

Urban Landscape in McEwan's Narrative Representation of Berlin

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Recommended Citation

Puschmann-Nalenz, Barbara J. "Urban Landscape in McEwan's Narrative Representation of Berlin." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 21.4 (2019): [<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.3201>](https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.3201)

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CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and CultureISSN 1481-4374 <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>>
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Volume 21 Issue 4 (June 2019) Article 5**Barbara J. Puschmann-Nalenz****"Urban Landscape in McEwan's Narrative Representation of Berlin"**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol21/iss4/5>>Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 21.4 (2019)**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol21/iss4/>>

Abstract: In her article "Urban Landscape in McEwan's Narrative Representation of Berlin," Barbara J. Puschmann-Nalenz discusses the image of Berlin created in Ian McEwan's novel *The Innocent* (1990) and the chapter titled "Berlin" in *Black Dogs* (1992). It starts from the hypothetical statement that while British literary fiction set in Berlin is rare after 1970 the genres of spy and detective novel, where crime and violence take center stage, shape the image of the city in highbrow narratives as well. The perspectivization of the cityscape, including its monuments, through the protagonists fundamentally influences its image. In *The Innocent* the limited view and interest of the central character transmits estrangement, indifference and personal preoccupations by a third-person narrator and figural narrative, whereas in *Black Dogs* a politically alert first-person narrator follows the event of the Fall of the Wall on the site as a detached observer. The ambiguity which results from the representations of the urban landscape reflects the display of ambiguous human characteristics in crucial situations. The essay argues that in the spatial narratives of these novels especially themes of disintegration, division and insecurity find their intricate symbolic expression.

Barbara J. PUSCHMANN-NALENZ

Urban Landscape in McEwan's Narrative Representation of Berlin

The city of Berlin has been the setting of numerous twentieth-century fictional narratives in English. Even though many readers will spontaneously think of best-selling spy novels, among them John le Carré's *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1963), or of Philip Kerr's thrillers published as *Berlin Noir* in 1993, there are several early examples of literary Berlin fiction from the interwar years. To name only two narratives by famous authors: Vladimir Nabokov's story "A Guide to Berlin" (originally 1925) and Christopher Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939) were stimulated by the authors' long-time stay in Berlin during a period when the German capital was popular with artists, emigrants and the international *bohème*. Recently, Nabokov's short story inspired a novel by Australian writer Gail Jones about characters who are Nabokov enthusiasts. It bears the identical title, *A Guide to Berlin* (2015).

In contrast to the Berlin narratives by Nabokov and Isherwood most of the Anglophone fictions after 1950 deal with crime and the city. As a journalist remarked on the occasion of Jones's publication, "Berlin is a demanding muse. With its complex history of suffering and evil, it is no wonder some would prefer to skate along its surface rather than to delve into its dark heart" (Crispin). Evil is a central concern of the two novels by Ian McEwan to be dealt with here. *The Innocent* or *The Special Relationship* of 1990, whose action takes place in postwar Berlin, generically draws on the paradigm of the spy novel and involves the English protagonist in a case of manslaughter. A reviewer states: "*The Innocent* showed us Cold War Berlin at its strangest and most unnatural" (qtd. in Childs 89). McEwan's 1992 novel *Black Dogs* addresses contemporaneous historic events in connecting the celebration of the Fall of the Berlin Wall with the first-person narrator's simultaneous experience of violence and collective memories of historic crimes elsewhere during the Second World War.

