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**Narrating the Self:  
Realism in the Works of Theodor Fontane  
and Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach**

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**Narrating the Self:  
Realism in the Works of Theodor Fontane  
and Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach**

**by  
Jennifer Lyn Van Hyning, B.A., M.A.**

**Dissertation**

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**Narrating the Self:  
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Comparisons of selected late realist prose works by Theodor Fontane and Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach reveal surprising thematic and narrative similarities regarding ways of looking at the self. Scholars have thus far largely overlooked these similarities, perhaps partially because Fontane has enjoyed more lasting recognition than Ebner-Eschenbach. Insights from close readings that make up the core of this dissertation, bolstered by a variety of interpretive methodologies, show a shared ambivalence towards the narrative possibilities and impossibilities of the individual's relationship to the self that frequently culminates in the death of a female character. Each chapter addresses one theme relating to a stage of human life and associated issues of self.

The methodologies are chosen to complement issues that emerge from the texts and range from idealist aesthetic constructions to poststructuralist psychoanalytical theory. The authors' autobiographic formulations of childhoods in the 1830s and 1840s that balance the conflicted aspects of self incorporate ideas from Schiller's idealism.

Schopenhauer's idea of the will provides a fitting frame for the internal and external challenges of becoming an adult in Ebner-Eschenbach's "Das Gemeindegeld" ("Their Pavel") and Fontane's *Effi Briest*. A combination of three methodological aids centering on the pressures of unrelenting surveillance in Fontane's Cécile and Ebner-Eschenbach's "Margarete" show how society disturbs the maintenance of the autonomy of self. In the interpretations of Ebner-Eschenbach's "Unsühnbar" ("Beyond Atonement") and Fontane's *Unwiederbringlich* (*Beyond Recall*) informed by Lacanian psychoanalytical theories, assets of impeccable feminine virtue that border on the sublime become deadly burdens.

The wide range of theories moves the interpretations towards the conclusion that is valid for the late realist movement in general: the narratives are reflections of individuals' attempts to build and maintain whole selves, in accordance with the principles of a realist worldview. The successes and failures of these attempts show realism straining to accommodate the changing perceptions of self, positioned at the threshold of Freud's revolution of the unconscious.

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## **Introduction**

The late realist narratives of Theodor Fontane (1819-1898) and Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach (1830-1916) pose a common question: what is at stake when stories of self are narrated? The works interpreted and compared in this dissertation share a fundamental thematic and narrative commonality in that they focus on characters, particularly female ones, who withstand difficulties forming and preserving their sense of self. Characters' experiences with the stages of their understanding of self that are depicted in the works I have selected range from the relatively few depictions of happiness and success to the comparatively frequent elements of self-doubt and deadly failure. The comparisons show that the narratives convey possibilities of balancing the individual's inner world and the increasingly complicated social world of the late nineteenth century. Realism as represented by these works does not downplay the significant flaws of a social system in decline, as it might at first appear to some twenty-first century readers, rather it critically engages with those flaws. Even if the works are unable to overcome the problems they identify, their engagement with issues of self is significantly different from the approach several short decades later when matters become complicated with ideas of the unconscious.

I have chosen, in a rather unusual fashion, to begin with the discussion of a short quote that relates to one of the works interpreted later. Although it may seem early to do this, the quote and my interpretive strategy introduce how I do close readings, something that is integral to this dissertation. It provides examples of specific usages of the terms

narrating and self that appear in the dissertation's title. A discussion of the term realism and how it is used in this dissertation follows shortly after this section.

### **“Hilfskonstruktionen”: An Interpretive Introduction**

In his 1930 essay “Das Unbehagen in der Kultur” (“Civilization and Its Discontents”), Freud quotes a line from Theodor Fontane’s novel *Effi Briest* (1895): “Es geht nicht ohne Hilfskonstruktionen,” and notes that Fontane tells us how humans need what Freud calls “palliative measures” to deal with the “Schmerzen, Enttäuschungen, unlösbare Aufgaben” of life.<sup>1</sup> Freud goes on to name three of these measures: “mächtige Ablenkungen, die uns unser Elend gering schätzen lassen, Ersatzbefriedigungen, die es verringern, Rauschstoffe, die uns für dasselbe unempfindlich machen” (Freud 432).<sup>2</sup> All three of the measures Freud names can be taken by doing certain kinds of reading, for example, reading a work of realism. Reading can deflect our attention away from our lives and ourselves, and later redirect it to an altered perspective. When a reader immerses herself in a work of realism,<sup>3</sup> the activity can become like an intoxicating substance that provides not only escape, but also a vicarious satisfaction that is close to everyday life, but only available in art. Freud, however, groups reading into only one of these categories of life aids: “Die Ersatzbefriedigungen, wie die Kunst sie bietet, sind gegen die Realität Illusionen, darum nicht minder psychisch wirksam dank der Rolle, die

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<sup>1</sup> Translations of citations given in German will be supplied in footnotes. Unless otherwise noted, translations are mine. “We cannot do without auxiliary constructions,” and “pains, disappointments and impossible tasks.” This translation is taken from Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 21, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth P, 1961), 75.

<sup>2</sup> “powerful deflections, which cause us to make light of our misery; substitutive satisfactions, which diminish it; and intoxicating substances, which make us insensitive to it” (Strachey Trans. 75).

<sup>3</sup> I will mention a “reader” throughout this dissertation. The reader I have in mind is me. I re-read and close read parts of the text, looking for motifs or symbols that stand out. I also pay attention to how the narrative is structured.

die Phantasie im Seelenleben behauptet hat” (Freud 433).<sup>4</sup> The larger focus of this dissertation is the ability of these narratives to create convincing illusions of life when their scope only allows them to portray the mental impressions of individuals reacting to their surroundings. I am concerned with something that Freud attributes to fantasy in the above quote: how acts of storytelling that construct and deconstruct characters’ notions of self tap into the reader’s fantasy. Multiple layers of fantasy interact, both within the works, amongst the casts of characters, between the characters and the narrative voices, as well as between the realm of the text and the twenty-first century realm of the reader.

A closer look at the context of the segment from *Effi Briest* from which Freud takes the expression “palliative measures” demonstrates the connection between fantasy and the formation of self within the novel. It assists in clarifying the explanation about self and narration that follows. This interpretation shows how the construction or dissolution of self is an issue that affects characters at various stages of their lives. It also brings up several themes of self that Fontane treats in many of his works and serves as an introduction to the subsequent section that explains why comparing his texts with those by Ebner-Eschenbach reveals larger insights about realism. These narratives of self are key to making realists’ works like those by Ebner-Eschenbach and Fontane such vivid depictions of human reactions to stressful social conditions, even without the recognized expansion of these issues into the realms of Freud’s yet-to-be proposed existence of the unconscious.

*Effi Briest* is probably the most frequently read work in all of German realism.<sup>5</sup> This interpretation gives several reasons for why it holds such an important place in the

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<sup>4</sup> “The substitutive satisfactions, as offered by art, are illusions in contrast with reality, but they are none the less psychically effective, thanks to the role which phantasy has assumed in mental life” (Strachey Trans. 75).

<sup>5</sup> Samuel Beckett included a tribute to *Effi Briest* in a passing remark of his title figure in his play *Krapp’s Last Tape* (1959): “Scalded the eyes out of me reading *Effie* again, a page a day, with tears again. Effie. . . (Pause.) Could have been happy with her, up there on the Baltic, and the pines, and the dunes. (Pause.)

realist canon. The scene from which Freud takes his quote is the last time the reader meets one of the novel's major characters, Baron Geert von Innstetten. The scene shows how this character who previously appeared stern and almost insensitive is now haunted by ghosts from his past, including his estranged wife, Effi, and her former lover, Major Crampas, whom he shot dead in a duel. Innstetten is having a conversation with Wüllersdorf, his second in the duel in which he killed Crampas. The two men are speaking about their lingering pain and Innstetten is collecting tips from his friend about how to bear it.

The dialogue is about self and the value of narration. The concept of self is made of two contradictory parts. It refers to an existing, already named something or someone. The thing that has been named is also the thing that is larger than any name, the essence that makes a person a person, and what makes each person an individual.<sup>6</sup> The men's conversation consists of them taking turns at narrating about and listening to the contradictions of these terms of self. Narrating means telling a story, often with the implication of telling it in detail.<sup>7</sup> A story is a group of related events that is presented in a certain way.<sup>8</sup> The veracity or accuracy of the way the events are related is not a given. In fact, some uses of the word "story" imply a falsehood.<sup>9</sup> Each of these definitions

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Could I? (Pause.) And she? (Pause.) Pah! (Pause.)" See Daragh Downes, "*Effi Briest*: Roman," *Fontane-Handbuch*, eds. Christian Grawe and Helmuth Nürnberger (Tübingen: Alfred Kröner, 2000), 633-634. Thomas Mann wrote of it: "Eine Romanbibliothek der rigorosesten Auswahl, und beschränkte man sie auf ein Dutzend Bände, auf zehn, auf sechs, - sie dürfte *Effi Briest* nicht vermissen lassen" ("A library of novels of the most rigorous selection, and if one limited it to a dozen volumes, to ten, to six, it must not be missing *Effi Briest*"). See Walter Schafarschik, *Erläuterungen und Dokumente: Theodor Fontane Effi Briest* (Stuttgart: Reclam 2002), 131.

<sup>6</sup> Günter Zöller begins his article "Schopenhauer on the Self" with a few helpful notes on the meaning of the self in German philosophical tradition. My definition borrows from his. See Günter Zöller, "Schopenhauer on the Self," in *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer*, ed. Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 18.

<sup>7</sup> See "narrate," 8 Nov. 2005, *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* < <http://www.webster.com> >.

<sup>8</sup> I borrow this definition from Mieke Bal. She defines events as "the transition from one state to another state." See Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Toronto: U Toronto P, 1997), 5.

<sup>9</sup> See "story," def. 5, 8 Nov. 2005, *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* < <http://www.webster.com> >.

contains complex nuances at play in this conversation. Though the narrating that is happening here contains certain details, it also leaves others out because they have become self-explanatory to the characters, though not necessarily the reader. Telling a story should ideally contribute to understanding about the events that are told, but here it only refers to the tangle of details. While narrating to his friend about his pain, Innstetten states: “ich möchte aus dieser ganzen Geschichte heraus” (EB 340),<sup>10</sup> and yet he contradicts himself by continuing to narrate. He cannot extricate himself from “the whole story” because doing so would mean excluding himself from his essence as a member of a storytelling species. Barbara Hardy calls examples like these from this novel “mimetic in the most rudimentary way: because human beings are storytelling animals and you cannot write a novel without showing them telling stories to others and themselves” (Hardy 120). Self, narrating, and realism are interconnected elements that make Fontane’s and Ebner-Eschenbach’s works fascinating examples of the story of self, poised on the verge of a revolutionary paradigm change in thinking about the self.

Narrating is a way for Innstetten and Wüllersdorf, and by extension the readers imagining such a conversation, to arrive at a feeling that there is a kernel of truth somewhere in the stories they have been telling their whole lives. Wüllersdorf is the perfect partner to share in Innstetten’s narrating about self because his story is supposedly similarly painful. This is a detail that the narrator allows to be dropped into the dialogue, another of the self-explanatory things that needs no elaboration. Wüllersdorf passes along advice that was once given to him: “es geht überhaupt nicht ohne

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<sup>10</sup> Sources for all original German texts by Fontane and Ebner are noted parenthetically after the citations. The translations are provided in footnotes. The translation of the quote above is: “I would like to get out of this whole *business*.” Italics are mine. “Business” in Fontane’s German version could also be translated as “story.” All translations from *Effi Briest* are taken from the following edition: Theodor Fontane, *Effi Briest*, trans. Hugh Rorrison and Helen Chambers (London: Penguin, 2000), 211. The German original version will be taken from: Theodor Fontane, *Effi Briest*, Theodor Fontane, *Das erzählerische Werk*, vol. 15 (Berlin: Aufbau, 1998). This will be abbreviated as EB and the translation will be referred to as EB. Trans.

‘Hilfskonstruktionen.’ Der das sagte, war ein Baumeister und muß’ es also wissen. Und er hatte recht mit seinem Satz. Es vergeht kein Tag, der mich nicht an die ‘Hilfskonstruktionen’ gemahnte” (EB 342).<sup>11</sup> He tells Innstetten that today he will make use of those “Hilfskonstruktionen” by taking the day off work, going to a wine bar, drinking an intoxicating substance, and listening to the regulars spin gossipy tales. This kind of narrating reveals something about the self in that it speaks of the teller’s positioning in relation to what is narrated and how. Wüllersdorf likes listening to others’ “Hilfskonstruktionen” because it gives him ideas of how to build his own.

This scene alludes to something that lingers outside the depiction of this conversation, something that will improve lives, something that can be conjured up with the right mixture of prose and poetry. The search for it is melancholy, but also entertaining, like Wüllersdorf’s hours in the winebar, using “auxiliary constructions” to distract him from his miseries. He rationalizes spending time on them because: “Ein bißchen fällt immer ab. Dreiviertel stimmt nicht, aber wenn es nur witzig ist, krittelet man nicht lange dran herum und hört dankbar zu” (EB 342).<sup>12</sup> Having made his point, Wüllersdorf leaves and Innstetten does too, in the sense that this is his last appearance in the novel. Together through their activity of narrating, the two friends have come to a realization about the contradictions inherent in their images of self, but they do not gain from this insight. They must try to come to terms with their knowledge by diverting attention away from it.

This scene brings one narrative strand of character experience to a conclusion that leaves the reader with no conclusion. What about it makes it an essential part of a

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<sup>11</sup> “‘you can’t get through life without ‘auxiliary structures.’ The man who said that was a master builder, so he should know. And he was right to put it like that. Not a day passes when I’m not reminded of those ‘auxiliary structures’” (EB Trans. 212).

<sup>12</sup> “You always pick up something. Three-quarters of it isn’t true, but if it’s witty, no grounds for complaint and you’re grateful for something to listen to” (EB Trans. 213).

masterpiece of German realism? What about its particular way of narrating the self makes it so memorable? Fontane's realism is bounded by its restrictions, but in the spaces of these limitations lie worlds of opportunity for learning about what was on the minds of people who were aware that they were standing on the edge of unprecedented historical change. Margret Walter-Schneider sees realism exactly within these spaces, in the deliberate holes that are left unfilled in Fontane's narratives that resemble the many holes that real life leaves open (Walter-Schneider, "Personen" 223-236). Walter-Schneider is not the only critic to focus on the holes in Fontane's realism. Russell A. Berman notes that the conclusion of *Effi Briest* in particular is a narration of "a death of sorts," and that "this realistic writing has an epitaphic quality" as "a response to a dying world in which meaning is disappearing" and adds "a realist novel that thrives precisely as a fiction, an 'auxiliary construction,' the untruth that allows life, in all its emptiness, to continue" (Berman 362). Berman argues that the novel's conclusion saves realism even as it is laying it to rest with Effi's burial, that it "redeems the fallen things of the world, bringing them to another order and an eternal life" (362). The major points of Berman's conclusion concur with the analyses of this dissertation except for the point that he judges Effi as fallen. I later argue that though her story is about a fall, her character undulates between states that are not fixed, something that is, to a certain degree, true of the positions of many other characters in Fontane's novels, even those that seem as rigid as Innstetten.

This dissertation's interpretations show that Effi and Innstetten are not Fontane's only characters to experience a blurring of boundaries between and outer worlds. His novels are full of the narrative holes that Hardy and Berman have identified, which could be equally plausible as signifying death or as the renewal of hope. In order to draw conclusions about Fontane's use of realism, I found it helpful to compare the narrative

treatment of thematic issues in his works with those in the works of another contemporary author, Ebner-Eschenbach. In the following section, I discuss why this comparison is fruitful in revealing the special relationship between narrating and self. This in turn will lead me to another short introduction on the topic of realism and how comparing works by each of the authors adds to the study of realism.

### **Resonances of a Realist Context for Narrating the Self**

My first reading *Effi Briest* left me with feelings of discomfort and ambiguity that did not fade away with successive re-readings. These resulted not only from my personal reaction to the novel, but were evident in various discourses within the work itself. I noticed that the web of contributing factors both in characterization and events make the conclusion seem strangely inevitable even though the weight of narrative details does not fully support the reason for Effi's death at the novel's conclusion. Helen Chambers suggests that this effect happens because Fontane's novels incorporate elements of the novella, a genre that was particularly popular in Germany in the nineteenth century. She cites the work of another scholar, Graham Good, and summarizes Good's points about the novella that she feels are applicable to many of Fontane's novels. Several of these address my reaction to the conclusion of *Effi Briest* and the two other fictional works by Fontane that I interpret in this dissertation. The first is that the novella is like a tragedy in that it often treats extreme matters, but unlike a tragedy because its conclusion contains a "weight of inevitability" which a character cannot counteract. Another points to the difference in form between the novel, which is set in the psychological present, and the novella that has a closed form whose ending is rooted in its beginning. The disturbing aspects of the end are ameliorated by the distance inherent in the storytelling, which



makes it seem like a “recollection in tranquility.”<sup>13</sup> As I began to read other realist works, looking for these characteristics combined with a female death at the conclusion, I found promising parallels in Ebner’s work.<sup>14</sup> A possible similarity with the novella-like characteristics of Fontane’s novels occurred to me when I noted that Ebner rarely or never referred to her longer narratives as novels, but preferred instead to call them *Erzählungen*, or stories. This reflects on Ebner’s Austrian cultural identity, and can also be interpreted as a characteristic of Austrian realism.<sup>15</sup> I also discovered that one of her narratives, “Unsühnbar” (*Beyond Atonement* 1890),<sup>16</sup> had in fact even been referred to as an Austrian *Effi Briest*. I noted that “Unsühnbar” also features an adultress heroine whose death is the concluding event of the novel, and that her death and the circumstances contributing to it have ambiguous and discomfoting echoes.

At first, this connection, noted by Agathe C. Bramkamp in her article citing the erroneous comparison drawn between these two novels of adultery, was one of the few that I found when judging whether a larger comparison of their works would be

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<sup>13</sup> Chambers lists ten points of similarities between Fontane’s works and Good’s findings on the novella (128). Others apply to Fontane’s and Ebner’s works. One is that the isolation of a character in a story contrasts with the social stability that is implicit or explicit in the story’s frame, suggesting that the notion of self is in conflict with society. Others address the importance of narration in a story, how *listeners learn* about “how human nature is defined by limit-cases of endurance or weakness or some other quality.” Also, that the novella has an oral quality that “assumes a copresent teller and hearer in personal communication.” See Helen Chambers, *The Changing Image of Theodor Fontane* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1997), 128. The article that Chambers discusses is Graham Good, “Notes on the Novella,” *Novel* 10 (1977): 193-211.

<sup>14</sup> Ebner-Eschenbach preferred using this shortened version of her husband’s name. Ebner is how I will refer to her throughout the rest of this project.

<sup>15</sup> Larissa N. Polubojarinowa suggests that Ebner’s insistence on calling all of her narratives, even the longer ones, *Erzählungen*, was a conscious one that followed an Austrian literary tradition established by older authors such as Adalbert Stifter (1805-1868) and Franz Grillparzer (1791-1872) and broke with the tradition of Goethe and Idealism. See Larissa N. Polubojarinowa, “Österreichischer Realismus als ein Problem der Literaturgeschichte (Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach),” in *Akten des X. Internationalen Germanistenkongresses Wien*, vol. 6, ed. Peter Wiesinger (Bern: Peter Lang, 2002), 481.

<sup>16</sup> In keeping with Ebner’s designations of genre, I set off the titles of her longer works with quotation marks even when her English translators have chosen to regard them as novel titles. This will result in some discrepancy in references to works. For example, the translated title of “Unsühnbar,” *Beyond Atonement*, will be italicized.

warranted. Bramkamp points out that Ebner published “Unsühnbar” five years before Fontane’s *Effi Briest* appeared in print. Thus if one wanted to draw connections between the two works, one would have to speak of Fontane’s novel as a reaction to Ebner’s story (Bramkamp 112). Bramkamp’s interpretation concludes that the most important difference between the two works can be attributed to Ebner’s gender (Bramkamp 111-112). She bases her conclusion on Maria’s inner battles that are more intense than Effi’s, even though Effi faces similar circumstances. She argues further that Ebner’s choice to depict Maria this way collides with the norms of plausibility acceptable to critics of the time, and that this makes Ebner’s narrative of adultery different than Fontane’s. Although I agree with the direction of Bramkamp’s argument, the comparative interpretations offered in this dissertation fill a space that her argument leaves untouched, namely that the structure of narrative elements and themes in a larger body of the two authors’ works reveals more similarities than have been previously noted. This observation was the building block of my comparisons that describe realism as a movement that, for all of its diversity that has confounded scholars’ efforts to define it, is manifested in surprisingly comparable themes and narrative structures centered around self.

Besides the seemingly obvious association between “Unsühnbar” and *Effi Briest*, no points of connection between the fictional works of the two authors sprang to mind. “Das Gemeindekind” (*Their Pavel*, 1887) is the work for which Ebner’s is best known. Because of its critical and commercial success in Ebner’s day and the place in the canon of German literature, “Gemeindekind” was a good place to begin judging the possibilities to compare the literary treatment of themes that Ebner and her contemporaries felt were compelling. Two aspects of self inform these stories despite their significant differences:

the negotiation of issues of origin that affect the building of self,<sup>17</sup> and the narrative structuring of the terminations of self. Class and the narrative non-events of a female character's death<sup>18</sup> are the bases of comparison that show how using realism as a vehicle for conveying stories of self can result in potentially rewarding or disastrous consequences.

The publishing history of "Das Gemeindekind" and *Effi Briest* was another detail of commonality that indicated that a comparison would yield new reflections about realism. The publication date of the first book edition shows that it appeared within a decade of Fontane's *Effi Briest*, but closer examination of the history of the two texts reveals that they were both first published in installment form in the same periodical, *Die Deutsche Rundschau*.<sup>19</sup> Clearly the editor of the periodical, Julius Rodenberg, a personal and professional friend of both authors<sup>20</sup> who will be mentioned several times throughout

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<sup>17</sup> The search for origins is related to the search for what Andreas Huyssen calls a "Zusammenhang der Dinge, ein übergreifendes Ordnungsprinzip" ("a coherence of things, an overarching principle of order"). He cites realist borrowing of classical, idealist, and romantic ideas as well as ties to regional cultures and customs as ways to accomplish this. He notes that in the age when science is making advances that hypothesize that nature is a mechanical, causal system of biological determinants, this ordering principle became more elusive. Darwin's theory of evolution is the best example of this. See Andreas Huyssen, ed., "Einleitung," in *Die deutsche Literatur: Ein Abriß in Text und Darstellung: Bürgerlicher Realismus* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1974), 18-19.

<sup>18</sup> This observation was borrowed from Patricia Howe. She writes of Effi's death: "Death becomes not so much an event as a context, in which, contrary to any notions of finality or absolute value we might entertain, the meaning of words is relativised." See Howe, "'A visibly-appointed stopping-place': Narrative Endings at the End of the Century," in *Theodor Fontane and the European Context: Literature, Culture and Society in Prussia and Europe*, eds. Patricia Howe and Helen Chambers (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), 146.

<sup>19</sup> All of the dates given for works by Fontane and Ebner in this dissertation refer to the publication of the work's first book edition. "Das Gemeindekind" appeared in the *Rundschau* from Feb. – May 1887. *Effi Briest* appeared in there from Oct. 1894 – Mar. 1895. For a comprehensive bibliography to Fontane's biography and works, see eds. Christian Grawe and Helmut Nürnberger, *Fontane-Handbuch* (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 2000). For example, for information on *Effi Briest* such as its publication history, see the article by Daragh Downes in the *Fontane-Handbuch*, 633-651. For information on "Gemeindekind," see Rainer Baasner, "Kritischer Apparat, Text- und Wirkungsgeschichte und Deutung," in Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, *"Das Gemeindekind"* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1983), 191.

<sup>20</sup> For a description of Ebner's relationship to Rodenberg, see Helmut Brandt, "Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach und die *Deutsche Rundschau*," in *Die österreichische Literatur: ihr Profil von der Jahrhundertwende bis zur Gegenwart 1880-1980*, pt. 2, ed. Herbert Zeman (Graz: Akademische Druck und Verlagsanstalt, 1989), 1001-1015.

this dissertation, felt that these two texts were of a quality appropriate for the ten thousand German-speaking readers who were the journal's audience.<sup>21</sup> The author's shared frequent publication venue, *Die Deutsche Rundschau*, makes it likely that they had some degree of familiarity with each other's work, though solid evidence of this, such as diary entries or mention of one another in letters, has not come to light in my research. Whether or not they were familiar with each other's works, it is surprising that both authors treated issues such as the development and sustenance of self.

### Realism in Context

How do narratives tell the stories of self that encourage efforts to return the self to wholeness when contemporary notions of self are precariously positioned? Once Freud draws public conclusions about his research, the traditional understanding of self begins to die a prolonged, strange death, not unlike the deaths of Fontane's and Ebner's female characters. An ambitious, but also ambiguous tone characterizes the works interpreted in this dissertation that serve as examples of each author's demonstrations of realism. The narratives propose that the smaller details forming the larger narrative coalesce to enunciate a larger, more promising, but also more elaborately and tentatively constructed way of interpreting reality.

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<sup>21</sup> Brandt notes that Theodor Storm, Gottfried Keller, and Conrad Ferdinand Meyer all published in the *Rundschau* and that it was the most important place of publication for the narrative literature of *bürgerlichen Realismus* after 1870. See Brandt, 1001. Fontane eventually published *Unwiederbringlich* (1891), *Frau Jenny Treibel* (1893), and *Effi Briest* in the *Rundschau*. See also Chambers 3, 9. The other better-known works that Ebner published there include "Lotti, die Uhrmacherin" (1880), "Dorf- und Schloßgeschichten" (1883), "Neue Dorf und Schloßgeschichten" (1886), "Unsühnbar," "Oversberg" (1892), and "Meine Kinderjahre" (1906). This and other useful information can be found in the newest biography on Ebner. See Doris M. Klostermaier, *Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach: The Victory of a Tenacious Will* (Riverside, CA: Ariadne, 1997), 155. See also Herbert Zeman, "Ethos und Wirklichkeitsdarstellung – Gedanken zur literaturgeschichtlichen Position Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach," in *Des Mitleids tiefe Liebesfähigkeit: Zum Werk der Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach*, ed. Joseph P. Strelka (Bern: Peter Lang, 1997), 117-118.

