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## Introduction

The literature of Berlin is a double category. It can at once reference literary writing that takes Berlin as its object and writing that, whether this is the case or not, belongs in Berlin, is attached to it, by virtue of being produced there. For the most part, this critical companion to the literature of Berlin will be concerned with the former: with writing, in a variety of genres and across the historical spread of modernity, that is concerned with the representation of this, one of the great cities of the modern world. But it will also incorporate consideration of the latter, of the sorts of habitation – and thus the conditions of possibility – that the city affords for the production of literature across its history.

Of course, given the chequered – often fraught – character of that history, in particular in the twentieth century, the conditions of literary production are not always hospitable. As we can see from the titles of two of the most prominent historical studies of the city, Alexandra Richie's *Faust's Metropolis* (1998) and Brian Ladd's *Ghosts of Berlin* (1997),<sup>1</sup> modern Berlin is at once a city dominated (on the Faustian model) by sometimes catastrophic fantasies and compacts of self-transformation and a haunting-ground for the phantoms of the resulting historical violence. Accordingly, the literature of Berlin has to negotiate both the operations of political power and, certainly for the period after the Second World War, their – often spectral – after-effects. At the same time, the city is not exclusively conditioned by those models, and it shares much with the other major cities of modernity. Indeed, the key generic themes that run through the broader canvas of the recent *Cambridge Companion to the City in Literature*, the socio-cultural dynamics and literary constructions that are sustained by cities, *per se*,<sup>2</sup> also feature in what follows, albeit in forms that are in significant respects site-specific.

While Berlin is a relative latecomer as a major urban centre, a status that the erstwhile provincial *Residenzstadt*, seat of the Hohenzollern dynasty since the fifteenth century, only really reached in the course of the eighteenth

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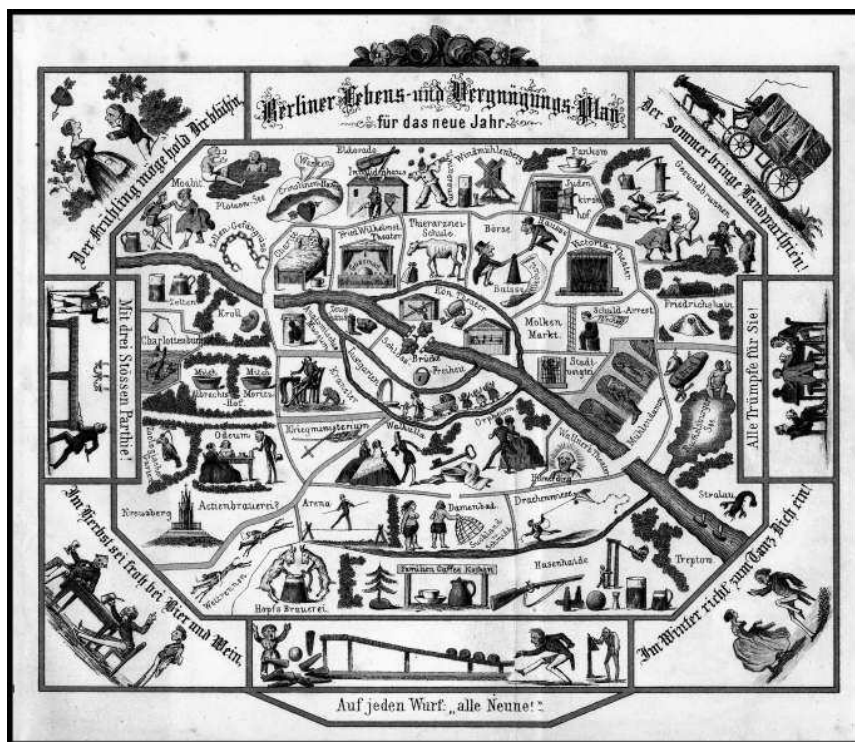


Figure 0.1: *Berliner Lebens- und Vergnügungs-Plan* (Berlin Map of Life and Entertainment), 1871. Photo © Dr. Jens Mattow, Berlin.

century, its ascendancy was remarkably dynamic. As discussed by Matt Erlin in Chapter 1 of this volume, it was with the reign of Frederick the Great (1740–86) that Berlin first became a significant centre of cosmopolitan thinking and cultural production. As traced by John B. Lyon in the opening of Chapter 3, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, the city then grew apace, becoming established as an imperial city of global significance and reach. An allegorical Berlin map of 1871 (Figure 0.1), representing such urban stations of life and entertainment as the city's theatres, shows that this burgeoning of the city also proceeded on a variety of cultural levels. And, as Anne Fuchs outlines at the start of Chapter 4, this development – in both broad civic and more cultural terms – was further accelerated at the start of the twentieth century, powered by the rapid industrialization of the city.

