

Funeral in Berlin Short Guide

Funeral in Berlin by Len Deighton

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Characters

principal characters in *Fu in Berlin*, who previously in *The Ipcress File* (1962), Dohle, jackdaw, with the addition of the suffix-ish, "Dawlish" suggests the bird's cry and habit of hiding its loot.

Dawlish is a thoroughgoing professional, although some people consider him fussy and dub him "Grannie Dawlish."

Robin James Hallam (aka James J. Hallam, F.R.S.A.) is a Home Office civil servant and homosexual who apparently monitors intelligence activities at Dawlish's W.O.O.C. (P). A member of the Oxbridgian society, he sports a strong upper-class prejudice. After the no-name agent visits him, Hallam thinks of him as "one of Dawlish's little men." A "Secret Service man?" he muses to himself and says, "Upstart."

To Hallam the anonymous agent is an "upstart from Burnley — a supercilious, anti-public-school technician who thought he was an administrator."

Hallam is a snob, but he is not without a sense of humor. He is fond of modern music; he likes to cook for himself; and he enjoys smoking Players No. 3 cigarettes. But he is a skinflint, and within him is a desire for gain so deep that he would commit murder to fulfill it.

Another principal character is the Russian Red Army Security Colonel Of the general appeared interest focuses naturally on the protagonist, the no-name British agent who still works for the provisional committee of MI-6. This time, however, he shares narration with a third-person omniscient narrator who allows some characters to reflect on themselves and their affairs. Although still the Odyssean "No-man," he is an advance over what he was previously — more experienced, confident, relaxed, and much less easily fooled. He has two codenames: "Edmond Dorf" and "Kadaver" (corpse). Although firm and ruthless when required, he is more likeable and more humane than before.

The anonymous agent's control officer, Dawlish, is a perfect foil for him.

Dawlish is smart enough to see through him while respecting his intelligence and integrity. He also has just the right sense of humor to parry him, and their repartee is brilliantly conducted by Deighton. The name "Dawlish" is not a real surname but a codename to protect the spy master's identity. Derived from the German *die Stok*. His surname is not Russian but German and means "push" or "drive."

It may be a code-name, but it fits his personality, for he is a compelling salesman. He sells the Semitsa deal to the Western agents, although the British agent remains suspicious of his truthfulness. Although Deighton gives him the patronymic



"Alexeyevitch," he places it before the given name of "Oleg." The typical Russian order is: a given name; a patronymic or matronymic; and a family name. If one already knows a Russian's family name and wishes to address him or her informally, he calls the person by his first two names. Therefore, Deighton's word order is backwards. Stok should be addressed informally as "Oleg Alexeyevitch." Although the colonel has a weird sense of humor and is not to be trusted, he is not an unlikable person.

Paul Louis Broum (aka Johnnie Vulkan and King) is the most complex of the important characters. He is a veritable Doppelgänger (double goer), a person accompanied by his shadow, a Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde. In the eyes of Samantha Steel he is kind and gentle, but when the anonymous agent faces him in a life-and-death struggle, he is vicious and brutal; indeed, he is Vulkan, the god of fire and metals. Born of a French Roman Catholic father and a Sudaten German-Jewish mother, both bilingual, he was a Roman Catholic Jew. He was also a Communist Party assassin and an army deserter. Eventually he found himself in the Nazi concentration and extermination center of Treblinka in central Poland. However, with the connivance of an S.S. doctor, he arranged for the murder of a camp guard named Vulkan so he could assume his identity and make his escape, which he succeeded in doing.

The final important character is Hanna Stahl (aka Samantha Steel), Ger.

der Stahl means "steel." She makes friends of both Johnnie Vulkan and the anonymous British agent. She is a member of the Israeli Secret Service, belonging to Sherutei Betahan (or Shinbet), which is roughly equivalent to the British MI-6. She is an American Jew but zealous in the Israeli cause. Pretty and outgoing, she provides some romantic interest. However, she ties the final knot of the plot together.



Social Concerns

Deighton presents the social and political interaction that took place in divided Berlin and Germany following the Allied victory of World War II in 1945 through the early 1960s. In 1945 Berlin was divided into four sectors, with Britain, France, the Soviet Union, and the United States each occupying a sector; at the same time they divided Germany into four zones.

Although Berlin was within the Soviet zone of occupation, the Western powers presumed that the Soviets would allow them free access to the city. To their chagrin, however, the Russians declared a blockade in June 1948 and closed all routes, water as well as land, through their zone, with the design of driving the Western powers out of Berlin altogether. But the West promptly replied by organizing a gigantic air lift to supply the West Berliners with the necessities of life.

