1950s.

Roth (2003) was primarily a journalist, a master of the feuilleton, an astute observer of the seamy side of Berlin city life and an unashamed technophile. He describes "a few scrawny [street] trees, sprung from the stones of a city

precinct” as “trees not by nature but by municipal decree” (65). On the same page he describes homeless people as “grotesque-looking figures, as though hauled from the lower depths of world literature.” And made to illustrate it as what he later calls in the same article “a series of illustrations, say, to Dante’s journey to the underworld” (70). This is all part of “the hidden side of the city, its anonymous misery” as he calls it in a later article (79). This dark underworld of death and decay contrasts with the visible side of the living upper world of modern technology. The triangular railway junction in Berlin epitomizes this as for Roth it is “an emblem and a focus, a living organism and the fantastic product of a futuristic force. It is a *center*. All the vital energies of its locus begin and end here, in the same way that the heart is both the point of departure and the destination of the blood as it flows through the body’s veins and arteries” (105; emphasis in the original).

The triangular railway junction is the “body of a machine” as Roth calls it on the following page. The dead body of the machine has replaced the living human body. The latter only provides the trope to figure the former. The triangular railway junction for Roth (2003: 106) produces an “iron landscape,” a “playground of machines,” and a “magnificent temple of technology.” The machine has been apotheosized into “the divine machine.”

By contrast with Benjamin who critiqued the verticality of the “rental barracks” of tenements, skyscrapers sent Roth (2003: 111) into greater raptures for the word itself has “something of the assertive, revolutionary quality of the builders of Babel.” Skyscrapers demonstrate for him “the omnipotence of human technology,” of “man and nature becoming one,” and “the conquest of vertical space” (113). They all do so over the horizontal space of the marshes on which Berlin was built. Berlin for Roth is, perhaps as a result, “a young and unhappy city-in-waiting” (125). Berliners, on the other hand, are habitués of “the waiting room” that has become “an anteroom to eternity.” The city of Berlin is an unhappy adolescent city whereas Berliners are senescent waiting for death; the city is on the verge of adulthood, and aging Berliners are on the verge of oblivion.

Berlin culture in the 1920s was renascent. For Roth (2003: 213), Alfred Döblin was “the writer whose contribution to German literature was the character of the lower-class Berliner, one of the most original creations of the intellectual world.” Roth is referring to Franz Biberkopf, the central

character of Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, first published in German in 1929. *Berlin Alexanderplatz* is what Brady (2009: 338) calls "the classic Berlin novel" "embracing both small fictional lives and the monster-city." In his review of Döblin's novel Benjamin (1999b: 302) asks rhetorically "what is Alexanderplatz?" and answers that it is "the site ... where the ground trembles" and "the innards of the metropolis." The site is what I call a feral quaking zone and the innards of the metropolis are what might be called, following and adapting Bakhtin ([1965] 1984b), the grotesque lower urban stratum.

Although Döblin ([1929] 1996: 64) does not mention the marsh-city of Berlin and its history, nor make a connection between the monster and the marsh—the monster who lives in the marsh (the marsh monster) and the marsh as monster—Döblin does figure the *Magazintplatz* in Frankfurt as "nothing but a filthy morass." A morass is invoked later in the novel when the biblical character of Job is addressed by "the voice" (ambiguously of God, or Devil, or somebody else) as "a living morass" (184). Perhaps no more a fitting cognate for a wetland could be found than as a living morass. Job is invoked as a figure of both wretchedness and its overcoming who is exemplary for Franz Biberkopf. Job is a living morass whereas the city is a filthy morass. Better to be a living morass than a filthy morass.

Wetlands, or their cognates, such as morasses, also occur later in the novel when Döblin employs black water as a figure for the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of the human heart. Döblin alludes again to the Bible, specifically to the book of Jeremiah (17:9) and the verse in which the prophet proclaims that "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it?" Döblin ([1929] 1996: 266) goes on to expostulate at length on

water in the dense black forest, black and terrible waters, you lie so dumb. In terrible repose you lie. Your surface does not move, when there is a storm in the forest and the firs begin to bend, and the spider-webs are torn between the branches and there is a sound of splitting. Then you, black waters, lie there below in the hollow place and the branches fall.

