

## FLY PLAGUE

Jochen Thermann

University of Wisconsin–Madison

This year there will be a fly plague, since the winter was too mild, so only a few larva froze to death. And as far as the birds are concerned, they are hardly able to decimate the stock of flies that only an endurable amount of flies would survive. For the birds reproduced far less fast than the flies did, for which the high number of descendants constitutes a biological necessity, because during the usual course of the season quite a lot larva, probably by far more than half, is wiped out.

Well, why the winter had been so mild was something Gustavo did not question for the time being. What he of course worried about were the swarms of flies which were, as soon as he dared to eat an apple on the street, alighting on it to stick their dried out proboscises in his fruit and suck out the apple leaving a shriveled, brownish rotten piece of wood in his hand that he dropped to the ground both fascinated and disgusted as if it was a spoiled idea. Now referring to the flies he could not even say they became all loathsome, yes he even had to confess, although it might seem strange at first sight, that among them were specimen with a certain beauty in shape and shading, even their flights had different styles on wings—some shimmering, some tough—, that after all there existed specimen he, so to speak, liked. For it is reasonable that man develops a fine-tuned perception, when he encounters flies no longer in passing, but they become his permanent companion.

Sometimes he could hardly imagine living without flies after he accustomed to them so much, even if they might have often been greedy and unapproachable. Yes, sometimes he had the impression they were not only sucking out his apples but also himself. Then they were stubborn pests begrudging him no sleep, flying around at night and hindering him in falling asleep. They sat in his neck and they seemed to be awake all night long.

That's how he lived on in a fly plague, of which many had not been aware. Even Maria saw them just as an irksome concomitant of life without realizing the rapture of their flights, the delicate trembling of their wings,

these death-black legs, the multiple of their perception for speed or the thirst of their proboscises. Just as little the perpetual restlessness bothered her; this headless floating without an aim, this navigating through space in loops without a system or this nervous cleaning of the tools for eating. Maria lived much more pragmatically in this respect. If she felt disturbed by a fly in Gustavo's apartment, she would slam it without hesitating. With the flat hand.

Meanwhile Gustavo collected the animal contemplating on the crushed body afflicted with darkblood clots, suddenly robbed of its vitality, wondering what might have become of this fly. The shorter the days got, the more fiercely the flies fought for the last groceries. They hung in black clouds above the garbage and compost pile in the garden, penetrated in increasing numbers the house, starved, became diseased and died like flies. Hardly any still performed loops filling the eye with enthusiasm as in springtime. In drunken gyroscopes they just managed to stay above ground, the wings were torn, the eyes heavy and in the meantime it was easy for Maria to catch them with her hand. What had caused a proud laughter a few weeks ago, was now a sad habit. It must have been an epidemic, probably some rotten apple, an evil virus that had spread among the flies with revolutionary force.

Gustavo did not care much. Yes, with delight he observed secretly the dying masses of fly. But probably some part of him got lost as well. He became more quiet as time was passing, he worked in the studio again more concentrated, he no longer kept himself awake with books, but with Maria's body, and only in some obscure hour he went downstairs to the basement in order to look for the larva, that he had nested in jars of jam, in stocks of meat and cheese.