The Soviets therefore lifted their blockade in May 1949, although the Air Lift continued until September.

Meanwhile, late in 1948, East and West Berlin established separate governments, thus dividing the city; and by 1949 the three Western zones of Germany became West Germany and the Soviet zone East Germany, the former's capital at Bonn and the latter's at Berlin.

During the 1950s travel between the two Germanys was ordinarily unrestricted until thousands of East Germans flowed into West Germany to escape their social system. Therefore, in August 1961, the East German police began building a concrete and barbed wire wall to keep the East Germans from escaping. Nevertheless, in the following years many East Germans were shot by border guards while attempting to escape. Not until 1989 was the Berlin Wall opened for free passage.

Deighton tries to show how the people of both East and West Germany responded to each other. He is particularly interested in dramatizing the interactions among the various intelligence agencies — the British Secret Service, the West German Gehlen organization, the American CIA, and the Soviet KGB — in their dealings with one another. The protagonist here is the same anonymous agent met with in *The Ipcress File*, still self-conscious about his working-class origin, still deft with ironic wise-cracks, and still shrewd, tough, and incorruptible.



Techniques

In *Funeral in Berlin* Deighton makes advances in varying his narrative point of view, while continuing to use the anonymous agent as his principal spokesman. The format of the novel begins with a page of quotations taken from Allen Dulles, Premier Khrushchev, R. Southey, Einstein, and R. Lewisohn. Then comes the title page and fifty-one chapters of narrative and description primarily in discourse form. Each chapter is dated in diary or dossier form and is headed by a paradigm or rule concerning the playing of chess. The novel ends with six appendices on poisonous insecticides, West German Intelligence (Gehlen); German Army Intelligence (Abwehr); Soviet Intelligence; French Intelligence; and the British Official Secrets Act and its amendments. The narrative point of view is changed in Chapter 2 to the third-person omniscient to disclose the reflections of Hallam; it is changed in Chapter 10 in the same way to reveal the reflections of Vulkan; Chapter 29 is a written message from a field agent to intelligence H.Q. in what might be called first-person plural; Chapter 32 is third-person limited and discloses what Jan-im-Gluck witnessed while a prisoner at the Treblinka camp; Chapter 34 reveals Colonel Stok's musings in third-person omniscient; finally, Chapter 43 peers into the mind of Samantha Steel in the third-person limited. This shifting from the first-person limited to third-person omniscient narrative point of view is done to allow a more detailed presentation of the subtleties of character, which is an attempt to push subgenre thriller fiction in the direction of the serious novel.

Another technique employed in Deighton's fiction is the specific naming of objects, especially brand and model specifications, so that the narrative images seem to correspond to the facts of real life as we know it. This naming is done, first, to lend realism to the narrative representation, not in a mimetic sense but to combat romantic idealization, especially regarding the ideal of Empire. Deighton's mentioning of two motion pictures, *The Four Feathers* (1939), a Korda film based on A. E. W. Mason's novel (1902) of Old Empire heroism versus cowardice and *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), a Milestone film based on Remarque's novel of the same name (1929) about the wasteful destruction of Germany's youth, are useful in making this point. Further, the naming of well-advertised brand names which cater to various classes and personalities and the frequent mention of the titles of popular songs and naming popular singer Dinah Washington, together with the brand names of cigarettes (Gauloises, Player's No. 3, Camels); motor cars (Cadillac, Skoda, Zil); and guns (Browning F[abrique]N[ationale], at Liege, 9mm semi-auto; Mauser HS [Hahn-Selbstspanner], .32 cal. semi-auto; Sten Gun Mark II, 9mm machine gun, cyclic rate 550rpm) adds to the verisimilitude of the narrative. And, since modern espionage is international and traveling is necessary, the naming of foreign places (Berlin, London, Hendaye-Plage, France) gives the spy novel a tourist character. All this naming makes the reader conscious that in the midst of familiar everyday life there is in operation a secret game of intelligence that sometimes involves treason, guns, and violence. In this way Deighton's narrative takes on a game-like structure that justifies his use of the rules and tactics of chess as chapter headings. Do the games he plays correspond to the history

he depicts? He has discounted any one-to -one relationship between themes: "History," he has said, "does not prove games wrong, anymore than games prove history wrong."