Fontane's thoughts on the topic of realism, in his 1853 essay "Unsere lyrische und epische Poesie seit 1848" ("Our Lyric and Epic Poetry since 1848"), are a good place to begin this discussion of realism. They were the only direct statements written by either author about realism. While Fontane discusses realism at length, he can define it only with the vague term *Verklärung*, which literally means transfiguration. He elaborates that this term applied to literature means "eine Rückkehr auf den einzig richtigen Weg" ("Poesie" 9), to return a sick art to a healthy state, but not a return to something old because "die Welt ist des Spekulierens müde" ("Poesie" 8).<sup>22</sup> It is a step forward to depict "das Leben je frischer je besser" ("Poesie 14).<sup>23</sup> The right kind of tone does not overstep the boundaries into what is coarse. It is definitely not "das nackte Wiedergeben alltäglichen Lebens, am wenigsten seines Elends und seiner Schattenseiten" that he sees as *Verklärung*.<sup>24</sup> Although he cannot exactly describe his kind of realism, he demonstrates it in his narratives as a world full of ambiguities and contradictions balanced by hope.

Fontane is not the only realist author who is enthusiastic about *Verklärung* as a concept to guide their literary endeavors,<sup>25</sup> but the idea translates somewhat differently for Austrian realists like Ebner. Karlheinz Rossbacher notes that the post-1848 atmosphere called for a national tone of conciliation in areas that would later become the German Empire, but that it did not fit the multi-ethnic empire ruled by the Habsburgs (Rossbacher 20-22). Despite this difference, he shows how Austrians like Betty Paoli, one of Ebner's close friends, expressed ideas that bear strong resemblance to the lines

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<sup>22</sup> "a return to the only right way;" "the world is tired of speculation."

<sup>23</sup> "life, the fresher the better."

<sup>24</sup> "the naked depiction of everyday life, at the least its misery and its shadowy sides" ("Poesie" 12).

<sup>25</sup> Huyssen notes that Adalbert Stifter, Theodor Storm, Gottfried Keller, and Wilhelm Raabe also use this term. See Andreas Huyssen, "Comments," in "Theodor Fontane, Unsere lyrische und epische Poesie seit 1848" in *Die deutsche Literatur in Text und Darstellung: Bürgerlicher Realismus*, vol. 11, ed. Andreas Huyssen (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1974), 51.

that I quoted from Fontane's essay above. In a poem "An die Realisten" that Ebner edited and published posthumously for her friend, Paoli writes:

Zum Spiegel einer Spanne Zeit  
Wollt ihr die heil'ge Kunst erniedern?  
Nichts als die bare Wirklichkeit  
Soll sie euch schildern und zergliedern? (Rossbacher 22)<sup>26</sup>

By citing this poem that is so similar to Fontane's comments noted above about realism, Rossberger shows that Fontane's goals to entertain and teach his readers are similar to Ebner's vision of herself as representing a "gesunden Real-Idealismus," as her colleague and friend Ferdinand von Saar called it.<sup>27</sup> In a discussion of Austrian literature at the turn of the last century, Herbert Zeman links Ebner to Saar, and points out that Ebner's literary influences did not include the philosophical-programmatic sources that German realists followed. He cites her inspirations as her observations and experiences from the people who surrounded her at her family's estate in the Bohemian countryside and the Viennese world of the high aristocracy, the bourgeois, and the workers, as well as her Catholic upbringing (Zeman 9-11). Although Zeman is correct in his assertions, when one compares Ebner's sources of inspiration to Fontane's, one sees that he likewise took material from personal experiences as much as from the formal knowledge he gained through professional experience writing, both as a travel writer and a newspaper correspondent. Donald G. Daviau narrows the difference between German and Austrian

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<sup>26</sup> "To a mirror of the span of time / you want to demean holy art? / Nothing but bare reality / for you it [art] should picture and analyze?" Rossbacher attributes this poem to Betty Paoli. "An die Realisten" ("To the Realists," 1874) appeared in a volume selected partially from Paoli's estate "Gedichte." He notes that Ebner changed the title to: "Die naturalistische Schule" ("The Naturalistic School"). Karlheinz Rossbacher, *Literatur und Liberalismus: Zur Kultur der Ringstrassenzeit in Wien* (Vienna: Dachs, 1992), 486 (note 49).

<sup>27</sup> "healthy real-idealism." This quote comes from a letter dated 9 February 1895 that Saar wrote to Ebner. Rossbacher also quotes a letter Ebner received from a reader that told her the effect of reading her work was as if she "[habe] in der Nacht im Bett [. . .] Alles gesehen wie's lebt und lebt" ("at night in bed, saw everything as if it were flesh and blood"). See Rossbacher 20, 23, and 486 (note 56).

interpretations of realism down to the Austrians' rejection of naturalism (Daviau 88-89). He names Fontane as representative of the late German realist movement, and emphasizes his openness to naturalism. Ironically, to support this statement, he characterizes several commonalities that I find between Fontane and Ebner as cleavages between these two branches of German-language realism. These include one influence on the naturalist movement that is addressed in the second chapter of this dissertation, Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophy. Fontane's and Ebner's reliance on Schopenhauer as an intellectual influence is the subject of interpretation, and one of the ways in which this comparative project suggests that these works push the boundaries of realism.

Scholarship on realism has had no problem placing each author within the movement, but defining or characterizing realism has proven a more challenging matter. Of the volumes that have been written on what realism is or is not, several from recent decades put this project into context. Wolfgang Preisendanz concludes his 1977 book *Wege des Realismus* with ten theses on the "problem of realism." He raises a point about the term realism that is contrary to my interpretations in this dissertation: that there was nothing inherently new about conceptions of reality that changed how artists and society looked at reality and bringing it to an end (Preisendanz 217-228). As will soon become clear, my textual interpretations build to the conclusion that ways of seeing the outside world change because the world of the self has become destabilized, indirectly prompting Freud to name and describe the unconscious.

Fritz Martini's exhaustive work on bourgeois realism, *Deutsche Literatur im bürgerlichen Realismus 1848-1898* (4<sup>th</sup> ed. 1981) gives a thorough overview of the age of bourgeois realism, demarcating it as starting after the revolutionary year of 1848 and continuing until the year of Fontane's death, 1898. Some of my conclusions echo his,

such as that one frequently portrayed perception in realism was the tension between the self and the rest of the world, or that German realism describes a historical period rather than a characteristic style (Martini 13, 14). His study obviously offers a broad view of realism, whereas my analysis takes two core samples and examines them for similarities, searching for the smaller stories behind those larger similarities.

Robert C. Holub opens his 1991 study, *Reflections of Realism*, by noting that “circular argumentation” of previous studies that try to prove how literary depictions are true to reality or nature have been unsuccessful.<sup>28</sup> His approach is to study how realist works rupture at the points where they reflect on their poetics and open to ideological spaces of otherness that they try to exclude. The ruptures to which he calls attention are also present in Ebner’s and Fontane’s works that are interpreted in this dissertation. I argue that otherness is acknowledged rather than denied there, and that it is left up to the reader to use the texts as aids to help them recover from glimpsing that otherness.

Martin Swales’s 1995 study stresses that it is not necessary to apologize, as he says Preisendanz has done, about the inward-looking tradition of German literature including realism. He reclaims the mental life of individuals as the seats of attitudes that enable the larger society to operate (Swales 19).

Todd Kontje’s 2002 introduction to the volume of articles, *A Companion to German Realism*, expands the view of nineteenth-century German literature beyond what he sees as the old literary history views. These held up the German *Bildungsroman* as a counterweight to French and English literature that are typically seen to be more concerned with broader social issues than were the philosophical and introverted

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<sup>28</sup> In Holub’s opinion, the approaches that yield this kind of unsatisfactory discussion of realism are those that try to prove realist literature’s “fidelity to reality” or “close correspondence to nature.” Examples of scholars who he interprets as having taken this approach are Richard Brinkmann, Peter Demetz, and Marshall Brown. See Robert C. Holub, *Reflections of Realism: Paradox, Norm, and Ideology in Nineteenth-Century German Prose* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1991), 13-14.



Germans (Kontje 7-8). Like other scholars of realism mentioned here, Kontje acknowledges the difficulties of defining realism and chooses instead to call it “a relative term, a way of defining a contrast instead of identifying an object” (3).

Each of these scholars’ insights about realism figures in to the contribution made by the comparative interpretations in this dissertation to the study of realism. My interpretations build on these previous conclusions by adding detail. They illustrate the similarities of theme and narrative treatment found in Fontane’s and Ebner’s works, works that are occasionally mentioned in the context of one another, but seldom compared in a way that does not try to privilege the quality of one over the other. The term realism is used in this dissertation to refer specifically to narration about individuals’ reactions to events in the world around them. With the exception of Fontane’s *Unwiederbringlich*, which takes place in 1859-1861, this means the final decades of the nineteenth century in the lands of the German Empire and the Austrian Habsburg Empire. The reactions of individuals that are portrayed are formative of the characters’ selves, their limitations and their possibilities.

Of course, the lives portrayed in these realist works are fictional, and thus the events portrayed in them only connect to the world outside of literature through the reader’s imagination. Nonetheless, each of these fictional works together with the autobiographical works interpreted in the first chapter were created by the imaginations of two writers inspired by their experiences and observations to reflect in these formats about their social and individual surroundings. The problematic, but unavoidable connection between narrations of personal lives and fictional narrations inherent in realism prompts me to explore the real life connections between these two authors.

## Connecting Lives, Connecting Works

In addition to strands of commonality in the several works discussed above, I was struck by similarities in personal backgrounds and experiences in the two authors' lives. Details of an author's biography do not determine how a text works, and it is ultimately impossible to conclusively determine authorial intention in a work. Nonetheless, finding biographical connections between these two authors yielded the clue about the *Deutsche Rundschau*, and other limited, yet sometimes notable information that was useful in determining how to approach interpretations. It quickly became apparent that the two never met or corresponded with one another.<sup>29</sup> This makes the thematic and narrative parallels in their works all the more striking.

The biographies of the two authors reveal points of connection despite the obvious differences. To be sure, these authors lent different experiences to their writing because they came from different cities, regions, classes, and were of different genders. One of the similarities behind these differences was that they were born into families of intercultural heritage. Theodor Fontane was a Prussian, born in 1819 in Neuruppin, in the northern part of the state of Brandenburg, of French Huguenot stock. Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, *née* Countess Dubsky von Tebomyslic, born in 1830 on her family's estate of Zdislawitz (in Czech, Zdislawic),<sup>30</sup> then in Moravia and in what is now the

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<sup>29</sup> Though limited, points of personal and professional connection make it nearly inevitable that the two knew of one another and were familiar with one another's work. In addition to the fact that each of them had close connections to *Rundschau* publisher Julius Rodenberg, each of them also were well-acquainted with Paul Heyse (1814-1910), another realist author who was, like Fontane, a member of the literary group *Tunnel über der Spree*. Besides the connection that I mention in chapter one between the origins of their *Kinderjahre* autobiographies, there is a line in *Effi Briest* that suggests that Fontane read Ebner's "Unsühnbar." In the same conversation from which I quoted previously, Innstetten seems to be referring to Ebner's Maria in "Unsühnbar," when he says to Wüllersdorf: "Den Mann im Büberhemd bring ich nicht mehr heraus und den Derwisch oder Fakir, der unter Selbstanklagen sich zu Tode tanzt, erst recht nicht" (EB 340). "I just can't bring myself to slip into a hair shirt now, let alone play the dervish or fakir and dance myself to death in a frenzy of self-accusation" (EB Trans. 211-212).

<sup>30</sup> Ebner sometimes spelled Zdislawitz with an ß. I will use the current standard spelling in German (with an s) except in quotes where it may be spelled differently.

eastern part of the Czech Republic, was an Austrian noblewoman descended from Czech and Protestant Saxon stock.<sup>31</sup> Ironically, Ebner probably spoke better French than Fontane, who, in his younger years, liked to accentuate his French-Calvinist roots by pronouncing his name in a French manner.<sup>32</sup>

The non-Germanic parts of each author's heritage served as encouragement to broaden their interest for peoples beyond the borders of their home countries.<sup>33</sup> Fontane and Ebner were both autodidacts, having not had opportunities to prepare formally for their chosen literary careers. Fontane first trained and worked as a pharmacist before becoming a journalist, a theater critic, foreign correspondent covering London cultural life and even battles, travel writer, and finally novelist. Ebner's upbringing resembled that of other daughters of Austrian nobility, splitting her time between Vienna and the country estate of Zdislawitz. Sadness marks her childhood because, as described in my first chapter, her birth mother died shortly after she was born. Two stepmothers also died. She disliked typical feminine activities such as embroidery and dancing, but was intensely interested in and gifted at creative writing.<sup>34</sup> This was something that troubled her family from the time she was a small child all through her adult life because it was

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<sup>31</sup> For a brief biography on Ebner, see Tatlock, "Introduction" vii-x.

<sup>32</sup> Ohff interprets this as a sign of pride in his Huguenot heritage rather than as an imitation of an aristocratic name "von Tann." See Heinz Ohff, *Theodor Fontane: Leben und Werk* (Munich: Piper, 1995), 9. Ebner's proficiency in French was due to the fact that she was educated by French governesses and actually began to write in French. As a child whose mother died only weeks after her birth, she also spoke Czech before German because she was mostly cared for by Czech nursemaids.

<sup>33</sup> Ebner invented characters from many different ethnic groups in the Habsburg empire. Probably her most famous non-Germanic figure is Božena, the Czech maid and title character of her 1876 narrative. Fontane wrote one novel set in Denmark, *Unwiederbringlich* (1892) that is interpreted in my last chapter, and *Graf Petöfy*, (1884) set partially in Vienna and in Hungary.

<sup>34</sup> The authors' influences of literary mentorship and peer encouragement were quite different. Fontane's entrance into the literary world benefited from his 1844 entrance as member of a literary group in Berlin called *Tunnel über den Spree* (*Tunnel over the Spree*), in which his and Ebner's friend, Paul Heyse, was also a member. Ebner lacked such associations, but enjoyed encouragement from Franz Grillparzer, the celebrated Austrian dramatist, who, at her socially and artistically well-connected stepmother's entreaties, read and praised her poems when she was a young girl. Ebner maintained a personal relationship and later also a professional one with Grillparzer from this time on, something she describes in her 1916 essay, "Meine Erinnerungen an Grillparzer" ("My Memories of Grillparzer").

considered an inappropriate interest for a young countess. One part of her education that was not lacking was in the area of theater, as she and her family attended frequent performances at the *Burgtheater* in Vienna (theater of the Habsburg court), an important theater in the German-speaking world. Like her friend and colleague, Ferdinand von Saar (1833-1906), Ebner first wrote for the stage, and experienced significant personal disappointment because of poor reviews from critics who attacked her mercilessly.<sup>35</sup> Both Ebner and Fontane began writing longer narratives later in their lives, not experiencing lasting success until after the age of fifty. They each lived long lives; Fontane died in Berlin in 1898 and Ebner in Vienna in 1916.<sup>36</sup>

A comparison of their careers shows that each author achieved a similar degree of success and fame during their lifetimes, but Fontane's work has enjoyed more lasting artistic recognition. During their peak years of literary success, the late 1870s through 1890s for Fontane and the 1880s through the beginning of the next century for Ebner, each author was bestowed with similar awards. Ebner was decorated in 1898 by the Emperor with the coveted *Ehrenmedaille für Kunst und Wissenschaft* (Medal of Honor for Art and Science) and held in such high esteem that in celebration of her seventieth birthday in 1900, she was the first woman to be awarded an honorary doctorate from the

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<sup>35</sup> Edith Toegel calls Ebner's years of trying for a break through in the theater world her "Leidensjahre" ("years of suffering"). She recounts several emotional setbacks that Ebner suffered because of bad and sometimes unfairly critical reviews. Though her gender was a detriment to her aspirations as a playwright, Toegel poses questions about conditions surrounding her unsuccessful theater attempts that go beyond this issue to questions of originality and style. See Edith Toegel, *Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach: Leben und Werk* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 19-37. Ebner's aristocratic identity has been thought of as a barrier to her career. Ferrel V. Rose argues convincingly in giving the background to Ebner's commission to write a play to celebrate Schiller, *Doctor Ritter: Dramatisches Gedicht in einem Aufzuge* (*Doctor Knight: Dramatic Poem in One Act*, debuted 1869), that her class and even her gender helped her in this case. See Ferrel V. Rose, *The Guises of Modesty: Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach's Female Artists* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1994), 66-67.

<sup>36</sup> Coincidentally and perhaps also fitting for an author who despite her criticism of the time was a loyal Habsburg subject, the years of Ebner's birth and death coincide with those of the last important Habsburg emperor, Franz Joseph.

University of Vienna.<sup>37</sup> Fontane was the recipient of the Schiller Prize in 1891 and was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Berlin in 1894. Reasons for trends in scholarly attention to both authors can only be touched upon here, but each author has had periods of declining readership and, in the last several decades of the twentieth-century, renewed appreciation and scholarly attention.<sup>38</sup> For Ebner, this includes the opening of the canon to include female authors and a more recent shift in concentration to her works themselves rather than mostly on her biography. For Fontane, the picture is more complex because he has experienced more attention in waves that have been buoyed by comparative readings recognizing his stature as not only a great German novelist, but a European one as well. The personal reputations of both authors that are reflected in parts of their reception histories are similar. They have been seen as kindly elderly figures who resolve the conflicts in their works with images of reconciliation or gentle resignation.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> At this ceremony she was celebrated by her friend and colleague, Paul Heyse, and the Socialist leader Viktor Adler. Even younger writers whose work she did not especially appreciate, such as Gerhard Hauptmann, an important German representative of the naturalist movement who benefited from Fontane's praise and encouragement, and Arthur Schnitzler, who was considered by Freud to be his *Doppelgänger*, wished her well. Klostermaier notes that Dr. Jacob Minor, a German professor at the University of Vienna and member of its delegation sent to honor her, noted that she was "the only writer after Fontane who appealed to young and old alike." For an account of the celebrations, and Ebner's reaction to Hauptmann and Schnitzler see Klostermaier's *Victory* 238-241, 283-284. For a summary of Fontane's relationship to Gerhard Hauptmann, see Hugo Aust, "Fontane und der europäische Naturalismus: Hauptmann," in *Fontane-Handbuch*, 377-381.

<sup>38</sup> Helen Chambers has published the newest and best sources for Fontane's reception history. See Helen Chambers, *The Changing Image of Theodor Fontane* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1997). No such published reception history exists for Ebner. Ulrike Tanzer provides a valuable examination of scholarship on Ebner focusing on the special conditions of her working life that were affected by her gender and on her representation of female figures and women's issues in her work, including commentary on unpublished dissertations and handwritten materials found in archives such as letters, entries in notebooks and diaries. See Ulrike Tanzer, *Frauenbilder im Werk Marie von Ebner-Eschenbachs* (Stuttgart: Hans-Dieter Heinz Akademischer Verlag, 1997), 74-84. Carl Steiner provides a brief overview of her reception history and he combines it with short comparisons of her work in terms of those of her contemporaries. His comparisons offer insight into Ebner's place in literary history, but they lapse into eulogistic praise for the humanity that Ebner conveys through her work. See Carl Steiner, *Of Reason and Love: The Life and Works of Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach (1830-1916)* (Riverside, CA: Ariadne, 1994), 181-198.

<sup>39</sup> For an insightful recognition and encapsulation of this view of Fontane and why it is misleadingly simplistic, see Christine Ann Evans, "The Darkening Medium: Speech and Silence in the Works of

Neither of these two celebrated authors fits into convenient categories in terms of literary history, something that forms the final area of commonality found in the details of their biographies and receptions that I discuss in this introduction. More of Fontane's works than Ebner's have entered the canon. Using the prose narratives that I compare in this dissertation as examples of their larger body of works, one can see that Fontane's contain a greater degree of detail and stylistic mastery than Ebner's. Fontane's skill at depicting dialogue, for example in the excerpt from *Effi Briest* that I used previously to highlight the lingering pain of a doomed relationship, is nearly unmatched in German literature. Even though these judgments of literary worth are important to mention, they fall outside the purview of my investigation.

Elements other than style have determined the two authors' respective reception. Along with other German-language realists, Fontane and Ebner wrote at a time in which German-language culture and literature were in transition, both in the north, in the German Empire, and in Austria, which political and military developments had excluded

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Theodor Fontane, Henry James and Marcel Proust," diss. Harvard U, 1985, 13-20. Joseph P. Strelka states his opinion that Ebner's work and personality fits squarely with her time and culture, but is viewed as old-fashioned or not worthy of scholarly feminist consideration. Terms that he uses to describe her and her work include "humanity" and "sympathy that gives her occasion to directly express true, high feelings." At the same time, he concedes that she sometimes appears "sentimental" to those who do not consider the differences between her time and ours, or at least the span of years that separates us from Ebner's era. See Joseph P. Strelka, "Vorwort," in *Des Mitleids tiefe Liebesfähigkeit: Zum Werk der Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach*, ed. Strelka, 7-9. Karl Christoffel gave the Fontane reader he edited with title similar to Strelka's: *Lerne Denken mit dem Herzen (Learn to think with the Heart)*. In his introduction, Christoffel states his purpose to make Fontane's delightful personality available to the reader. "Der helläugige Freimut, die unverstellte Offenheit, die 'verantwortungsvolle Ungebundenheit' des geistigen Freischärlers sprechen uns, die der Freiheit des Geistes so lange Entwöhnten, aus jeder Zeile an, die er geschrieben hat." ("The bright-eyed frankness, the genuine openness, the 'responsible independence' of the intellectual irregular speaks to us who have for so long been weaned of freedom of spirit, from every line that he wrote.") See Karl Christoffel, "Geleitwort," in *Lerne Denken mit dem Herzen: Theodor Fontanes Selbstbildnis, Lebensweisheit, Weltbetrachtung aus den Gedichten, Erzählungen, Lebenserinnerungen und Briefe*, ed. Karl Christoffel (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1949), 8. Key to early publications that signify the "rediscovery" of Ebner is the much-cited 1966 speech by Gertrud Fussenegger in Munich in front of the *Bayerischen Akademie der Schönen Künste* and the *Adalbert-Stifter-Vereins*. In it she notes the remarks of Kurt Benesch, a Viennese author, about the downside of Ebner's fame. Without critical reception, Ebner's reputation became romanticized as a "schöne Seele" ("beautiful soul"). Fussenegger gives more substance to Ebner's memory. See Gertrud Fussenegger, "Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach oder der gute Mensch von Zdißlawitz: Ein Vortrag" (Munich: Delp'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1967), 12.

from German unity. International awareness of German-language literature published between Goethe's death in 1832 and Thomas Mann's 1901 novel *Buddenbrooks*, whose title was inspired by the name of a minor figure in *Effi Briest*, was limited. In Austria, the deaths of three major literary figures, Johann Nepomuk Nestroy in 1862, Adalbert Stifter in 1868, and Franz Grillparzer in 1872, formed the juncture of a new period that still felt strong connections to its past. Fontane's and Ebner's works fell into categories that relied on tradition and were not overtly groundbreaking in their style. Helen Chambers concludes that Fontane's works did not fit into the category reflecting stereotypical nineteenth-century characteristics of other German cultural achievers as the "introspective, intellectual dreamer," nor of the "larger-than-life *Kraftmensch*" (Chambers 129), also matches the view of Ebner's works as representing a typically Austrian aristocratic and feminine identity. Even though the years of Ebner's life correspond with those of Emperor Franz Josef, suggesting that her narrative voices only represent conservative leanings of an empire in decline, the works that are interpreted in this dissertation advocate stances that are more nuanced than will fit standard labels.<sup>40</sup> The comparative interpretations offered in this dissertation contribute to filling the post-Goethe, post-Grillparzer, pre-modernist space that exists in the study of German realism in both its German and Austrian variants.

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<sup>40</sup> One example of Ebner's positions on social issues that reflects a mix of conservative and progressive positions is her stance on women's issues. Ulrike Tanzer supplies the most recent and thorough account of Ebner's positions on the topic, and her connections to influential Austrian and German leaders of the women's movement. Tanzer describes Ebner's positions as difficult to categorize. She was strongly in favor of the reform of the educational system for women and girls, was against women obtaining the right to vote, advocated for a fuller integration of women into the workplace, and felt that good marriages were based on partnership. See Tanzer 138-147.

## **Methodologies of Interpretation**

One of the features that first attracted my attention in both authors' works was their frequent depiction of death. The most notable seemed to be those of the title female characters such as Fontane's Effi and Cécile, and Ebner's Margarete. The more I delved into these representations of death and tried to connect them in order to make sense of the stories of failed selves narrated about these female characters, the less able I was to find a common cause that might explain their logic. What had been wagered in the telling of these stories and lost with the deaths of the major female characters who were so important that the works were named after them? Why should the narrators bother to tell stories in which it seems unavoidable that these main figures die at the end?

Even though I was unable at first to see the common patterns in how the authors' stated and demonstrated realist ideals had woven the red thread of loss into these narratives, it seemed obvious that particular issues were involved in each of these fictional deaths. My first approach to understanding these works and their characters was to read around in texts by the two authors without imposing any particular interpretive methodology as an agenda. I did this so that the texts themselves would indicate the interpretive frameworks that would lead to insights.

The texts and my close readings of them form the core of this dissertation because they represent my primary area of interest as a scholar. As I read, I meticulously search for details that emerge from the written language to bring the text alive. For example word choice, tense of verbs, metaphor, symbolism, narrative style, setting, tone, and even explicit or implicit spaces between words or ideas are some of the textual features that have emerged from my readings. Like an architect imagining the outline of a construction project who surveys the land on which the finished structure will stand, I survey the texts, the property that I claim for my structure of interpretation. This tells me



what features, what ideas about self are present in them. Only with this knowledge do I determine which tools, theories, or methodologies will help me fit my materials, the pieces of my detailed textual observations, together into the structure that I had first imagined. This structure is a clearer understanding of realism, of the hopes and fears of Germans and Austrians of the late nineteenth century, examined through the lens of narrating about the self.

My readings are informed by my growing familiarity with narratology, the study of narrative. Narratology helps me determine how the texts are constructed and how these constructions work to produce an effect in me, the reader. Focalization is one aspect in particular that is helpful to monitor. Focalization, as Mieke Bal defines it, is “the relation between the vision and that which is ‘seen,’ perceived” (Bal 142). Paying attention to focalization, including who does it as well as how and why it is done this way, makes it possible to recognize different parts of the narrative and interpret what they do. It opens up new possibilities of interpretation because it encourages me to consider why certain details have been included and others have been left out or downplayed in the narratives. Focalization is also useful because it works on interpreting the immediate level of the literary text as well as the larger level of wider narratives such as the study of literary movements like realism. For example, making comparisons not only between one pair of works by the authors, but rather linking these comparisons to the other ones done in this dissertation shows how the strands of storytelling that are the individual works get woven together into a larger representative statement about realism. Though only my third chapter explicitly names focalization and narratology as interpretive aids, they are important throughout this dissertation.

Excluding close-readings and narratology, no single methodology fit my goal of generating specific interpretations that would add up to more generalized observations

about realism because my reading of each pair of texts revealed different sets of issues. The thematic issues raised in the texts were connected, and so it made sense that the methodologies that highlighted these issues would have points of connection as well. During my reading, various theoretical or cultural texts helped me to articulate and to interpret the core question in each chapter. In this section, I will explain the logic behind my choice of methodologies in the context of the texts interpreted. More detailed explanations of these theoretical and cultural texts and how I employ them will appear in the chapters themselves.

