

*Ein zu weites Feld?*  
Exploring Expanding and Restrictive Spaces  
in Theodor Fontane's *Effi Briest*

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For many literary scholars and followers of German literature and culture, 2019 has been celebrated as 'fontane.200' in recognition of the birth of Germany's most well-known author of the 'Realist' period, Theodor Fontane (born Dec. 30, 1819). Organized by both the Brandenburg Society for Culture and History at the University of Potsdam, and his hometown of Neuruppin, fontane.200 has offered various attractions for everyone, from Fontane novices to enthusiasts, throughout Germany. These attractions include photographic exhibitions of Fontane's European travels, visual and installation art exhibitions in Brandenburg, Berlin, Frankfurt and Neuruppin, several theatre performances, as well as land and water tours of places where Fontane lived and visited. In particular for Fontane scholars, fontane.200 also organized an academic conference in July 2019 called "Fontanes Medien," where leading scholars in German Studies and Media Studies gathered to share current research on Fontane's continuing relevance within contemporary and past media ecologies.<sup>1</sup>

It is not, however, only with respect to discussions of media that Fontane scholars still find cause for further examination of the author's modest oeuvre. Over the last decade, monographs, book chapters, and journal articles continue

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1 The fontane.200 website, accessible in German, English, and Polish, can be found at <https://fontane-200.de/en/>. The conference "Fontanes Medien" featured prominent literary and media scholars like Rolf Parr, Fotis Jannidis, Roland Berbig, and Ilinca Iurascu, and took place at the University of Potsdam.

to appear at a disproportionately high rate,<sup>2</sup> a fact made even more striking given that the literary genre to which Fontane's texts belong, Realism, is often derided as that interregnum between the more intellectually, artistically, and aesthetically fecund periods of 19<sup>th</sup> century Romanticism and *Sturm und Drang*, and then early 20<sup>th</sup> century modernist movements like Expressionism and Dada.<sup>3</sup> Yet it is here, within the issue of genre, that we find a possible hint at the enduring legacy of Fontane's texts for literary scholars; namely, for literature described as Realist, there is a troubling, yet alluring, ambiguity that permeates his novels. This shadowy, though unmistakable ambiguity and even ambivalence punctuates Theodor Fontane's entire body of fiction, but possibly it is most comprehensively interwoven into his well-known novel *Effi Briest* (1895), which, as his penultimate work, was published three years before the highly lauded *Der Stechlin* (1898). It is neither the language nor the style that obstructs access to this canonical text, but rather it is the elusiveness of the narrative that lends it its opacity. Frequently it is left to the reader to extrapolate conclusions vital to an understanding of crucial plot details, which all too often are frustratingly, although tantalizingly, withheld. Take for instance the affair between the protagonist Effi Briest and her seducer Major Crampas that ultimately leads to the dissolution of her marriage with Baron Geert von Innstetten; the extent of the transgression is never explicitly articulated in the novel, but rather is merely pointed towards through Effi's surreptitious walks and meetings with Crampas, and later through the discovery of an intimate epistolary communication between the two.

Fontane's ambiguous narrative technique in this novel is emblematic of the

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2 An online library database search of Fontane scholarship from 2008-19 reveals dozens of German and English language book publications on Fontane's works, in addition to multiple times as many journal articles.

3 There is a large body of criticism that identifies Realism's weaknesses, attacking it as naïve in its understanding of 'representation' and even ideologically suspect. Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* is often used as the most convincing criticism.

historical context in which he was writing, as in the years leading up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century the recently unified German nation occupied a rather ambivalent space in the European fold, seemingly inhabiting the position of imperial ‘other’ in contrast to the established European powers of Britain and France. Germany’s unique modernization, belated national status, failed bourgeois revolution, weak democratic and social progress, and reticence to industrialize,<sup>4</sup> coupled with its relatively tardy entry into the colonizing race, significantly affected the development of a German national consciousness. The need to identify what and who is German is in turn reflected in the works of numerous German authors in the period following unification in 1871.<sup>5</sup> The fluid national borders that had only recently been tentatively fixed served to include a culturally, religiously, socially, economically and historically disparate population who, up until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, had been agrarian Bavarian-Catholic, Protestant-mercantile Hamburger, Polish-German Brandenburg military, or virtually any other such permutation of hyphenated identities we can imagine. These complex, multivalent identities ultimately belied the heterogeneous population that was at best loosely united through shared language and space.

The act of naming one combination of inclusive criteria necessarily sketches a border between inside and out. In developing a national space, inclusion then, by

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4 See David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley’s *The Peculiarities of German History* for one of the most comprehensive and insightful historical investigations published in English into how ‘peculiar’ Germany’s national development really was, and in what ways. The *Sonderweg*, or ‘special path’, theory that Blackbourn and Eley explore in this text, is a controversial and divisive explanation of Germany’s ‘unique’ 19<sup>th</sup>, and then 20<sup>th</sup> century, historical development.