Notwithstanding the end of the Second Empire in the wake of the First World War, and the ensuing turbulence, Berlin continued to burgeon in the

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years of the Weimar Republic. As such, it became what the poet Else Lasker-Schüler – drawn to the city, like so many, from the provinces – called, in a short, lyrical prose text of 1922, a revolving ‘Weltfabrik’, or world factory. It was a dynamic industrial complex also in the field of cultural production: a magnetic attraction and an exacting time-piece, the ‘clock of art’ as Lasker-Schüler’s dubs it,<sup>3</sup> for writers and other artists seeking the pulse of the times or wanting to play a part in setting its pace. In particular from its massive expansion around 1900, Berlin worked not just as a factory but also as an urban laboratory, a place of experimentation with the possibilities – and the excesses – of the modern city in social, political and cultural terms. This laboratory character applies, not least, to formative developments in the disciplinary, indeed intrinsically interdisciplinary, field of urbanology: the conceptually informed critical study of cities. In the first three decades of the twentieth century, first Georg Simmel, and then Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin, established the terms and the fundamental critical methods for the analysis of the modern urban condition. If, as Jürgen Barkhoff points out in Chapter 2, early nineteenth-century Berlin was the birthplace of the philosophical tradition of hermeneutics, then a century later, these pioneering urbanologists transferred its critical resources to the study of the city in its advanced, modern form. Not only did the city produce literary texts, but it was itself understood as an object of critical reading, a mobile and multiform text, requiring advanced skills of interpretation.

We might seek initial guidance here from one of the writers who can be said to have made a contribution through his literary work to the urbanological study of Berlin, an émigré visitor to the Weimar-period city of Kracauer and Benjamin: Vladimir Nabokov and his ‘Guide to Berlin’ (‘Putevoditel’ po Berlinu’ (1925)). This text, one of the works in Russian that he wrote and published during his Berlin years, is also introduced by Yasemin Yildiz in her account of Berlin as a migratory setting in Chapter 11. In its style, it is close to the kind of short prose text, the urban narrative miniature, which Fuchs discusses in Chapter 4, principally through close analysis of the exemplary case of Robert Walser, and which Carolin Duttlinger follows in its further developments in Chapter 5. Like Walser, in Fuchs’s account, Nabokov is at once concerned to conjure up the experience of the contemporary city across a variety of external and internal environments, and to apply critical understanding to its workings. Here, the literary work of such as Walser or Nabokov converges with the urban cultural analysis of Kracauer or Benjamin, both of whom indeed also contributed to creative writing on the city in the short reportage form of the *Feuilleton*.

Perhaps above all, what Nabokov’s ‘Guide’ shows is a constitutive tension that is also fundamental to Benjamin’s study of nineteenth-century Paris or

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early twentieth-century Berlin, whereby the progressive dynamics of modernity are always also turned back towards the past. This dialectical turn is introduced in the second of the five urban vignettes – or, with Benjamin, Kracauer, Bloch and Adorno, *Denkbilder* (literally, ‘think images’) – that make up the ‘Guide’: ‘The Streetcar’. The first person narrator muses on this contemporary mode of transport, which has superseded the horse-drawn cabs of his youth in St Petersburg, but – in its turn – is set for supersession. The 1920s urban observer projects through time onto ‘some eccentric Berlin writer in the twenties of the twenty-first century’, who will study the museum-bound remains of the age of the tram and, with their help, give account of ‘Berlin streets in by-gone days’.<sup>4</sup> And for the narrator of the Berlin guide, Nabokov’s proxy, this is the function of literary creation in the mode that he pursues: an attentive viewing of the contemporary world as if from the future. It is the view that also draws the ‘Guide’ to a close, that of ‘future recollection’,<sup>5</sup> as the narrator sees himself, as a persistent memory image in the making, through the eyes of a young boy in a Berlin bar.