The first in a series of methodologies that emerged from my readings of the pairs of primary texts was psychoanalysis. Later on, I will explain how the other methodologies that emerged from my readings relate to psychoanalysis, but first, I explain more fully how psychoanalysis is useful to my interpretations. I do this by referencing the texts that are the material for the psychoanalytically-inspired interpretations in my fourth chapter, Ebner's "Unsühnbar" (*Beyond Atonement*, 1890) with Fontane's *Unwiederbringlich* (*Beyond Recall*, 1891). In these works, the authors approach, but do not cross the narrative boundaries of realist possibility, suggesting elements that violated the affinities of a more noble or aesthetically heightened depiction of reality, the norms of realism. Their two main female characters suffer from mental disturbances that, combined with other marital, familial, and social stresses they encounter, drive them to will their own deaths. These characters resembled Freud's patients. They come from influential families and have problems that are reflected in dreams and in their sexual relationships to their husbands, and stem from their relationships to male members of their families of origin. Their problems are triggered both by stresses that are unique to them because of their mental states and challenging social and personal positions, but also endemic to their oppressive patriarchic societies,

factors that Freud documents in his case histories. Freud was a product of his time and culture, and Fontane and Ebner shared elements of this background.<sup>41</sup> Like many of Freud's contemporaries, Fontane and Ebner had sensed that the workings of the human mind were more complicated than could be accounted for with the analytical tools that were available to them. Language structured into stories and narratives was what was available to them, but this was also the basis for Freud's revolutionary theories. They were trying to build expressions of truth with language, and Freud was trying to break these kinds of expressions down into their elemental parts and attribute their semblance of cohesiveness to the unconscious. Both Fontane's and Ebner's brands of realism and Freud's early thoughts about psychoanalysis seem to reveal timeless truths, although they are, in their origins, quite dependent on their surroundings.

The relationship between an individual's concept of truth and its context in personal and social constructions of identity as expressed in narrative structures is the point that attracted me to Freudian psychoanalysis, but the specific psychoanalytic theories that I use are those of Jacques Lacan, a later psychoanalyst who based his work on close readings of Freud's texts. Lacan's concept of language as a structure into which all speaking subjects must enter is an explanation that describes the life-threatening conundrums in which the two heroines of "Unsühnbar" and *Unwiederbringlich* find themselves. They are caught within the structure of language even though the structure does not suit their needs, and even though they glimpse familiar, sometimes frightening

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<sup>41</sup> Freud used the term "psychoanalysis" for the first time in 1896, one year after Fontane's *Effi Briest* and two years before Ebner's "Unsühnbar" were published, in other words, in the last stages of the authors' productive lives. In his *Freud Reader*, Peter Gay notes that the word appeared in the one of Freud's publications in French called "Heredity and the Aetiology of the Neuroses." Gay also excerpts Freud's account of his first uses of the term in "An Autobiographical Study." See *The Freud Reader*, Peter Gay, ed. (New York: Norton, 1989), xxxvi, 18-19. It should be noted that Josef Breuer, a close associate of Freud's and a contributor to his theories, was Ebner's personal physician. Ebner sometimes consulted with Breuer when depicting illness in her works. For example, she consulted him regarding Wolfi's death in "Unsühnbar." See Klostermaier *Victory* 297.

and sometimes alluring reminders of their existence before entering the structure. As represented in the texts by the placement of letters or written testaments to their problems, they attempt to take refuge from their discomforts by assuming positions of silence. They have no rational constructions with which to make sense of their lives other than the system of language, but the choice to be silent places them in inhabitable positions in relation to themselves and others. They are no longer able to contribute to the narration of their own stories, and with their suicides, they remove the possibilities of narrative dialogue from others who care for them.

Because psychoanalysis is the basis of Laura Mulvey's theory of the gaze, one of the three ideas that I use in the interpretations of Fontane's *Cécile* (1886) and Ebner's "Margarete" (1891) in my third chapter, I discuss Mulvey's theory before the others. Mulvey's 1975 theory of the gaze explains how screen images of women in film narratives become structured by patriarchal society as a way to help it maintain order.<sup>42</sup> Even though her theory is based on the narrative elements (shot, counter-shot, etc) of film, it can nonetheless be useful in determining the role and the power of the gaze as it is narratively represented in literary works. The gaze becomes a tool of focalization. *Cécile* and "Margarete" describe how women are seen, primarily by the men who find them intriguing. The two characters are ultimately controlled by gazes that convince them that their lack of power can never be remedied. They commit suicide. Instead of death as a (non)representation of the inadequacy of language, as in chapter four, these deaths illustrate the power of the gaze in constructing the illusion of narrative control. This illusion contributes to a sense that a higher truth exists and has been accessed

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<sup>42</sup> In my chapter, I rely on this older version of her theory even though I am aware that Mulvey has since elaborated on her original theory with the purpose of exploring how her theory addresses female members of the audience. Her recent article to which I refer is: Laura Mulvey, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* (1946)," *Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sue Thornton, *Feminist Film* (New York: New York UP, 1999), 122-130.

through these realist narratives. The illusion is one kind of “Hilfsmittel,” as Freud might call it, using the term he borrowed from *Effi Briest*. It deflects attention from the disturbing sense that this truth is missing in real life. Mulvey revisited her theory in a 1999 article that considered the possible effects of these visual representations on female moviegoers. Her update invites an aside on the narrative effects of the gender of a narrative voice on the possibilities of interpretation of these two female deaths. The different focalization affected by a female narrator shifts the interpretation of the deaths from a passive to an active motivation on the part of these two female characters.

Another theory that I use in chapter three treats control with visual surveillance as its model, the Panopticon, as discussed by Michel Foucault in his 1975 study *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison*. The Panopticon is an eighteenth-century innovation in social control. Cécile and Margarete find themselves in conditions that resemble the Panopticon, in that they are observed from all angles and by many different examining gazes. They become accustomed to the uncomfortable sensation of being critically observed and begin to internalize the examining gaze. As Foucault argues and as my interpretations illustrate, the Panopticon becomes transformed from an architectural structure and a program of positive social engineering to a trap, or as Fontane expresses it: “wer mal ‘drinsitzt’, gleichviel mit oder ohne Schuld, kommt nicht wieder heraus” (Grawe, “Nachwort” 256).<sup>43</sup>

Focalization is the most concrete way of illustrating the power relationships in which Cécile and Margarete find themselves ensnared. It also complements Foucault’s and Mulvey’s theories because it makes visible the functioning of an unseen force, the gaze. It shows the effects of the gaze’s power on the stories told about others and about

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<sup>43</sup> “‘he who is ‘sitting in it,’ whether guilty or not, does not ever escape.” Grawe takes this quote from a letter Fontane wrote to the critic Paul Schlenther dated 2 June 1887, after the publication of the first book edition and the first critical reactions to the novel.

the self, the relationship between image and action. Subjects of the narratives are made into objects through the sequence of observing, internalizing, and externalizing. Fontane's and Ebner's title characters are not the subjects telling their own stories, but rather the objects of stories that others tell about them. This is part of realism's sophisticated use of imagery and illusion, and the limits of realism to examine its own devices.

Freudian/Lacanian psychoanalysis and Foucault's and Mulvey's theories about the power of looking and the gaze are twentieth-century ideas. The other two ideas that I use to organize my interpretations come from the late enlightenment and the reception of enlightenment ideas in the early nineteenth century. The choice to select philosophical/theoretical ideas from two centuries points to my conclusion that realism as expressed by Ebner and Fontane in these works relies on its early nineteenth-century roots while it also anticipates literary and intellectual developments that follow it.

The next methodology introduced here is from the early nineteenth-century that only became popular in Germany and Austria in the latter half of the nineteenth century. I use it in the comparative interpretations of *Effi Briest* and "Das Gemeindkind" in my second chapter. Arthur Schopenhauer's idea of the will is, in the opinion of some Schopenhauer scholars, a forerunner of psychoanalysis, at least in terms of Freud's concept of the subconscious.<sup>44</sup> Freud's idea of the unconscious was preceded by Schopenhauer's assertion that the individual has little control over his own actions because the will is all encompassing in the world and governs all things and life in it.

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<sup>44</sup> Sebastian Gardner summarizes Schopenhauer's psychoanalytic insights. Key among these are the "superficiality of conscience," the importance of sexuality, and the inability to will our actions. Gardner also points out ways in which Schopenhauer's ideas do not contribute to Freud's notion of the unconscious such as Freud's division of the mind into distinct systems, something that he interprets being present in traces in Schopenhauer's thinking. Gardner is careful to note that Schopenhauer's influence on Freud is disputed, though it is regularly mentioned in the history of philosophical ideas. See Gardner "Schopenhauer, Will, and the Unconscious," in *The Cambridge Companions to Schopenhauer*, ed. Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 375-390.

Schopenhauer's philosophy can be characterized as being largely pessimistic; it holds that life means suffering and that the only way to avoid this is self-renunciation. The exception to this pessimistic view is Schopenhauer's assertion that underneath the appearance of a world divided up into separate entities is the larger truth that everyone and everything, all selves, are united by the will. This prompts each individual to see the other as part of himself, driven by the same inner nature. This mix of a mostly pessimistic world-view tinged with important parts of mild optimism matches the tone of Fontane's and Ebner's works, particularly these two signature works. Schopenhauer's will can be compared to the "Etwas" in what Innstetten calls "das tyrannisierende Gesellschafts-Etwas" (EB 268),<sup>45</sup> the indeterminate feeling that Innstetten and other characters perceive as surrounding them as well as emanating from within them and confusing the categories of inner and outer worlds, self and other. It gives society cohesion, something that is beneficial to the group, and yet it causes the individual to suffer. The will is a way of accounting for the complex, ambiguous presence of pessimism and optimism in both of these narratives. Even though Fontane and Ebner expressed serious points of disagreement with Schopenhauer's philosophy, they incorporate his ideas into these narratives to express comparable tones of ambiguity. This ambiguity in turn stimulates the reader's critical thinking about the limited possibilities for developing the self, the illusions of free will that foster hope in these possibilities, and the pervasive forms of social violence that check the possibilities.

The final interpretive approach that I describe here is the one that I use in my first chapter and one based on Friedrich Schiller's notion of the play impulse from his 1795

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<sup>45</sup> "that social something which tyrannizes us" (EB Trans 173). This is a term from *Effi Briest* that Innstetten uses in the first of his two discussions with Wüllersdorf. (The quotations from the opening of this introduction are excerpted from the second discussion between the two men.) Innstetten uses this word as an explanation for why he feels he has no choice but to challenge the man he has just discovered was Effi's former lover to a duel and thus to irrevocably change his own and his family's life.

series of letters, *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (*On the Aesthetic Education of Man*). It brings Fontane's and Ebner's intellectual roots in the early nineteenth-century together with their literary expressions of self in their autobiographies of childhood that share the same main title, *Meine Kinderjahre* (*My Childhood Years*, Fontane's published in 1893, and Ebner's in 1906). The connection between Freud's ideas and Schiller's synthesizing idea of the play impulse as a tool to aesthetically represent and encourage the realization of an individual's full human potential is to think of the play impulse as a "Hilfskonstruktion," an illusion. This illusion is what the autobiographical narratives indicate that the narrators, the authors, try to create when considering their childhoods. These are the only primary texts in this dissertation that are non-fiction, but they use many of the same devices that realism does when arranging and supporting what Philippe Lejeune calls "the autobiographical pact" (Lejeune 14). The narrators, whose identities are confirmed by the title pages and use of the personal pronoun "I," present their stories as being true, even as they admit in both obvious and subtle ways that what these autobiographical narrators tell cannot possibly reflect their actual experiences. The narratives' effectiveness hinges on the synthesis that Schiller describes as the play impulse. Schiller's idealist conception of the play impulse shows how these autobiographical texts reflect the difficulty or near-impossibility of maintaining autonomy and control of self that is represented in the fictional works interpreted throughout the remainder of the dissertation.<sup>46</sup> The temporary benefits of being able to employ the play impulse are impossible to sustain.

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<sup>46</sup> In an article that traces Schiller's aesthetic thoughts to a negative conclusion in his *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*, one of several negative conclusions in his various writings on aesthetics that scrap his ideas as almost completely infeasible. Linda M. Brooks, "Sublime Suicide: The End of Schiller's Aesthetics," in *Friedrich von Schiller and the Drama of Human Existence*, ed. Alexej Ugrinsky (Westport, CN: Greenwood P, 1988), 97-98.



The selection of different methodological foundations for each of the four chapters reflects what these interpretive combinations indicate about late realism as formulated in the works of these two authors. It is a sophisticated literary gesture that anticipates Freud's naming of the unconscious even as it advocates for individual pursuit of reconciliation between self and one's environment. It shares characteristics of literary movements that follow it such as modernism and even postmodernism as it fluctuates between representations of visions of self that reflect wholeness and those that acknowledge dissolution. In the last segment of my introduction, I briefly describe how my chapters are organized.

### **Chapter Organization**

The succession of themes treated in each of my four chapters resembles those found in a person's lifespan, beginning with the theme of childhood and progressing towards death. This choice stems from realism's emphasis on individuals and their life issues. Some of the contents of each chapter have already been mentioned above, for example, that each pairs interpretations of two narrative works, one by each author. The chapters incorporate relevant secondary research that has been done on the works analyzed, and sometimes also on the type of interpretation employed and the conclusions drawn. The details of how this research relates to my project can be found in the chapters themselves. Another point that bears repeating is that although the level of artistic skill and attention to detail is different in most of the texts, with Fontane's texts being more intricate in most facets of narrative execution, interpretive attention to the works is balanced. The following descriptions of chapters are intended to aid the reader in making connections between the disparate chapters and themes.

The first chapter is entitled “The Play of Realism: Representing the Happiness of Childhood Selves” and treats an early stage in the development of a human life, childhood. Existing research into the two *Kinderjahre* autobiographies has uncovered some of the reasons why, at an old age, the authors may have chosen to explore their memories of childhood in autobiographical form. Those studies also provide insight into the intersection of each author’s life and works. My comparison of the two *Kinderjahre* texts shows that, at almost the same stage in their lives, each author investigated his or her idea of self, creating a synthesis that represents a best self by converting painful and happy childhood memories into an artistic form. This first chapter, together with the fourth one, functions as a set of bookends that support my conclusions about realism. This bookend supports Fontane’s and Ebner’s interpretations of the concept of self as a whole that, in conjunction with Schiller’s concept of the play impulse, synthesizes the conflicting forces of person and condition, or intrinsic character and changing experience. While the fourth chapter shows that the two realists anticipated the “discovery” of the unconscious, this chapter shows that they were also innovative in appropriating ideas such as Schiller’s play impulse, one of the foundational ideas of German intellectual history.

Each author’s concept of an ideal ur-self presented in the autobiographies of childhood is a stepping-stone to the second chapter that treats the depictions of two adolescents coming of age. The chapter’s title is “The Clay Pit and the Garden: Narrating the (Im)possibilities of Becoming.” Schopenhauer’s idea of the will as the underlying principle of his mostly pessimistic view of reality provides the basis to help me explore the balance of pessimism and optimism that informs the narrated selves and thus makes the main characters in Fontane’s *Effi Briest* and Ebner’s “Das Gemeindegeld” seem believable. Though the experiences of Fontane’s Effi and Ebner’s Pavel and Milada

Holub diverge in many ways from one another because they are of different classes and genders, they each clash violently with the boundaries that shape their identities. Each struggles with the concepts of free will, determinism and personal responsibility. The difficulty in labeling the outcomes of these works as either optimistic or pessimistic contributes to readings that address the question of what makes Ebner's and Fontane's brands of realism believably ambiguous.

Once identities have been formed as they are for Fontane's Effi and Ebner's Pavel, they are sometimes disrupted, as illustrated in the third chapter, "Gazing into the Panopticon: Focalizing the Observation of Women." This chapter returns to the issue at the heart of the dissertation by examining the effects of narration about the other on the formation of self. The texts themselves highlight the element of narration. By attending to what happens with focalization in the texts, it can be noted that Fontane's Cécile and Ebner's Margarete are not so much actors as they are objects that are defined by the narrators and predatory men to whom they become tied. The conceptual aids of Foucault's Panopticon and Mulvey's theory on the gaze show how their identities that were already formed can be altered through the intervention of visual control. The women's views of self become fragmented to such a radical degree that their suicides, the one way they find to determine themselves, form the conclusion of the stories.

The final chapter, entitled "The Sublime Virtue and Ironic Ambiguity of Female Death," interprets the narrated experiences of two female characters who enjoy sublimely virtuous reputations, Christine Holk and Maria Dornach. These two mature characters enjoy the most social and economic capital of any discussed in this dissertation, something that one might assume would help them to tell their own stories and thus manage their own identities. Using Lacan's psychoanalytical theories of *jouissance* and the place of the letter in the unconscious, I show the paradox of how the strengths of their

virtue contribute directly to their self-destructive actions. I connect their sensations of pleasure and pain with their conscious or unconscious decisions to occupy positions in which they are vulnerable to the damaging forces of desire and silence. Their experiences form the culmination of the experiences of the characters in the other chapters, accentuating the holes in their perceptions of personal wholeness and making this chapter a matching partner to the bookend of the first chapter. The narratives reflect childhood joys and tragedies, adolescent choices, and the adult pressures of marriages that build to an ultimate test. They pass because they finally make their points of dispute violently clear. They fail because the cost of making these statements means forfeiting their lives. The deaths in this chapter mirror the ambiguous fates and deaths of the characters in the second and third chapters, but are darkened by the failure of language that reflects their existential crises.

Together, the comparative interpretations found in each of the chapters contribute to the study of realism by describing how these stories are told. The dissertation is a presentation of composite pictures taken through the camera of realism that depicts how figures within the texts at various stages in their personal development understand themselves and their places within their environment.

## 1. The Play of Realism: Representing the Happiness of Childhood Selves

Ebner called the process of writing her autobiographical account of childhood: “die Arbeit - die keine ist und keine sein darf” (Schmidt 172).<sup>1</sup> This chapter explores two works that share many of the characteristics of the fictional writings of Ebner and Fontane, and yet belong to the category of autobiography, Fontane’s *Meine Kinderjahre: Ein Roman* (*My Childhood Years: A Novel*, 1893) and Ebner’s “Meine Kinderjahre: Biographische Skizzen” (“My Childhood Years: Biographical Sketches,” 1906).<sup>2</sup> It is significant that the authors turn their imaginations to their beginnings as they prepared to meet death. This juxtaposition of beginnings and endings sets up an opportunity to accentuate the ambiguity about the emotional tones that the autobiographies convey: hope and contentment as well as considerable pain. The interpretations of the *Kinderjahre* texts yield insight into the following themes that appear there: happiness, its confines, the writing games played to achieve it, and the limitations of the authors’ brands of realism.

There are several reasons why the *Kinderjahre* texts offer a sound basis on which to begin a dissertation that compares Fontane’s and Ebner’s fictional narratives in order to reflect on realism as a larger whole. The autobiographies serve similar purposes: they address the origins of artistic inspiration, as well as the deeper desire explored in this

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<sup>1</sup> “The work - that isn’t, and may not be.” No English translations of either autobiography have been published.

<sup>2</sup> Given the similarities in the full titles of Ebner’s and Fontane’s autobiographies of childhood, I abbreviate them in my discussion with a common name, *Kinderjahre*. Unlike Fontane, Ebner does not view her autobiography as a novel, but rather as “biographical sketches.” Therefore, I punctuate her title with quotation marks. I will use italics for the title when it refers to Fontane’s autobiography or to both works.

chapter, to produce and reflect happiness through artistic skill demonstrated in narrative formulations about self. Interpretations of the two *Kinderjahre* also form a basis from which to launch an investigation of the theme of self because they represent each author's account of the formation of his or her ideas of self. Realism plays with the boundaries between life and fiction. In autobiography, the relationship between life and text is closer, but the space between the resemblance of the life that the narrator describes and the author's life that the reader imagines has commonalities with realist fictional space.<sup>3</sup> In both genres, the reader tries to discover a truth through the texts, often a truth that is revealed indirectly, through the tension between the narrative and its resemblance to life. Although significant research has been done on both of the autobiographies separately, and their individual places within the genre of autobiography, research that compares these two autobiographies and what interpreting them could contribute to the study of realist fiction works is lacking. This is true of the two authors' works in general, with a

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<sup>3</sup> Interpretations in the secondary works that treat the authors' fictional realist works dealt with in this dissertation often begin with a discussion that identifies the actual incidents that apparently sparked the author's imagination and led him or her to rework the material. The material for an autobiography is obviously the author's actual life. Philippe Lejeune points out, however, that "An author is not a person. He is a person who writes and publishes. Straddling the world-beyond-the-text and the text, he is the connection between the two. The author is defined as simultaneously a socially responsible real person and the producer of a discourse. For the reader, who does not know the real person, all the while believing in his existence, the author is defined as the person capable of producing this discourse, and so he imagines what he is like from what he produces" (11). This is what I have done in this chapter because the *Kinderjahre* texts themselves encourage the reader to search for meaning that lies below the surface of what is presented. Lejeune mentions what he calls "the myth of the novel being 'truer' than the autobiography" (something that Fontane and Ebner also believe, see p. 242, note 3 of the conclusion) and writes that "the reader tends to think of himself as a detective" who is looking for discrepancies in what Lejeune calls the "contract" (14). In the autobiographical contract, the author and the narrator are the same because of the first person narration and the name on the title page, but the contract between the narrator and reader in fiction is different and varied. Although Lejeune calls autobiography "all or nothing" because it "does not include degrees" (13), this is exactly what Fontane and Ebner do. They fudge these contracts in three ways: in their subtitles, by convoluting the autobiographical categorization of these works; by setting their stories of self in the distant past that they can truthfully claim is not so easy for them or others to accurately remember; and finally by admitting openly in their forewords that their depictions are driven by fantasy and fact. See Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1989) 3-30. This kind of contract is what is in question in *Cécile* and "Margarete," as discussed in chapter three, where the reader is enlisted to participate in the hunt for meaning behind what is presented as the façade of alluring femininity.

few of the notable exceptions being ones that interpret these texts. Still, most of those comparisons focus on one autobiography or the other, but do not make comparative interpretations of them.<sup>4</sup> The most thorough of these is Betty Heitzman's 1998 dissertation, "The Autobiography of Childhood and Youth from Fontane to Carossa: Four Case Studies," in which she devotes one chapter to each of the texts as part of an investigation of the genre. Yet, Heitzman makes no mention of the overlaps in these two specific texts' production and publication histories. The connections in the history of each autobiography's origin are the most direct connections that I could establish between Fontane's and Ebner's work.<sup>5</sup> These connections shed new light on the similarities and differences of the two *Kinderjahre* texts, as well as lend support to the main argument of this dissertation: that a comparison of the two authors' works adds to the understanding of the realist movement as a whole.

As mentioned already, happiness is the thematic element that dominates my interpretation of the two autobiographies. It also informs one of the strongest connections between the two works. The tone of the autobiographical texts, like most of the others interpreted in this dissertation, is ambiguous. As the narrators of their autobiographical stories of self, Fontane and Ebner describe more unresolved pain than happy memories in their childhoods, but the main theme of these texts is happiness because the narrators use their artistic skills to convert that pain into something that is productive of a clearer understanding of self. They evaluate their feelings towards their

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<sup>4</sup> Some of those that focus on Ebner's "Kinderjahre" bring up Fontane's *Kinderjahre* as a point of reference. See Katherine Goodman, *Dis/Closures: Women's Autobiography in Germany Between 1790 and 1914* (New York: Peter Lang, 1986), 168; Rose 160; Peter C. Pfeiffer, "Geschichte, Leidenspathos, feminine Subjektivität: Marie von Ebner-Eschenbachs Autobiographie *Meine Kinderjahre*," *Monatshefte* 87 (1995): 70-71; Edith Toegel, "'Vergangene Freuden, überstandene Leiden'" Reflections on Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach's Autobiographical Writings," *Modern Austrian Literature* 30 (1997): 37-39.

<sup>5</sup> See also my observations in the introduction (p. 18, note 29) about Innstetten's remarks in *Effi Briest* that seem to indicate Fontane had read and had formed an opinion about Ebner's "Unsühnbar."

origins as well as their future and use the happiness that they create in their texts to brighten both.

The autobiographical format offers the authors opportunities to tell stories in their own voices. The narrative voice in each of the texts can be equated with the voice of the author. It should be noted, however, that the author represents his or her self at a temporally distant stage of development, and from varying angles that foreshadow later life events and incorporate knowledge that was unavailable to the childhood self they are representing. Although autobiographies provide insight on an author's life because they are more personal than the author's fictional works, it is logical to assume that the most sensitive of revelations will be withheld.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, the authors must choose some conflicts to represent as having been overcome to make their depictions of past experiences interesting to readers. The authors use the primary settings of the *Kinderjahre* to transport themselves into a literary space in which they artistically confront their present selves and the conditions that formed them, particularly their relationships with their parents. This offers them a safe space in which to attempt this sensitive work because they are careful about what they divulge, lest this information negatively impact their lives as private individuals.

Play is a natural topic for autobiographies of childhood. Play of an unusual kind is the first example of the way that points of thematic comparison can be drawn between the *Kinderjahre* texts. Considerations of the authors' views on representation and art creep into their descriptions of childhood play, not primarily as the reflection of memories of childhood, but rather as each narrator's attempts to appreciate her or his

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<sup>6</sup> Estelle C. Jelinek refutes this idea, however and calls it "the autobiographic fallacy." She maintains that neither male nor female autobiographers are likely to treat painful memories in their works. See Estelle C. Jelinek, "Introduction," in *Women's Autobiography: Essays In Criticism*, ed. Estelle C. Jelinek (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1980), 10-11.



literary skill in creating a satisfying literary product from emotionally delicate material. This interpretation brings these two texts together by comparing the ways the authors reconcile conflicting elements of themselves and their identities in their accounts of play. I do this by using the play impulse proposed by Friedrich Schiller in his 1795 idealist masterpiece *Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen (On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters)*. In the cases of Fontane and Ebner and their *Kinderjahre*, the play impulse is a way to conceptualize the important role that beauty performs in allowing the authors to reaffirm their skills of literary creation by approaching material key to their depictions of their own formations of self.

The *Kinderjahre* texts hold important places amongst larger bodies of each author's fictional works because they provide examples of how the authors approach a slightly different kind of narrative task, personal accounts of the formation of self. These accounts offer valuable clues about the authors' views on realism because they treat topics directly from their own lives, making the way they translate material that is singularly personal into artistic representations all the more complex. The texts give indications about why and how the authors treat the topics they do in their other works. Thematic features that are present in the authors' fictional works are also found in the *Kinderjahre* texts. The ones that I treat in the following discussion are: familial and cultural inheritance, joys, struggles, lessons learned, and rites of passage. A discussion of these topics helps draw conclusions about the possibilities that enliven and the boundaries that enclose the late German realist movement.