5 Fontane’s novels are some of the best examples of this, but see also Gustav Freytag’s *Soll und Haben*, which is set on the Polish border, and Adalbert Stifter’s *Brigitta*, which is set on the eastern fringe of the Austrian empire. The term *Heimatliteratur* was also coined in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to label the literary trend of representing rural, agrarian German life as the essence of the German people. One prime example of a periodical publication of *Heimatliteratur* was *Die Gartenlaube*, in which Fontane frequently published.

definition, requires exclusion, not just in terms of physical spatiality, administered through the practical control of borders, but also, and perhaps more importantly, through a mechanism of mental *mapping* that culturally, socially, religiously and linguistically designates those who belong and those who are defined as foreign or 'other'. The term 'mapping' is particularly significant for Fontane and late 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany, where the lines of demarcation were literally taking shape. As a gerund nominalized from the active verb 'to map', mapping should be understood as an active, constitutive form of representation that does not merely objectively record naturally-occurring, pre-existing geographical spaces.<sup>6</sup> Following the 'spatial turn' in cultural and literary studies,<sup>7</sup> and in particular seminal works in human and cultural geography by scholars like JB Harley and Denis Cosgrove,<sup>8</sup> this essay also understands 'mapping' as an ideologically power-laden form of knowledge-production, in the sense of Foucauldian 'discourse', and therefore will read the mapping of national, social, and in particular *gendered* spaces in the context of Fontane's novel in a similar way. In fact the construction of *Effi Briest* was concurrent with the construction of the German nation and German identity, if we understand identity not as something naturally occurring or essentially linked to place, but rather as just that, a *construction*. Thus the work can be read

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6 There is a clear correlation between the kind of mapping and ideas on spatiality discussed in this paper, and Frederic Jameson's development of 'cognitive mapping' developed in the first chapter of *Postmodernism*.

7 Although the 'spatial turn' is the result of an enormous and complex body of texts from a range of intellectual disciplines from the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, it is in particular the work of geographers Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja, David Harvey, and Doreen Massey that are most germane to the context employed in this text, and in the Humanities and Social Sciences more broadly.

8 JB Harley's "Deconstructing the Map" is an influential essay from 1989 in which he demands nothing less than "an epistemological shift in the way we interpret the nature of cartography" (150), since "cartographic facts are only facts within a specific cultural perspective" (153). Maps, in fact, are better understood as texts that can be historically, linguistically and culturally deconstructed, rather than as 'mirrors of nature'.

as an interrogation, and occasionally even a subversion, of the requisite framing of inside/outside that defines the process of establishing belonging. By framing this construction as a process it is thereby implied that identity, be it national, gendered, racial or otherwise, is neither static nor pre-given, for the “construction of opposites and ‘others’ . . . is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from ‘us’” (Said 332). Identity then occupies an interminable space of transition that is, of course, linked to historical, geographical and cultural contexts. Like the nation-space, identity is forever in a process of articulation, making it only partially complete, and therefore always ambivalent.<sup>9</sup> Representations of space and spatiality, whether they take the form of physical spaces (home, town, country, continent, colony), of spaces of identity (national, cultural, gendered, social), or of other restrictive, transgressive and expansive spaces, are points of inquiry taken up in the discursive field of *Effi Briest*. The current paper investigates this novel as a complex cartographic network that speaks to the cultural, social, national and, by extension, colonial context in which it was written through an analysis of Fontane’s sometimes explicit, sometimes not, construction of variegated spaces and their borders, and how these spaces are maintained or destabilized through the course of the text.

### **Restrictive Gendered Spaces**

Possibly as a result of how frequently he published his fiction in serialized form, Fontane often utilized repeated motifs and expressions in his novels and short stories. For example, in *Effi Briest* the motif of the Chinese man runs throughout the novel, which is partially related to the text’s focus on the ‘east’

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9 Ambivalence in relation to identity construction is understood here in relation to Homi Bhabha’s development of the term in *The Location of Culture*. For Bhabha, ambivalence is inherent in colonial discourse, where the contradictory co-presence of colonizer and colonized serves to destabilize colonial discourse’s authority and authenticity.

and Germany's fledgling colonial aspirations. Likewise, Fontane explicitly presents reoccurring addresses to spatiality as both a motif and more broadly as a theoretical framework for the text. On three occasions in the novel, Herr von Briest terminates discourse with his wife with the imperious claim that the conversation cannot continue because the matter at hand is "[e]in weites Feld, Luise" (48), "... wirklich ein zu weites Feld" (50) and "... ein zu weites Feld" (377).<sup>10</sup> Each time von Briest's declaration that the matter is 'too broad a field' to discuss increases slightly in intensity. The second time the expression appears, Herr von Briest uses it as an exasperated response to his wife's admonition "also jetzt gibst du das zu. Mir gegenüber hast du's immer bestritten . . . dass die Frau in einer Zwangslage sei" (50).<sup>11</sup> He acknowledges that she is right, and that wives are basically subjugated in marriage, but the issue extends beyond his borders, so the conversation, and chapter, ends. Von Briest's final assertion, as the last line of *Effi Briest*, again encloses the discursive field of the text while simultaneously opening up the analytical field for the reader. His deferral to the vastness of the subject field, on this occasion one of burning importance that concerns the parents' acceptance or denial of complicity in the downfall of Effi (his wife has

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10 The English translation, at least in recent editions of *Effi Briest*, does not capture this spatial aspect. In Mike Mitchell's 2015 Oxford World's Classics English edition, which is the edition used for all English translations in this article, we find "That's a big question, Luise" (30); "It really is too big a question" (32); and "It's too big a question" (239). Previous English translations, such as Douglas Parmee's 1967 Penguin edition, have "A big subject" (44) and "That's really too big a subject" (46). However, *Ein weites Feld* is also the name of Günter Grass's 1995 novel, which features a main character named Fonty, and is translated as *A Broad Field*, thereby preserving the spatial focus. Grass's novel was widely panned as a "complete and utter failure" (Reich-Ranicki), yet it gives similar attention to expanding spaces and boundaries, and is actually a prescient warning about German nationalism, the moral corruption of capitalism, and the expansion of both unified Germany's borders and neo-liberal economic and political policies.