This distinctive turn to the future in order to experience the present as past is arguably proper to the ambiguous temporal structures of cities in general. Cities are structures that, as they expand and contract over time, project into the future and recall the past, rise and fall, often in non-synchronic ways. But the sense of multiple timescales has particular resonance for the city of Berlin, more especially in its Weimar years. And it is especially in evidence in the sort of ‘thickening’ that Yildiz attributes, following Aydemir and Rotas, to the migratory setting, as space becomes layered, after the fashion of a palimpsest, through time. The migratory subject, always coming from another place at another time, is perhaps especially liable to thicken the experience of the city in this way.

This complex temporality is also the disposition of the writings of another expatriate literary guide to Berlin in those years: Christopher Isherwood. Isherwood captures at once the setting of the stage for the violence of National Socialist Berlin, which Reinhard Zachau outlines in Chapter 6 of this volume, and a melancholic sense of a present that can only be the object of retrospection when he says ‘goodbye to Berlin’, and the march of history takes over. The ‘Welcome to Berlin’ that Andreas Kraß and Benedikt Wolf adopt from Bob Fosse’s 1972 screen version of the musical *Cabaret* to open Chapter 10 also anticipates a ‘goodbye’, in particular to the kinds of sexual and socio-cultural liberties that Weimar Berlin cultivated and that drew Isherwood, W. H. Auden and others to the city. If Isherwood, famously, casts his literary work as that of a first-person camera,<sup>6</sup> recording views of late Weimar Berlin, his literary version of photography is marked by the kind of mixed tense that Roland Barthes attributes to that medium, capturing the

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compound temporality of the future anterior, as ‘*This will be and this has been*’ are melded into what will have been.<sup>7</sup> This is the character, for instance, of the darkening city scenes that open two of the sections of his *Goodbye to Berlin*: ‘A Berlin Diary (*Autumn 1930*)’ and ‘A Berlin Diary (*Winter 1932–3*)’.<sup>8</sup> As Duttlinger shows in Chapter 5, there is a particular, intermedial alignment between the writing of Weimar Modernism and the genre of the photobook, and also the medium of film. Lyn Marven’s reading of Irmgard Keun’s late Weimar classic, *Das kunstseidene Mädchen* (The Artificial Silk Girl (1932)), in Chapter 9, provides a nice illustration of the latter.

What this triangular relationship between literature and other media implies is a tension between the future-oriented drive of the city as recorded by the camera (in particular the film camera) or by the photographically disposed literary text and the prospect of its loss. Photography, like Nabokov’s streetcar, is a technology that is already marked by the anticipation of its passing. And observational urban writing modelled on it has a similar predicament. We are reminded of a scene from another of Nabokov’s Berlin writings, where a puddle encountered ‘in the middle of the black pavement resembled an insufficiently developed photograph’.<sup>9</sup> It is the paradox of this form of writing that it presents that sense of loss (inflected, for the émigré Nabokov, with that of the other city, the place of origin, behind Berlin) with compelling presence.

This volume stakes a claim for Berlin as a city that has produced a compelling series of literary presences in the last 250 years, even as it registers the narrative of what has been lost or not fully developed. The sort of companionship that the volume offers to the reader in the exploration of the iterations of the literary city over that period is of a particular kind. While visitors to the city, like Nabokov or Isherwood, make appearances in the volume, most of the authors considered here are German, and most of the literary works originally written in German. And while some readers will be familiar with at least some of what is discussed and with the original language of the German texts, no such familiarity is assumed. Rather, the authors of its thirteen chapters have sought to be genuine critical companions to the interested reader, offering orientation through different dimensions of the city’s literary map and introductions to a set of its most significant locations, its landmark features and key historical developments.