Themes

A principal theme in *Funeral in Berlin* stems from the very practice of intelligence work — namely, the question: "Whom can you trust?" This theme was introduced by Deighton in *The Ipcress File*, and he supported it in his Appendix to that novel by quoting some lines from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. In this drama, Artemidorus reads aloud a note he wrote to Caesar warning him to beware of his colleagues: "Caesar, beware of Brutus; take heed of Cassius, come not near Casca; have an eye to Cinna; trust not Trebonius . . ." In *Funeral in Berlin* the Russian Colonel Stok informs the German agent Johnnie Vulkan: "I make my plans upon the basis of everyone being untrustworthy." The British no-name-agent tells Vulkan: "The moment you think that you know who your friends are is the moment to get another job." In the nightmare world of espionage such paranoia is routine and part of the rules of the "Game."

A second theme, also introduced in *The Ipcress File*, is concerned with the character and the schizophrenic mentality of the double or triple agent. The typical unpatriotic and traitorous agent is an effete snob like Dalby in *The Ipcress File*; a stingy homosexual like Hallam; or a repulsive criminal like Vulkan, both in *Funeral in Berlin*. These characterizations no doubt stem from the effect on Deighton of the treachery spawned at Trinity College, Cambridge University, in the 1930s by the Communist Apostles Burgess, Maclean, Philby, Blunt, May, and Springhall. All of these gentlemen were recruited by the Soviets as spies and moles in the British government during World War II; many of them were also homosexuals.

The most important thing to patriotic Deighton no doubt was that these elite members of the governing class had not only betrayed their country but also themselves. As for the schizophrenic mentality, the no-name British agent tells Vulkan: "I'll tell you your trouble Johnnie . . . You've become a professional phony. You've become so good at pretending to be different that you have lost contact with your identity. You've learned so much jargon that you don't know which side you are on."

A third significant theme is the importance the competing powers attach to the obtaining of scientific talent, whether by the acquisition of refugees, by the enticement of money, or by political defection. Although this theme was introduced in *The Ipcress File*, in that novel the method of acquisition and the motive for obtaining the scientist were quite different, featuring kidnapping and brainwashing to make the scientists into Soviet moles in the West. In *Funeral in Berlin*, KGB Colonel Stok's story that a Russian biochemist named Semitsa wishes to defect from the Soviet Union is his Russian fairy tale designed to trick Western intelligence into making itself ridiculous.

Stok succeeds in bringing Vulkan and Israeli agent Samantha Steel — the latter anxious to obtain the Russian scientist for Israel because her rival, Nasser's Egypt, has acquired many ex-Nazi scientists — into a deal to steal Semitsa from the anonymous British agent who in the long run is not fooled by Stok nor by Vulkan and Steel.



Finally, the theme of class rivalry between the working-class anonymous agent and his Oxbridgian superiors is much more restrained in general than in *The Ipress File*. The anonymous agent's boss Dawlish is the most lovable character in the book.



Key Questions

Funeral in Berlin suggests not only what a "cold war" is but also what the "Cold War" was in the early 1960s following the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961.

During World War II, the Soviet Union had been one of the Allies in union with Great Britain and the United States (France had been occupied by Germany) in opposition to the Axis powers, principally Germany, Italy, and Japan. Germany surrendered on May 7, 1945. The Soviet Union declared war on Japan and occupied Manchuria in August. While American troops were preparing to invade Japan, President Truman ordered the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Such destruction brought the war to an end, but it also initiated the Nuclear Age, the most dangerous age human kind has ever known.

In such a time the Cold War began with the dropping of the Iron Curtain of Communism versus Democratic Industrial Capitalism. Deighton's novel may be discussed in terms of its credibility in depicting the atmosphere and life of divided Berlin during this Cold War period, inspired as it is by the real situation.

Deighton seeks to achieve authenticity — hence credibility — by various means. One way is by paying strict attention to geography. He takes his characters from one place to another by authentic routes, accurately naming the streets or avenues as well as districts, sometimes characterizing them. For instance, when driving his car through London, he shifts it into high gear as he passes "Parliament Square." He writes: "Charlotte Street runs north from Oxford Street and there are few who will blame it." In Berlin Samantha Steel is being driven to Tempelhof Airport. She watches "the big snowflakes hitting the grimy streets" in passing through "the Reinickendorf district," and when she reaches "Schönberg" she learns that "Tempelhof is just ahead."