11 "So now you admit it. To me you've always denied . . . that the woman is in a situation where she has no choice" (32).

just asked whether or not Effi's death was their fault), is his discursive mechanism of repression that works to arrest any potential for productive dialogue, thereby insuring that the discussion will never call established opinion and convention into question"(Berman, "End of Realism" 341). Frau von Briest had raised the question as to whether they themselves might have had a hand in the unhappy turn of events that ruined their daughter, asking:

Ob wir sie nicht anders in Zucht hätten nehmen müssen. Gerade wir. Denn Niemeyer ist doch eigentlich eine Null, weil er alles in Zweifel lässt. Und dann, Briest, so leid es mir tut . . . deine beständigen Zweideutigkeiten . . . und zuletzt, womit ich mich selbst anklage, denn ich will nicht schuldlos ausgehen in dieser Sache, ob sie nicht doch vielleicht zu jung war? (295)<sup>12</sup>

In indicating that perhaps Effi was too young to marry, Frau von Briest is also hinting toward deficiencies in the system of marriage within a patriarchy, which subjugates and renders second-class the female partner in the union. Herr von Briest, however, closes any prospect of a space for dialogue on the subject by claiming that such things belong to 'ein zu weites Feld.' Here again we witness one of Fontane's strategies of ambivalence that, in this case, does not overtly criticize the plight of women in 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany, but certainly is a gesture towards a more critical appraisal of a situation that Herr von Briest is so blatantly skirting. By denying any prospect of a dialogic space due to the seemingly infinite spaces of the 'field', Briest is in fact maintaining the restrictive and confining borders that delineated the female's gendered role at the time. Yet tellingly this

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12 "Whether we shouldn't have brought her up differently, more strictly. We ourselves, that is. Niemeyer's actually no use at all, because he leaves everything in doubt. And then, Briest, much as it pains me to say so . . . your constant double entendres . . . and finally, something I reproach myself for, since I don't think I should come out of this without blame: was she not perhaps too young?" (239).

is not stated explicitly in the text, but rather in exactly what is avoided being said. In this respect Briest's 'zu weites Feld' becomes a very immanent space; one that has been opened up to the critical reader while in the text it is simultaneously and conversely closed off.

Throughout the novel Fontane consistently plays with the tension between restricting and opening up physical spaces, gendered spaces, or discursive spaces, and it is this tension that so clearly marks *Effi Briest* as anathema to singular, fixed and homogeneous representations of 19<sup>th</sup> century German society and identity. In order for the tension between two sides to be articulated though, both sides must be represented. One such tension that is presented throughout the text in various guises is the use and creation of stereotypes to represent the constrictive spaces of an us/other dichotomy, and how this binary proves to be inherently ambivalent. From the opening scene of this novel there is an obvious reference to the German national stereotype and the woman's role in this national space. Though in its politically puerile stages, the cultivation of the national image had long been in the making in the German states, and thus it is no coincidence that we first find Effi relaxing in a splendid garden setting, knitting needles in hand, dutifully performing her prescribed female duties, yet somehow discontent with this activity:

... legte die Tochter ... von Zeit zu Zeit die Nadel nieder und erhob sich, um unter allerlei kunstgerechten Beugungen und Streckungen den ganzen Kursus der Heil- und Zimmergymnastik durchzumachen. (6)<sup>13</sup>

Both Rolf Parr ("Der Deutsche, wenn er nicht besoffen ist") and Rudolf Helmstetter (*Die Geburt der Realismus*) point out the connection between Effi's inclination toward gymnastics and the fostering of the German national stereotype

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13 "Effi ... would put her needle down from time to time to get up and, bending and stretching this way and that, go through the whole series of callisthenic exercises" (3-4).



of being active, fit and industrious. In this seemingly insignificant moment we witness Fontane's connection to German patriot and fellow Brandenburger Friedrich Ludwig Jahn's extension of Greek gymnastics to a German context and how mass gymnastic organizations went hand in hand with German nationalism, significantly contributing to the construction of German identity at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Hobsbawn; Kohn). Effi even suggests to her mother that her predisposition towards gymnastics is an inherited trait, passed on in the blood lines from mother to daughter, as she poses the question "[v]on wem hab' ich es? Doch nur von dir"(7).<sup>14</sup> Albeit beyond the scope of this novel, the role of disciplined, uniformly performed gymnastics would later reach its ideological apogee in the service of National Socialism's ideas of the fit and pure national body.