While a significant part of the corpus of texts that feature here is canonical, in that sense also with landmark status, this companion equally seeks to introduce readers to less mainstream writing. These categories may not fully align with the more and the less familiar territories of the city, but the literature of Berlin has certainly done much to shape the way in which the

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city has come to be known, both internally and at large. Given that the experience of a city is always mediated as much through the texture of its localized spaces as through its focal points of orientation, the experience of the city in literature needs to encompass something of both types of encounter. For Berlin in particular, this means giving adequate attention to the less conspicuous category of the *Kiez*, the local ‘patch’ or neighbourhood, as an informal level of civic organization, informing the identification of Berliners with their city. Cumulatively, the chapters of this volume draft a literary map that is at once marked out by key reference points, places and monuments, some of them encountered on multiple occasions, and the more local domains, on the model of the *Kiez*.

By way of introduction to this double form of mapping, we might consider perhaps the best-known landmark example of the literature of Berlin. It is one that is recurrently referenced in this volume, most substantially in Duttlinger’s reading in Chapter 5: Alfred Döblin’s Modernist masterpiece, *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929). Döblin’s epic narrative is at once centred upon and named for one of the major civic squares of the city, and it undertakes an exploration of the more informal spaces that surround it. The Alexanderplatz is, to use the terms developed by the urban theorist Henri Lefebvre, representative in a double sense here. It is at once a ‘representational space’ (the space, that is, of lived experience and the practical negotiation of everyday existence as representational practice, a production of meaning) and the object of ‘representations of space’ (of plans and designs relating to the conceptual shaping of the city).<sup>10</sup> The Alexanderplatz is perhaps paradigmatically representative of modern Berlin in that double sense. As I have argued elsewhere, it is a kind of agora for the modern city of Berlin, a marketplace and site of social interaction. In that sense, Döblin’s view of the Alexanderplatz in 1929 is a mobile equivalent to that of E. T. A. Hoffmann, from a self-consciously fixed point, upon the social congregation of the Gendarmenmarkt square a century earlier, as discussed by Barkhoff in Chapter 2. At the same time, the Alexanderplatz has been the object of a series of master plans for the political, architectural and logistical organization of urban life.<sup>11</sup> The relationship between the two levels of space, in turn, determines the forms of spatial practice that emerge on and around the square: practice at the level of everyday life and at the level of the march or the demonstration, that is, of more orchestrated forms of political representation. We could think of the rally on 4 November 1989, when leading GDR writers, such as Heiner Müller and Christa Wolf, both of whom feature in this volume, were amongst those who occupied this marching-ground of the state in order to lend their voices as literary intellectuals to the calls for political change that would prove to be tectonic. Wolf invoked



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the idea of the ruling cadre marching past the people in the 1 May parade on the Alexanderplatz, and Müller the idea of demonstrations with dancing if the government should resign.<sup>12</sup>

The Alexanderplatz of today with its architectural silos, from the fourteenth-century Marienkirche (St Mary's Church) at its southern boundary, via the Weimar Modernism of Peter Behrens, to such heroic Soviet-era implants as the Television Tower, and the banal, generic mall constructions of the post-unification years, represents the history of the city in a remarkably assorted, almost archival constellation. Yet, there is a sense that the archive is not properly configured, that the elements are not placed in cultural-historical terms, but rather in the mode of what Marc Augé famously called the non-place, the generic site without distinctive identity.<sup>13</sup> While Augé's principal focus is on the exchangeable, globalized spaces of airports and hotels, there is also every reason to consider the 'place', or square, on the model of the Alexanderplatz, as non-place, in his sense. Indeed, it is perhaps indicative that Augé's anthropological term of art has entered into popular discourse, with a recent Berlin television feature on an online public dialogue around the tribulations of urban planning in the case of the Alexanderplatz and the adjacent historical centre of Berlin dubbing it a 'Nicht-Ort', a non-place.<sup>14</sup> And while Augé develops the term for the particular conditions of what he calls 'supermodernity', it arguably already applies to the historically unsettled scene of construction and reconstruction that gives its name to Döblin's Modernist novel.