### **Why Compare Accounts of an Prussian and an Austrian Childhood?**

As mentioned in the introduction, the first and the fourth chapters of this dissertation form a complementary pair. In both chapters, the primary works being

compared bear titles that share points of similarity. Both chapters deal with how the works treat psychological issues of being an individual. In this chapter, the narrators depict themselves as children learning to be themselves. In the fourth chapter, female characters who are close to dying anticipate ceasing to exist. A realistic illusion that works of art mirror real life is depicted in the *Kinderjahre* texts in two ways. First, subjective childhood memories are presented as if they were completely factual,<sup>7</sup> and second, the narratives function on the premise that these supposedlyfactual depictions convey the core of the creative individual. The *Kinderjahre* are not the same as the other realist texts interpreted in this dissertation because they are not fictional per se, but as Fontane's and Ebner's main writing style is realism, and the style of these texts matches those other texts, it is logical to assume they share commonalities with the authors' works of realist fiction.

Rather than proceeding directly to a discussion of the merits of comparing these two works, I first present the details of textual similarity that are most easily be noted. At the level of the texts themselves, the titles are fairly plain, something not unusual for

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<sup>7</sup> Ebner proclaims in her foreword: "Dieses Wesen ist treu geschildert, buchstäblich und im Geiste" ("This soul is depicted faithfully, to the letter and in spirit"). Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, "Meine Kinderjahre: Biographische Skizzen," in, Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, *Autobiographische Schriften I: Meine Kinderjahre, Aus meinen Kinder- und Lehrjahren*, Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, Kritische Texte und Deutungen, vol. 4 (Tübingen, Niemeyer, 1989), 5. References to this text will be marked with the abbreviation EKJ. Fontane similarly claims: "Alles ist nach dem Leben gezeichnet" ("Everything was pictured as in life"). He goes on to explain that he has chosen to call his autobiography a novel so that he can defend himself against the unavoidable questions about authenticity. Theodor Fontane, *Meine Kinderjahre: Autobiographischer Roman*, in Theodor Fontane, *Autobiographische Schriften*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Aufbau, 1982), 3. References to this text will marked with the abbreviation FKJ. These quotes bear a strong resemblance to the title and main premise of Lilian R. Furst's book about realism. See Lilian R. Furst, *All is True: The Claims and Strategies of Realist Fiction* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1995). Critics writing on each of the *Kinderjahre* texts have addressed the question of whether to interpret these texts as historical testimonies, which would make them memoirs, or historical works. Most favor reading them as literature. For a convincing argument that Fontane's *Kinderjahre* should be read like a workd of fiction, see Margret Walter-Schneider, "Im Hause der Venus: Zu einer Episode aus Fontanes *Meine Kinderjahre* mit einer Vorbemerkung über die Interpretierbarkeit dieses 'autobiographischen Romans,'" *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft* 31 (1987):232-233.

autobiographies of the time.<sup>8</sup> They are also quite similar to one another. The subtitles differ in their descriptions of the textual formats. Fontane labels his *Kinderjahre* an autobiographical novel and divides it into chapters with titles, and Ebner terms her “Kinderjahre” biographical sketches that are shorter than Fontane’s chapters and bear no titles. I will return shortly to details about the significance of each text’s format. Each of the accounts limits itself, more or less, to a time period that encompasses the same period of childhood: for Fontane his eighth through twelfth years of life, and for Ebner her eighth through fourteenth years. Another notable similarity is the importance that each author assigns to the depiction of his or her father. Ebner’s father was the only biological parent or grandparent she ever knew. Fontane’s depictions of his parents in *Kinderjahre* focus predominantly on his father. Although scholars differ in opinion on the mood of the *Kinderjahre* texts, on the surface at least, the narrators convey positive impressions.<sup>9</sup> Each narrative concludes with an event that marks the end of childhood. Though I have found no evidence that Ebner’s “Kinderjahre,” the later of the two autobiographical texts,

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<sup>8</sup> For a sample of titles, see Günter Niggel, “Fontanes *Meine Kinderjahre* und die Gattungstradition,” in *Sprache und Bekenntnis: Sonderband des Literaturwissenschaftlichen Jahrbuchs, Hermann Kunisch zum 70. Geburtstag*, eds. Wolfgang Frühwald and Günter Niggel (Berlin: Duncker, 1971), 257-258.

<sup>9</sup> In his afterword to the Reclam edition of Fontane’s *Kinderjahre*, Christian Grawe calls the text “eine Art späte Liebeserklärung des Sohnes an seinen Vater Louis Henri Fontane” (“a type of late declaration of love of a son to his father, Louis Henri Fontane.” See Grawe “Nachwort,” in Theodor Fontane, *Meine Kinderjahre: Autobiographischer Roman* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1986), 257. The title of A. R. Robinson’s article on Fontane’s *Kinderjahre* states his view of the author’s tone. See A. R. Robinson, “Recollections in Tranquility: An Examination of Fontane’s ‘Autobiographical Novel,’” in “‘Erfahrung und Überlieferung’ Festschrift for C. P. Magill, Hinrich Siefken and Alan Robinson, eds. (Cardiff, Wales: U Wales P, 1974), 113-125. Betty Heitzman sees both *Kinderjahre* texts as largely positive, especially Ebner’s, which she reads as a successful search for a healthy relationship with God. She also mentions Ebner’s description of childhood as a way to “play” with life in the sense of seeing it in its whole scope. Heitzman 154. Birgit A. Jensen reads Fontane’s *Kinderjahre* as Fontane’s self prescription, a rebuilding of the self that was never constructed properly in his childhood, an ironic distancing from his parents. See Birgit A. Jensen, *Auf der morschen Gartenschaukel: Kindheit als Problem bei Theodor Fontane* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), 104-140. Peter C. Pfeiffer reads Ebner’s “Kinderjahre” as a “Leidensgeschichte,” which translates as a story of suffering reminiscent of Christ’s passion. See Pfeiffer, “Geschichte” 76.

was directly influenced by her awareness of Fontane's text,<sup>10</sup> these textual similarities warrant a comparison, and yield a new vantage point from which to consider realism.

The similarities internal to the texts are not the only ones that seem obvious. Their backgrounds also contain points of congruence. In addition to the similarities in narrative time represented by each of the texts, and despite the fact that more than a decade separates the publication dates of the first book editions, the authors wrote their *Kinderjahre* texts when they reached the same stage of old age, Fontane at age seventy-two and Ebner at age seventy-three. Each author seems to undertake these particularly personal literary endeavors as a way to regain a sense of confidence in themselves and in their abilities. The factors that make up each author's apparent impetus to write their *Kinderjahre* are fascinating. In Fontane's case, this story has been well documented and has greatly enriched possibilities of interpretation.<sup>11</sup> The story behind Ebner's text is not

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<sup>10</sup> In her treatment of Ebner's "Kinderjahre," Goodman concludes that Ebner read Fontane's *Kinderjahre* and took an example from it to express her autobiographic material. Goodman does not provide any hard evidence that this is the case, however. See Katherine Goodman 168. In an article comparing Fontane's and Ferdinand von Saar's work, Norbert Bachleitner argues and concludes a point that opposes Goodman's conclusion about Austrian reception of Fontane. He mentions Ebner by name as well as the names of her colleagues, Ferdinand von Saar, Ludwig Anzengruber, Peter Rosegger when drawing the conclusion that none of them were aware of Fontane's work. He draws an exception for Jakob Julius David, who reports having met Fontane and who also wrote an obituary for him in the journal *Die Wage* in 1898. See Norbert Bachleitner, "Of Grieving Girls and Suicidal Soldiers: Theodor Fontane and Ferdinand von Saar," in *Theodor Fontane and the European Context: Literature, Culture and Society in Prussia and Europe*, eds. Patricia Howe and Helen Chambers (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), 33. At this stage in my research, I feel there is no way to prove which of Goodman's or Bachleitner's conclusions are correct because Ebner herself destroyed most of her personal documents, such as letters or diary entries, that could have proved this. She also requested that those with whom she corresponded do the same. Even without hard evidence, it seems that Goodman's and Bachleitner's guesses are reasonable based on the probability that Ebner would have been interested in what other realist writers were producing and getting published.

<sup>11</sup> Fontane biographer Hans-Heinrich Reuter is one of these. See Hans-Heinrich Reuter, *Fontane*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Verlag der Nation, 1995), 757-773. Another is Christian Grawe. See Christian Grawe, "Nachwort" in *Kinderjahre* 245-247. Claudia Liebrand takes a different course. She notes the chronological jump in the sixteenth chapter of *Kinderjahre* that describes Fontane as an adult visiting his elderly father for the last time before his death. She interprets Fontane's narration of his father's death in this context as: "Schreiben gegen den Tod, das Beschreiben des Todes und die Inszenierung des eigenen Dichtertums als Annihilation der Todesgefahr" ("writing against death, the description of death and the staging of one's own authorship as annihilation of the danger of death"). See Claudia Liebrand, "Tod und Autobiographie: Fontanes *Meine Kinderjahre* und Canettis *Die gerettete Zunge*," *Hofmannsthal Jahrbuch zur europäischen Moderne* 2 (1994): 287.

as dramatic, but involves some similar factors including thoughts about death and challenging health concerns.<sup>12</sup>

Two shorter autobiographical texts that Fontane and Ebner wrote help to connect the two *Kinderjahre* texts. The connection between these texts is the closest one that I can make between the two authors who neither met nor exchanged correspondence. In 1894, Karl Emil Franzos requested that both Fontane and Ebner submit pieces for a collection he was compiling titled *Geschichte des Erstlingswerks*.<sup>13</sup> Ebner's contribution "Aus meinen Kinder- und Lehrjahren" contains some of the same thematic substance covered in her later "Kinderjahre." Fontane's essay "Das Schlachtfeld bei Groß-Beeren" ("The Battlefield at Groß-Beeren"), appearing only one year after his *Kinderjahre*, does not present any of the same material as his *Kinderjahre*, save for references to his mother's French heritage. However, both of their texts treat some aspect of their childhoods.

Another detail of the context of the *Kinderjahre* publishing history shows there was a small degree of separation in terms of professional acquaintance between Fontane and Ebner. Both authors intended to initially publish the texts in Julius Rodenberg's *Deutsche Rundschau*, the influential periodical that was mentioned in the introduction.

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<sup>12</sup> In the years from 1893-1899, Ebner lost many loved ones. Her elder sister "Fritzi" (later Gräfin Kinsky) who plays a role in her "Kinderjahre" and is mentioned in this chapter, her husband Moritz, and her intimate friend, advisor and manuscript proofreader, Ida von Fleischl-Marxow, are some of the people she lost at this time. See Toegel "Freuden" 36. Klostermaier specifically explains Ebner's poor health. She speculates whether her childhood suicide attempt, an episode discussed later in this chapter, caused some of her future problems including migraines. Ebner also had problems with her eyesight, hearing, and also suffered from trigeminal neuralgia (*tic douloureux*) that caused "facial pains" so severe that sometimes she could not speak. See Klostermeier, *Victory* 156-161.

<sup>13</sup> Christa-Maria Schmidt provides a list of the other contributing authors to Franzos's collection. The most recognizable contributors were Fontane, Karl Emil Franzos, Paul Heyse, Friedrich Spielhagen, and Conrad Ferdinand Meyer. Ossip Schubin, a pseudonym for Aloisia-Lula Kirschner, was the other female contributor. See Christa-Maria Schmidt, "'Aus Meinen Kinder- und Lehrjahren:' Kritischer Apparat, Textgeschichte und Deutung" in Marie von Ebner-Eschenbachs *Autobiographische Schriften I*, Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, *Kritische Texte und Deutungen*, vol. 4, ed. Christa-Maria Schmidt (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1989), 294. See also Rose 160.

Rodenberg had been acquainted with Ebner since 1873 and published many, though not all, of her works in the *Rundschau*.<sup>14</sup> Her “Kinderjahre” made its first published appearance there in four installments in 1905. Fontane and Rodenberg hoped that his *Kinderjahre* would appear in the *Rundschau*, but a difference in opinion between them led Fontane to reject Rodenberg’s offer to publish excerpts. As it turned out, even less of the text than Rodenberg had planned to publish appeared in Karl Emil Franzos’s journal, *Deutsche Dichtung*, and in *Magazin für die Literatur des In- und Auslandes*.<sup>15</sup> Even though the relationship between Fontane and Rodenberg suffered because of this difference in opinion, the *Rundschau* published *Effi Briest*, Fontane’s next work. Ebner’s comparatively larger success in her relations with Rodenberg is a considerable boon to her career in the short term, even though up to the present day Fontane enjoys greater recognition both within the community of German studies and among a wider audience.<sup>16</sup> As indicated by the biographical details that I supplied in the introduction, the degree of public recognition that each author had earned by the time they wrote their *Kindjahre* texts was comparable.

Now that I have established connections between the publication histories of these two autobiographical works, I move to their structural layouts, which reveal both similarities and differences. For the most part in both texts, events are narrated in

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<sup>14</sup> Ebner met Rodenberg in 1873 when she was personally introduced to him by Josef von Weilen, an influential teacher in her literary education, and a scholar who was well connected to the Austrian court. Ebner sent Rodenberg all of her new works, some of which he published in the *Rundschau*. See Klostermaier *Victory* 88, 155. The letters that Schmidt includes in the critical edition of “Kinderjahre” show that Ebner addresses Rodenberg as “verehrtester Freund.” See Schmidt 173. Helmut Brandt explores Ebner’s connection to Rodenberg and *Die Deutsche Rundschau* and cites Ebner calling what Rodenberg did for her personally and professionally as a “Lebensrettung” (“life saver”). See Brandt 1003.

<sup>15</sup> Fontane was only able to convince these journals to publish chapters thirteen and sixteen. Ironically, Rodenberg had offered to publish more. See Helmut Nürnberger, “Autobiographische Schriften und Zeugnisse,” in *Fontane-Handbuch* 754-755. See also Theodor Fontane, *Aus meinem bunten Leben: Ein biographisches Lesebuch*, eds. Gabriele Radecke and Walter Hettche (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1998), 285.

<sup>16</sup> Brandt notes that Rodenberg recognized in Ebner aesthetic sympathies the were closer to his own than those that Fontane embodied in his late works. Brandt therefore questions Rodenberg’s instincts about determining the kind of bourgeois realism that would have lasting literary value. See Brandt 1013.

chronological order, though organization by theme prevails in the narrative logic. The most obvious structural difference is that Fontane calls his work a novel and Ebner calls hers a collection of sketches. This suggests differences in thematic organization that I explore below.

Fontane groups his narrative into chapters that describe aspects of his childhood surroundings and activities. Many of the chapter titles are indirect questions that he answers through the lens of an old man who is assigning meaning to his memories of a childhood self. He states in his foreword that he aims to achieve the following goals with his autobiographical formulations: to indulge in his “Vorliebe für Anekdotisches;” to discover how “den ganzen Menschen” can be found in the first years of life; and to portray “wenigstens etwas *Zeitbildliches*,” a part of which is what he feels is a special place; and a “noch ganz von Refugié-Traditionen erfüllten Französischen-Colonie-Familie” (FKJ 3).<sup>17</sup> He hopes that in the context of his *autobiographical novel*, he can build the depictions of his roots into a larger meaning that is also applicable to the trajectory his life has taken since those distant days.

Ebner’s sketches create a different narrative effect from Fontane’s chapters. Nonetheless, the purpose seems similar to Fontane’s: to create happiness with her writing. This seems plausible irrespective of whether she took part of her motivation for writing “Kinderjahre” from her reading of Fontane’s *Kinderjahre* or not. The format opens the text to the possibility of free association, unbound by the need to confine the substance of her writing to the topic put forward in a chapter-title heading. This is what she indicates in one of her aphorisms: “Die Skizze sagt uns oft mehr als das ausgeführte

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<sup>17</sup> “preference for things anecdotal;” “the whole person,” “at least something that gives a picture of the time,” and “a family still quite influenced by the refugee traditions of the French Colony.” The “Französische-Colonie” refers to the sizeable and influential French Huguenot community in Brandenburg and in Berlin. For more information on Fontane and the Huguenot community, see Helmuth Nürnberger, “Theodor Fontane: Leben und Persönlichkeit,” in *Fontane-Handbuch* 1-2. See also Helmuth Nürnberger, *Fontanes Welt* (Berlin: Siedler, 1997), 41.

Kunstwerk, weil sie uns zum Mitarbeiter macht" ("Aphorismen" 58).<sup>18</sup> Whether the "uns" refers to her as the author or to us as the readers is unclear and also unimportant; the use of this particular structure creates the effect of being deliberate. She lets her fantasy guide her, and hopes that its strength will again convince her as well as her readers (the "uns" in the aphorism) of her and their inherent sense of worth. Her sketches recount how she experiences pain and happiness in recurring cycles that begin in childhood and continue to affect her as an elderly woman. The format also allows her to formulate her memories into circular, repetitive patterns, emphasizing her perceptions that life's experiences and the feelings that punctuate them occur in a returning and retreating pattern.<sup>19</sup>

Beginnings and endings, anecdotally-styled chapters, and sketches bordering on modernist style are the frame for the central picture of the renditions of realism in these two authors' works. I argue that finding or rather creating happiness out of the material of their own lives by formulating it into a literary product is the authors' way to articulate their own truths. In his 1853 essay, "Unsere lyrische und epische Poesie seit 1848," Fontane calls this "Interessenvertretung" ("Poesie" 13), a way to show that under the "Trümmern halbvergessener Jahrhunderte manche unsterbliche Blume blüht" ("Poesie"

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<sup>18</sup> "The sketch often tells us more than the finished work of art because it makes us participants."

<sup>19</sup> Heitzman's main thesis revolves around the repetitive aspect of the sketches. Goodman sees a connection between this kind of pattern and Ebner's exposure to Schopenhauer's philosophy, to the paintings of the Impressionists, as well as possibly to her thinking on a topic that fascinated her and her contemporaries, sensory perception. She expands on these influences to connect the way that Ebner may have tried to sort through her impressions of herself better by proposing that she knew of Ernst Mach's sensory perception work and Gustav Fechner's pre-Freudian psychological theories that argued against materialism by promoting synaesthesia. See Goodman 168, 171, 174-175. Pfeiffer analyzes the difference made by the sketch format as he briefly compares Ebner's "Kinderjahre" with Fontane's. He concludes that Fontane's goal to place himself within a specific historical context belongs to the standard causal psychological development of autobiographical writing of the nineteenth century. Pfeiffer argues that Ebner writes against this tradition. He notes her choices open up successive circles of consciousness and make her text more modern than a simple documentation of an aristocratic girl's childhood from the first half of the nineteenth century. She narrates from the child's perspective and leaves history out of her formulations of memory. He feels that these elements combined with others in the text make it a representation of her identity as an artist. See Pfeiffer, "Geschichte" 69-71.



14).<sup>20</sup> Fontane's narrator is calling on unchanging truths that persist in people and in life "je frischer je besser" (Fontane, "Poesie" 14),<sup>21</sup> even as the cultures that propagate them are born, flourish and then die. Schiller uses a similar flower image to represent a person's progression towards his or her full humanity in his aesthetic letters: "In dem wir sagen, die Blume blühet und verwelkt, machen wir die Blume zum Bleibenden in dieser Verwandlung und leihen ihr gleichsam eine Person, an der sich jene beiden Zustände offenbaren. [. . .] Nur durch die Folge seiner Vorstellungen wird das beharrliche Ich sich selbst zur Erscheinung" (Schiller 74; let. 11, par. 5).<sup>22</sup> The search of Fontane's narrator for undying truths in the world around him is a property of realism, but so is the search for truth that lies inside a person, the process of building and maintaining self. Searches and the concept of truth act as narrative frames that enclose the pictures of artistic happiness depicted in these two *Kinderjahre* texts.

Ebner also supplies a frame for her narrative of childhood memories that hints that the picture inside will portray an eternal truth. In the first sketch of her "Kinderjahre," one written from Rome in 1905, Ebner expresses sentiments that resonate with both those in Fontane's *Kinderjahre* and Schiller's letters. Deaf in one ear by this time of her life, she writes about viewing the eternal city: "Wie tot liegt sie da, die so viel verbraucht und so viel erduldet hat. Kein Laut dringt herauf, vernehmbar nur dem inneren Ohr ist ihre feierliche Sprache des Schweigens" (EKJ 6).<sup>23</sup> Life greets her again

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<sup>20</sup> "representation of interest," and "ruins of half-forgotten centuries many an eternal flower blooms."

<sup>21</sup> "the fresher, the better."

<sup>22</sup> "If we say 'the flower blooms and fades', we make the flower the constant in this transformation, and endow it, as it were, with a Person, in which these two conditions become manifest. [. . .] It is only through the succession of its perceptions that the enduring 'I' ever becomes aware of itself as a phenomenon." All quotations of Schiller's original text and the English translation are taken from: Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*, eds. and trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1967), 74-75. This translation will subsequently be noted as Schiller Trans.

<sup>23</sup> "As if dead, it lies there, that which has been responsible and has borne so much. No sound penetrates up; its celebratory language of silence is perceptible only to the inner ear."

through her activity of writing childhood memories. She tells the pages of her manuscript that have already unfolded their paper wings to fly home where life is budding from the trees and bushes. She celebrates life, “das grüne Seelchen, dessen Geschichte ihr erzählt” (EKJ 7),<sup>24</sup> as she transitions from talking about death in the context of her impressions of Rome. Life and death are interconnected, as are memory and present in both of the autobiographies of childhood.

### Realists' Happiness

If happiness is missing or broken and one seeks to retrieve or reconstruct it, as Fontane and Ebner do, one of the ways to go about finding it is locating a place in which to search for it. Fontane chooses to search in his second hometown, Swinemünde, now known by its Polish name, *winouj cie*, a small port and bathing resort on the eastern side of the island Usedom on the Baltic coast,<sup>25</sup> where his father moved his family in 1827 upon purchasing the *Adlerapotheke*, a small pharmacy of his own. The home of Ebner's realist truth is the site of her birth and, a short time later, her mother's death, the south-central Moravian country estate of Zdislawitz.<sup>26</sup> Swinemünde and Zdislawitz play roles that are as important as any of the characters or themes contained in the narratives. The places have a singular hold on the authors' imaginations, and are perfect places in which to search for lost happiness.

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<sup>24</sup> “the green little soul whose story you tell.”

<sup>25</sup> For information about Swinemünde, see “Swinemunde,” *LoveToKnow 1911 Online Encyclopedia*. © 2003, 2004 LoveToKnow, 9 May 2005 <<http://79.1911encyclopedia.org/S/SW/SWINEMUNDE.htm>>.

<sup>26</sup> The estate was bequeathed to Ebner's father by her mother, who received it as inheritance from her father. It lies in eastern part of what is now the Czech Republic, not far from the town the German-speaking Austrians called Kremsier, but now known by its Czech name Krom•ž. The Czech name for the estate is Zdislavice. Tatlock's introduction to her translation of “Das Gemeindegeld” is the source of my information on the location of Zdislawitz, which is spelled Zdißlawitz in the text edited by Schmidt. See Tatlock, “Introduction” vii.

In her examination of the creation of place in realist texts, *All is True: The Claims and Strategies of Realist Fiction* (1995), Lilian R. Furst provides an explanation for why and how place is integrally important in the world of realism:

Place [. . .] assumes supreme importance in realist fiction because it is so intimately implicated in both the formation of personality and the course of events. [. . .] It amounts to far more than an insistent acknowledged background, or an omnipresent context for the action. [. . .] The interaction between the perceiving, feeling, reflecting self of the protagonists on the one hand and the consensus of their particular material and social world on the other is the ever reiterated and ever changing matter of realist narrative. [. . .] The generally painful negotiations between individual idealism and the reigning mentality are the archetypal theme of realism. And that reigning mentality is concretely embodied in place as a physical locale is invested with moral dimensions to such an extent that it becomes, as it were, almost a *dramatis persona* in its own right. (Furst 176-177)

Furst's account of the function of place exactly describes the roles of the authors' chosen settings for their *Kinderjahre*. It also highlights the role that place plays in representing a state of mind that is integral to the plot that develops within the narrative. In accordance with the realist tradition in which Fontane and Ebner have invested their artistic energies, Swinemünde and Zdislawitz are logical settings for them to undertake a rediscovery of the processes that formed them. They also use the process to reevaluate the selves that either emerged from those processes or were present from the beginning of their existence, an idea that feeds into the larger concept of Schiller's play impulse. My analysis thus far builds the case that the narrators are taking the reader on textual journeys of memory back to the places of childhood. The narratives strive to produce a sense of wholeness for the selves that are depicted in them, and thus first depict tones of happiness. Because the self, this world within, is so important to realism, place as a reflection of mentality also plays a significant role. Next, I move from the background of

the texts and the thematic of place to explain Schiller's idea of the play impulse and how it can help explain the narrative processes at work in the *Kinderjahre* texts.

Given Schiller's prominence in nineteenth-century German culture, it stands to reason that both Fontane and Ebner read his works extensively and relied on them as a foundational factor in their artistic development. Schiller's notion of the *Spieltrieb* (referenced in this chapter by its English translation, play impulse) is a synthesis of the conflicting forces of *Formtrieb* and *Sinntrieb* (formal and sensual impulses). The result of Schiller's attempt to philosophically synthesize the forces that constantly counteract one another can be applied to the processes of coming to a new understanding of identity described in the two autobiographical narratives. In their texts, their narrators try to understand self as it was when they were children so that they can reevaluate their selves as they are in the present and project how they would like them to be in their future. I discuss these matters in detail in a subsequent part of this chapter dealing with games. For now, concentrating on the authors' childhoods and their settings provides valuable background information to the texts, and helps explain how Schiller is important in the intellectual lives of the authors.

In the literary canon of the nineteenth century, Fontane and Ebner are not the only authors concerning themselves with the topic of children and childhood. One scholar writing about Fontane's depictions of childhood, Birgit A. Jensen, notes that children captured the imagination of many in the literary world of the nineteenth century.<sup>27</sup> This suggests that the two authors were following a tradition that finds meaning in origins as revealing knowledge about the inner essence of life. Ebner and Fontane had made

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<sup>27</sup> Jensen cites many examples. Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1837-1839), and Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (1885) were popular among readers in the English-speaking world. Notable nineteenth-century German-language works about childhood are for instance E.T.A. Hoffmann's "Sandmann" (1815), Johann Nepomuk Nestroy's *Schlimme Buben in der Schule* (1847), and Gottfried Keller's "Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe" (1856) take childhood as a topic of interest. See Jensen 4-5.

children main characters in their fictional works, Fontane to a lesser degree than Ebner. Ebner is well known for her sensitive and socially critical depictions of children and childhood in works such as “Die erste Beichte” (1875), “Das Gemeindegeld” (1887), “Das Schädliche” (1894), and “Der Vorzugsschüler” (1901), among others. Fontane’s balladesque novellas “Grete Minde” (1879) and “Ellernklipp” (1881) depict the largely unhappy childhoods of two girls. Fontane’s Effi Briest and Ebner’s Holub siblings from “Das Gemeindegeld” are adolescents when readers first meet them. Both authors are drawn to children as well as women when they want to depict the most vulnerable kinds of characters and characters with the most possibility for development.