What is noteworthy for the ritual in this novel, however, is that the gymnastic exercises are being performed by a female rather than a male. In these initial moments of the text, Effi is represented as occupying both female and male gendered spaces, the former by way of the knitting needles, the latter by means of the exercise. Fontane further conflates and confuses these gendered spaces when Effi asks her mother "warum steckst du mich in diesen Hanger, in diesen Jungenskittel . . . Warum machst du keine Dame aus mir?"(7).<sup>15</sup> Here Effi is represented as a kind of gendered paradox, situated as she is in this obviously female-gendered garden with her knitting needles, yet predisposed to gymnastic activity and wearing a kind of boy's smock, conscious that she does not look like a lady, yet also unwilling to bend into that role. She later cites one of her father's favourite sayings, "Weiber weiblich, Manner mannlich," after which she immediately states to her friends "nun helft mir erst Ordnung schaffen auf dem

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14 "Where do I get it from? It has to be from you" (4)

15 "And then why do you stick me in this pinafore dress, in this boy's smock? . . . Why don't you make a lady out of me?" (4)

Tisch hier, sonst gibt es wieder eine Strafpredigt”(9).<sup>16</sup> Combining these fixed gendered spaces, to which her father so steadfastly holds and, as previously mentioned, which he maintains until the novel’s very conclusion, together with ‘order’ is certainly no accident in the narrative. ‘Ordnung’ is maintained by patrolling and controlling the fixed social categories that define one’s identity, and any transgression of these established borders serves to destabilize and subvert the fixity and stasis of these spaces and the border between them. However, Effi is clearly stifled in both her physical and social space: she is impulsive, described throughout the novel as ‘leidenschaftlich’ (passionate); she has ‘Sehnsucht’ (longing); she is bored, discontent. In other words, she is being restricted in her social and gendered role, and much like the young German Empire that Effi represents in so many ways, she seeks to expand her borders.

### **Expanding Spaces: Germany’s Imperialist Imagination**

As witnessed throughout the text, when confined and restrictive spaces are illustrated, so too must spaces of expansion be given in order to maintain the tension that exists as the one constant in this novel. Presented in contrast to the constricting setting of the garden and the boring task of knitting is the obvious metaphor of expansion veiled in Effi’s attire. She is described as wearing:

... ein blau- und weiß gestreiftes, halb kittelartiges Leinwandkleid, dem erst ein fest zusammengezogener, bronzefarbener Ledergürtel die Taille gab; der Hals war frei, und über Schulter und Nacken fiel ein breiter Matrosenkragen. (6-7)<sup>17</sup>

Bearing in mind that this novel was published in 1894-95, approximately a decade

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16 “Women womanly, men manly” ... “And now help me get this table tidied up, otherwise I’ll be in for a telling-off again” (5).

17 “Effi was wearing a blue-and-white striped linen dress, a bit like a smock, that needed its tight bronze leather belt to give it a waist; a wide sailor collar thrown back over her shoulders left her neck free” (4).

after Germany had begun its large-scale, state-sponsored colonial expansion into Africa and East Asia,<sup>18</sup> Effi clothed in a sailor's outfit is an unambiguous reference to the extension of the German borders into other, distant lands. The connection is further accentuated just a few pages later when one of her friends compares her appearance to a cabin boy, to which Effi retorts:

Midshipman, wenn ich bitten darf. Etwas muss ich doch von meinem Adel haben. Übrigens Midshipman oder Schiffsjunge, Papa hat mir erst neulich wieder einen Mastbaum versprochen . . . (16)<sup>19</sup>

There are already several studies connecting Fontane and *Effi Briest* to Germany's colonial program towards the end of the century. Reinhard Finke, for example, cites Fontane's correspondence with the Nobel Prize winning author Paul Heyse, in which Fontane derides the colonial pioneer Hermann von Wissmann,<sup>20</sup> and then goes on to highlight the numerous intertextual examples that link Innstetten and Wüllersdorf's conversation concerning the former's contemplated move to Africa with the personal accounts of life in Africa by German colonialists like Wissmann and Carl Peters (Finke 297-315).<sup>21</sup> Dietmar Storch comprehensively details the

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18 For comprehensive studies that detail the historical and literary dimensions of German colonialism see Dirk Göttsche's *Remembering Africa*; Todd Kontje's *Imperial Fictions: German Literature Before and Beyond the Nation-State*; Sara Friedrichmeyer et al.'s *Imperialist Imagination*; Debra Prager's *Orienteering the Self: The German Literary Encounter with the Eastern Other*; Bradley Naranch and Geoff Eley's *German Colonialism in a Global Age*; and Helmut Stoecker's *German Imperialism in Africa*.

19 "Midshipman, if you please. My noble name must be worth something. Apropos midshipman or cabin boy, only recently Papa promised me a flagpole again . . ." (9).

20 Known as Germany's greatest African, Major Hermann von Wissmann (a military rank he achieved after his African service) was a key military leader in supporting the German East Africa Company's colonial expansion and rule during the 1880's and 1890's. He became infamous for leading massacres against local villagers and burning their villages and agricultural fields.