In this article I propose to examine narrative structures in McEwan's texts that are linked to a mapping of the city of Berlin. Special attention will be given to the representation of monumental sites or edifices and the question of their narrativity. In both novels by McEwan the thematic focus on separation and division or dividing-up is pursued on a diegetic, a structural as well as a symbolic level. From a spatiotemporal angle, the necessity for the characters to cover a specific distance reveals the city plan or, alternatively, its obliteration. While monuments provide landmarks on the way which the protagonists walk or travel across Berlin to meet other people the representations reflect division as a marker of human relationships as well as geo-political developments. My exploration inquires whether the intricacy of elaborate narrative structures of the novels set in Berlin corresponds with the presumable complexity of the cityscape as it is perceived by the focalizers and communicated by a third-person or first-person narrator. The conclusion will aim at a clarification of the question if the specific relation of the textual and the urban structures is one of analogy or contrast, or possibly an irregular and shifting connection. Since in mainstream or high-brow British fictions after 1970 Berlin does not frequently emerge, the two narratives by a renowned writer can be regarded as exceptional, whereas the incidence in US-American fiction is much higher (Parker). The purpose of this article lies in illuminating the correlation or reciprocity between an individually discerned urban design and the narrative structures representing this subjective perception.

Whereas the deluge of scholarly literature about Berlin has been dedicated to a variety of architectural and historical details ever since 1945, as Brian Ladd reveals in his bibliography and acknowledgments, Anglophone fiction, by comparison, seems much less diverse with its concentration on spy and detective novels even after 1989. To me this prevalence corroborates the insight that it remains difficult for authors of literary fiction to address the visible details of Berlin and her urban landscape. The US-American historian Ladd presents a compelling and unusually knowledgeable study about the "fusion of architecture, history, and national identity in Berlin" (dust cover). His reconceptualization of the urban monument extends to open spaces, e.g. the notorious wasteland of Potsdamer Platz prior to Germany's reunification. His statements about the period of the Cold War in the chapter "Divided Berlin" (1945 to 1989) are of special interest considering *The Innocent*. In fictional narratives memories often become attached to and triggered by settings, dates or situations, so that a fusion of the temporal with the spatial in a renewed experience occurs.

In the two novels by McEwan the protagonists' sense of place has an impact on the perception of events or encounters represented in the plots, and vice versa. The narrativization of the main characters' sense of place will be at the center of this investigation. My intention conflates in one point with that of the historian Ladd, who states about his book: "Buildings matter for me here not because of any intrinsic beauty or value, but because they are the symbols and the repositories of memory" (4). For a narrative representation the subjective awareness of the symbolic, which a focalizer or narrator communicates, proves decisive. It is characteristic of contemporary literature that the divergent views manifest in the

fictional narratives of places and monuments add a plurality of new meanings to the symbolic spaces. A critical study of Berlin's monumental architecture published in the final decade of the Cold War maintains that the traditional monolithic nature of the visual monument serves socio-political aims: "Characteristic of a monument [in the nineteenth-century tradition] is the reduction of a complex development to a single aspect that the monument's sponsors have identified as the most important. Such a monument is thus the result of a selection; it prevents the observer's own confrontation with the complex historical event. Insofar as the monument narrows one's perception and dictates the conclusions one draws from it, it is authoritarian" (cited in Ladd 168). This process, I contend, by which a monument becomes institutionalized memory, has been inversely displayed and revised in works of narrative fiction, which return to the monument the complex diversity of aspects that the reduction to a monolith had annihilated (Schlote 79-80). Through an individual perspective the object can be liberated from its function in the accustomed and dominant national or ideological discourse.

Ian McEwan's *The Innocent* depicts from beginning to end the central character's constant move to, from, and across the city of Berlin. Richard Brown shows in detail to what high degree McEwan mediates the Berlin setting in this novel through famous fictional intertexts from the 1930s and their corresponding film versions but restricts his analysis mainly to indoor scenes. Restlessness is one of the strongest sensations that pervade *The Innocent*. The protagonist's trajectory through the city on foot, by car or the underground railway is part of his working as well as his private life. Young and unsophisticated Leonard Marnham, who as a technician of the Post Office is asked to work for the British Secret Service in Berlin in 1955, experiences the constraints and cultural frictions of "the special relationship" in the Armed Forces and the suspicion towards the Russians in the subdivided city. The dissociation of the former Allies especially by ideological boundaries separating the four sectors, geographically undermined by tunnels and clandestine spying, to which is added the failure of teamwork among the Western occupying forces, manifests the conflicts of the Cold War. These tensions are mirrored in the private, highly aggressive confrontations inherent in Leonard's personal affairs during his time in Berlin. That political and public moral differences in Berlin form a symbolic space for the individual probing of borderlines is a topic explored by Lynn Guyver. As one of Guyver's results emerges the nullification of most moral differences during the novel's action.