Two themes play important roles in *The Ipcress File* as well as in *Funeral in Berlin*, which have to do with "brainstealing" and "brainwashing." British biochemists are being kidnapped in England, taken to a safe house, and there brainwashed. That is, they are made to abandon their previous beliefs and become communists. When the British Secret Service learns that a scientist code-named "Raven," having been brainwashed, is being taken from Lebanon into Syria, the anonymous agent and Dalby, his chief, take off for Lebanon where they rescue the scientist in the mountains. The anonymous agent returns to London where he is kidnapped by the same gang, taken to the safe house, and subjected to brainwashing techniques. He escapes and arranges for the capture of the gang, thus becoming a hero in spite of himself.

In *Funeral in Berlin*, a Red Army officer in State Security, Colonel Stok, located in East Berlin, informs the British Secret Service that a prominent Communist biochemist wishes to defect to London. When the anonymous agent arrives in West Germany at Tempelhof Airport, he is met by a mercenary agent named Johnnie Vulkan who takes him to see Colonel Stok. Stok informs the Englishman that the turning over of the Russian biochemist is not an official exchange but a private matter — if the price is



right. The anonymous agent agrees to pay the sum suggested by the colonel, who tells him that Semitsa will be brought into East Berlin and taken through Checkpoint Charlie under the cover of being a corpse in a casket. Once through the checkpoint the funeral car will be driven to a mortuary in West Berlin.

From there Semitsa's corpse (he will have been put into a drug-induced deep sleep) will be delivered to the British agent at a garage in the Wittenau district. When he arrives at the garage he finds Johnnie there. Johnnie holds him up at the point of a Mauser semiautomatic. He informs the Englishman that he, Johnnie, has made a deal with the female Israeli agent to turn the Russian scientist over to her.

In a fight between the Englishman and Johnnie, the latter is accidentally killed.

Samantha Steel arrives at the garage and takes possession of the casket at the point of a Mark II Sten sub-machine gun. She leaves with the casket in a van on her way to Tempelhof and Haifa, Israel.

"Brainstealing" — although not exactly like the above — has taken place among the competitive world powers, mostly by offering political asylum, monetary rewards, or other inducements. Why at the historical time of the above novels might such powers as the Soviet Union, China, and Israel, and others, have been anxious to obtain biochemists in particular? Because biochemistry is the study of the chemistry of living organisms, and it seeks a knowledge of their structures and functions. Biochemists can discover and make chemical agents for use in chemical and biological warfare.

1. In *Funeral in Berlin* Deighton adds to his previous characterizations two new devices: (1) the self-reflections of Hallam, Broum (aka Vulcan), Stok, and Steel; and (2) the reports of eye witnesses, as Jan-im-Gluck, to Broum's behavior at Camp Treblinka. To what extent does each one of these reflections explain the actions of the person in so far as he or she contributes to the development of the plot? Are these extensions of characterization effective?

2. Great novelists such as Goethe, Stendhal, Proust, and Henry James diligently explore the psychological subtleties and motivations of their central characters because their novels are essentially studies of people and manners relative to their society and its culture. But if the subgenre of the spy thriller is essentially, as a critic maintained, a quest "to disentangle truth from its mirror images" in order to find out "who is threatening whom about what," and thus requires considerable concealment on the part of the author, cannot the spy novelist go too far in developing the subtleties of character?

3. Consider the following argument and critique it: Morals belong in reality to civilized society. They are not the natural growth of the struggle for existence. They are a garden plot which civilized man has carved out of the wilderness. It requires cultivation if it is not to grow wild again. The survival of the fittest is a pragmatic affair; civilized morals have no part in it. If someone shoots at you, you must shoot back or surrender. War breaks the civilized state of peace; when war occurs all parties are the criminals, whether defenders or attackers. Moral principles hardly exist in statecraft or warcraft.



Espionage is essential to warfare; and both depend on secrecy, disinformation, deception, and belief in a myth.

4. Although Deighton (with le Carre) has been credited with having invented the postmodern realistic spy novel, he (and le Carre as well) later moved in the direction of myth and romantic idealism. For instance, in *Funeral in Berlin* he suggests his villain Braum (aka Vulkan) is Vulcan, the god of fire and metals. Further, however, he sees him metaphorically under the guise of Goethe's *Faust* (1808), a great philosophical drama, as a "little Faust, seeker of salvation by striving." He is a "Sturm-und-Drang" (storm and stress) artist, "who wanted to die "with Goethe on his lips" but ironically was foiled by being killed accidentally while trying to prevent having his fine suit soiled. Then the English agent wonders: Is Samantha Steel little Faust's "Gretchen" (Profane Love) or his "Helena," or Helen of Troy (Sacred Love). How is it that authors can thus write at cross-purposes with their original intention? Specifically, why do you think Deighton has thus undermined his own presuppositions?