21 Peters was a German colonist who led several expeditions to east Africa in the 1880s and 1890s, eventually founding the German East Africa Company. He claimed large amounts of land for Germany, which he secured through treaties with local populations, but he was also known for leading cruel and unnecessary violence against the same local populations.

historical connection between the use of the Chinese man motif in *Effi Briest* and Germany's colonial incursion into Eastern Asia, namely China. Finke and Storch's articles document with meticulous description and textual citation the historical context influencing Fontane at the time, but neither explore what kind of commentary this colonial contextualization may have had for the novel, apart from the reality of the situation outside of itself. Peter Utz, on the other hand, views the apparent imperial referencing in the novel as an acerbic criticism of the use of stereotyping, highlighted in the figure of the Chinese man, and how this metaphor for German imperialism "gibt sich der preußische Herrschaftsapparat als Angstapparat zu erkennen"(212). Utz even cites Effi's sailor's outfit as indicative of how the "Herrschaftsapparat funktioniert als 'Angstapparat'" (222)<sup>22</sup> in Fontane's work. While I share Utz's position that the myth of the Chinese man functions as a control mechanism of authority and surveillance, which Innstetten employs to keep Effi uncertain and afraid so that she continues to occupy the prescribed social and gendered spaces, there is something that Utz does not seem to allow in Effi's naval hint towards colonial expansion, but which Russell Berman points to directly in his article "*Effi Briest* and the End of Realism," as well as indirectly in his book *Enlightenment or Empire: Colonial Discourse in German Culture*. For Berman, Fontane's invocation of imperialism as a frame for the novel is undisputed, but where Utz sees the imperialist thread as an unequivocal rebuke of Europe's colonialist intrusion into foreign territory, Berman views Effi's hint towards movement and expansion in less specific terms, and more as the transgression of the binding borders that incarcerated her in those limiting spaces and which made her so tragically unhappy. Berman even goes so far as to state that "imperialism was, more often than not, a progressive discourse associated with science and technology and one, moreover, that could have a

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22 "mechanism of control functions as mechanism of fear" (my translation).

particular appeal to women hoping to escape the limitations of the social order in Germany” (“End of Realism,” 353-54). This idea is, of course, not only Berman’s but shared by others like Marcia Klotz, and though somewhat contentious and even counter-intuitive given that colonialism was yet another means of suppressing voices, exploiting people, and relegating individuals to subclass humans, it does accurately indicate the consistent tension represented in this novel between spaces of confinement and containment, and how representations of movement or stasis either unsettle or solidify these spaces.

While the references to colonial expansion couched in Effi’s sailor dress, ‘der Chinese,’ Gieshübler’s ‘Kohlenprovisor’ Mirambo, and Innstetten and Wüllersdorf’s conversation about fleeing to Africa, are clear and extensively treated in the works already mentioned as well as Claudius Sittig’s article on colonial discourse in the novel, there is much more that needs to be said about the socially and gender-defined spaces that confine Effi and which she seeks to transcend. Even before Effi and Innstetten are married, there are indications that the bride is feeling somewhat reticent about entering the defined role as the wife of a high official, as Luise von Briest tells her daughter that her marriage will be a ‘Musterehe,’ yet Effi shamefully admits “ich bin nicht so sehr für das, was man eine Musterehe nennt” (37).<sup>23</sup> Effi is cognizant of the fact that her impulsiveness, her longing for passion and the foreign are about to be tamed by a system rooted in custom, one that is ultimately meant to define and limit her horizons. She knows what kind of a man Innstetten is, somewhat bitterly exclaiming to her mother “das rechte Maß, das hält er” (39)<sup>24</sup> and later that Innstetten “ist ein Mann von Charakter, ein Mann von Prinzipien” (41),<sup>25</sup> yet these traits make him an

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23 “I’m almost ashamed to say it, but I’m not very keen on what people call an ideal marriage” (23).

24 “The right balance, yes, he does strike that” (24).

25 “He’s a man of character, a man with principles” (25).

upstanding man, a man rooted in honour, but regressively so. Innstetten is tied to Bismarck, to Prussia, and Prussian ambition; he is a man who is limited to tradition and in turn will limit Effi to this tradition as well. Effi's gaze looks beyond this narrow and limiting field, as she hints at when her mother asks her what she desires for her new home, she states "ein japanischer Bettschirm, . . . Schwarz und goldene Vögel darauf, alle mit einem langen Kranichschnabel . . . und dann vielleicht auch noch eine Ampel für unser Schlafzimmer, mit rotem Schein" (34).<sup>26</sup> Her comments are innocent and naïve yet they offend established decorum and gender expectations (her mother's response is silence), since not only would her new acquisition cast a red glow over her bedroom, so too would Effi's entrance into Kessin society with such exotically and erotically suggestive items be viewed under a sceptical and dubious light by the staunchly conservative population.

That is not to say that the people of Effi's new hometown of Kessin, located in the predominantly Slavic area of Outer Pomerania in east Prussia, are entirely unfamiliar with the 'foreign' and 'exotic', as upon the newly-wed couple's entry into the town Innstetten makes sure to point out the numerous 'foreign' elements that comprise the demographic. While much has been written about the African and Asian colonial elements in this text, *Effi Briest* is primarily focused on an 'inner colonization', or in other words Germany's colonization of historically Polish territory.<sup>27</sup> When highlighting the disparity between the people of Kessin and country folk, Innstetten notes the former are different:

Weil es eben ganz andere Menschen sind, ihrer Abstammung nach und ihren Beziehungen nach. Was du hier landeinwärts findest, das sind

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26 "... it would be a Japanese bed-screen, black, with golden birds on it, all with a long crane's beak . . . and then perhaps another lamp for our bedroom, with a red glow" (21).