This tension between a settled sense of place and forms of non-placement is perhaps what gives *Berlin Alexanderplatz* its paradigmatic status for the literature of Berlin. Notwithstanding its character as a text inhering in a particular time – the late Weimar years – as well as occupying a particular, eponymous location, this text can serve as a more developed kind of second-order guide for the literary mapping that is undertaken here across a variety of periods and urban environments. If different contributors to this volume, dealing with very different chapters in the story of Berlin in literature, have made reference, unbidden, to *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, this indicates something of its potential as a landmark text. In particular, as Katharina Gerstenberger notes in Chapter 8, it has been a yardstick for the efforts to capture the so-called *Wende*, or 'turn', of unification in 1990, and the city's new status as the capital of the 'Berlin Republic' that has followed. The notion of the *Wenderoman*, or novel of that national and civic turn, has recurrently been measured against Döblin's epic narrative, and the contenders, for all their individual interest, invariably found wanting. *Berlin Alexanderplatz* has accordingly been invested with a powerful nostalgia for its encompassing representation of the life of the city in dynamic and unsettled times. It is, in other words, a particular site of memory for the literary culture of Berlin.

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Of course, the literary mapping undertaken here cannot itself pretend to be encompassing. It cannot entirely represent the literary life of Berlin in spatial terms – the imaging of the city in the synchronic dimension – or in temporal terms – the diachronic dimension of developments in its literary culture. And it can certainly not do full justice to the interaction between the two, how the spatial organization of the city – what I have called elsewhere its cultural topography – is modified along the timeline of its modern history.<sup>15</sup> The history of the literature of Berlin is represented here through a set of its key chapters, ranging from the eighteenth century to the present day. That the account could have started earlier is clear, and indeed this is illustrated in striking form by the *Berliner Totentanz* in the Marienkirche, the city's version of the generic, medieval *danse macabre*, as presented by Gerrit-Jan Berendse to set the scene for Chapter 13. However, the volume spans most of the city's more significant literary production. There are points in this historical span where the account is thickened, the mappings compounded and, so, complicated. This is the case, in particular, for the first decades of the twentieth century, when Berlin emerged as what the discourse of the time called a *Weltstadt*, or city of the world. And the Weimar period, as perhaps the heyday of the city's literary and broader cultural life, and the apogee of its global cultural influence, is thus given particularly sustained attention across several chapters, as indeed in this Introduction.

While the historical sequence that governs the larger part of the volume gives prominence to narrative writing, albeit also with some reference to other genres, individual chapters are also dedicated to drama and to poetry. As David Barnett argues in Chapter 12, Berlin is a leading city of theatre, less as a developed setting for the plots of dramas than as a place of their production and performance. Indeed, Berlin theatre has played a particular role in the creative re-production of literary texts, from the pioneering work of Brecht and his Berlin Ensemble (Barnett particularly explores the example of Brecht's adaptation of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*) to the innovations of *Regietheater* or 'directorial theatre', which holds sway in the Berlin theatre culture of today.

In the dramas most associated with the city of Berlin since the beginning of the twentieth century, life and death sit closely together. This is most evident in the postwar theatre of Heiner Müller, as in *Germania Tod in Berlin* (*Germania Death in Berlin* (1977)), one of Barnett's focal texts. But it is already fundamental to the Naturalist drama of Gerhart Hauptmann, as also explored in Lyon's reading of *Die Ratten* (*The Rats* (1910)) in Chapter 3. And with the medieval *Totentanz* as his point of departure, Berendse, in Chapter 13, shows that this proximity of death to life in Berlin is also a key characteristic of the modern city's relationship to poetry. It is seen there to



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extend from visceral versions of the high lyric mode in the post-Baudelairean sonnets of Gottfried Benn, through the *Gebruuchsslyrik*, or utilitarian lyric, of Brecht's urban poetry, to the popular verse of David Bowie's Berlin songs.

Bowie's association with Berlin is, one might say, identitarian, in a special sense. That is, it has to do with the particular frame that the city in certain forms and at certain times – in this case West Berlin in the late 1970s – has provided for a living out of counter-normative, creative identities. Three chapters of this volume are also assigned to a set of identity questions that have particular salience for Berlin and have made distinctive contributions to the vitality of the city's literary identity in the period since 1900: questions of gender (Marven on writing by women in Chapter 9), of sexuality (Kraß and Wolf on queer writing in Chapter 10) and of ethnicity and migration (Yildiz in Chapter 11). This – in certain senses interrelated – set of identity categories, which could certainly have been extended further, has a special function, not only in the practical life of the city but also in what we could call its cultural imaginary – the ways in which ideas of Berlin have been constructed. It is a measure of both the inclusiveness that the city has achieved and the exclusions that it has imposed, or that have been imposed by powers of state, across its history. To use a term coined by Henri Lefebvre, what is at issue here are the 'rights to the city':<sup>16</sup> the extent to which different social and cultural groups can freely inhabit it by right and, thereby, also co-constitute its conditions of living. And, as further developed by Michel de Certeau, this is the basis of 'habitability' as the 'production of an area of free play (*Spielraum*) on a checkerboard that analyzes and classifies identities'.<sup>17</sup>