The authors’ selves as children are not the only vulnerable characters in their *Kinderjahre* autobiographies. The authors also depict their parents’ struggle to come to terms with the responsibilities of raising a family. “Krisen der Ungleichzeitigkeit” (Jenson 35)<sup>28</sup> is the term Jensen uses to name the difficulties facing Fontane’s parents and others of their generation, including Ebner’s father. These are times during which parents find themselves unable to prepare children to meet the demands of a radically new period of time, when the concept of childhood was in flux and compulsory public education became a social goal.

Fontane’s and Ebner’s views of their parents reflect the weakness in parenting skills that were accentuated by these times of change. It is perhaps important to note that each of their fathers was a veteran of the Napoleonic Wars. Ebner’s father remained soldier-like throughout his life. She calls him her “fürchterliche, liebe gute Papa” and notes that he demands not love, but “Gehorsam!” (EKJ 19-20).<sup>29</sup> Fontane’s parents have opinions about education that conflict with one another. His mother, whom he

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<sup>28</sup> “crises of unsimultaneity.”

<sup>29</sup> “the fearsome, dear, good Papa,” “obedience!”

characterizes as “ein Kind der südlichen Cevennen,” is full of passion. She likes to say that she is a child of the Enlightenment and add that she considers herself and her community “reformiert” in a less than strict religious adherence to “das Genfertum” of her Huguenot forebears (FKJ 13).<sup>30</sup> The narrator expresses satisfaction that his mother was not a religious zealot, but despite this positive trait, she is portrayed just as extreme and ineffectual in her convictions about childrearing as is his father, who is characterized as a hedonist in comparison to his mother. Louis Henri Fontane, as portrayed here, was a “Gascogner voll Bonhommie” (FKJ 13)<sup>31</sup> who possessed the gift of gab and the love of gambling. The depictions of Ebner’s and Fontane’s parents in their *Kinderjahre* works make it seem likely that they were so preoccupied with overcoming their own dramatic past, and finding their own ways that it was difficult for them to have the insight to prepare their children for the future. Both narrators express feelings of ambivalence about the most appropriate tone to strike so that they can portray their childhoods as whole, and therefore also happy. Together with expressions of their intrinsic identities, this ambivalence forms the conflicts that they reconcile in the *Kinderjahre* narratives.

Parents and place form points of background, the frames for the pictures of wholeness. Fontane and Ebner use their knowledge of the frames to draw the pictures that fit inside of them. Each author predicts or pronounces success in their prefaces or afterwords, the narrative frames of their *Kinderjahre* texts. Fontane’s narrator reports that he appreciates having been “guter Leute Kind” (FKJ 186).<sup>32</sup> His feeling is tied to Swinemünde because it nourished this impression, similar to the one he had when first entering into the house where he and his family would live. He describes seeing the

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<sup>30</sup> “a child of the southern Cévennes mountains west of the Rhône River and east of Massif Central in France” “Cévennes” 13 March 2005, *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*. “reformed Geneva-ism.”

<sup>31</sup> “a good-natured person from the region of Gascony in SW France,” “**Gascony**.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2005. Encyclopædia Britannica Premium Service, 13 Mar. 2005 <<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?tocId=9036143>>.

<sup>32</sup> “the child of good people.”

house and being filled with “etwas wie Hoffnung und diese Hoffnung trog auch nicht. Es war ein wunderbar schönes Leben in dieser kleinen Stadt, dessen ich noch jetzt, wie meiner ganzen buntbewegten Kinderzeit, unter lebhafter Herzensbewegungen gedenke” (FKJ 29).<sup>33</sup> In her opening to the body of her narrative, Ebner likewise proclaims to her formulations: “Ihr seid etwas,” because they are so closely linked with “meiner engsten Heimat” (EKJ 5, 7).<sup>34</sup> The authors’ creative energies are portrayed in these autobiographies as stemming not only from themselves and their upbringings, but from their cultural identities, those that grew out of their relationship with the places they feel they belonged.

The happiness of these two late realists is tied up in their *Kinderjahre* texts. The texts serve as the culmination and the germination of artistic lives and the traditions that informed them. In the form of his play impulse as proposed in his letters on the aesthetic education of man, Schiller provides a promising way to compare how these two authors, who are so different in their origins and yet so similar in their inclination, build their happiness by looking back at their childhood roots.

### **Play as Beauty**

Their *Kinderjahre* texts indicate that Fontane and Ebner considered the process of writing their autobiographies of childhood to be different from other projects they had undertaken. In this section, I first build on the material that I have already presented about the authors’ motivations for writing these works, briefly treating each project individually. This will allow me to show how Schiller’s main objective in writing his *Aesthetic Education of Man* is complementary to the individual author’s objectives.

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<sup>33</sup> “Something like hope and this hope wasn’t deceptive. It was a wonderful, beautiful life in this small city. Still today my heart beats in a lively way as I recall my whole colorfully moving childhood.”

<sup>34</sup> “you are something,” and “my closest home.”

Next, I explain my reading of Schiller's conflicting impulses and how he attempts to synthesize them with a new impulse, the play impulse. Finally, I explain in more detail how elements in each of the *Kinderjahre* narratives can be interpreted as representing Schiller's impulses and how the narrators bring resolution to their own conflicts by employing Schiller's play impulse.

Fontane's foreword indicates that he considered his *Kinderjahre* a representation of a whole self. Unfortunately, not all of his readers appreciated his approach and found his depiction unbalanced. Upon deciding not to publish Fontane's first version of his *Kinderjahre* in *die Deutschen Rundschau*, the editor, Julius Rodenberg, requested that Fontane alter his text to include more details about the games that he played as a boy. Fontane refused to do this because he was pleased with the text exactly as it was, though he honestly admitted that it was full of "unbarmherzliche Kleinmalerei" that might not be to his readers' taste.<sup>35</sup> By writing this way about a much younger version of himself, Fontane seized an opportunity to stand back and observe his self-representation as a work of art. It seems that he applied Schiller's most famous statement from the fifteenth letter: "der Mensch spielt nur, wo er in voller Bedeutung des Wortes Mensch ist, und *er ist nur da ganz Mensch wo er spielt*" (Schiller 106; let. 15, par. 9),<sup>36</sup> to write himself out of his psychological and physical funk by employing Schiller's ideas. Play is at the center of his *Kinderjahre*, not play in the conventional sense (the one about which Rodenberg would have liked to read more), but rather as Fontane's ability to recognize "eine vollständige Anschauung seiner Menschheit" (Schiller 94; let. 14, par. 2)<sup>37</sup> in a piece of art that he created.

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<sup>35</sup> "remorseless depiction of detail." Fontane used this expression in a letter to Rodenberg dated 24 July 1893. See Fontane, *Aus meinem bunten Leben* 285.

<sup>36</sup> "man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and *he is only fully a human being when he plays*." (Schiller Trans. 107).

<sup>37</sup> "a complete intuition of his human nature" (Schiller Trans. 95).



Ebner's appreciation of Schiller plays a key role in how one can apply the concepts that Schiller puts forward in his aesthetic letters to add to the interpretation of Ebner's "Kinderjahre." Schiller was a model for her of how an author, poet, and playwright can use his or her talent to influence people and society. He was her example of literary greatness, a figure with whom her family, and particularly her father, was familiar through their patronage to the theater. As an elderly woman, she still considered the *Burgtheater* in Vienna "die Grundlage zu meiner ästhetischen Erziehung, die damals begann und heute – noch lange nicht beendet ist" (EKJ 79).<sup>38</sup> Writing for the theater was her initial dream, and she fought through years of harsh lessons that taught her that the theater was closed to women other than actresses. Schiller's multi-faceted talent that extended beyond theater to poetry, prose and philosophy, as in his aesthetic letters, was an inspiration for her not to give up her search for a way to employ the talent that had been affirmed already at an early age by none other than the great Austrian literary figure, Franz Grillparzer.

Schiller's aesthetic letters provided her with a framework for how she could express the trials she had endured and how she was able to convert them into aesthetic success. The letters inspire a different way to imagine how she might have thought of this autobiographical project as a way to reconcile her desire and ability to write despite the restrictions her society imposed on her as a woman. Writing provided her a way to

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<sup>38</sup> "the foundation of my aesthetic education that began at that time and is still not concluded today." Rose notes commentary by Stefan Zweig in his autobiography *The World of Yesterday* (1944) about how theater played a more important role in Viennese life than it did in other European cities. Schiller plays were performed more than any other playwright's in mid-century. Rose comments that the theater played the role that Schiller had wanted it to play, the role that it played for Ebner's father and in which Ebner wanted to take part as a playwright, an educational institution. Rose also notes that one of the high points of young Ebner's life came on her fourteenth birthday when the same stepmother who had established her contact with Grillparzer, Xaverine (*née* Kolowrat-Krakowsky), also presented her a complete set of Schiller's works. Rose describes how Ebner was commissioned by the Committee for the Schiller Memorial to write a play about Schiller. She entitled it *Doktor Ritter: Dramatisches Gedicht in einem Aufzuge* (*Doctor Knight: Dramatic Poem in One Act*). It was performed first in 1869 at the *Kärntnertortheater*. See Rose 6-7, 63-86.

access a vehicle of expression that was so aesthetically attractive, it would engage and influence people for the good. Katherine Goodman recognizes that behind much of the Ebner's fictional work, one senses her unspoken desire to influence society in a way that moved beyond the private, interpersonal sphere that became her trademark thematic milieu (Goodman 172). Schiller's aesthetic letters suggested a way for her to actualize this desire. Instead of seeming stubbornly inattentive to the restrictions her society and family imposed on her creative aspirations, she tried to make her art useful by making it as aesthetically pleasing as possible. This was a way to make an effective argument for women's pursuit of their self-actualization; something that a direct appeal to reason did not seem as successful in accomplishing. This way of making a point is addressed by Schiller in his twenty-third letter:

Es gehört also zu den wichtigsten Aufgaben der Kultur, den Menschen auch schon in seinem bloß physischen Leben der Form zu unterwerfen und ihn, so weit das Reich der Schönheit nur immer reichen kann, ästhetisch zu machen, weil nur aus dem ästhetischen, nicht aber aus dem physischen Zustand der Moralische sich entwickeln kann. (Schiller 164; let 23, par. 6)<sup>39</sup>

Schiller is advocating art as a way to promote morality, one of Ebner's unspoken goals. By writing these autobiographical sketches, she used beauty to convert her lifelong pain into happiness, both for herself and for her readers.

Play is a way for people of any age to free themselves from tension, but the play that Schiller writes of in his letters is not the usual kind, nor is the play that is the aspect of the *Kinderjahre* texts that concerns us here. Fontane and Ebner use several kinds of play as themes: play in the ordinary sense of the word or the games that children play and

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<sup>39</sup> "It is therefore one of the most important tasks of education to subject man to form even in his purely physical life, and to make him aesthetic in every domain over which beauty is capable of extending her sway; since it is only out of the aesthetic, not out of the physical, state that the moral can develop" (Schiller Trans. 165).

play as an analogy for psychic balance between cognitive and emotional aspects of one's identity. The Schillerian variety of play described in the texts sometimes when the usual variety of play is not. When the two authors are able to engage Schiller's play impulse, their stories representing whole selves flow in more believable and entertaining ways. Fontane and Ebner show that they agree with Schiller's declaration that: "die Kunst ist eine Tochter der Freiheit, und von der Notwendigkeit der Geister, nicht von der Notdurft der Materie will sie ihre Vorschrift empfangen" (Schiller 6; let. 2, par. 3).<sup>40</sup> Their childhood experiences, not only the usual kind of play, become opportunities to use art to free themselves from the conflicts that they had internalized throughout their lives, but which were much easier to untangle when they were children. Explaining Schiller's aesthetic theory as a tool for creating whole selves is the first step towards showing how Fontane and Ebner create these selves, and thus also happiness, with their autobiographies of childhood.

Schiller wrote his series of letters in response to the excesses of the French Revolution. They comprise his proposal to resolve the conflicting impulses that are inherent in every individual, to bring about a new age of "anthropological wholeness" (Saul 206). Beauty is Schiller's synthesizing force and the play impulse is his way of accessing it. The formal and sensual impulses constitute a human being's two impulses, according to Schiller's formulations. The sensual is the more basic of the two, representing the body's needs that must be met to ensure survival as well as the psychological needs that engage the mind. This is the impulse that children recognize first, though it is not necessarily easier to satisfy than the conflicting impulse, the formal impulse. This second impulse is the expression of the need to impose structure on the

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<sup>40</sup> "Art is a daughter of Freedom, and takes her orders from the necessity inherent in minds, not from the exigencies of matter" (Schiller Trans. 7).

surrounding environment. It is the impulse that civilization is best at recognizing and rewarding, and the one that children are educated to cultivate. Outgrowths of these conflicting impulses influence most of the conflicts that arise in the two authors' fictional works. The psychological needs of the individual, his or her sensual impulse, are often sacrificed to the needs of the society, representing the formal impulse.

Beneath these the two impulses, Schiller establishes another dimension of conflict: between person/self, the unchanging, intrinsic nature of an individual; and condition and its determinations, the conditions that go into forming an individual. Each of these is a strong factor in the formation of identity, but only an achievement of balance between the conflicting factors has potential to reflect the most accurate depiction of the self. The play impulse becomes important when Schiller presents the harmonizing influence of beauty as the key to achieving balance (Savile 201). It allows a person to become conscious of him- or herself and is able to appreciate both the rational and sensual parts of the self. My reading of selected passages of the *Kinderjahre* texts show how the authors come to a fuller appreciation of themselves in the passages that portray the play impulse at work. By doing this, the narrators summon the beauty of skills so that they can harmonize aspects of their formations of self that have long remained unresolved. First I discuss this in terms of Fontane's *Kinderjahre*, and then I shift to Ebner's text.

Several quotes from Fontane's *Kinderjahre* indicate that he is struggling to harmonize the kinds of conflicting forces in his life that Schiller describes in his letters. His title heading for his fourteenth chapter, "Wie wir erzogen wurden. – Wie wir spielten in Haus und Hof" (FKJ 139),<sup>41</sup> indicates that the two topics, the necessity of learning what society feels it is important he learn, and how he follows his natural inclinations, are

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<sup>41</sup> "How we were brought up. – How we played in the house and the yard."

complementary to each other, when in fact they are not. The first line of the chapter is the same as the first part of the title with a question mark instead of a period: “Wie wir erzogen wurden?” (FKJ 139).<sup>42</sup> The reader is lead to expect that the narrator is signaling that he will proceed straight to the answer of this question. Instead of doing this, he begins a long description of the complications that are involved in answering this question. He repeats what he had presented in previous chapters and what has also been touched upon previously in my discussion, that his parents’ differences in temperament had a negative effect that stayed with him for the rest of his life. Each parent had imperfections and strengths that counter-balance each other. Fontane answers his question, using a teasingly ambiguous tone: “‘Gar nicht erzogen und ausgezeichnet erzogen’, so sagte ich und dies scheinbar sich Widersprechende paßte ganz vorzüglich zusammen” (FKJ 141).<sup>43</sup> He supplies this answer after giving a long string of obfuscating material. The positioning of this statement in a chapter that falls well after the halfway mark of the narrative indicates that Fontane is not able to come to terms with either the hurt associated with his parents’ relationship to each other and him. But as in most of Fontane’s prose, gleaning the full picture of what is expressed requires repeated close readings and careful thought.

At the outset of this investigation, I placed happiness as the main objective of Fontane’s text because this is the tone that accompanies the narrative formation of a whole self. Achieving this necessarily involves the harmonization of painful dissonances in the formation of “den richtigen Menschen” (FKJ 140).<sup>44</sup> Of course, because this harmonization takes the form of an artistic project, it must also be aesthetically pleasing.

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<sup>42</sup> “How we were brought up?”

<sup>43</sup> “‘Not at all educated and outstandingly educated,’ is what I said and that which seemed to contrarily fit quite excellently together.”

<sup>44</sup> “the right person.”

This becomes clear when this portion of the text is laid over a background of the principles put forth in Schiller's aesthetic letters. Most complicated problems require innovative solutions, and sometimes, as seems to be the case for hurt that obviously cannot be undone, simply framing it so that it can be properly displayed is enough to encourage reflection and bring satisfaction.

Reflecting back on what makes up the main goal of the narrative and what are the supporting structures, it appears that Fontane's parents are part of the frame of the narrative even though they are described in such vivid detail that it might seem like they should be included in the main picture. They represent the formal and the sensuous impulses that first took form during his childhood, though neither parent represents one impulse over the other. Their concern and care feed his sensuous needs, though in a quality that is lacking. Discipline, even when applied inconsequentially, builds his development of the formal impulse. The narrator is referring directly to his parents when he writes:

So waren die *zwei Persönlichkeiten*, die wir tagaus, tagein vor Augen hatten und wie man mit Recht gesagt hat, das Wichtigste für den *physischen Menschen* sei die Luft, drin er lebe, weil er aus ihr mit jedem Atemzuge Gesundheit oder Nicht-Gesundheit schöpfe, so ist für den *moralischen Menschen* das, was er von seinen Eltern sieht und hört, das Wichtigste, denn es ist nicht eine von glücklichen Zufällen abhängige, vielfach unfruchtbare Belehrung, sondern ein *Etwas*, das in jenen Jahren wo die Seele sich bildet, von Minute zu Minute seine Wirkung übt. (FKJ 141, Italics are mine.)<sup>45</sup>

On the surface, "zwei Persönlichkeiten" ("two personalities") refer to his parents. Interpreted with a Schillerian overlay, the phrase refers to the two conflicting impulses

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<sup>45</sup> "Such were the *two personalities* that we had before our eyes day in and day out. And as one had correctly said, the most important thing for the *physical person* is allegedly the air in which he lives, because with every breath that he takes of it, he draws in good or ill health. Thus for the *moral person*, that which he hears and sees from his parents is the most important thing, because it is not dependent on lucky coincidence or unfruitful instruction, but instead on a *something* that builds the soul in those years, that delivers its effects from minute to minute." (I have added sentence breaks.)

and their effects on different parts of self. Similarly, “wir” probably refers to his siblings, but as they are mentioned nowhere in the text save for in the briefest of aside remarks, “wir” represents the two selves that are formed by the two impulses. According to this quote, the portion of his self that is governed by the sensuous impulse is healthy as long as the air it breathes is clean, which one can assume that it is in Swinemünde. His moral self, that which would be influenced by the formal impulse, is the portion that he feels is weaker than the sensuous one, though the narrator does not say this directly. According to this passage, it is the “*Etwas*” that makes all the difference. It is what makes him feel most comfortable, but one has only to read several lines further to see his positive tone contradicted. He writes “*unser* normaler Nicht-Erziehungsprozeß gestört [wurde]” (FKJ 141),<sup>46</sup> referring to his two selves governed by the two impulses that were not nurtured in the appropriate way. His parents’ application of discipline is not at all consequential. This lack of structure not only weakens the structure of his formal impulse, but also takes away from the nurturing of his sensuous self because it needlessly interrupts his desire to find his own method of synthesizing the two impulses. The narrator expends much effort trying to depict his parents’ actions and motivations. Even though he as an old man still does not understand his parents, he realizes that the process of having to bring them into harmony with one another through this literary depiction has helped him understand himself.

Formal upbringing and play are grouped together in this chapter of Fontane’s *Kinderjahre* because they represent the impulses that conflict with one another, the ones that he tries to harmonize. The narrator inserts a clue that points to where the reader can find the harmonizing element in the sentence before the narrative transitions from formal upbringing to play: “wenn ich nicht in die Schule ging oder gerade Schillersche Balladen

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<sup>46</sup> “our normal process of not being educated was damaged.”

lernen mußte, so gehörte meine Zeit der Beschäftigung nach freier Wahl an, der Ungebundenheit, dem Spiel” (FKJ 145).<sup>47</sup> The remark about memorizing ballads by Schiller refers back to an exchange in the previous chapter between the young Fontane and his father about the difficulty he experienced memorizing the Schiller poem “Das Elysische Fest” (“The Elysian Festival” 1798). Among the boy’s general complaints that he cannot accomplish his task is the specific one that he isn’t familiar with the queen who makes a formal entry in the beginning of the poem, and therefore cannot process the meaning of the poem’s text. His father cannot answer who the queen is or help his son understand: “Das ist auch nicht nötig [. . .] Welche er meint, ist am Ende gleichgültig. Es ist ein Ausdruck für etwas Hohes” (FKJ 138).<sup>48</sup> His father has inadvertently given his son the right idea that the queen represents something important. The queen to whom the passage refers is Ceres, the Greek goddess of growth. She represents Fontane’s problem that he doesn’t understand how to form a whole self out of two impulses that cannot be sufficiently satisfied as separate needs, let alone be satisfied in a way that addresses a greater need. While in the context of this particular scene, the boy’s goal is memorizing a ballad about how Ceres leads mankind to higher levels of development, the same goal that Schiller is trying to accomplish in his aesthetic letters, the larger goal is to understand how to progress to a better understanding of the self. The narrator closes the scene with the revelation that he was never able to memorize that particular poem, but thanks to the teacher who made this assignment, he memorized all of Schiller’s other ballads. He did not master every lesson, but all in all, he gained knowledge of the larger context.

The boy Fontane played games that sound usual, but carry deeper meanings. He enjoyed performing feats of physical strength and agility, pasting paper or cardboard

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<sup>47</sup> “when I didn’t go to school or was not having to learn Schiller’s ballads, my time belonged to a activity of my free choice, to independence, to play.”

<sup>48</sup> “It isn’t necessary. [. . .] Whichever one he means is unimportant in the end. It is an expression for something great.”



together, something he also calls “*Papparbeit*” (FKJ 146),<sup>49</sup> and hiding so that no one would find him for a long time. The narrator takes a curious position towards both paper projects and hiding, even as he notes that these two pursuits took up most of his time. Paul Irving Anderson explores hiding as a theme in *Kinderjahre* and uncovers a new interpretation to *Effi Briest*, the novel on which Fontane’s work foundered and which the completion of the *Kinderjahre* facilitated.<sup>50</sup> I agree with Margaret Walter-Schneider’s judgment of Anderson’s way of approaching the text. In her article interpreting Fontane’s *Kinderjahre*, she posits that though Anderson’s approach to seeking what Fontane has hidden may be fruitful, what is important in a text is not that which is hidden, but rather what one can learn from the “Deckschichten im literarischen Kunstwerk” (Walter-Schneider, “Im Hause” 230).<sup>51</sup> Anderson wants to extricate the boy from his favorite hiding place by lifting away the layers of pain, the layers of hay stacked high up under the eaves of the barn, right below the roof that is always in need of repair, so that the secret underneath can be discovered. But this is where the boy loves to hide, or at least where the narrator chooses to depict him hiding. The hay and the roof make him feel protected. The hiding place and knowledge that someone is searching for him are just as enjoyable and as developmentally valuable as his boundless play outside in the open air. This is the next form of play that we will interpret.

The most stunning of young Fontane’s escapades forms the high point of the narrator’s depictions of play, and the point at which he is able to rescue the most beautiful memory of himself by applying the harmonizing effects of Schiller’s play impulse to his depiction. The setting reinforces the effect of the scene. The incident

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<sup>49</sup> “pasting papers.”

<sup>50</sup> For an interpretation that uses Fontane’s *Kinderjahre* as a source of clues for the interpretation of one of his fictional works, see Paul Irving Anderson, “*Meine Kinderjahre*: die Brücke zwischen Leben und Kunst: Eine Analyse der Fontaneschen Mehrdeutigkeit als Versteck-Sprachspiel im Sinne Wittgensteins,” in *Fontane aus heutiger Sicht*, ed Hugo Aust (Munich: Nymphenburg, 1980), 143-182.

<sup>51</sup> “protective layers in the literary work of art.”

takes place on the boundary between water and land, the quay in Swinemünde, a place that is dangerous and thus has been declared off-limits to children. The seasons are also at a point of transition. Winter is giving way to spring, and the river ice is melting. Still, the ships are anchored three deep in their winter positions, their mooring ropes draped enticingly against the walkway, inviting the boys to scamper up onto the ships. Fontane paints a picture of his young self that resembles the swashbuckling adventures depicted in Sir Walter Scott's novels, one of his favorite authors. The boys play at tightrope walking, incorporating another boundary between air, water, land, and ship. Their antics give way to a game of chase. There are no adults in the scene, and naturally the chase leads onto territory that is too enticing to resist. Not unexpectedly, it also ends in a dangerous situation. Young Theodor is being chased. He evades his pursuers, hiding for an instant, then leading them up the ship's masts and around on the decks, but the leap he successfully takes to the neighboring ship is the decisive moment. The self of his portrayal is poetry in motion, Schiller's "*lebende Gestalt*," the object of the play impulse, "was man in weitester Bedeutung *Schönheit* nennt" (Schiller 100; let. 15, par. 2).<sup>52</sup>

At the moment when he could have declared victory, he sees that one playmate has landed in deadly trouble, dangling from the side of one of the ships over the ice-cold water. Young Fontane forgets danger, lowers himself down on a ladder and extends his body so that his friend may grab on and thus be saved. He is careful to add that this particular playmate was a boy of illegitimate birth who ironically bore the name Ehrlich, German for honorable, genuine, or truthful. Ehrlich grasps the tip of young Fontane's boot and they are both able to maintain their grip until adults see them and come to the rescue.

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<sup>52</sup> "*living form*," "what in the widest sense of the term we call *beauty*" (Schiller Trans. 101).

The positive meaning of the name of the boy being rescued is ironic in terms of the familial origins of the boy he rescues, but fortuitous for the elderly Fontane, the voice of the narrator, whose purpose for the larger outcome of the account is to examine his own origins. In the details that build the narrative to this point, he has expressed criticisms of his parents, something that he had waited a lifetime to do. He has relieved himself of real psychic pain, but he does so in a way that is gently ambiguous so as not to soil the memories of others who are still living and who share his memories. His detailed depictions of typical childhood antics and anxieties do not make him look bitter or foolish for retaining his lingering pain for so long. Finally, in this scene, he arrives at a place in which he can bring the conflicting parts of his identity into alignment. He has broken the confines of his parents' rules that forbid him to play on board the ships, even as he has pronounced them reasonable. He tests his abilities to outrun and outthink the danger brought about by his transgression. The sensual impulse that drives him to find satisfaction in thrill seeking is engaged, as is the formal impulse that encourages him to do what is right and go back and save Ehrlich.