The dominant item in his army-furnished rented apartment on Platanenallee, to which a military car takes him from Tempelhof airport past the Olympic Stadium, is "a street plan of Berlin" (*Innocent* 3). Leonard's watchfulness about getting from A to B eclipses whatever important or formerly popular sights he can glimpse of the city. What strikes him more is the comparative comfort of US-Americans, which sharply contrasts with British austerity even in the jointly occupied former German capital: "The car was a disappointment. On his way to Nollendorfstrasse from the U-Bahn Leonard had seen a pastel American vehicle with tail fins and swags of chrome. This was a dun-coloured Beetle, barely a year old, which seemed to have suffered an acid bath...A blur of road surface was visible through a perfectly round hole in the floor. In this cold and resonating shell of tin they were creeping under the bridges of the Anhalter Bahnhof at a roar" (*Innocent* 10).

His US-American supervisor almost takes an owner's pride in the reconstructed hotels and shops on the Kurfürstendamm, when on their way from Leonard's place of work to his flat they pass the bravely elegant parts of the newly restored "Center West" beside the ruined tower of Kaiser-Wilhelm memorial church (*Innocent* 23). Another U.S. citizen explains to Leonard the history of the trajectory to the east through Tiergarten (the former royal hunting grounds), ending with the words: "Up ahead is the memorial to the Russian soldiers who took the city, and I'm sure you know the name of this famous edifice" (*Innocent* 28) – the US-American takes it for granted that his disciple knows the Brandenburg Gate. While the reader, especially if s/he happens to be German, can be spatially immersed in a description of the familiar the protagonist feels estranged. This kind of guided tour that subsequently leads him into the Russian sector, which his supervisor Bob Glass presents as sombre and rather forbidding, alienates Leonard even more from the allies he is obliged to. In her article Katherina Dodou elaborates on the representation of Englishness and the Briton's conflict with the American self-image.

In young Leonard's discrimination the spaces and monuments do not possess narrativity; they have no symbolic meaning for him. He is "innocent" because ignorant, as Peter Childs states (78), and he may even be called defiant about their historicity or significance either for German national identity or the conquerors' pride. The acknowledgement of a monument's narrativity thus depends on the beholder's informed perception. Leonard's indifference and lack of interest, however, extend beyond material signs: he shows little political commitment to his job despite the jokes he makes when celebrating his engagement to Maria Eckdorf. In addition, he has great difficulty to empathetically relate to individuals and instead cultivates a sort of childish narcissism, which partly echoes his self-awareness as a member of the occupying forces when he rapes his girl-friend.

His intimacy with the German divorcée Maria Eckdorf, which he engages in despite all warnings, develops out of the estrangement he feels towards his own Anglophone companions as towards his temporary foreign environment. His—literally—underground work as communications technology expert ends abruptly when it is discovered that the (historically verified) tunnel, by which US-Americans spy into the Russian sector, has long before been betrayed by Leonard's (nonfictional) neighbor. Leonard's love affair comes to an end not primarily because he has thereupon to go back to England and not even because Maria and Leonard killed Maria's ex-husband in self-defense and hushed up their deed, but because on his way to the plane he spies Maria with the US security officer Bob Glass: "They both waved, like parents to a departing child" (*Innocent* 211). Apparently, they are on very friendly terms, "continuing to wave their insulting goodbye" (*Innocent* 211). To him this is the real betrayal, which eclipses the political discords of "the special relationship." Deeply hurt, he wants to never see either of them again.