27 Kristin Kopp's *Germany's Wild East: Constructing Poland as Colonial Space* is a recent, book length study on this topic that dedicates an entire chapter to Fontane's writing on German colonization of Polish land.

sogenannte Kaschuben, von denen du vielleicht gehört hast, slawische Leute, die hier schon tausend Jahre sitzen und wahrscheinlich noch viel länger . . . so findest du . . . auch Menschen aus aller Welt Ecken und Enden. (54)<sup>28</sup>

The multiform cultural and ethnic pastiche that comprises Kessin is certainly no anomaly when theoretically expanded to the field of nation states themselves, for in liberal nation-making the reality of heterogeneous nations was widely accepted, even before the turn of the century. In already well-established nations of the world, where migration had long been part of national development, an unscrambling of intertwined cultures and ethnicities seemed utterly impractical and unrealistic, thereby putting the myth of the homogenous nation in a rather dubious light (Hobsbawm 33). For Effi this element of the foreign and unknown is the single most enticing element of her new home, illustrated by her statement “das ist ja entzückend, Geert . . . nun finde ich eine ganz neue Welt hier. Allerlei Exotisches”(54).<sup>29</sup> It is clear that Effi’s trepidation about entering a socially confining space in Kessin, in addition to what she expects to be an equally constricting domestic space as wife and perhaps mother, is contrasted by the prospect of the foreign and unfamiliar in her new sphere, a prospect that is met with considerable enthusiasm on Effi’s part. She even goes on to hope for more than just European foreignness, but “vielleicht einen Neger oder einen Türken, oder vielleicht sogar einen Chinesen” (54)<sup>30</sup>. The ‘Chinese’ comes at the end of

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28 “Because they’re quite different people as regards both their origins and their connections. The people you will see inland from here are what are called Kashubs; you may have heard of them, they’re Slavs who’ve been settled here for a thousand years, probably even longer . . . you’ll find people among them who come from all parts of the world” (34).

29 “But that’s delightful Geert . . . I’m going to find a whole new world here. All sorts of exotic things” (34).

30 “. . . perhaps a negro or a Turk or even a Chinaman” (34).

the list because Effi ascribes to him the highest value of ‘foreignness,’ whereas the ‘Neger’ and ‘Türken,’ though foreign, are geographically nearer and thus perhaps more ‘known.’

The implementation of these foreign elements into Kessin society serves a couple of purposes in this novel. First off, for Effi, they serve to open a broader perceptual space that makes the small town appear less constricting, less stifling and therefore more appealing. She has, in reality, not traversed great distances from her previous home in Hohen-Cremmen, but due to the apparent eruption of the limiting borders of provincial life, caused by the very presence of the unfamiliar in Kessin, Effi senses that she just might be able to escape having her fantasies thwarted in the seemingly limited and limiting space of this small town. Even as Effi moves from the public to the private space of her own home does she witness an encouraging expansion of the familiar into the foreign. She comments on the décor of her new home, complete with a strange ship in the hall, a shark and a crocodile, all giving the effect that even in her domestic sphere everything is “so orientalisches, und ich muss es wiederholen, alles wie bei einem indischen Fürsten” (70).<sup>31</sup> However, in expanding Effi’s boundaries to coincide with her teeming enthusiasm and zest for life, and ultimately her representation as movement and progress in this novel, Effi is simultaneously being subtly distanced from her husband and estranged from polite society. Innstetten immediately recognizes in Effi’s “unwiderstehliche[m] Reiz des Unbekannten” (Rainer 548)<sup>32</sup> an intrinsic threat to the established social and gendered order that he both maintains and embodies. In order to arrest the potential for any further

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31 “Everything so oriental, and I repeat, like some Indian prince’s . . .” (44). Effi’s statement “alles so orientalisches” is the point of departure for Debra Prager’s article of the same name. This article insightfully examines the Oedipal and Oriental tension in Effi’s unfulfilled sexual desires.

32 “irresistible appeal of the unknown” (my translation)



destabilization of his authority, and in order to confine Effi to the space in which he believes she belongs, Innstetten uses the very thing that expands Effi's perceptual horizon to confine that horizon. Innstetten utilizes the image of the Chinese man, and by extension the prospect of the foreign, the exotic and the unfamiliar, as a mechanism of control that keeps Effi in a constant state of fear, even when her husband is away. Innstetten preys on the naivety of his young wife who, despite the vastness of her imagination, is profoundly ignorant of anything that happens outside of her immediate surroundings. Thus she declares upon hearing that a Chinese man is living in their town, "[e]in Chinese, find ich, hat immer was Gruseliges" (46), to which Innstetten replies "ja, das hat er" (55).<sup>33</sup>

The motif of the Chinese man serves numerous purposes in this text: the first being as a mechanism of control and surveillance over Effi in her husband's absence. She is tormented by the very idea of a Chinese man, living or dead, even before she has the slightest understanding of the events that preceded his death. Later, as she rides in a carriage with Innstetten, she passes by the dunes where the mythical figure is supposedly buried and is unable to bring herself to look in the direction of the grave. Innstetten's installation of fear in his young bride serves to solidify his authority, not through force or violence, but through a calculated system of control over knowledge. Again the colonial frame of the novel is referenced in Innstetten's knowledge control mechanism, a repeated and often discussed tenet of colonial discourse itself, as Helen Callaway acknowledges:

Imperial culture exercised its power not so much through physical coercion, which was relatively minimal though always a threat, but through its cognitive dimension; its comprehensive symbolic order which constituted permissible thinking and action and prevented other

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33 "I think there's always something creepy about a Chinaman" . . . "Yes, there is, isn't there" (35).