The young Theodor saves not only his friend, but also himself by writing this account. Honor ("Ehre"), the root for the playmate's name "Ehrlich," is saved by telling the truth, a realist objective.<sup>53</sup> He avoids being plunged into the icy waters of the river by summoning the rescue efforts of adults representing the society he knows will criticize his foolhardy actions. This is his acknowledgment of the necessity of the restrictions that society places on the individual. The chapter concludes with a brief exchange between him and his father. The boy expects to receive harsh punishment for his dangerous actions, but instead of acting as expected, his father sighs: "Alle Wetter, daß du nicht

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<sup>53</sup> Lillian R. Furst stresses that realism creates an illusion that presents itself as the truth and denies that this is a contradiction. See Furst 1-27.

gehorschen kannst. Aber es soll hingehen, weil du dich gut benommen hast.” Fontane praises his father’s leniency: “So mu Erziehung sein.” He still speaks of his father as he continues with these sentiments: “traf er’s nicht immer glücklich, wenn er aber seinem unmittelbaren Gefühle folgen konnte, traf er’s desto besser” (FKJ 158-159).<sup>54</sup> His leniency extends not only to his father’s natural inclinations, but also towards his own. In the resolution of this scene, he expresses what is closest to his heart. He has been able to appreciate his father’s ability to show for once that he can be a good parent. Most of all, he is able to celebrate the beautiful elements of his most memorable childhood exploit. In this narrative moment, his feeling matches the aesthetic value of his work, he is able to reconcile his conflicting impulses into a beautiful synthesis, or in other words, engage Schiller’s play impulse.

The elderly Fontane undoubtedly altered and elaborated the details of the account in the process of rendering it to the context of his lightly fictionalized memories. As I have already argued, in doing so, he has actualized the best part of himself. His choice to set the action on a Sunday in April of 1831, for example, seems like a detail that was added to give subtle, truthful effect to what he really remembered. Coincidentally Easter, the festival of birth or rebirth, fell on April 3 in the year 1831.<sup>55</sup> It was also the month before the Russian victory at Ostrolénka in May 1831 that took Poland, a country fighting to protect the independence it had officially declared in January of that same year, a step closer to defeat. In a previous chapter in *Kinderjahre*, Fontane describes how he

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<sup>54</sup> “By Jove you can’t obey. But it should be overlooked because you behaved well.” “Child rearing must be like that.” “even if he didn’t always get it right, when he was able to follow his immediate feelings, he always did it that much better.”

<sup>55</sup> For a website that is useful in providing Easter dates, see Robert W. Mallen, “*Easter Dating Method*,” Apr. 2002, *Astronomical Society of South Australia*, 16 March, 2005 <<http://www.assa.org.au/edm.html#List18>>.

followed the news of the Polish freedom fighters with deep interest.<sup>56</sup> He adds “daß ich vielfach nur mit geteiltem Herzen auf der Seite der Polen stand” (FKJ 115),<sup>57</sup> something that is reminiscent of how his heart is divided whenever he has to obey one impulse at the exclusion of the other. Walter-Schneider notes that he uses stars as a symbol of what he imagines the Polish revolutionaries to represent and even how he quotes from Schiller to do so: “Was wäre aus der Welt geworden, wenn es nicht zu allen Zeiten tapfere, herrliche Menschen gegeben hätte, die, mit Schiller zu sprechen, ‘in den Himmel greifen und ihre ewigen Rechte von den Sternen herunterholen” (FKJ 115).<sup>58</sup> In a leap that she admits is beyond the range of her article to prove, Walter-Schneider equates the stars in this and other scenes in *Kinderjahre* as being related to dissolution, a realm of the fundamental and poetic that stands above the ordered world of society. The resolution of the scene on the quay offers a stunning example of how Fontane incorporates this potentially disruptive kind of poetic energy into the depiction of the prosaic setting of children at play, and how his synthesis of these elements represents the best of his abilities.

Whereas Fontane sees stars when he incorporates his poetic energy into prose, Ebner sees windows as various aspects of her self as she tries synthesize them into an appreciation of her full humanity. Windows have various functions in the sketch that I interpret next. These become clear in the course of my close reading that follows shortly. First, it is useful to look at how another realist writer, Henry James, uses windows as a metaphor for how readers “see” what is being depicted by a realist text. In the preface to his novel *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), Henry James writes how he envisions windows

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<sup>56</sup> Ebner also followed other events in Poland with interest, for example, the peasant uprisings in Galicia in the 1840s. This is evidenced by her 1883 *Erzählungen* “Der Kreisphysikus” and “Jakob Szela.” For a plot summary and brief commentary of the narratives, see Steiner 121-125.

<sup>57</sup> “that I stood in many ways only with a divided heart on the side of Poland”.

<sup>58</sup> “What would come of the world if there weren’t brave, glorious people living in all times, who, to coin Schiller’s phrase: ‘reach for the heavens and pull down their eternal rights from the stars.’” For a brief discussion of this place in the text, see Walter- Schneider, “Im Hause” 245-246.

in the house of fiction. James writes: “at each of them stands a figure with a pair of eyes [. . .] insuring to the person [. . .] an impression distinct from any other” (James 46). James’s elaboration of his vision of windows of the house of fiction helps show how readers see what is portrayed in these realist autobiographies:

The spreading field, the human scene, is the ‘choice of subject’; the pierced aperture [. . .] is the ‘literary form’; but they are, singly or together, as nothing without the posted presence of the watcher – without, in other words, the consciousness of the artist. Tell me what the artist is, and I will tell you of what he has been conscious. Thereby I shall express to you at once his boundless freedom and his ‘moral’ reference (James 46).

James’s window symbolism has to be adjusted slightly to fit the autobiographical form, but his image of watchers at windows suggests several kinds of watchers, the readers and the author/narrator. In this “Kinderjahre” sketch, several levels of narration are emphasized by the presence of the windows. The elderly Ebner representing and thus watching her younger self is the “human scene.” The readers peering through the windows are another, one that the author hopes to inspire with her insights about her self. In the following interpretation, I describe how Ebner achieves what James and Schiller calls “boundless freedom.” Käte Hamburger, commenting on Schiller, calls “purposelessness of aesthetics”<sup>59</sup> as Ebner shows how what is possible for her may also be possible for her readers, whose eyes are watching her watching herself through the windows that she places in her text.

One of Ebner’s scenes features three windows and three scenes that represent aspects of how the narrator tries to harmonize the different aspects of her self. These

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<sup>59</sup> Käte Hamburger uses this phrase (in German “Zweckfreiheit des Ästhetischen”) to describe Schiller’s play impulse because it comes close to Kant’s “Wohlgefallen ohne Interesse” (“pleasure without interest”) and corresponds to a Schiller quote from a poem that appears in the prologue to his 1799 tragedy *Wallenstein*: “Ernst ist das Leben, heiter ist die Kunst” (“Serious is life, gay is art”). See Käte Hamburger, “Nachwort: Schillers ästhetisches Denken,” in Friedrich Schiller *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*, (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1965), 145.

scenes are preceded by the depiction of another notable window in the text, the one that her elder sister, Fritzzi, broke while playing. The children are afraid that their father will fly into a rage in reaction to their careless accident, but he surprises them by shrugging it off and even making a joke out of it. The three window scenes in this sketch build upon the mixture of fear and joy introduced in the scene involving the broken window. The first windows are part of the background for one of their catechism lessons with the local priest, Pater Borek. The second window represents her attempt to join her mother in heaven. The third window opens to give her and other members of her family great joy. This is the order in which the window scenes appear in the text, but indications of time in the text reveal that the real-life incidents happened in a different order. The last window that is portrayed as revealing a sight to elicit great joy is part of an event that the text notes as happening two years before the other scenes. I argue that the chronologically inverted narrative placement reflects Ebner's conflicting energies and her artistic solution to reconciling these conflicts.

The windows in the scene of the sketch that features the sisters' "allerbester Freund," Pater Borek, teaching them "die Lehren eines milden Christentums" (EKJ 50)<sup>60</sup> do not play an important role in the action. Instead, they offer a subtle invitation for readers to peer through them and follow what is about to take place. The windows' location on either side of a settee is mentioned at the same time as the narrator tells about Pater Borek entering the room. The girls offer their friend a seat on the settee, but as usual, he modestly refuses. As the reader, I watch the scene unfold through the window that the author has placed in the scene. I imagine myself taking the seat that the priest refuses, and getting a closer look at the action. The lesson begins, but the girls are having trouble concentrating. The priest gently scolds them when their attention is captured by

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<sup>60</sup> "very best friend" and "the lessons of a mild Christianity."

the menagerie of animal figures that is laid out on the table behind the priest. They take their role as students seriously and try to cover the figurines with a cloth for the next lesson. Unfortunately the cloth is too small and they still become distracted. This introductory scene presents the conflicting elements of self in a charming way, winning the affection of the reader with the description of the girls' sincere efforts to learn their lessons properly. The scene establishes the kind of "moral reference" to which James refers. The narrator establishes her younger self as honest in emotion, but challenged in terms of receiving the lessons put before her. The further development of the sketch's events show that the narrator uses this scene as an example of how even the best efforts to learn an important lesson sometimes do not further the likelihood of success, and how one's inability to learn lessons the first time influences life's later developments.

The next portion of the sketch continues the theme of the first. It describes how the girls' exposure to religion is expanded as they begin to attend mass. No window is present, but this seems unimportant because the little country church in which the scene takes place is described as poor in decoration. The most striking sensations come from the narrator's gushing emotional language as she writes that she feels a holy presence. Inspired by this presence, she borrows the box that contains the holy instruments for conducting a mass and convinces Fritz to help her recreate what has moved her so deeply. She is addressing the needs of her formal impulse as she imposes a cognitive structure on the experience that her sensual impulse has registered as deeply moving. When the girls invite Pater Borek and their grandmother to witness their interpretation of mass, they find that the religious system is not receptive of their offering of logic. Social values, represented by her family and the Church, discourage her precocious attempts to examine religion critically. She is strongly discouraged from addressing her formal impulse.



The sketch's second window plays a role in the aftermath of Marie's first confession. It functions within the narrative as a kind of portal that gestures upward to what the author presents as a greater truth. The narrator depicts her younger self while she is learning the ironic and painful lesson that windows cannot be used as doors. While the window allows her a glimpse at what she thinks is the truth, she must incorporate what she sees in some creatively productive way rather than assuming that she can overstep the boundaries of the physical world to seize the truth. Her seven-year-old self tries to escape the confines of the incomprehensible rules that limit her freedom to comprehend the world. She is asked to prepare for her first confession even though she clearly does not comprehend the sacrament's nuances. She looks forward to confession because she sees it as a way to win the affirmation of her loved ones, who are encouraging her to take this religious step, and to act according to her own moral and intellectual standards. It is a way for her to recognize her two selves, the one shaped by the forces of time and circumstance and the other that is her unchanging essence, by asking for and receiving God's blessings for both. She expects confession to result in her transformation into an uncorrupted form, but finds it "furchtbar die Angst früher oder später doch wieder in meine alten Fehler zu verfallen und den Glanz meiner Seelenschönheit zu trüben" (EKJ 53).<sup>61</sup> Conflicts between accepting and affirming her human imperfections and striving to meet a higher standard in various realms both private and public plague the author at all stages of her life.

"Wer sterben will, springt aus dem Fenster, und diese Art, ins Jenseits zu fliehen, sollte die meine sein" (EKJ 53).<sup>62</sup> The incident with this particular window offers a glimpse of a mirage of what she hopes will be a beautiful rebirth rather than a death.

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<sup>61</sup> "horrible the fear sooner or later to nevertheless again decline into my old mistakes and to muddy the brilliance of my soul's beauty."

<sup>62</sup> "He who wants to die jumps out of the window, and this method of fleeing into the hereafter was supposed to be mine."

However, unlike Fontane's conciliatory depiction of the picturesque scene on the quay that Sunday in April 1831, within the world of Ebner's sketch, reconciliation is only possible through death. The young Marie imagines it as a rebirth by means of "einem so herrlich erlösenden Tod" (EKJ 53),<sup>63</sup> a flight into a kind of existence in which she need not deal with quandaries about how to reconcile conflicting impulses or how to act morally.

In an article that takes a wider view of Schiller's aesthetics examining how his concepts changed throughout his theoretical writings, Linda M. Brooks finds that Schiller's ideas of beauty feed into the category of the sublime and finally find no logical outlet outside of suicide. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to examine the wider meaning of Brooks's findings and incorporate them to my interpretation, one of her comments on an excerpt from the aesthetic letters adds to the understanding of what may have been happening in young Marie's mind as she looks forward to killing herself. The narrator leaves a gap in the place where she might have revealed her immediate thoughts about what she is about to do, claiming a lapse of memory: "Vor dem unmittelbar darauf Folgenden gibt mein Gedächtnis mir keine Rechenschaft" (EKJ 54).<sup>64</sup> Brooks's interpretation of Schiller's twenty-fifth letter partially fills the narrative space that is left empty in the text with the possibility that the child has overstepped the boundaries of balance. She interprets the meaning of Schiller's letter this way:

Man establishes his identity, his autonomous 'Ich,' Schiller tells us, through aesthetic reflection, a process whereby he puts the world outside himself, makes it objective – 'thinks' it; in essence gives it 'form.' And since in aesthetic reflection, the 'necessity of nature' has begun to 'relax its hold upon him, man now experiences moments of 'peace,' indeed, of aesthetic 'infinity,' against a background of transience an image of the infinite, namely 'form.' (Brooks 95)

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<sup>63</sup> "such a gloriously redeeming death."

<sup>64</sup> "Of the consequences that immediately followed, my memory gives me no account."

In light of this elaboration on Schiller's theory, one can imagine how young Marie might have been stunned by the beauty of her anticipation of achieving her perfect state. She uses the word "engelhaft" (angelic) twice in the sentence that describes her approach to the confessional (EKJ 53). Her imagination does not linger on how this will happen, how she will have to make the painful transition of parting with her physical existence. In a portion of Schiller's twenty-fifth letter that Brooks quotes in her discussion discussed above, the reader can see how even Schiller does not know how to envision the consequences when the balance between form and sense has been tipped:

Aber indem ich bloß einen Ausgang aus der materiellen Welt und einen Übergang in die Geisterwelt suchte, hat mich der freie Lauf meine Einbildungskraft schon mitten in die letztere hineingeführt. Die Schönheit, die wir suchen, liegt bereits hinter uns, und wir haben sie übersprungen, indem wir von dem bloßen Leben unmittelbar zu der reinen Gestalt und zu dem reinen Objekt übergangen. Ein solcher Sprung ist nicht in der menschlichen Natur, und um gleichen Schritt mit dieser zu halten, werden wir zu der Sinnenwelt wieder umkehren müssen. (Schiller, 184; let. 25, par. 4).<sup>65</sup>

Abstract existence in the world of form is not sustainable. Schiller concludes here that beauty lies in life, in the search for balance between the formal and sensual impulses.

The dark turn that the sketch has taken is ameliorated by the conclusion. The trajectory of Marie's jump does not carry her all the way through the window, which anyway was located in the building's second story, the highest floor of their comparatively low-lying residence. Instead, it takes her on a collision course with the

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<sup>65</sup> "But whilst I was merely seeking a way out from the material world and a transition to the world of spirit, my imagination has run away with me and carried me into the very heart of this latter. Beauty, which is what we were out to seek, already lies behind us; we have o'erleapt it completely in passing from mere life directly to pure form and the pure object. But a sudden leap of this kind is contrary to human nature, and in order to keep step with this latter we shall have to turn back once more to the world of sense" (Schiller Trans. 185).

window's frame representing the boundaries of her physical existence. As the author and narrator, she has arranged the sketch to highlight her own corporality in contrast to her fantasies of transcendence. Although she only mentions a painful bump on her head, her injury probably caused a concussion.<sup>66</sup> Pater Borek is the person who finds her after her brush with death. He is able to convey in the gentlest terms how mistaken she was to think that bringing about her own death could have been a good way to retain the blessings from God that he has bestowed on her. He does not lecture her or remind her later of the incident. She recalls his actions and words as he pointed the finger used for taking oaths to the lump on her forehead: "Da hat Ihr Schutzengel 'Merk's Tölpel' daraufgeschrieben" (EKJ 54).<sup>67</sup> The narrator presents the outcome of this incident as a message from fate that has convinced her that she must stay within the boundaries of her own story rather than trying to convey herself into a eternal realm. She decides that she must find another way to come to terms with the irreconcilable aspects of her self that include the pain of longing for a mother.

The scene that follows in this same sketch contains the last of the three windows and functions as her narrative proof that she has learned the lesson that experience and Pater Borek have taught her. It is the most beautiful scene in the "Kinderjahre," as well as one of the most beautiful ones in the author's body of works. It portrays life's mixture of happiness, challenges, and tragedies. Joy emerges as if from on high from this window that is also located in the second story of the family's house. Like the last window, this one is also thematically related to death because it is the connection between a sickroom and the fresh sunshine of the outside world. The larger context of this scene is a cholera epidemic that is sweeping the countryside. Ebner, who lived long

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<sup>66</sup> As noted previously in footnote 12, biographer Doris Klostermaier feels that her suicide attempt may have been one of the causes of her life-long struggles with her health.

<sup>67</sup> "Here your guardian angel has written 'Take note, naïve one.'"

enough to experience the revolution in medicine that revealed unseen entities as some of the causes of illness, notes that this wave of disease was treated differently than it would have been later in her life. The healthy, even those who could economically afford to do so, like Ebner's class, the aristocrats, did not flee from the sick in fear, but instead stayed to nurse them. This detail contributes to the heightened emotional effect of the scene. Among the sick are Marie's stepmother and youngest half-brother. Miraculously, the two recover and appear at the sickroom window to wave greetings to the rest of the family, who celebrate with joy. Only chance, or in Ebner's world-view, the blessings of God, could have brought about this wonderful moment, though Ebner also recognizes the tireless energies of humans, such as her grandmother Vockel, Pater Borek, and Doctor Engel<sup>68</sup> as contributors.

This is the scene that does not follow the others in the sketch in chronological order but rather, as the text notes, in 1836, two years previous to the events related to the two other windows in the sketch that portray the author's spiritual beginnings. In fact, the context of the whole "Kinderjahre" text indicates that this happy scene is only fleeting, because the reader has already been informed by a previous sketch that the stepmother whose recovery the family is celebrating, her father's third wife, Eugénie von Bartenstein, died in 1837 after giving birth to a child who also died. The change in chronological order suggests that the scene's position within the text is significant. It indicates that Ebner is using it as a way to convince herself tragic events of her childhood do not carry as much psychological weight within the narrative work of art that she is creating as a happy event such as this one does. Happiness and resolution are not only the products of experience or of God's good will, but also of the power of her own

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<sup>68</sup> Engel is a Jewish name with the felicitous meaning "Angel."

creative energy. The windows that Ebner portrays in this particular scene represent windows to her heart.

This sketch using windows as a key narrative device presents a sequencing of the emotions that the author/narrator reports her younger self as experiencing, starting with curiosity and earnestness in practicing religion, moving to confusion and displaced hope for the fulfillment of wishes, and ending with pure joy that portrays the positive as more powerful than the negative. The reader is invited to identify with these emotions as she peers through the window that is the text, and invited to envision herself alongside the characters and narrator inside of the story looking through, hitting against, or shouting with glee at the windows depicted in the text. An elderly Ebner narrating about the small world of her childhood shows how a change of perspective such as a shift in chronology or the emphasis of certain aspects of an event over others affects the perception of reality as presented in a text. Ebner is showing how she can play in a Schillerian sense, reconciling serious doubt, even the proximity and threat of death, by celebrating the happiness to be able to practice her narrative art form. She is also showing how she can modify the usual form of realism by presenting events in a different chronological order than they happened in reality. This indicates that she is experimenting with literary innovation similar to modernism. In this sketch, she portrays how she experiences feeling and reason as well as bodily and spiritual sensation and synthesizes them through her writing. She shows herself and her readers that she is someone who has achieved “eine vollständige Anschauung seiner Menschheit” (Schiller 94; let. 14, par. 2)<sup>69</sup> through beauty, or as Schiller would call it, the play impulse.

Both authors use their depictions of play to achieve their personal and professional objectives and to find happiness through their writing. Their depictions of

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<sup>69</sup> “a complete intuition of his human nature” (Schiller Trans. 95).

play and development portray simple stories such as their memorable antics on ships or the love and concern of a priest for his young parishioner, but they reveal deeper struggles in the authors' processes of balancing elements of the self. The surface and deep levels of meaning contained in these narratives combine to form beauty, the aesthetic element that promotes balance and well-being.

### **Concluding Realist Happiness**

I have argued that Fontane and Ebner are placing their work and themselves at the center of the harmonizing Schillerian principle of the play impulse by engaging their autobiographical voices, or in other words writing themselves as the narrators of their own stories. In this concluding section of the chapter, I briefly add two more close readings from the *Kinderjahre* texts to show how the authors bring the self-affirming and self-creating accounts of childhood to a close. I call attention to the boundaries and the confluences with their larger bodies of realist works that are suggested in these concluding episodes. These, in turn, serve to conclude my observations made in the context of previous interpretations presented in this chapter.

As he approaches the conclusion of his account of childhood, Fontane repeats the “to begin with the beginning” tactic<sup>70</sup> that he used in the opening scenes of his *Kinderjahre*. He brings the reader back to the beginning, to a place that he hopes he can interpret as carrying positive meaning. He narrates a short scene in which he and his band of boys spend time by a pond in the woods. The scene is symbolically significant in summarizing the attitude with which he enters the next stage of his life. First, I describe

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<sup>70</sup> This is a quote from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) that Fontane used in his foreword to his *Kinderjahre*. See FKJ 3. Fontane used it as a literary flourish to express that he, like Alice, experienced some magical adventures as a youth. Like Lewis Carroll's literary treasure, the most magical of all, however, is not the experiences themselves, but his rendition of them in his *Kinderjahre*.

a setting of the scene, and then I show how Furst's description of the use of setting in realism holds true for Fontane's *Kinderjahre* as well, how, at least in this case, the action is not as important as the place and the atmosphere.

The place is a familiar one that the narrator declares is close to his heart. It is the same place where he previously let the narrative linger, when at seven and a half years of age, he first entered the area of his new hometown. At that time, he noted the magic atmosphere of the spot surrounded by pine trees that cast shadows in the setting sun on the dark, mysterious waters of the pond on which white water lilies that he calls by the using the scientific name of their plant family, "Nymphäen," ("nymphs"),<sup>71</sup> making them sound like fairies. In this later scene that takes place in the spring of 1831, soon after his escapade on the boats docked at the quay, a revolution, to use the narrator's word, is brewing.<sup>72</sup> The eleven-year-old Theodor and his brave second-in-command Fritz Ehrlich, whom the reader recognizes as the boy who was rescued from falling into the water, are preparing to defend one of their favorite play outposts against the menacing boys from the docks (the boundary area) who will soon claim the streets as theirs. Because he perceives a threat, young Theodor sets aside his hobby of fashioning weapons and shields out of paper, and starts to consider his position as informal leader of his group of friends in a more serious light. The world external to his family and himself has begun to advance into his awareness, one sign that his childhood is coming to an end. Despite or perhaps because of his feelings of vulnerability, he chooses to spend time here in this meaningful place, planning and dreaming of how he might turn back the tide of change and maintain what is important to him.

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<sup>71</sup> In the second pond scene analyzed here, Fontane calls the flowers "gelbe und weiße Teichrosen" ("yellow and white pond flowers" EKJ 182). The scientific name for the family of aquatic flowers is "Nymphaeaceae." See "Water Lily," *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., vers. 2001-2005, 24 Sep. 2005 <<http://www.bartleby.com/65/wa/waterlil.html>>.

<sup>72</sup> Niggel discusses how Fontane refers to the 1830 July Revolution in Paris with the children's revolution that he depicts in *Kinderjahre*. See Niggel 272.



The action depicted in the scene is minimal; in fact nothing really happens in the external world. In the world internal to the narrator, everything changes. The setting creates the effect that a special place is now under threat from a sinister foreign element. Young Theodor finds himself nearly alone in his mission to protect the dearest of his interests, the pride and security of his high position amongst his peers. Conflict breaks out with the tough boys from the docks after this particular scene, which represents the build-up to a small flurry rather than a storm. Unlike the chase scene on the boats, neither the scene at the pond in the woods, nor the later scene of the confrontation are resolved. In the later scene depicting the fight, young Theodor suffers no serious physical injuries from the fight, though his status amongst his neighborhood peers has been damaged. The narrator writes that he as a boy was left with a “Gefühl, wieder einen großen Moment versäumt zu haben” (FKJ 177-178),<sup>73</sup> because he wasn’t able to maintain his status. Still, he includes these scenes because they belong to the larger category that he labels poetic with his oft-quoted lines: “Alles war Poesie. Die Prosa kam bald nach, in allen möglichen Gestalten, oft auch durch eigene Schuld” (FKJ 186).<sup>74</sup> Even though these statements sound as if he is devaluing the worth of the prosaic, the prose to which he refers also includes the prose that he is celebrating in the pages of his *Kinderjahre*. It is prose that forms his life’s work that later supports his wife and children, and that, in the form of his *Kinderjahre*, actually saves his life.

Like Fontane in his conclusion, Ebner also returns to a point that she considers the beginning, and where chronological and attitudinal ends are inferred. Her grandmother Vockel, the only constant maternal attention she has ever known, the woman whose fate it became to play the role of a substitute mother both for Marie’s mother as well as for

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<sup>73</sup> “feeling of having again missed a big moment.”

<sup>74</sup> “Everything was poetry. The prose came soon afterwards, in all possible forms, often also through my own fault.”

Fritzi and Marie, has just died, forming the point that Ebner designates as the end of her childhood. Her grandmother had been both a support and a hindrance to her development of creative energy. She praised her grandchild for reciting poetry, but became upset when she learned that Marie had composed it herself and intended to continue writing. As an elderly author looking back on her fourteen-year-old self over the sixty-one years, Ebner remembers creating a kind of simple ritual that acknowledges the conflicts she has faced and her perseverance that helped her to endure them and synthesizes them into an affirming belief. She begins her conclusion by describing her ritual, at which two stages of self are in attendance. Her elderly self invites the presence of the experiences of disappointment that her younger self has not yet experienced. Her younger self invites guests in the form of her impressions of literature: her bold plans for her first serious work, a drama for the theater, and a volume of Friedrich Gottlob Klopstock's odes that had been in her grandmother's small library of books. She opens the book and it falls open to the page with Klopstock's famous "Die Frühlingsfeier" (1759). The author/narrator includes in her text excerpts of a few of the ode's passages that speak of great oceans and a small drop of water on a bucket, the masses of inhabitants in the drop, and the earth and the heavens at the time of their creation. To the question posed in the ode, "Und wer bin ich?" and the answers that the poem gives, she adds her own: "Mehr – weil ich wei , wie wenig ich bin" (EKJ 120).<sup>75</sup> Literature, in this case a canonical German poem, helps her to find a way to conceive of herself, the world around her, and her place in it. She stresses that now "ich *darf* 'mein Vater' zu ihm sagen" (EKJ 130).<sup>76</sup> In her ritualistic entry into a new stage of life, she permits herself to pronounce her loyalty to a higher power than her own father, who disapproves of the step she is

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<sup>75</sup> "And who am I?" and "More – because I know, how little I am."