Not surprisingly, the end of the narrative confirms that his whole way from innocence to disenchantment leads through a series of "insult[s]" against his self-esteem (*Innocent* 169, see Heiler 105-07). A heavier cesura even than Maria's temporary refusal to meet him again after his sexual attack is their dissection of Otto Eckdorf's body—with Maria now in charge, whose directions he follows—and Leonard's attempt to remove the body parts in his errand across town. He hardly notices where he is going: "Once he began on the next stage, there would be no time for reflection. But he had few thoughts now. Beyond the spinning tiredness, he was aware of his pleasure in going" (*Innocent* 171). Division thus entails separation, large-scale as well as small-scale.

Paradoxically, the more disorganised and panicked the protagonist's actions—the referential of the narrative—become the more precise and specific is their representation, while its linguistic structure shows an increased reductiveness. Monosyllabic words and brief main clauses portray the young man's "frantic effort" (*Innocent* 174) to move on with the two heavy cases containing the corpse and to remain as inconspicuous as possible for the German police. The fear of violence whose target he may become and his shortness of breath when he reaches the underground at Kottbusser Tor are reflected in the terseness of sentences. Leonard's progress is reported in the telling mode, while the onset of hallucinations in part demands free indirect discourse (*Innocent* 175, 178). Among British soldiers at the Zoo railway station, where a taxi takes him, dazed, he feels safer, and the pace of the narrative becomes more relaxed. The plainness of the syntax and an anaphora which imposes a strict rhythm (*Innocent* 177) emphasize the central character's narrowing awareness and restrictive projection. It swerves between his tunnel vision about where to go or how to transport the cases and his dreams respectively nightmares when he arrives in his flat (*Innocent* 176-84). In the military surroundings of the tunnel Leonard finally regains by subterfuge and intimidation of the US-American officers the power to escape undetected, with the cases and their contents left behind at his workplace.

The Innocent contains an incomplete double time frame. The postscript informs about Leonard's life and time back in England, where he eventually holds the position of head of a small company supplying components to the hearing aid industry. This is communicated by the third-person narrator with an ironic twist (in Berlin the protagonist's task had been to operate the tape recorders in the tunnel, eavesdropping on the Russians). After retirement and widowhood, he visits the city again in June 1987. "It took him no more than the taxi drive from Tegel airport to the hotel to become accustomed to the absence of ruins" (*Innocent* 213). Yet the renewed city is as strange to him as the postwar surroundings were in 1955. He gets lost in the streets around the Bahnhof Zoo, then strolls in the Kreuzberg quarter until he sees places whose topography he can vaguely remember from his laboring in the tunnel which had burst through the sector border. "He thought how strange it was that he should come here to get his first sight of the Wall" (*Innocent* 217), an edifice which visibly put an end to overstepping the frontier. The signs which formerly marked this border above ground have been removed. Instead, he finds himself confronted with the new demarcation.

This impenetrable monument is still there, while the traces of the espionage work are barely recognizable and not remembered by anybody except Leonard, who realizes that during his nostalgic excursion he is being observed from a watch tower by the Vopo—East German border police—on duty. Again McEwan's narrative points out that this wall possesses two sides, and that its narrativity and ambiguous symbolic significance differ considering from which side you view it. In the official terminology of the Federal Republic the Berlin Wall was "the fortified inner-German border" and for the GDR authorities "our Anti-Fascist protective barrier." Free indirect discourse unveils Leonard's irresolute introspection: "He poked at some earth and stones with the toe of his shoe. What was he expecting to find? Evidence of his own existence?" Yet, "It was here in this ruin that he felt the full weight of time. It was here that old matters could be unearthed" (*Innocent* 218). Despite its unrecognizability, it is the place more than anything from which he hopes to gain an assertion of his younger self. His lonely tracking ends with the