worlds from emerging. (57)

It becomes apparent on a few occasions that Effi's fears could be alleviated were Innstetten to allow it, but in debunking the myth so too would he relinquish control, and this is not something he is willing to do. This is illustrated in the scene where Effi asks to have the curtains, which make an eerie sound when they brush the floor at night, shortened. To this Innstetten replies "[d]u hast ganz recht, Effi, wir wollen die langen Gardinen oben kürzer machen. Aber es eilt nicht damit, um so weniger, als es nicht sicher ist, ob es hilft" (71).<sup>34</sup> Innstetten is fully aware that his wife is unnerved by the uncanny sounds emanating from above, but in order to fit the domestic space he has in mind for her she must bend to his rules, or as he states, she will adapt "unter [s]einer Führung" (71).<sup>35</sup>

As colonialism and the accompanying discourse that played such a key role in its support and advancement clearly enjoys a prevalent space in the subtext of this novel, it is possible to view the representation of marriage itself in this work as a reflection of the imperialist program. Susanne Zantop notes in her work *Colonial Fantasies* that the 19<sup>th</sup> century institution of marriage was comparable to a three-step colonial takeover:

. . . first, as bride, the other is familiarized - she becomes part of the same species; second, as wife, the other is taken possession of, assimilated into the family and subjected to European patriarchal control; and third, as 'land,' the other becomes depopulated, dehumanized, an empty space that yearns to be filled, a blank spot on the map that demands inscription by its new occupant and master. (137)

In this respect then Effi is the empty space on which Innstetten seeks to inscribe his authority, maintaining his control over her by neither denying nor confirming

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34 "You're right, Effi, we'll shorten the long curtains up there. But there's no hurry, especially since it's not certain it'll make any difference" (44-45).

35 "under [his] guidance" (45).

the existence of the ghost that so profoundly terrorizes Effi and which keeps her submissive. It is not until much later in the novel that Effi comes to realize that Innstetten's program is one of control through knowledge, and it is, not surprisingly, Crampas who enlightens Effi on this matter. Crampas is a man severely compromised in terms of both moral credibility and integrity, and he serves to gain from Effi's recognition of her husband's plan. Effi accurately equates the mechanism of control over knowledge with Innstetten's role as educator, as she plaintively asks "[u]nd will er mich auch erziehen? Erziehen durch Spuk?"(167).<sup>36</sup> Crampas, for all his faults, then candidly summarizes the situation with "[a]lso Spuk aus Berechnung, Spuk, um dich in Ordnung zu halten" (169).<sup>37</sup> Order is once again presented as that limiting space tied to Innstetten, Effi's father, and a long history of restriction and submission of women and progress. It is the face of Prussian discipline, embodied in this novel, as it was in reality, by its authoritarian head Bismarck, and it is the counter-weight to Effi's fantasy of growth and her expanding horizons.

Taking up again the motif of the Chinese man, it is necessary to consider the role that this myth plays in establishing the boundaries of belonging in Kessin, and how we can extend this aspect to the effect that establishing an us/other binary has in any formation of identity. It is essential to understand that in this novel the Chinese man was never *actually* a man, but from his inception was merely a myth. Innstetten underscores this fact when he states "ein Chinese ist schon an und für sich eine Geschichte" (58)<sup>38</sup>, thereby denying the figure any sense of agency or humanity. The Chinese man can then be constructed as any sound stereotype ought to be; that is, without any real connection to an actual subject. He becomes the embodiment of the foreign and unknown, he stands

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36 "And he wants to educate me as well. Educate me with a ghost?" (106).

37 "So a ghost to serve his own purposes, a ghost to keep you in order" (107).

38 ". . . just the mention of a Chinaman's a story all on Its own" (36).

for a projection of otherness that can neither be proved nor disproved, and he is the object of both desire and derision. The Chinese man, like any stereotype, is necessarily ambivalent, which, as Homi Bhabha notes, is what gives him his currency. Ambivalence:

ensures [the colonial stereotype's] repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures; informs its strategies of individuation and marginalization; produces that effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be in excess of what can be empirically proved or logically construed. (95)

In *Effi Briest* the Chinese man serves as the stereotype of the other, of that which cannot be known, yet is always malleable enough to fit the exotic expectations, and therefore acts as a refracting mirror for what the people of Kessin are not. Innstetten took great pains to highlight the international composition of his small town, indicating that its residents hale from the four corners of the earth, and that with the founding of its Catholic Church the town is progressing. Kessin is a virtual cultural and ethnic bricolage, the flagship for emerging heterogeneous nations of the world, yet what ultimately sutures the otherwise disparate parts turns out to be the presence of the distinguishable 'other.' The story of the Chinese man, as he was never anything *but* a story, is representative of a kind of interior colonialism at work in this text, premised on an understanding that what unifies a collective sense of identity and belonging is ultimately a reflection of difference.<sup>39</sup> As Innstetten tells Effi the tale of the Chinese man he eventually

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39 Skin color and the ideology of racial differences play a crucial role in inclusion and exclusion. In Toni Morrison's "The Pain of Being Black" (1989), she summarizes skin's power to bind and to other with "if there were no black people here in this country, it would have been Balkanized. The immigrants would have torn each other's throats out, as they have done everywhere else. But in becoming an American, from Europe, what one has in common with that other immigrant is contempt for me—it's nothing else but color. Wherever they were from, they would stand together. They could all say, "I am not that." So in that sense, becoming an American is based on an attitude: an exclusion of me" (120-21).

enunciates the Chinese man's eternal 'otherness' by stating that his grave lies outside and separated from the people of Kessin. The pastor was reported to have said "man hätte ihn auch ruhig auf dem christlichen Kirchhof begraben können, denn der Chinese sei ein sehr guter Mensch gewesen und geredesogut wie die andern (106)."<sup>40</sup> Who was meant by the 'others' is clear to no one in Kessin, though it can be assumed that he meant other foreigners and not the natives of this east Prussian town.

