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in
BERLIN?

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The Radio Tower

The Berlin Funkturm, or Radio Tower, first opened to the public at the Great German Radio Exhibition in 1926. The 480-foot structure was designed for transmitting radio waves. It was also intended to be a striking symbol of Germany's modernity and cosmopolitanism – a response to Paris's Eiffel Tower. Nicknamed 'the lanky lad' (der Lange Lulatsch), the Funkturm became an iconic part of the city's twentieth century skyline. The Radio Tower was the tallest building in Berlin until 1933, its unexpected angles celebrated in art and culture. Visitors queued to see the panoramic views of the city from an observation deck.

In his 1939 autobiographical novel *Goodbye to Berlin*, Christopher Isherwood recalls how the Funkturm's searchlight "swung its little ray through the night." The writers and lovers Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West dined at the Tower's Art Nouveau restaurant in January 1929.

The Funkturm can still be visited today and also has a role relaying emergency (police) radio and mobile networks.



The Radio Tower. Photograph by Martin Höhlig,
1927 © Fred Richter

Vita Sackville-West recalled the experience of dining at the Radio Tower in her letters to Woolf.

Read the excerpts below and discuss the questions.

It is so empty here without you ... You won't get this till after you have been to Long Barn,* which I hope will have reminded you of me a little and perhaps revived in you something of those feelings to which you gave such surprising and disturbing expression in the Funkturm? I say, you don't know what a difference your week here has made to me. Formerly, the whole of Berlin was pure loathsomeness to me; now, there are just a few places that are invested with romance.

(25 January 1929)

*Sackville-West's home

I have been reading a German war novel which is creating a great commotion here, but this Teutonic language tramples like an elephant on my brain, so I prefer to write to Virginia—not that I have anything to say except that I love her and wish she were not ill. I can't believe it's the 'racketing' of Berlin; really, you might have spent every night for a week till 5 in the morning indulging in orgies—to hear you talk—or Leonard* talk, rather, and the doctor... No, no; it was the 'flu, but whatever it was it's very distressing. Do you know what I believe it was, apart from 'flu? It was SUPPRESSED RANDINESS. So there—You remember your admissions as the searchlight went round and round?

(6 February 1929)

* Leonard Woolf, Virginia's husband

Questions

- 1. How is Berlin presented in these letters?**
- 2. Choose 3 adjectives to describe the relationship between Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West. Explain your choices.**
- 3. Why did the Radio Tower become an iconic symbol? Explain three reasons.**
- 4. Do you think the Funkturm and the Eiffel Tower are still significant today? Justify your answer.**

Extension: Find 6 fun facts about radio and its role in culture in the 1920s and 30s.