rereading of a letter from Maria he received, "forwarded ... with a batch of circulars and junk mail" (*Innocent* 219). Maria lives in Iowa, her husband already dead and her three daughters grown. She explains how Bob Glass, the one powerful individual among former allies in the postwar city, had helped her in 1956 when she was suspected of murder, but it was Leonard whom she had loved. "I guess in those days it was an occupied city and the Germans had to do what the Americans told them. He got the whole thing covered up and the investigation was dropped" (*Innocent* 221) Maria eventually marries Glass, and they settle in Cedar Rapids. The revelations in the narrative's postscript in the manner of analytical drama demonstrate that it was all a misunderstanding, that the road not taken would have changed Leonard's life and saved him from disappointment and regret. He decides to pay a visit to Maria soon.

The Innocent was first published on May 10, 1990. In the light of the months preceding and following its publication the concluding interior monologue, set in 1987 before the Fall of the Wall, points to the contingencies and vicissitudes of political and personal events alike. "They would return to Berlin together, that was the only way...They would visit the old places and be amused by the changes, and yes, they would go out to Potsdamer Platz one day and climb the wooden platform and take a good long look at the Wall together, before it was all torn down" (*Innocent* 226). These sentences present a private conciliatory fantasy holding an inadvertent premonition of the Fall of the Wall. They echo President Reagan's speech in Berlin on June 12, 1987 which ended with the words "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall." Melancholia and a certain datedness of the main character's imaginings dominate the outcome of a melodrama which diverges from the pattern of the old-school spy novels. Its readers might find a *déjà vu* in McEwan's narrated city of 1955, as with David Malcolm who claims, "The landscape, too, is clearly a cold war Berlin recognizable from dozens of novels and films" (117). The geographical structures, where they are represented from the protagonist's perspective in *The Innocent*, however, are subjected to his detached and disinterested perception of the cityscape. The result is a discrepancy of awareness. Though the topographical picture of Berlin is interwoven with signification and collective memory supplied by other characters and the narrator, Leonard's view is liable to his narrowing psychological condition in 1955-56, as the city is subject to the restrictions imposed by the historical situation.

The aging Leonard Marnham's projection at the Wall "before it is all torn down" implies a recurring pattern in the past and present of the city. The cycle of erection, destruction and reconstruction epitomizes a hallmark of Berlin. Her history is by the protagonists of McEwan's novels also experienced as a manifestation of permanent transitoriness. Monuments as signs of communal memory, whether dating from the Weimar Republic, the Nazi regime, or the Cold War with the division of Berlin, are not considered everlasting.

McEwan's historical novel *Black Dogs*, published two years later, places the narrated time of its second chapter two-and-a-half years after the "Postscript" of *The Innocent*. Travelling across Europe becomes the main occupation—beside storytelling—for the first-person homodiegetic narrator in *Black Dogs*. The author divides the book into four sections, each of which is marked by a year and a place. Jeremy, the first-person speaker, who distinguishes his experiencing I from the narrating I and characterizes himself as an enlightened person, travels in diverse European countries at different times—England, Germany, Poland and France. He lives through historic moments either experienced by himself (in 1981, 1987, 1989) or evoked and narrated as the intradiegetically communicated memories of other characters (1946). The novel's second part, titled "Berlin", presents the most recent events in the narrative's nonlinear time structure. The date November 9, 1989, is from the first minute of the characters' awareness felt to be unique. In the narrator's perception the historic interweaves with and in every sense disturbingly interrupts the personal. Jeremy and his wife are making love when Bernard, Jeremy's father-in-law and till the late 1950s a convinced communist, calls them to impart in an unintelligible because highly emotional voice that the Berlin Wall is coming down (*Black Dogs* 68-69). Together Jeremy and Bernard take the next flight to Berlin to see history in its making on the site, already celebrating the day on the plane with champagne.