Black waters are regarded as dumb, passive, and static. They do not hear, do not act, and do not move. Plants decay in them and animals move in them

but nothing else happens in them. For Döblin they are not even rightly a part of the black forest:

The wind tears at the forest, to you the storm does not come. You have no dragons in your domain, the age of the mammoths is gone, nothing is there to frighten anyone; the plants decay in you; in you move fish and snails. Nothing more. Yet, though this is so, although you are but water, awesome you are, black waters, and terrible in repose. (266)

Black waters have ceased to be the domain of mythic and prehistoric creatures, in a word, of monsters, so they cease to frighten. They have also become the site only of plant decay and the habitat only for banal or common animals. Yet despite this double diminution, black waters are still “awesome” and terrible in their passivity. They are addressed in the second person, but according to this account the addresser does not enter into intersubjective dialogue with black waters as they cannot speak. Black waters are as highly communicative as all other lands and waters for those who have ears to hear.

Eleven pages later Döblin ([1929] 1996: 277) repeats the first of these paragraphs concluding with the addition that “the storm does not penetrate you.” Black waters are feminized as virginal and inviolate, as lying still, passive, supine, uncommunicative, the addressee, but never an addresser. They are also reduced to surface, despite their depths, however shallow. Their functions are also reduced to decay, despite the new life that springs from decomposition. They are the habitat for only fish and snails (and all other animal species are ignored). The verse from Jeremiah is also repeated on this page.

Hans Fallada is probably the only real contender with Döblin for the title of the preeminent novelist of Berlin. For Fallada in his 1937 novel *Wolf among Wolves*, set in Weimar Germany, Berlin is “the unquiet city,” the title of the first part of the novel. Unlike Döblin, Fallada ([1937] 2010) figures Weimar Berlin in terms of its swampy beginnings. The narrator reflects that in the country Germany “one might think that the *Deutsche Tageszeitung* exaggerated when it called Berlin a morass of infamy, a Babel of sin, a Sodom and Gomorrah. But when you’d had a sniff of it you realized that those remarks were an understatement” (66–67). Over six hundred pages later Berlin is invoked in the same terms as “the morass of the great city” (683). The odour of the city repeatedly assaults the sense of smell in the beginning of the novel

where “out of the dark well of the courtyard the smells from a hundred lodgings” produce “a dull vapor [that] hung over the city. The stench of an impoverished people did not so much rise to the skies, as cling sluggishly to the houses, creep through every street, and seep through windows into every mouth that breathed” (4–5). The smog of London and St. Petersburg were figured in similar terms by T. S. Eliot and Andrei Bely as we have seen in the case of London in Chapter 4 and as will see with St. Petersburg in Chapter 8. Other smells assault the nose, such as the margarine that “smelled rancid” (4) and “the foul stench” of the courtyard (7). Unlike Fallada, the odor of courtyards, and of Berlin in general, is a feature of the city that Benjamin does not register or comment on.

Smells are immediate and overcome distance and the barrier between inside and outside of the body in an often uninvited and unpleasant way. The smells of the city bring the city inside the city-dweller. The city-dweller smelling the city no longer dwells in the city as just his or her external environment, but the city dwells in him or her as part of his or her internal environment. Along similar lines to Walser and Doblin, for Fallada ([1937] 2010: 493) the morasses in the country are not much better than those of the city as with “an unfrequented part” of a forest called the Black Dale, which “looked gloomy and wild . . . The otherwise almost flat country was here all undulations, humps between which were dark little valleys where springs trickled just strongly enough to survive the summer and form a morass in which the wild boars had their almost inaccessible retreats.”

The morass in the country figures and mirrors the morass of the city. The wildness of the morass figures the ferality of the city. Both are places of evil for the Black Dale in *Wolf among Wolves* is where the cache of weapons for the failed *Putsch* are buried, where Lieutenant Fritz shoots himself, and where Violet is abducted. Weimar Berlin in Fallada’s ([1937] 2010) *Wolf among Wolves* is a place of evil of gambling, prostitution, and corruption. Chapter 2 entitled “Berlin Slumps” (both economically and morally) begins by relating graphically how “in 1923, to the dreariness of the faces, the evil smells, the misery of that barren stony desert, there was added a widespread shamelessness, the child of despair or indifference, lechery borne of the itch to heighten a sense of living in a world which, in a mad rush, was carrying everyone toward an obscure fate” (11).

Fallada (2010: 12) wrote *Wolf among Wolves* in 1937 when the Nazis were in power, and so he had the benefit of hindsight in diagnosing the evils of Weimar Germany and figuring Berlin as an “accursed city.” The infamous morass of Berlin gradually infiltrates the country and nation to the point that Eva von Panckwitz, whose family sinks increasingly into financial and personal ruin, reflects that “something just had to be done to get out of this morass. But somehow everything one did mysteriously only sucked you deeper in” (603).