<sup>76</sup> "I may say 'my father' to him."

implicitly vowing to take. She will devote herself to developing her God-given talents and continue writing.

The interpretation that follows most naturally from this ritual is the one put forward by Heitzman, namely, that this ritual shows that Ebner has come to terms with God. This is a reasonable interpretation, but it foregoes recognition of the complexity of Ebner's relationship not only with God, but also with the many layers that make up the reality of her life and of her perceptions of what has constituted her life even in its earliest stages. The interpretations of the window scenes indicate that her relationship to the Church was a complicated one for most of her life beginning in her childhood. They also show how the people in her life who teach her about religion, Pater Borek, her father, and the rest of her family, are deficient in encouraging her curiosity or critical understanding. Her relationship to the complex notion of God is part of the larger picture of her understanding of reality. It can be observed in the proof that she recognizes as support of his existence. This proof also includes her notion of self. It is an answer to the question in the Klopstock quote given above that inquired about her identity. She writes that now she is: "ein verwehender Hauch auf einem Stäubchen im All [. . .] Aber der Atem Gottes lebt in diesem Hauche" (EKJ 120).<sup>77</sup> She goes on to explain that she credits this recognition of her small self as part of a force: "Um das zu begreifen, bedurfte ich einer Gnadengabe des Unendlichen, eines Lichtstrahls von seinem Geiste" (EKJ 120).<sup>78</sup> Her reason and her feeling merge here to arrive at this conclusion.

This might have been a powerful place for her to end her "Kinderjahre," and yet it is not where the text concludes. The sketch containing the poetic ritual with its simultaneously simple and complex realization is only the second-to-last sketch. The

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<sup>77</sup> "a transitory breath on a small piece of dust in the universe [. . .] but the breath of God lives in this breath."

<sup>78</sup> "In order to grasp that, I was in need of a gift of grace of Eternity, of a beam of light from his spirit."

final one is short, only a paragraph. In it, the elderly author stands on the threshold of the room that was her childhood in the building that has contained her life and remarks on the changes in her self since she left that room behind. She is like one of James's watchers at the windows of fiction. The person who is her present self, the narrator of these memories, is trying to imagine the self she is about to lead out of the room. She, the elderly narrator, has changed since she inhabited that place. She still honors her profound insight about the nature of the vast universe and her special, yet incredibly small place in it. Nonetheless, she must signal a direction for the path that will lead her fourteen-year-old self and her seventy-three year old one into the future. How can she take her achievement of what Schiller calls the "absolute Existenz" (Schiller 136; let. 19, par. 12),<sup>79</sup> her perception of her self and its context, Schiller's play impulse that is the synthesis of person and their conditions, and convert it into an energy that will be life-changing for her and for others?

Schiller has no easy answer and neither does she. At points throughout Schiller's aesthetic letters, but especially at the end of the last letter, there is a distinct note of resignation that despite his strong belief that beauty can be the saving power of mankind, he is not sure how his utopian concept of aesthetic synthesis can actually benefit a real society. Ebner hopes that the fulfillment of her self as depicted in her "Kinderjahre" will be a lasting work of art and will encourage others find their own brand of fulfillment through beauty. In the sketch before the ritual, Ebner makes a pronouncement that she does not regret her life of hard work and suffering, despite the fact that some of her pain resulted in no material benefits. She values the process as well as the result. Whereas in her childhood, she once aimed to become the "angehender Shakespeare des 19.

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<sup>79</sup> "absolute existence" (Schiller Trans. 137).

Jahrhunderts” (EKJ 103),<sup>80</sup> her pledge is no longer as bold as it once was in terms of her work. She is determined to continue feeding her “Sehnsucht, zu denken und zu leiden” (EKJ 121),<sup>81</sup> and will try to prevent herself from succumbing to resignation.

The conclusions to Fontane’s and Ebner’s accounts of the beginnings of their lives add to the possibilities for judging their ends. By ends, I mean their goals for representation, not only of their views on their own lives, as reflected in the limited spectrum of the years that they depict in their *Kinderjahre* texts. Ends also refers to approaches to depicting people and stories from material they gathered from life and translated into literature. Their goal, as Fontane wrote in his 1853 essay on realism that was cited previously, is the representation of interests, their own and others’, as well as the larger goals of their societies. They were inspired by lofty ideals, as Schiller was, but like him, they saw how they had to compromise when these ideals are not realized as they hoped they would be. They can do something that Schiller could not in his philosophical writings as represented by his letters on aesthetic education. They bring the conflicts that he represented in philosophical terms down to the level of the prose of everyday. They may not have come closer than he does to resolving the inherent conflicts of self and its determinants in any of their works besides in their *Kinderjahre* texts, but they also do not dampen their moments of bringing harmony to these conflicts by concluding on the same note of resignation as Schiller does.

In the process of writing, the authors succeeded in reconciling the pieces of themselves that were disjointed. Ebner could not write away the lingering childhood pain of losing one source after another of maternal love, nor the pain of having had to part with loved ones who had recently died. She could ameliorate, but not eradicate the

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<sup>80</sup> “budding Shakespeare of the nineteenth century.”

<sup>81</sup> “longing to think and to suffer.”

sources of her insecurity in the male-dominated literary world. Fontane could do nothing but acknowledge and frame, if not permanently repair the holes in his self. He recognizes and celebrates the fact that he will never be anything except “Stückwerk” (FKJ 187).<sup>82</sup>

Both authors use symbols of water to conclude their accounts of childhood. Ebner imagines herself as a droplet within a larger ocean. Fontane does what he is told by the headmaster of the *Gymnasium* in Neu-Ruppin, his next stop in the process of forming his self, “und es ging auch wie Wasser” (FKJ 188).<sup>83</sup> The symbol of water plays powerful roles in the fictional works analyzed in the final chapter of this dissertation, the one that focuses on death. Here, it is a symbol of fluid beauty that can reflect or absorb, like realist narratives that reflect the richness of previous traditions, such as Schiller’s idealism. Water is a symbol that recurs in the works that I analyze in this dissertation and in my interpretations of them, notably in the next chapter and in the fourth one.

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<sup>82</sup> “patchwork.”

<sup>83</sup> “and it also went like water.”

## 2. The Clay Pit and the Garden: Narrating the (Im)possibilities of Becoming

In an aphorism selected and translated from his collection *Parerga and Paralipomena* (1851-60), Arthur Schopenhauer reacts to a canonic play of the German enlightenment, but inadvertently hits upon an aspect that points to the complexity of literary realism. A realist author's task of transforming subject matter from real life into a poetically realistic representation requires striking a fine tonal balance throughout the narrative:

Aller Anfang ist schwer, heißt es. In der Dramaturgie gilt jedoch das Umgekehrte: alles Ende ist schwer. Dies belegen die unzähligen Dramen, deren erste Hälfte sich recht gut anläßt, die aber sodann sich trüben, stocken, schwanken, zumal im verrufenen vierten Akt, und zuletzt in ein bald erzwungenes, bald unbefriedigendes, bald von jedem längst vorhergesehenes Ende auslaufen, mitunter gar wie *Emilia Galotti* in ein empörendes, welches den Zuschauer völlig verstimmt nach Hause schickt. Diese Schwierigkeit des Ausganges beruht teils darauf, daß es überall leichter ist, die Sachen zu verwirren als zu entwirren; teils aber auch darauf, daß wir beim Anfange dem Dichter carte blanche lassen, hingegen an das Ende bestimmte Anforderungen stellen; es soll nämlich entweder ganz glücklich oder aber ganz tragisch sein, während die menschlichen Dinge nicht leicht eine so entschiedene Wendung nehmen; sodann soll es natürlich, richtig und ungezwungen herauskommen, dabei aber doch von niemandem vorhergesehen sein. (*Parerga* II, #228, 519)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "All beginning, it is said, is difficult; in the art of drama, however, the opposite applies and all ending is difficult. This is proved by the innumerable dramas which promise well in the first half, but then become obscure, halting, uncertain, especially in the notorious fourth act, and finally peter out in a forced or unsatisfactory ending, or in one that was long foreseen by everyone, or sometimes, as in *Emilia Galotti*, in one that is revolting and sends the audience home in a thoroughly bad mood. This difficulty of the ending is due in part to the fact that it is always easier to entangle affairs than to unravel them; but also to some extent to the fact that at the beginning we give the poet carte blanche, whereas at the end we make definite demands. Thus it is to be either perfectly happy or wholly tragic, whereas human affairs do not readily take so decided a turn. Then again it must work out naturally, correctly and in an unforced manner; and yet this must not be foreseen by anyone." Trans. is from: Arthur Schopenhauer, #228 in "On Metaphysics of the Beautiful," in *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays*, vol. 2, trans. E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1974), 440.

Human lives, whether confused or straightforward, always end in death, and thus death may be one of the most natural, and thus most realistic ways to end a story about human life. Two of three characters at the center of this chapter die prematurely: Milada Holub, the sister of Pavel, the main character in Ebner's "Das Gemeindekind" (1887), and Effi Briest in Fontane's 1895 novel of the same name. The depictions of their deaths have the potential of being melodramatic or tragic, but they are also written so that they can be interpreted to seem quite natural. After all, though death is inevitable, it is ultimately unpredictable.

Schopenhauer continues his aphorism about the truths of life depicted literarily by moving from the theater to another form:

Ein Roman wird desto höher und edlerer Art sein, je mehr inneres und je weniger äußeres Leben er darstellt; und dies Verhältnis wird als charakteristisches Zeichen [. . .] Die Kunst besteht darin, daß man mit dem möglichst geringsten Aufwand von äußerem Leben das innere in die stärkste Bewegung bringe: denn das innere ist eigentlich der Gegenstand unsers Interesses. (*Parerga* II, #228, 520)<sup>2</sup>

He has hit upon a reason why the famous theatrical conclusion of *Emilia Galotti* incites consternation amongst some audience members: such an emotional moment, a kind of assisted suicide, a father stabbing a desperate daughter who wants to die, would be far more convincing depicted in a narrow, intimate sphere rather than on a stage for all to see. Had Emilia Galotti's death been depicted within the realm of a realist novel, it might have been built up with more details of place and social fabric so that it would have made more sense than it did in a condensed version of the plot to be performed on-stage. Longer realist narratives, like those written by Fontane and Ebner that are interpreted in

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<sup>2</sup> "A *novel* will be of a loftier and nobler nature, the more of *inner* and the less of *outer* life it portrays; and this relation will, as a characteristic sign, accompany all gradations of the novel [. . .] Art consists in our bringing the inner life into the most intense action with the least possible expenditure of the outer; for the inner is really the object of our interest" (Payne Trans., vol. 2, 440-441).



this dissertation, contain more language and therefore also more material for analysis than a play. Nonetheless, their expanded length hides their focus on small things such as an individual's understanding of self.

Schopenhauer's association of "stärkste Bewegung," what another Schopenhauer translator, R. J. Hollingdale, rendered into English "the most violent motion" (Schopenhauer, *Essays* 165), as the catalyst for high and noble art seems incongruous when applied to the context of Ebner's and Fontane's reputations. As mentioned in the introduction, they have sometimes been thought of as wanting to teach readers to "learn to think with the heart" (see pp. 21-22, note 39 in introduction). Their primary interest, however, was to produce realist depictions, which meant distilling life's larger meanings. In many ways, violence, like death, permeates the reality of life and is integrally connected with life's truths. It provides a contrast for the hopes that one holds most dear, the images that animate one's inner life, the life of the self. "Das Gemeindkind" and *Effi Briest* contain examples of the fortifying processes of self that are at work when adolescents step over the threshold into adulthood. The Holub siblings and Effi must come to terms with the violence of the outer world that threatens to disrupt their inner worlds. Milada and Effi transcend their trials by succumbing to death in narrative conclusions that contain tragic aspects, but when considered carefully, these conclusions carry comparable degrees of gravity to that of Pavel. He must settle for his severely limited existence, disappointing though it is markedly improved. The ambiguity of tone in the themes of these two narratives makes for a realistic aesthetic portrayal of the complexities of even the basic elements of existence.

This chapter takes up where the first one left off. The process of understanding one's self moves in waves that crest and fall. Artistic renderings of childhood memories that implement Schiller's play impulse represent the crest and the trials of the three

characters discussed in this chapter represent the fall. There are no value judgments associated with the rising and falling. Certainly the falling portion of the cycle, the process that I argue occurs in the two works under discussion here, attracts aesthetic inquiry more readily than the rising portion. Problems attach themselves more easily to our imaginations than solutions, making it comparatively simpler to write a compelling beginning to a narrative, than to compose a believable conclusion, as Schopenhauer states in his aphorism.

Schopenhauer's concept of the will to life lends itself well to a discussion of these two works because it acknowledges a space for compassion, while foregrounding the premise that life is primarily a painful struggle. With Schopenhauer's concept of the will forming the theoretical backdrop, the experiences and fates of Ebner's Holub siblings and Fontane's Effi Briest are explored here according to the following three themes: the violence and possibilities of origin, the promise and illusion of free will, and finally, the realist recognition of the indefinite direction of human affairs.

### **Ambiguities of Origin: Possibilities and Violence**

The initial portion of the chapter introduces aspects of the origins of the two narratives, highlights the points of Schopenhauer's will to life philosophy pertinent to my argument that ambiguity is a constant feature in realist depictions of the formation process of self, and explores selected opening passages from each narrative that reflect this ambiguity. The Holub family's occupation of brick making and the vines that dominate the opening garden scenes where readers first meet Effi are the symbols on which this part of the interpretation relies. They bind the origins of the narratives

themselves to the origins of the characters and reflect the essence of Schopenhauer's will to life philosophy.

The motivation to compare the three major characters emerges not only from the common tone of ambiguity and the death of the two female characters, but also because of the places of significance that the works occupy amongst each of their body of works. Ebner's "Gemeindekind," which she sometimes doubted she would ever finish after working on it for at least five years, enjoyed the most successful publication history of any of her works.<sup>3</sup> She refers to it with motherly affection and care as she writes to Rodenberg, in a letter accompanying the first draft of the story's manuscript: "Es kommt nicht ein Buch zu Ihnen, [. . .] -- eine Seele kommt, meine ganze Seele. Alles was ich auf dem Herzen habe, alles was ich guten Menschen ans Herz legen möchte."<sup>4</sup> Fontane did not foresee his works enjoying recognition after his death, but with *Effi Briest*, he enjoyed the biggest commercial success of his life.<sup>5</sup> In an 1895 letter, he writes about how smoothly the writing process went, indicating how his intuition supports the high quality of his work: "Vielleicht ist es mir so gelungen, weil ich das Ganze träumerisch und fast

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<sup>3</sup> In an article based on information from Ebner's diaries that came to light after the publication of the critical edition, Rainer Baasner, the editor of the critical edition of the text tracks the beginnings of Ebner's work on "Gemeindekind" to at least 1881. He notes that she probably started working on conceptions of it earlier, but that she would often not make a diary entry about it until it was more likely that her work would come to fruition. See Rainer Baasner, "'Armes Gemeindekind, wirst du noch?': Die Entstehungsgeschichte der Erzählung *Das Gemeindekind* im Lichte der Tagebücher Marie von Ebner-Eschenbachs," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 104 (1985): 555, 562. "Das Gemeindekind" appeared in no less than sixteen book editions during Ebner's lifetime and was published by an impressive number of newspapers published in cities in the north and south of the German-speaking countries from the *Wiener Arbeiterzeitung* to the *Basler Vorwärts* and even in Fontane's home territory the *Brandenburger Zeitung*. See Rainer Baasner, "Text- und Wirkungsgeschichte," in Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, *Das Gemeindekind*, Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, *Kritische Texte und Deutungen*, vol. 3 (Bonn: Bouvier, 1983), 212-213. It was translated into English in 1893 in New York and distributed as part of a subscription series. See Tatlock, "Introduction," xv.

<sup>4</sup> "What is coming to you isn't a book [. . .] -- a soul, my whole soul is coming. Everything that I have in my heart, everything that I want to give to the hearts of good people." The letter is written in Vienna and dated 24 Oct. 1886. See Baasner, "Text und Wirkungsgeschichte" 190.

<sup>5</sup> Fontane happily notes in a diary entry from 1896 that the work appeared in five editions within the span of a year from its first publication. See Daragh Downes, "Effi Briest," *Fontane-Handbuch* 633.

wie mit einem Psychographen geschrieben habe. Sonst kann ich mich immer der Arbeit, ihrer Mühe, Sorgen und Etappen, erinnern – in diesem Falle gar nicht. Es ist so wie von selbst gekommen, ohne rechte Überlegung und ohne alle Kritik.”<sup>6</sup> In these quotes, the authors express their confidence about the quality of their insights about basic human traits that they feel are reflected in these two works.

Despite the differences in class and gender between Pavel and Effi, the two main characters, the mixed tonal impressions about their experiences, and, finally, the conclusions of their narrated experiences bear similarities. They are both driven by something they cannot control, but perceive within their own bodies. Sexuality, a key component of Schopenhauer’s will that is touched on later in this chapter, forms the root symptom of the uncontrollable drive in their lives, but their feelings of being compelled to act in ways contrary to their wishes abound.<sup>7</sup> Instead of their experiences bearing clear

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<sup>6</sup> “Maybe I had such success because I wrote everything out in a dreamy state, almost like a *Psychograph*. Usually I can always remember a job – the troubles, worries, fumbling around, but that’s not at all the case this time. It came as if by itself, without serious consideration and completely without criticism.” A “psychograph” is a “soul writing” instrument that makes communicating with the world of the spirits possible. Schafarschik notes that Fontane used the word in a figurative sense to describe his writing. The 2 March 1895 letter is addressed to Hans Hertz, the son of Fontane’s publisher Wilhelm Hertz. See Schafarschik, *Erläuterungen*, 29,108-109.

<sup>7</sup> In some ways “Das Gemeindekind” resembles naturalist literature. Danuta Lloyd and others have touched on this point, but always come back to the conclusion that it is not a work of naturalism because Ebner is associated too closely to the “old school” for this to be possible. Danuta illustrates this view with a 1912 quote from Richard M. Meyer that calls “Das Gemeindekind” an “Experimentalroman im Sinne Zolas; doch freilich so, daß sie, wie Ibsen, wie Fontane, das Experiment mit der anschauenden Phantasie durchführt, nicht mit den rechnenden Verstand” (“experimental novel in the sense of Zola; though in the manner that she, like Ibsen, like Fontane, carries out the experiment with the fantasy of observation and not with calculated reason”). With this quote, Lloyd shows Ebner’s style as something in between, not completely modern, like naturalism or modernism, but also not irrelevant, like some who do not appreciate her work might read it. She punctuates this quote with one from the early Ebner biographer, Moritz Necker: “Pavel ist Realist. [. . .] von der Zehe bis zum Scheitel; er ist der moderne, aufs Konkrete, aufs Tun, nicht aufs Rasionieren oder Betrachten gestellten Mensch, der durchwegs Marie von Ebners Ideal bleibt. Aber zum Unterschiede von anderen modernen Idealisten: mit dem spezifischen Ebnerischen Zusatz hoher sittlicher Gesinnung” (“Pavel is a realist [. . .] from his toe to the top of his head; he is the modern person who tends towards concrete things, towards doing, not reasoning or regarding, who completely remains Marie von Ebner’s ideal. But different from other modern idealists; with the specific Ebner addition of high moral convictions”). These quotes are examples of the tendency I mentioned in my introduction, ones that probably lowered Ebner’s literary worth: critic-free high praise. See Danuta Lloyd, “Waifs and Strays: The Youth in Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach’s Village Tales,” in *Views and Reviews of Modern German Literature: Festschrift for Adolf D. Klarmann*, ed. Karl S. Weimar (Munich: Delp, 1974),

negative or positive meanings, they are complex and ambiguous. Schopenhauer's will helps to conceptualize what they experience.

Milada's character and experience are distinctly dissimilar to her brother's and Effi's. Her virtuous traits belong in the category of sublime virtue, a feminine trait that I describe in my fourth chapter to assist me in characterizing the features of the two female characters interpreted there. Effi's and Pavel's experiences with people from backgrounds outside their immediate circles are limited, but Milada's is even more so. She is sequestered in a convent school, where the nuns strictly control her contact with the outside world. For a time, she convinces herself and others that she can be immune to the pressures of life. This works to her and others' advantage, until she is finally unable to physically maintain her illusion of sustaining an existence removed from earthly concerns. Her negotiations with what Schopenhauer calls the will help to make sense of her fate within the context of her brother's story, but also within the possibilities of realist depiction.

Schopenhauer's will to life is an appropriate tool to assist in this interpretation for several reasons. The first involves a description of how the idea of the will works. The will to life is central to Schopenhauer's attempts to explain philosophically the workings of the world through his own observations, bolstered by examples from literary and historical tradition. What Fontane and other realists attempted to explain using *Verklärung*, or poetic transfiguration that connects experiences with an overarching redemptive meaning, Schopenhauer denied with his arguments that his idea of the organizing force of the world, the will, is devoid of any logic. A Schopenhauer scholar,

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43. Exactly the opposite kind of attention comes from Helmut Koopmann who seems to find little he likes about Ebner's work. He faults her severely for not reflecting in her works that she was capable of positive interactions with symbolism, naturalism, or other European movements of the turn of the century. See Helmut Koopmann, "Schloß-Banalitäten: Lebenslehren aus einer halbwegs heilen Welt: Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach," in *Deutschsprachige Schriftstellerinnen des Fin de Siècle*, ed. Karin Tebben (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Büchergesellschaft, 1999), 162-180.

Christopher Janaway, explains that the will strives ceaselessly, but with no other purpose than to prolong life. Even though life consists mostly of suffering and boredom, striving continues.<sup>8</sup> There are several important aspects of life that Schopenhauer recognizes, but is unable to fit into the rubric of the will. The first is selfless compassion, something that in many cases is contrary to one's own preservation. Another problem is that while he denies the existence of God or any comparable form of divine ethical order, he retains the idea that the individual bears responsibility for his or her actions, something that would be impossible if the effects of the will truly guided all aspects of existence. Forces beyond the characters' control akin to the will seem to drive the events in "Das Gemeindegeld" and *Effi Briest*, although personal responsibility occupies a position of equal importance in the narratives. Additionally, suffering and boredom, intersected at key moments by compassion, define the experiences of all three of the characters under consideration in this discussion.

Besides the nature of Schopenhauer's philosophical theory itself and the way in which he presents it, another reason that the idea of the will adds to this interpretation is that the place that it occupies in intellectual history coincides with the place of the two authors. Schopenhauer conceived of almost all of the major tenets of his philosophy as a young man between the years 1810 and 1818, but his ideas did not achieve fame until the decade of his death, in 1851 when the work from which the aphorism at the beginning of this chapter is cited, *Parerga und Paralipomena*, became popular (Janaway, "Schopenhauer" 221, 231). As previously mentioned in my introduction (see p. 30, note 45), scholars have argued for Schopenhauer's importance as a contribution to Freud's

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<sup>8</sup> This explanation is taken from Christopher Janaway, who supplies two comprehensive overviews of the philosophy and life of Schopenhauer. See Christopher Janaway "Schopenhauer" in *German Philosophers: Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997), 215-337, and specifically 226-227. See also Christopher Janaway "Introduction," in *Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer*, ed. Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 1-17.

revolutionary ideas about the unconscious, a concept that is central to my interpretations in the fourth chapter. Interpreting the narrated experiences of Effi and the Holub siblings through the lens of Schopenhauer's will, illustrates Fontane's and Ebner's positions in relation to the cultural discussions of their time: their interpretations of Schopenhauer's controversial ideas assimilated some of its aspects and vigorously refuted others.

The authors' receptions of Schopenhauer's ideas were somewhat akin to Pavel's and Effi's realizations that they do not exercise as much control over their destinies as they had thought. Ebner and Fontane felt engaged enough by the philosopher's reputation as a dramatically different thinker to read his works and develop opinions about them, something that indicates a certain attraction to his thinking.<sup>9</sup> It is often true that beliefs are formed to a significant extent by what one opposes. According to what biographers and scholars have argued about the authors' personalities and views on other matters, and to a certain extent about their views on Schopenhauer specifically, both authors found Schopenhauer's unwavering pessimism extreme, and his well-known misogynistic opinions, distasteful.<sup>10</sup> This attraction, mixed with reservations about

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<sup>9</sup> Fontane biographer Hans-Heinrich Reuter dedicates a whole chapter of his Fontane biography to Fontane's reception of Schopenhauer. Reuter reports that Fontane began to discuss Schopenhauer's works with friends in the winter of 1873-1874. Reuter cites proof that Fontane continued to read Schopenhauer at least until early 1884, when he made notes about his reactions to Schopenhauer's *Parerga and Paralipomena*, from which I take my opening quote. (See next footnote.) He attributes Fontane's interest in Schopenhauer to his desire to keep abreast of the interests of the day. Reuter notes that Fontane's early reception of Schopenhauer was more superficially positive than his later readings. He notes that Fontane appreciated Schopenhauer's empirical method of approaching philosophy as well as his stylistic clarity. See Hans-Heinrich Reuter, *Fontane*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Verlag der Nation, 1995), 648-655. Rose writes that Ebner's interest in Schopenhauer can be traced back as early as 1860 and continues throughout her life. He quotes letters Ebner wrote to her literary mentor, Josef von Weilen, discussing her readings of Schopenhauer: "Schopenhauer's philosophy is morbidly sad. What are we if we have no free will?" Rose also notes her attraction to his thinking and cites her intention to find what she called a "gratifying, friendly result" from her reading of his philosophy. Rose uses Ebner's appreciation for Schopenhauer to produce a unique interpretation of an *Erzählung* that was first published in 1888, "Ihr Traum: Erlebnis eines Malers" ("Her Dream: Experience of a Painter"). See Rose 136-141.

<sup>10</sup> I have been unable to find any sources on Ebner's reaction to Schopenhauer's misogyny. Enno Lohmeyer provides the most thorough interpretation of Ebner's reception of Schopenhauer by concentrating on the frequently recurring theme of compassion. He notes that Schopenhauer's influence on Ebner has previously been ignored. See Enno Lohmeyer, *Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach als Sozialreformerin* (Königstein/Taunus: Ulrike Helmer, 2002), 149-165. One example in which

Schopenhauer's philosophy, reduced here to his ideas on the will, creates a space of tension that adds to my interpretations, highlighting the tone of ambiguity in the two narratives.

The tensions of Ebner's Schopenhauer reception are evident in the first impressions made by her "Gemeindekind" text on the reader. The title, the first sentence, and the way in which the Holub siblings are introduced illustrate what promises to be an artistically productive ambiguity. Yet these same elements also threaten to fall apart under the weight that the narrator places on them.