As a sign for what awaits those who transgress the established boundaries of social custom and expectation, the myth of the Chinese man further serves as an ominous warning for Effi to heed the space which has been assigned to her. Innstetten's early recognition that his impetuous and high-spirited wife was prone to pushing borders and gazing beyond her limited role as wife and mother caused him to employ this mechanism of knowledge control, though ultimately Effi saw through the tactic and transgressed the borders set for her. Effi's position in Kessin was always that of an outsider, as "trotz der anscheinenden Privilegien ihres Standes" her position was "prekärer als diejenige der anderen Frauen" (Rainer 554).<sup>41</sup> She, like the Chinese man, eventually incurs the wrath of the public due to her offence (marital infidelity), and thus, like the Chinese man, is denied belonging by being buried outside the others, robbed of her aristocratic title because she dishonored both of her surnames. Yet, very much like most of the novel, there is a definite ambivalence that unsettles the rigidity of the social boundaries that would appear to have been crystallized by Effi's downfall and Innstetten's vengeful murder of Crampas. Innstetten, who as the embodiment

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40 "The pastor from Berlin is supposed to have said he could just as well have been buried in the Christian churchyard, for the Chinaman had been a very good man and just as good as the others" (67-68).

41 "despite the apparent privileges of her standing" . . . "more precarious than that of other women" (my translation).

of Prussian honour, code, discipline and authority, is profoundly shaken in his conviction of the social space he has occupied throughout the novel once he has ended Crampas's life. While discussing with Wüllersdorf whether he should demand a duel with Crampas, Innstetten presents a case for himself as to why it is incumbent upon him to seek satisfaction from his former friend. He states that the supposed affair with his wife is a "Fleck auf [s]einer Ehre" (300)<sup>42</sup> and that when it comes to the established social boundaries of Prussian societal space it does no good to transgress those limits, for "die Gesellschaft verachtet uns, und zuletzt tun wir es selbst und können es nicht aushalten und jagen uns die Kugel durch den Kopf"(299).<sup>43</sup> However, once the deed has been done, Innstetten's certainty in adhering to his prescribed duty as Prussian man is fundamentally shaken, as he calls into question the arbitrariness of temporal borders and their relation to honour. He asks:

Aber wo fängt es an? Wo liegt die Grenze? Zehn Jahre verlangen noch ein Duell, und da heißt es Ehre, und nach elf Jahren oder vielleicht schon bei zehneinhalb heißt es Unsinn. Die Grenze, die Grenze. Wo ist sie? War sie da? War sie schon überschritten? (308-09)<sup>44</sup>

Innstetten's repeated references to temporal spatiality and borders and how these spaces are fundamentally ambivalent and arbitrary represents a significant moment of self-reflection and criticism of the Prussian societal norms he had so staunchly supported throughout the text. In perhaps one of the most singularly telling moments of destabilization in the novel, Innstetten then goes on to propose "[s]o aber war alles einer Vorstellung, einem Begriff zuliebe, war

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42 "stain on my honour" (190).

43 "society would despise us, and eventually we would despise ourselves as well and be unable to bear it and blow our brains out" (189).

44 "But where does it start? Where is the boundary? Ten years still requires a duel, and it's a matter of honour, and after eleven years, or even ten-and-a-half, it's a piece of nonsense. The limit, the limit. Where does it lie? Was it there? Had it already been crossed?" (195).

eine gemachte Geschichte, halbe Komödie" (309).<sup>45</sup> In this quasi-epiphanous statement, Innstetten in fact represents several of the themes treated in the text: the constructed nature of social prescripts, identity and nation itself; and by extension the fluidity of the borders that designate these limiting spaces. Innstetten's query as to whether or not the borders were already transgressed is not a question limited to the legitimacy of his duel with Crampas, nor with the Prussian system of code and honour to which he subscribes, nor does it have to be limited to the constant ebb and flow of national borders themselves, or even the borders that distinguish identity, be they gendered, national, ethnic, or otherwise. Rather, his question underscores the fluid nature of borders that define and limit spaces in general.

The one categorical claim that can be made about this work is that no single feature of this text represents a univocal or homogenous point of view. It would be a misreading of the persistent tension that exists from cover to cover were Innstetten's reevaluation of the fixity of borders and spaces not incorporated into this analysis. Written as it was in the time of national construction in Germany, replete with the colonial images of its expansion into Africa and Asia, a reading of the representations of restrictive and transcending spaces in *Effi Briest* ultimately opens up a critical dialogue with the terminal 'zu weites Feld' that Herr von Briest, unsuccessfully, employs in his attempt to limit the potential for rethinking the spaces we inhabit.

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45 "But then it was all just for the sake of an idea, an abstract concept, a made-up piece of business, almost play-acting" (195).

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