Just as Sodom and Gomorrah were burnt for their sins, so was Berlin. The city, such as Berlin, and Hamburg, that begins in water, ends in fire; or more precisely, the city that is created in water is destroyed in fire; the city that is created in one element is destroyed by another; the city of earth created out of water and erected into the air is destroyed by fire in the air exacted by airplanes. Berlin was likened to “the fire city of Vulcan” by a late-nineteenth-century observer (cited by Kotkin, 2005: 102); in the mid-twentieth century it was a fire city. During the dying days of World War II Fallada (2015: 10) described in his prison diary of 1944 how “I’ve spent many hours in the air-raid shelter in Berlin, watching the windows turn red, and often enough, to put it plainly, I’ve been scared witless.” Fallada also wrote in a letter to his sister about “the terror attacks, which were probably the worst thing I have ever experienced” (243, n.22). Later in his prison diary he describes the transition from the pre-war triumphal modernity of Berlin to the late-war ruination of Berlin when “we often looked out across the city, sparkling with light, while the nearby radio mast threw out its beams of light, like outstretched arms, into the night sky. Today it is all just a vast expanse of rubble, misery and ash” (75).

Similarly in Fallada’s (2009: 563) last novel, *Alone in Berlin*, set during the war and published in 1947, he describes how “during the ever more terrible nights that the war brought upon the city of Berlin, when the sirens wail, the planes move over the city in ever denser swarms, the bombs fall, the high explosives howl as they detonate, fires burst out all over.” The sense of hearing is assailed with the wailing sirens and howling bombs dropped from swarming planes. Swarming creatures are an abomination according to the Levitical interdiction as they are neither fish, nor flesh, nor fowl. Fallada uses the term here in relation to planes; three years earlier in his prison diary he used the term in relation to people, or more precisely inhabitants of overcrowded city

streets in Berlin “that are swarming with people like a beehive swarming in the summer” (Fallada, 2015: 90). The earth below in the modern city and the sky above in modern warfare are inhabited by abominable, artificial creatures.

The Berlin bombings, for Otto Friedrich (1972: 6), “363 raids in all—destroyed about ten square miles of central Berlin, wrecked about one-third of the city’s 1.5 million buildings, [and] killed or seriously injured about 150,000 people. It was probably the most crushing attack ever inflicted on a major capital.” It was not, of course, the most crushing attack ever inflicted on a major city as that dubious distinction would go to Hiroshima, the bombing of which wiped out 90 percent of the city and killed eighty thousand people immediately while tens of thousands more would later die of radiation exposure.

In 1938, the year after he published *Wolf among Wolves*, the prolific Fallada (2014) published another novel in which Berlin figures prominently. *Iron Gustav: A Berlin Family Chronicle* is set before, during, and after World War I. Before the war, the “great stone city of Berlin” (129) is the place in which Eva, one member of the family, “felt as if she were oppressed by a nightmare from which she ought to wake up and yet could not—a bad dream, ever darker, ever more desolate” (150). In Joycean terms, history is a nightmare from which the Berliner cannot awake. This sleeping nightmare is prescient as it becomes for Eva a waking day-mare later in the novel.

After the war the city of nightmares and day-mares becomes for her younger brother Heinz the natural habitat for the femme fatale, the mistress of his older brother Erich, “when he had fallen still deeper under her spell, for he became more and more her plaything, her minion, her slave. He gave way, at first, open-eyed, then closed his eyes and threw himself into the abyss” (Fallada, [1938] 2014: 288). Later when he escapes her clutches, the abyss of the femme fatale is figured in retrospect as “the swamp” in which he had “lived in an unhealthy, feverish atmosphere” in the clutches of “an almost sadistic woman” from which he “eventually found the strength to escape” (322).

The city-swamp, the feral quaking zone, is not only the natural habitat for the femme fatale, but also becomes a wasteland. In the post-World War I Weimar Germany of hyperinflation “Berlin had become a wasteland” during “gloomy days, black days” (Fallada, [1938] 2014: 448). Moreover, “Berlin

was in chaos” (484). As one character puts it to Heinz on the following page, “the world stinks like a big dung heap” with “your private pile of stench” (485). Berlin, set in the native quaking zone of the marshy morass of a wetland, becomes the feral quaking zone of a chaotic, stinking wasteland, the sad and sorry story of most cities located in or by wetlands.