Arriving on the spot this day and night offer a chastening experience, however, so that Jeremy already feels a pang of regret to have come there. The apartment where they want to stay is located in Kreuzberg (*Black Dogs* 81), in 1989 still one of the districts closest to the Wall and therefore neither gentrified nor fashionable. To get on by taxi turns out to be impossible because of the crowds and hooting cars. Approaching on foot the Victory Monument, which commemorates the Prussian wars against Denmark, Austria and France that led to the forming of the German National State in 1871, the Street of June 17, monumentally crossing the former royal Tiergarten, takes the two men towards the Brandenburg Gate. The first-person narrator's unfiltered experience exhibits the mundane at an emotionally charged moment of historic grandness in the presence of symbolic architecture. From the accumulation of media vehicles and portable toilets in Tiergarten to the rubbish and terrific noise in the street

and the outfit of punks or hooligans Jeremy's narrated impression highlights the profanation of the poignantly uplifting moment (*Black Dogs* 82-87) and thus sharply contradicts his original exhilaration.

For the reader it contains a peculiar thrill to see how the magnitude of the unique event is subverted by a comprehensive narrative perspectivization. The celebration of freedom and the novelty of barriers crossed are deflated and subjectively divested of glory or even dignity. The two characters' visit to Berlin starts with a euphoric mood and results in an almost depressed feeling, which concurs with the metaphorical meaning of the novel's title: "Black Dog" was an expression Winston Churchill used for depression, from which he suffered from time to time. Bernard's dead wife was convinced that "Black Dogs," materializing in her being threatened by monstrous beasts, metaphorically meant "a kind of cultural depression, civilisation's worst moods" (*Black Dogs* 104). The two Englishmen's dejected sobriety obliquely reflects one particular historic reaction to the Fall of the Berlin Wall as well: that this event was not welcomed with great joy by everybody. Earlier on Bernard had to admit that communism did not lead to happiness and wealth for everyone. The hooting and shouting from the impatient crowds west of the demarcation line, who are waiting for the definite opening of the Gate, cannot deceive him about the defeat of a system in which many citizens east of the Wall had believed and that the authorities of the GDR still adhered to. "Two or three thousand had gathered in the hope of seeing the Wall come down at its most important, symbolic point. On the twelve-foot-high concrete blocks that straddled the approach to the Gate a line of nervous young East German soldiers were standing at ease, facing west. They were wearing their service revolvers tucked away out of sight in the small of their backs" (*Black Dogs* 86-87)

The novelistic portrayal of this evening uncertainly conveys the impression that the outcome of the situation is not yet clear at all; sensationalism and chaos rather than joy rule at several places in West-Berlin. "We were passing by that section of wasteland and Wall still known as Potsdamerplatz, threading our way through clusters of friends gathered round the steps of the viewing platform and souvenir kiosk, waiting for something to happen" (*Black Dogs* 90). The aging Bernard, fundamentally shaken and constantly plaguing his son-in-law with political debates mixed with very personal memories of his marriage, becomes involved in a brawl at Checkpoint Charlie when he tries to shield a "romantic revolutionary" (*Black Dogs* 96) of Turkish looks, who keeps waving a red flag, from skinheads. The aggressive youths are driven away by two young women in black, whom Bernard had noticed with disapproval on June 17 street. These punks emerge as the only ones able to save the old man from an undignified, helpless situation and further violence, with Jeremy as a mere bystander. There seems hardly any room for tolerance in the city on this night of heightened patriotism—a circumstance which the protagonist calmly watches. With an acute awareness of the geographically dismembered metropolis he realizes the incidents of social dysfunction. The topographical gapping spaces of the city and the vulnerability of its society mirror each other as interdependent.

