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Heat: An Excerpt from OY PIONEER!: A NOVEL – Marleen S. Barr – Germany 1983, 1989, 2008

Heat: An Excerpt from *Oy Pioneer!: A Novel* by Marleen S. Barr (University of Wisconsin Press, 2003)

Although I knew that Germany has many elaborate pools replete with squirting fountains and bubbling hot and cold water, I was not prepared for the particular organic contraptions I would encounter at this pool.

I could easily accept women and men sharing the same locker room. After all, I had previously witnessed naked people strolling through the English Garden in Munich. I remember noticing a particular stroller, a naked man who carried a shoulder bag. Seeing one walking naked person is much worse than seeing a naked group. I was glad to learn that, at the S-Bahn station located nearest to the English Garden, nudity is verboten. Maybe my relief was somehow attributable to my Jewish Puritan ancestors—or to my contemporary American upbringing. When I accompany my parents to their Long Island beach club, they never fail to chastise me for wearing revealing bathing suits. I respond by describing the nudity in Munich.

“You’re not in Munich anymore,” they always say.

And now I was in a Schwimmbad. I was nervous because I really did not want anyone I knew (especially male colleagues and students) to see me attired in a bathing suit. I opened the sauna door. All the sauna users were naked.

“We have to take off our bathing suits. It would be weird not to. If we’re not naked, we’ll seem like voyeurs,” said my American female friend.

“Okay, I suppose you’re right,” I answered as I removed my suit. I was almost numb. I had never seen so many penises in my entire life. The sight of wall-to-wall penises was strange. I

was not sure that I was enjoying the view. Nonetheless, I followed my friend into the sauna. We sat with a group of naked men.

“I can’t believe this. I just can’t. I’m not used to seeing so many penises. I think I’m suffering from penis overload,” I whispered.

“Shhh. These men all speak English.”

“I won’t say anything else. But what does one do in here if one meets a man one knows?”

“I’m not sure. I need some air. It’s too hot. I’m going out for a few minutes.” I was left alone with the German penises.

The sauna door abruptly opened. My stricken looking friend entered. “Someone we know *is* coming. Since you can’t take cover, brace yourself.”

The owners of the German penises chuckled. They were eager to see what a Puritanical American woman would do when publicly and directly confronted with a penis attached to a familiar person. A sauna offers nowhere to go and nowhere to hide. My friend clutched my hand and closed her eyes. The door opened. Hundsnort, my notoriously sexist department head, entered—naked.

“Lovely to see you, Frau Dr. Lear.”

“Likewise, Himmler.”

I saw no need to use formal titles and surnames—to acknowledge phallic power—when confronted with a penis. I imagined my next reference letter from my dissertation director: “This charming young woman from Queens has, during her Fulbright year, learned to live with German penises.”

Marleen S. Barr – Fulbright to Germany 1983, 1989, 2008