5. Plot can produce suspense, but so can style. Deighton's style is taut, fastpaced, colloquial, and colorful. In narration he likes ambiguity and discursiveness; in dialogue banter, sarcasm, and parody; in description naming specifically: streets, districts, clothes, food, cars, guns, helicopters, cigarettes, and popular songs. What is the effect of the style of description of the fight between the English agent and Johnnie Vulkan in Chapter 42 of *Funeral in Berlin*? Does it enhance suspense?

Literary Precedents

Although modern fictional texts may be strongly influenced by past ones either by imitation or by counteraction, they may also be strongly affected by historical events in politics, economics, and social affairs. Specters of fear are particularly effective in this way: The smashing victory of the Japanese over China in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 caused much concern in Europe. This was especially true in Germany where Kaiser Wilhelm II was pursuing his "Neue Kurs" ("New Course") by building an army, a navy, and an empire. As a result of the Japanese victory he envisioned the rise of what he called "die gelbe Gefahr" ("the Yellow Peril"). That is, he saw the teeming millions of Asia — Chinese, Mongols, Manchus, and Koreans — led by their Japanese masters, conquering all Christian Europe. This specter of the "Yellow Peril" became the theme of a thriller by the British author Sax Rohmer (pen name of Arthur C. Wade) titled *The Insidious Dr. Fu-Manchu* (1913), and this theme was pursued through twelve additional titles of the Fu-Manchu series.

However, the true father of the invasion thriller was another British author, William Le Queux. He predicted, at first, a Franco-Russian invasion of Great Britain in *The Great War in England* in 1897 (1894) and in *The Invasion of 1910*, with a *Full Account of the Siege of London* (1906). But with the easy defeat of Russia by Japan in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, he concluded that Germany alone posed a real threat to England. Consequently, he produced *The Great War* (1908), in which he predicted World War I, and *Spies of the Kaiser: Plotting the Downfall of England* (1909). Meanwhile, Erskine Childers discovered a German plot to invade England in his *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903). During World War I, John Buchan's spy thriller, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, depicting a German spy ring operating in England, was published (1915).

By the end of World War I, the importance of espionage and counter-espionage had become apparent to the general public; yet the spy story made but little advance in genuine sophistication despite the efforts of Oppenheim, Somerset Maugham, Ambler, and Graham Greene. Not until Ian Fleming introduced his flamboyant James Bond in *Casino Royale* (1953) did readers encounter a spy story they could appreciate with enthusiasm. In dealing with the theme of the Soviet penetration of British SIS, Fleming's *Vesper Lynd* is a thinly disguised portrait of Harold "Kim" Philby. Despite this realistic revelation, in spirit *Casino Royale* is pure romance bordering on the mythological. Later, Fleming's *From Russia, with Love* (1957) would realistically portray Great Britain as a "toothless tiger" in the new jungle of the international power struggle, merely a "has-been" great power.

When the spy writers of the postwar generation emerge in Len Deighton (b.

1929) and John le Carre (b. David Cornwell, 1931), they are disgusted, resentful, and cynical that their country was betrayed by "gentlemen Communists" from Trinity College, Cambridge and that the British government covered for them and allowed them to escape. Hence the spy novels of Deighton and le Carre represent a decided break from the royalist philosophy of Oppenheim, the innocent view of Amber, the moralizing



of Greene, and the swashbuckling of Fleming. However, the cynicism of Deighton is quite the opposite of le Carre's: Deighton's cynicism is Greek; if he believes in mistrust, he also believes in independence, self-control, and loyalty to his cause.

But le Carre's cynicism is postmodern; if he mistrusts, he also believes in fault-finding, metaphysical moralizing, and freedom that is nearly anarchistic.

Related Titles

Funeral in Berlin features the same anonymous British agent as *The Ipcress File*. This is also the case for the three novels that follow it: *Horse Under Water* (1963), *The Billion Dollar Brain* (1966), and *An Expensive Place to Die* (1967), which are also spy novels.

Deighton has also written two books other than *Funeral in Berlin* that have to do with Berlin. *Berlin Game* (1983) is a spy novel which is the first volume of a trilogy featuring his agent Bernie Sampson as its protagonist. *Winter: A Novel of a Berlin Family* (1987) is a serious historical study of a well-to-do upper-middle-class family during the period 1920-1940.



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