When on the following day the injured Bernard has to board the plane from Berlin to London in a wheelchair, he confesses to Jeremy what made him so angry that he interfered with the gang of young men near Potsdamer Platz: "'You heard what they were shouting?' 'Ausländer 'raus.' 'Foreigners out. The Wall comes down and everybody's out there dancing in the street, but sooner or later...'" (*Black Dogs* 104) leaving the sentence unfinished. This dialogue is already part of the novel's third section, set in Poland. The old man's pessimistic appraisal once more reflects the mixture of euphoria and sinister prospects, which accompanies the two visitors' résumé. Jeremy remains silent at Bernard's utterance, but immediately remembers his visit at the site of a concentration camp years ago together with his future wife Jenny, Bernard's daughter. The public and the personal thus may in an individual's perception either contradict each other, as for Jeremy, or conflate, as they do for Bernard. In the narrative, a fusing of places and moments in time dramatically takes center stage in Bernard's comment or Jeremy's memory. The characters' resulting conclusion may either diverge from the publicized dominant narrative about November 9, 1989, or retrospectively integrate the public image into the private view. The immediacy of the portrayals, which in the "Berlin" section offers subjective snapshots of a monumental event, supplements the images communicated by the media and the master narrative, which is told from the end, namely Germany's final solemn reunification. The novelistic representation reveals the moment's inherent contradictions, its insecurity and contingency.

The general complexity of narrative structures intensifies the symbolic in McEwan's two novels, where the object of representation is the ruinous state respectively the dividedness of urban structures. This characteristic can be observed in McEwan's texts regardless of whether the omniscient third-person or the first-person narration addresses human anatomy or the occupied city. About the analogy between the dissection of Otto Eckstein's dead body and the divided city in *The Innocent* the author said in an interview in *The European Messenger* in 1992, "I wanted to show the brutality man can aspire to by comparing the dismemberment of a corpse to the dismemberment of a city: the bomb-devastated Berlin

of the post-war" (K. Ryan 58). In *Black Dogs* the theme of violence or evil is reflected in diverse chapters, periods, and places: Wiltshire, Majdanek, the South of France, and felt as a threat in Berlin on the day the Wall comes down.

While the narratives produce an elaborate maze of symbols, narrative situations and language structures, each of them offers a portrayal of Berlin in which the urban complexity of a thoughtful design appears shattered and occasionally amorphous. This particularity is by no means to be explained by the intertextual features these novels contain. In the protagonists' perception of *The Innocent* urban structures fail to map a specific design or to symbolize an entirety. To the central character the city does not appear as coherent, nor do her monuments work as signifiers, since the signified is only presented as a void—at best they function as useful signposts for geographical orientation. This is also valid for the picture of the reuniting German capital in *Black Dogs*, in which the "Berlin" section is characterized by ambivalence of perception and framed by the narration of gloomy memories. Through the perspective of Leonard in *The Innocent* Berlin's sights and edifices possess hardly any narrativity. They cannot compel the protagonist's curiosity or be of benefit to him. What a critic describes as "the Modernist Consciousness of the City" (Groes 99): is blatantly missing from the narrative representations which address experiences of Berlin haunted by the absence of an "imagined community" (Anderson).

The phrase "urban structure" is thus not expedient for the picture supplied by the third-person narrator as perceived through Leonard in 1955: the focalizer only notices isolated formations through their fleeting apprehension. In the Berlin of November 9, 1989, the past deconstruction of the cityscape is also repeatedly addressed by the first-person narrator Jeremy. Violence of human actions, generally the antagonist of complex structures in urban as in social life, emerges thematically and symbolically in the novels as the constant danger lurking inside the protagonist or in his immediate surroundings, with the manifestations of collective memory seeping into the experience of present events. McEwan comments on his topic: "I'm interested in how a violent impulse grows inside us. In *The Innocent* a rather ordinary man is caught up in a difficult situation and becomes extremely violent. The protagonist's mind is full of images of the Second World War" (qtd. in K. Ryan 58). The shocking insight gained by Leonard Marnham after the homicide, "that all this stuff was also in himself" (*Innocent* 169), extends beyond the macabre effect of the description of the physical, as becomes evident to the reader. It equally applies to the spiritual (or biological) disposition of humans to use force, especially when under pressure.