Chapters 9, 10 and 11 of this volume each investigate the contours of that area of free play, what one of the texts discussed in Gerstenberger's account in Chapter 8 (Tanja Dückers' *Spielzone* (1999)) titles a Play Zone. These chapters trace both the possibilities and the limits of an alternative space of urban occupation, extending beyond the governing discourse and structural economy of what de Certeau calls the 'local authority'.<sup>18</sup> While these questions of the right to the city – as extended to the literary rights to the city – are particularly in focus in those three chapters focusing on identity formations, they also feature in other contributions to the volume from its first steps. The great thinker, Moses Mendelssohn, who is a focal protagonist in Erlin's account of Berlin as a centre of the Enlightenment in Chapter 1, had to enter the city via the Rosenthaler Tor, a gate designated for non-resident Jews, when he migrated there from Dessau in 1743. The networks of urban intellectual and cultural sociability that sustain the developments of the Berlin Enlightenment in Erlin's account, and subsequently Berlin Romanticism, as discussed by Barkhoff in Chapter 2, were never fully inclusive. As Barkhoff shows, while the literary life of early nineteenth-century

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Berlin was enlivened by salons that were sustained by Jewish women, the more general culture of the city in the Romantic period was marred by anti-Semitism. Equally, any emancipation that it afforded for women was strictly limited. Much as the Romantics were attached to certain freedoms of the imagination and literary creation, they often also infringed others; and as the volume recurrently shows, this ambivalent constellation of progressive and reactionary thinking and activity is a regular feature of the literary history of Berlin.

The history of anti-Semitism and of other forms of identity-based coercion and exclusion also indicates a level of experience that is not always readily visible in the surface appearances of the city. And another theme that recurs in this volume is the underground, inhabited with varying degrees of choice, often by those who have forcibly deprived of any right to the city they might have enjoyed. Here, too, a more general characteristic of the literature of cities takes on a particular form, in keeping with the historical specificity of Berlin. It is most acute, of course, in the period of the most intense civic constraint, that of National Socialism as shown in Chapter 6 and signalled by the title of the only recently published testimonial narrative of survival against the odds by Marie Jalowicz with which Zachau's account concludes: *Untergetaucht* (Gone Underground (2014)). But, what Gerrit-Jan Berendse calls, after Julia Kristeva, abjection – the driving out or underground of the inherent 'other' – is in evidence at other times too. There are, for instance, the rats – archetypal species of urban abjection – that run underground, as it were, from Hauptmann's drama, as discussed by Lyon, to Annett Gröschner's *Walpurgistag* (Walpurgis Day (2011)), set against the contemporary gentrification of the *Kieze* of East Berlin, which features amongst the texts by women writers given special attention by Marven. These Berlin rats, hosted by different texts, embody at once the precarity and the potential resilience of underground existences in the city.

Between the two rat texts and in the wake of National Socialism, which mobilized the figure of the urban rat for its own ideological purposes, there is Cold War Berlin, as adumbrated indeed in Robert Siodmak's 1955 film of Hauptmann's play, transposed to the postwar, pre-Wall city. As Alison Lewis shows in her account of the literature of Cold War division in Chapter 7, the imposition of the Wall upon Berlin radically reorganized its space for authors writing on either side of it and projecting the possibility of border-crossings. The Wall imposed upon the city a split psycho-geography, which prompted fantasies of crossing to the other side, in the wall-jumping that Lewis discusses, but also, in many cases, tunnelling. We could here invoke another foreign visitor as a writer of and in Berlin, Ian McEwan, following in the tradition of adopting Berlin as setting for hard-boiled Cold