In another interview the writer calls Leonard "an ordinary kind of guy carrying within himself the very destructiveness that there was in Otto [a former resistance fighter who had opposed the Nazis]" (qtd. in Brown 54). The idea that macrostructural historic events repeat themselves on an individual level or may be foreshadowed by microstructures surfaces in both novels. The fearful, pessimistic notion of history repeating itself is also verbally alluded to in Jeremy's conversation with his compatriot Bernard in *Black Dogs* after their observation of hostile, if thoughtless, impulses in a unique historic moment. McEwan's two fictions exemplify that in the era "post" the grand narrative that features great figures at great moments (Lyotard xxiv) the narrative of ordinariness, fractures and limitations can even take possession of exceptional spatiotemporal situations.

Apart from the explicit reflections of characters and narrators on human nature, *The Innocent* demonstrates that an encounter with physical aggression also subverts the permanence and complexity of human relationships. For Jeremy, the first-person narrator of *Black Dogs*, lasting ties have eventually—in the late 1980s, when divisions are softening—become comparatively crisis-proof. Compared to Leonard, his perception is calm and open to visual experiences of the disjointed cityscape, including the bewildering discrepancies inherent in an exceptional moment. For him, individual preoccupations can recede in Berlin before a disinterested susceptibility for the public and historical, whereas Leonard Marnham's mind despite his professional entanglement in political affairs appears narrowed to a single personal disaster. Only the aging Leonard of the novel's "Postscript" set at the Wall can attain an alleviating and detached view on the ostentatiously disrupted city. His quest for a discovery of his earlier self remains very uncertain, since the monument of his buried past, the tunnel, is fallen into decay. Yet "evidence of his own existence" (*Innocent* 218), disconcerting though it may be, can be unearthed on this site—of which Maria's letter, which Leonard rereads on the spot, is symbolic. In this place and at this moment the personal division can be negotiated and may perhaps even be overcome. His vision of the future is optimistic.

The confidential and intimate story of his private matters absorbs Leonard. As "A Legal Alien," as an Estonian critic refers to Leonard Marnham (Soovik 131), he had remained obtuse to sights as signs. "Mapping" the city would in his case be a misleading term, since only disconnected details are perceived in the postwar Berlin marked by destruction and division. Meaning can by Leonard not be attached to spaces but resides in the participation in personal relationships. A stranger in a strange land, the foreigner stays disconnected. Only by Leonard's later-life contemplation is a way to future connectedness

envisaged in his imagination. Ironically, the city plan of Berlin, itself a symbol, had for him remained a piece of paper attached to the wall of his sitting-room and never became an image in his consciousness. By the protagonist a vision of the city's topography cannot be realized in *The Innocent* despite the number of names of streets, squares and buildings.

"The alien gaze" of the author and his protagonists has shaped these narrative images of the metropolis in the heart of Europe, focused on at different moments of the second half of the twentieth century. In both novels the narration emphasizes the macabre of the actions in which the temporary residents or visitors of the former German capital are entangled and which they carry out or observe contrary to their accustomed nature. Ian McEwan's nuanced and sophisticated 1990 novel reveals an aspect of human nature that is also intradiegetically met with shudder. While for most readers the narrated cityscape and its edifices are recognizable despite their historic deformation the unearthing of hidden or masked elements of human experience harbors a disconcerting impact. In these portrayals, the city's picture has thus been enlarged beyond what is traditionally considered "the memorable"—a notion qualifying the memory of an event or person as edifying and honorable and therefore deserving visible commemoration (M. Ryan 146).

Conceiving the narrated city as a model of the entire society, which Volker Klotz presents as one interpretation manifest in prose literature, appears troubling in the light of the present novels. Which society? Even though set in the (then) former German capital, Germans only supply a minority of the characters represented and hardly ever embody the agents in the novels' plot. Vulnerable, fragile, torn apart and damaged, yet possibly also capable of restoration and recovery—those are the epithets to describe both the material urban structures and the imagined social communities reflected in them. This includes a transnational society *en miniature* which the two narratives construct.

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