"Das Gemeindekind," the title of Ebner's text which has been translated literally as "Child of the Parish" and figuratively as "Their Pavel"<sup>11</sup> sets up the conflict between characters and the social setting in which they find themselves. All versions of the title refer to a singular person, although two children are introduced in the opening scene. Lynne Tatlock, the most recent English-language translator of the text, feels that her title, "Their Pavel" alludes to the slight pejorative aspect of the original German title, the fact that the child is someone else's, not our (the community's) own. There is an ironic tone to the original German title because being a child of the community could under some circumstances be considered an honor. The circumstances that are described in the

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Schopenhauer's relevance to readings of Ebner's works has been denied is Baasner's comment of the critical edition of "Das Gemeindekind." He curtly disputes the relevance of either Schopenhauer's or Nietzsche's ideas to interpretations of "Das Gemeindekind" or any of Ebner's other works. See Baasner, "Armes Gemeindekind" 346. Fontane's reception of Schopenhauer can be documented as being more critical, especially regarding Schopenhauer's views on women. In the above-mentioned 1884 reactions to *Parerga and Paralipomena*, specifically the chapter "Über die Weiber" ("On Women"), Fontane writes: "Das ganze Kapitel [. . .] zählt zu dem Schwächsten, was man sich denken kann; es ist das Gequackel eines eigensinnigen, vorurteilsvollen, persönlich vergrätzten alten Herrn" ("The whole chapter [. . .] belongs to the weakest that one can imagine; it is the jabbering of a selfish, prejudiced, personally enraged old gentleman"). See Schafarschik 145.

<sup>11</sup> In her forward to the translation which I use and which will be abbreviated as TP, the translator, Lynne Tatlock, acknowledges the first English translator of the text, Mary Robinson, who translated the title literally as noted above. Robinson's translation was published in New York by Robert Bonner's Sons in 1893. Tatlock categorizes the publishing house as having a middle-brow reading clientele. She also notes that the edition was one volume of a subscription series, but that she found no copies of it in American research libraries with the exception of the U.S. Library of Congress. See Tatlock, "Acknowledgments" and "Introduction" v, xv.



narrative are anything but honorable, however. Whether the title is pejorative, honorable, or simply unlucky, ambiguity prevails and the reader's interest is piqued. One of the children, whom Tatlock's title already identifies as Pavel, will be associated with the reactions of scorn or pride, and the other will be excluded from a connection with the people of the community.

The first sentence of the narrative is preceded by an epigraph by George Sand, a French author whom Ebner admired. The epigraph reads: "Tout est l'histoire" (GK 5),<sup>12</sup> a bold but vague statement that suggests that what is about to be portrayed has already taken place.<sup>13</sup> The first sentence of the narrative that follows contradicts this sense because, except for the date that lies in the past for even Ebner's contemporary readers, it reads like the first line of a newspaper story reporting on an incident which has an outcome yet to be determined: "Im October 1860 begann in der Landeshauptstadt B. die Schlußverhandlung im Prozeß des Ziegelschlägers Martin Holub und seines Weibes Barbara Holub" (GK 5).<sup>14</sup> The couple's livelihood as brick builders, the people who make the elemental units from which a community builds its structures, plays an important role in the effect of the opening scenes. The first sentence suggests that if even these simple and yet fundamentally important people have been accused of a crime, more negative consequences are to follow for the community as a whole. The cumulative effect of the ironic title, the enigmatic epigram, and the to-be-continued first line is the

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<sup>12</sup> "Everything is history." All translations of "Das Gemeindegeld" will be taken from Tatlock. See Tatlock 1. Both Tatlock's translation and Baasner's critical edition of the narrative identify the source of the Sand quote as *Histoire de ma vie* I. Tatlock qualifies the source of the citation "I. p. 268" as Ebner's own from the original epigraph. See Tatlock 149 (note 1).

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Salumets uses the Sand epigraph to make a connection between Ebner's view of history and Nietzsche's. He argues that both see history as an insurmountable obstacle to achieving satisfaction in life. See Salumets, "Geschichte als Motto: Ebner-Eschenbachs Erzählung 'Das Gemeindegeld,'" *Sprachkunst* 15 (1984): 14-23.

<sup>14</sup> In Baasner's edition, "Oktober" is spelled with a "c." "In October of 1860 in the provincial capital B. the final deliberations in the trial of the brickmaker Martin Holub and his wife Barbara Holub began" (TP 1).

suggestion of various possibilities, mostly pessimistic, which the narrative could pursue. Yet despite the overwhelming difficulty of the situation that might seem even more negative once Schopenhauer's idea of the will is factored into the background of the setting, the narrator soon finds ways to introduce positive possibilities.<sup>15</sup>

Instead of the narrative continuing in the style of newspaper-like reporting, it breaks into a separate paragraph in a different, more finely detailed style of reporting. Of interest here is the family's dynamics. Whereas the first sentence gives specifics of the date and names of the individuals, the narrative thereafter describes a family like many others. They are strangers to the community they have entered, having wandered there for reasons undoubtedly linked to what is depicted as the father's alcoholism and abusive behavior. The community takes note of them immediately, expecting them to cause problems because they are conspicuously poor, and the head of family is a violent alcoholic.

Though the family's predicament is dire and the first line has already led the reader to expect that it will soon become worse, the mother and children are described as caring, honest, hardworking people who have been bullied by the male authority figure of the family. The thirteen-year old boy, Pavel, and his mother toil in the clay pit making bricks as if they were beasts of burden. In fact, Pavel is compared to an animal the first time the text mentions him: "plump und kurzhälsig, ein ungeleckter Bär, wie man ihn

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<sup>15</sup> Enno Lohmeyer's incorporation of Schopenhauer as the foundation of Ebner's concept of compassion helps him to approach the topic in a more meaningful way than if it had been when it was stressed as a simple device included to move readers' emotions. He stresses that Ebner applied Schopenhauer's idea that others are "kein Nicht-Ich, sondern 'Ich noch ein Mal'" ("not a 'not-I, but rather an 'I once again'") as the deeper meaning of compassion, as opposed to the shallow variety that is motivated by the egoistic desire to benefit one's self first with one's actions. This leads to Ebner's belief in an "uncompromising compassion" that cannot be wiped away by material suffering. It remains the core of human possibility within every individual. Lohmeyer quotes from Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die beiden Grundprobleme der Ethik: Schriften zur Naturphilosophie und zur Ethik*, Arthur Hübscher, ed., 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 4, Arthur Schopenhauer: *Sämtliche Werke* (Wiesbaden: Eberhard Brockhaus, 1950), 272. See Lohmeyer 153, 164.

malt oder besser nicht malt” (GK 5).<sup>16</sup> The narrator’s deliberate reluctance to characterize him under these conditions, together with the narrator’s choice to identify him first and not his sister with a proper name strongly indicate that he and not his sister will become “das Gemeindegeld,” the subject of the narrative. All the while, the ten-year-old girl, Milada, whose name Baasner notes means “the agreeable one” (Baasner, “Deutung” 264) is too small to perform this hard labor. Her character seems placed there to “mitigate the harshness of all fatalities,” a phrase Eva Edrich borrowed from George Eliot’s 1871 novel *Middlemarch*.<sup>17</sup> Milada makes it her task to remind her mother and brother of their humanity even while they work like beasts of burden. She does this by encouraging them to speak amongst themselves. Speech, as discussed in greater detail in the fourth chapter, is a central characteristic of humanity.

Hope and despair mingle in the first impressions conveyed by the narrative that depicts an economically and socially low level of human existence: a poor family stricken by alcoholism and by a largely uncaring social environment. Ebner sets about balancing these two tonal strands and concurrently sets up a web of situations. She hopes it will be possible to take the strands of the situations and untangle them as if it were an effortless task, as Schopenhauer suggests is desirable.

Issues that are thematically linked to the bricks the family makes recur throughout the narrative, but are introduced here at its outset. Three of the four bricks of the Holub family are solid, but are subjected to undue stress from their environment. The father is the brick that seems irrevocably damaged by alcohol and a mean spirit. The two

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<sup>16</sup> “awkward, short-necked, the very picture of an uncouth fellow though it were better not to picture him at all” (TP 1).

<sup>17</sup> Eva K. Edrich uses this phrase as another way of calling female figures like Milada angels. She differentiates the characterization she is trying to make from that of Gilbert and Gubar. According to Edrich, they saw women as feeling entrapped, whereas she sees Milada and her literary sisters as using their weakness to inspire their male protectors to free themselves from entrapment. See Eva K. Edrich, “Women in the Novels of George Sand, Emily Bronte, George Eliot and Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach: To Mitigate the Harshness of all Fatalities,” diss., U Denver, 1984, 10-12.

foundational bricks of the family structure are removed after the father murders the village priest and is executed for his crime, and the mother is sent to jail for her alleged criminal complicity. The narrator increasingly pushes Pavel into the narrative spotlight after this episode and soon also removes Milada from the picture. One brick is a meager beginning, but the narrator's attention to it signals that she believes in its potential as a sound foundational piece of her story.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to the symbolic bricks that are Pavel's family members, other bricks that contribute to building the individual are added to the narrative structure: economic and social conditions that include educational opportunities and psychological pressures. It is unclear to what degree these elements are impacted by the rational actions of individuals or by an unseen, constantly striving force beyond all reason such as Schopenhauer's will. The question Ebner poses seems to be whether the materials used to make these bricks are capable of structurally supporting her dream of hope for these simple characters who represent humanity in a basic form. The small, but significant signs of hope that the narrator adds to the narrative up to this point show that she feels optimistic that she can make something positive develop out of this grim situation. One point that stands in the way of her achievement of a positive outcome is the realistically formidable obstacles that she has placed in the way to make the story seem more true to life.

From Ebner's desolate brickyard, my interpretation moves to a garden, the site for the opening scene of Fontane's *Effi Briest*, to inquire into the initial signs of ambiguity

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<sup>18</sup> The question of the gender of the narrator in "Gemeindekind" does not open up as many interesting interpretive opportunities as the same question in the texts analyzed in the third chapter of this dissertation. For the sake of convenience and consistency, I will refer to the narrator here as a woman because the author is a woman and because the narrator shows Pavel an almost motherly concern. Baasner refers to the narrator as a male without providing supportive evidence of gender or discussing the reasons for his choice. He notes that the identity of the narrator is never revealed, though it is apparent that he/she is a member of the village community. See Baasner, "Text- und Wirkungsgeschichte" 324- 329.

and their implications for the formation of Effi's self. The people and the setting of the opening scene of the novel seem tranquil and domestically harmonious, but first impressions can be deceptive once one returns to them to reevaluate their meaning. Already in the first paragraphs of the novel, the narrator's attention to the physical world indicates a feeling of uneasiness between the people who inhabit this world and their surroundings. The narrator provides a detailed description of the house and its grounds at Hohen-Cremmen, the von Briest family home. No people save for the reference of a historical figure are mentioned in the first long paragraph.

Fontane, a pharmacist by training and therefore someone who was informed about the properties of plants, often made vegetation an important part of his settings. In the garden of Hohen-Cremmen, several plants that seem to blend into one dominate as they creep along and cover the garden wall that mostly encloses this shaded, backyard space: the "kleinblättrige Epheu" and the "wilde Wein" (EB 5, 6).<sup>19</sup> An obvious interpretation is that the "wilde Wein" represents the thirty-eight-year-old mother, Luise, and the "kleinblättrige Epheu," her sixteen-year-old daughter, Effi, who so resembles her mother she is called "die 'Kleine'" (EB 6).<sup>20</sup> The two plants, like the mother and daughter, have grown in such an intertwined fashion that it requires substantial effort to separate one from the other, something that the characters ignore in terms of the social conjunctions that are about to be arranged in the scenes following this one. Nature has made the two plants and the mother-daughter pair similar to one another, but the choices of people are responsible for the entanglement of the two plants. The two were propagated in the same small space as one another, just as the close relationship between mother and daughter was nurtured so that it would grow to be a close one. As will be touched upon in the

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<sup>19</sup> "small-leaved ivy" and "Virginia creeper" (EB Trans. 5).

<sup>20</sup> "the little one" (EB Trans. 6).

following brief plot description, it proves to be as difficult to extricate Effi from her mother's presence as it would be to disentangle the ivy from the wild vine. Schopenhauer's will controls plants as well as humans and though its encompassing strength is perceived individually, it is better understood as a whole.

A brief explanation of how the scene fits into the larger events that the narrator recounts illustrates the ambiguous complexity of the effects of the will on Effi's experiences. The time of day in the first scene is post-lunch and Effi and Luise are sitting peacefully working on an embroidery project for the church. The garden, which appears to be landscaped with ordinary plants, is really a complex system of signs of imbalance in the human, particularly Prussian, relationship with the surrounding world. Effi's friends drop by to play and she tells them that she suspects that something significant and romantic may happen to her soon. Their play is interrupted by Luise, who calls her to come inside and meet a guest whose visit they have been expecting. He is Baron Geert von Innstetten, a *Landrat*<sup>21</sup> in Pomerania and Luise's former suitor. She tells her daughter that he has come to request her hand in marriage. The narrative indirectly depicts Effi's acceptance. Even though the engagement has been arranged suddenly, Effi seems satisfied with the plans. She knows that her parents, particularly her mother, feel that this is a good match and she imagines it will fulfill her fanciful dreams for her future.

Returning to an interpretation of the motif of the two plants highlights how the relationship between Effi and her mother is delicate and beautiful, but also unsettling. While mother and daughter are clearly affectionate towards one another, there is also a tension between them. While the two are embroidering an altar cloth for the church, Effi cannot sit still. Like the tendrils of the vines that surround them and the strands of

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<sup>21</sup> Rorrison and Chambers leave the title *Landrat* untranslated because there is no adequate English equivalent. In notes to the text, they describe the office as that of a "Prussian official, appointed by the crown. He was in charge of a *Kreis*, the smallest administrative district, so Innstetten was the biggest fish in a small pool." See EB Trans. 219.

embroidery thread piled on the table that are sewn into the body of a cloth used by the community, she curls her body into graceful and rather comical exercises. Her movements could be interpreted as innocent play or they could be mildly defiant of her mother's wishes that she would be more lady-like. Her once high-spirited mother, who the narrator informs the reader, has passed this trait along to her daughter, scolds her gently for her lack of dignity. Nonetheless, the conversation between the two of them serves as a tacit admission that the traits that give Effi an air of wildness like a curling, expanding vine or a "Tochter der Luft" (EB 7),<sup>22</sup> as Luise affectionately calls her, also lend her an attractive, healthy aura. Vines and Effi all need a strong anchor to support their antics. When Effi leaves home to start a life as Innstetten's wife, she needs more than the fond memories of her mother, her husband's former love and the dearest person in her life, to be reflected in his eyes. She needs a strong new anchor so that she can grow and sustain her graceful, light personality, but finds none. As my interpretations show when they move to details further along in the text, after Effi's marriage, she takes on a closer resemblance to a daughter of the air. She instinctively continues her vine-like mannerisms, ignoring for as long as she can that she has found no new anchor to replace the one that was ripped from the ground when she left her parents' house.

A threshold is not a secure place in which to begin the task of binding together a new relationship, as indicated by the next scene, which depicts the ivy vine as a backdrop of the beginning of the troubling relationship between Effi and her future husband. As individuals and as a couple, Effi and Innstetten stand on several thresholds. An engagement means making plans to enter into a new life, but they do not stand together. She is about to be thrust from the protective garden of childhood and he is planning to make further advances in his promising career. The scene that follows their engagement

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<sup>22</sup> "a daughter of the air" (EB Trans. 6).

takes place in the garden-room, which is itself a kind of threshold, not quite inside or outside, part of an addition to the older structure of the house that seems neither new nor old.<sup>23</sup> At the beginning of this scene, Luise has just informed Effi of Innstetten's proposal and asked her indirectly for an answer. Effi is stunned speechless upon realizing that this is not all a farce when her father and Innstetten step across the threshold of the garden-room where she is standing with her mother. Even though Innstetten projects a friendly manner, his presence and the momentousness of this occasion are more than she can handle. Her good manners, learned from her mother, struggle with the will as she battles for composure. Her reaction resembles the small leaves of the vine being blown by a draft: "Effi, als sie seiner ansichtig wurde, kam in ein nervöses Zittern" (EB 18).<sup>24</sup> As this encounter between the nearly-engaged couple is taking place, through the curtain of the vine overgrowing an open window a playful voice of one of Effi's playmates is heard to call: "Effi komm!" (EB 18).<sup>25</sup> Later in the narrative, the narrator reports that Innstetten recalls how this disembodied voice made him shiver with apprehension, a reaction equivalent to Effi's own quivering.<sup>26</sup> Effi and

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<sup>23</sup> In her dissertation that compared works of Fontane and Henry James, Amy Wissinger Penrice devotes a chapter to special representations. She compares the garden at Hohen-Cremmen with the grounds and house at Gardencourt in James's *The Portrait of a Lady* and notes that both for both Effi and Isabel, antithetical spatial elements confuse their readings of spatial signs that might otherwise indicate to them what they need. She makes particular note of the threshold quality of the garden room at Hohen-Cremmen and of the confusing vertical lines of the swing and the pond on the grounds of the residence. See Amy Wissinger Penrice, "Theodor Fontane and Henry James: Configurations of Control," diss., Harvard U, 1988, 95-123.

<sup>24</sup> "Effi, seeing him, began to tremble nervously" (EB Trans. 13).

<sup>25</sup> "'Come back Effi!'" (EB Trans. 13).

<sup>26</sup> Peter C. Pfeiffer interprets Innstetten's reaction to this moment as negative for a different reason. He posits that the novel reflects realism's epistemological problem in expressing the relationship between the subject and the object. He sees Effi as a child of nature ("Naturkind") and Innstetten, the "Mann von Prinzipien" ("man of principles") who adheres to the socially sanctioned rules of language. He reads the call of Effi's playmate through the vine as the expression of a conflict-free interface between man and nature, something I dispute in my interpretation. Additionally, he notes that the motif of ivy is often conflated with the grapevine in bourgeois realism. He cites Raabe's use of the grapevine symbol that changed throughout his works. Pfeiffer relates how at first it stood for the idyllic transfiguration (*Verklärung*) and later as a rejection of the conventional vehicles of poetic transfiguration. See Peter C.



Innstetten are trying consciously to convince themselves that their plans for a life together are logical and mutually beneficial, even as their perceptions tell them the opposite is true. Tense energy, the tirelessly creeping vine that entangles Effi and Innstetten, infuses this threshold scene. Here and elsewhere it is evident that Schopenhauer's will also steps over the threshold of playing an influential role in this novel.

The violence that is depicted is subtle compared to the everyday violence that the Holubs must endure, but it is nonetheless a force that must be acknowledged. Effi and Innstetten are quivering because this is an exciting encounter, but also because they sense it is uncomfortably strange that such a young girl should marry her mother's former suitor. The civilized violence here is intimately familiar to all present except for Effi. From observation, she has undoubtedly sensed the workings of the social system in which she is about become a pawn. She is not the only one who must endure the pain involved in adhering to the social rules. She complains to her mother that Innstetten has arrived earlier than announced, but from his point of view, he is arriving far too late to fetch his heart's true desire, Luise. Effi is promised to him as a kind of consolation agreement, a social reward for him repressing his sexual urges and diverting them into his career serving the Prussian state. Violence is everywhere and yet is unacknowledged by the characters. They are so tightly caught in the web of the system that their incessant, dull pain goes largely unnoted.

The interpretations thus far have served as introductions to the ambiguous tones established by the opening scenes of each narrative. By using Schopenhauer's will as a lens through which to glimpse the nature of these ambiguous origins, the commonalities of the clay pit brick making site and the shaded garden of a genteel home begin to stand

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Pfeiffer, "Fontanes *Effi Briest*: Zur Gestaltung epistemologischer Probleme des Bürgerlichen Realismus," *German Quarterly* 63 (1990): 77, 80-82.

out. The interpretations thus far have framed the tasks that the narrators set out for themselves: to depict possibilities for the development of the self in the three major characters and the obstacles that impede this process.

### **The Promise and Illusion of Free Will**

The tasks of character development that begin in the opening scenes are set against backdrops of violence. Let us recall that in the aphorism quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Schopenhauer declares that the factor that makes a novel a form of high art is that in the process of narration what he calls the “inner life” can be separated from the “outer life” through an “intense action” that will not overly disrupt the “outer life.” In the following section of this chapter, each narrator’s attempts at creating and enforcing a separation between the two worlds are explored.

Although the two worlds that Schopenhauer references in his aphorism are the inner and outer worlds of an individual, one can also use the concept to refer to the possibilities of optimistic or pessimistic tones and their existence inside or outside of the characters’ selves in the two texts. In the portion of my discussion that contains quotes from Fontane and Ebner about their reactions to the texts they had produced, the authors felt these two works to be deep, almost unconsciously honest expressions of a clarified reality that they wanted to convey to readers. Their ideas of *Verklärung* (literary transfiguration) are as much statements excluding certain ideas as they are positive statements of belief. As Fontane wrote: “Man lernt auch da und festigt sich in seinen Grundsätzen, wo man mehr ablehnen als zustimmen muß.”<sup>27</sup> Pavel and Effi both

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<sup>27</sup> “One also learns and becomes stronger in one’s principles when it comes to cases in which one must reject more than agree.” Reuter quotes Fontane’s review of a performance of Friedrich Hebbel’s drama *Herodes und Mariamne*. Hebbel was a great admirer of Schopenhauer. Reuter interprets the statement as pertaining to Fontane’s dislike for the ideas that, in his own opinion, Schopenhauer represented. See Reuter vol. 2, 653.

undergo periods in which they try to understand which parts of their environment and experiences of the outer world they must incorporate into their inner worlds. In other words, they learn in just the way Fontane refers to in the above quote. They reject some principles and strengthen their adherence to others.

The narrator of “Das Gemeindegeld” harbors an idealistic desire to effect an improvement in at least one life, Pavel’s, and thereby also effect change in others. She is assisted in her pursuit of an ideal by Milada, the only member of the family who has a larger view of life. Milada is a fairly unpromising figure in terms of character development, because from her first appearance, she is nearly a saint. All of her almost holy energy is expended trying to enliven the family spiritually because Barbara, their mother, and Pavel are too wrapped up in the family’s life and death struggle with the outer life to nurture an inner life. Almost as soon as the children are rendered orphans by the violent events described previously, they are separated from one another. Though Milada mitigates the harshness of Pavel’s reality by remaining in his imagination like his guardian angel, her ability to inspire her remaining family members is blocked by the walls of her confinement. The narrator must find other ways of conducting her humanizing project with Pavel.

One specific way the narrator does this is by changing the tense in several places from the usual narrative tense of the preterite to the present.<sup>28</sup> This creates an atmosphere of immediacy in the narration as well as a blending of the inner and outer realms of Pavel’s experience. Although the examples of this narrative device are few and account for only brief moments in the narrated time, discussing two instances helps to illustrate the effect that these experiences have on Pavel’s understanding of self.

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<sup>28</sup> My attention to this detail in the narrative was triggered by Baasner calling attention to it in his “Deutung.” See Baasner, “Deutung” 324.

The first incident occurs early in the narrative stages of Pavel's development. Martin Holub, the children's father, has already been executed for his crime. Barbara, their mother, has been sentenced to years of hard labor in prison because she could not find the courage to dispute her husband's lies that she participated in the murder. Milada has been adopted by the local baroness who sends her away to the convent.<sup>29</sup> It is as if Pavel were isolated from his biological connections so that Ebner's artistic experiment with changing a life for the better could be conducted more cleanly. The community fulfills its responsibility to care for Pavel only in letter. He has slipped into delinquency, but he misses Milada terribly and longs to re-establish contact with her. Finally, the baroness grants him permission to visit his sister at the convent.

The episode begins as he makes his way on foot to see her, entering unknown territory. As he is approaching his destination, the upcoming shift in tense and thus also in narrative tempo is announced by the chiming of the first of two bells, a church bell. He approaches a bridge under which "ein gewaltiges Wasser" (GK 42)<sup>30</sup> rushes. On the other side lies the town where Milada now lives, behind the walls of the convent. The tense changes as he crosses the bridge. The outside world of nature connects him to the only feature of significance in his inner world, his deep love for his sister. He marvels at the torrents of water, representing the power of chance that has chosen her to be the recipient of such a sudden and dramatic rise in station and its accompanying physical stability and educational possibilities. He imagines falsely that she is able to admire this mighty river every day, not realizing how severely this new luxury has confined her. Sitting on the bridge is an old woman selling apples, Milada's favorite fruit, the Biblical

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<sup>29</sup> Henry James's character Pansy Osmond from *The Portrait of a Lady*, another young girl who is sent to a convent to refine her ladylike attributes, shows much more depth than Milada. In addition to the advocacy of Isabel, her father's wife, her attributes endow her with greater strength for coping with the harshness of her situation, because, unlike Milada, she survives the conclusion of the novel.

<sup>30</sup> "a mighty torrent" (TP 37).

fruit of knowledge. He longs to present an apple to her, but lacks money. He knows that since she has become a lady, stealing for her like he once did is no longer appropriate. Even if he could buy her an apple, the strict nuns would probably not allow her to accept a present from the brother whom they view as a corrupting influence. He cannot present her with his newfound expansion of knowledge that this journey to visit her has afforded him. She is not allowed to share in his wonder at the forces of nature nor to experience a rush of these kinds of intense perceptions now that she is limited to such a controlled environment. He too must learn control. He must come to terms with the disappointment that accompanies his recognition that he must now obey certain social rules. Standing directly in front of the convent's door, he is frustrated that he cannot find the bell to this structure that has "auffallend kleine Fenster" (GK 43),<sup>31</sup> a sign of the severity of the nuns who inhabit it. When one of a group of local children rings the bell for him, the tense shifts back to its usual preterite. The violence inherent to this place he is about to witness is part of the everyday kind in the world he inhabits, nothing extraordinary that must be marked narratively by a special tense.<sup>32</sup>

The second narrative tense deviation, the last one interpreted here, involves a point at which Pavel has rounded several corners in his development. It brings together strands of themes that play out in the narrator's intervention with Pavel. These are compassion, the strengthening of the inner world at the expense of the outer one, and violence that, according to Schopenhauer's view, is an inescapable part of life and makes

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<sup>31</sup> "remarkably small windows" (TP 38).

<sup>32</sup> This is an example of Ebner's criticism of the Church, which prompted mixed reactions. Doris M. Klostermaier's article concentrates mostly on Ebner's position towards the Church and vice versa during the period of the *Literaturstreit* from 1903-1914. She also includes comments on the 1905 review of Ebner's works, including "Das Gemeindekind," in a German ultramontane journal. The reviewer felt that though Ebner was mostly hostile to Catholic belief, some of her works were acceptable for certain audiences. "Das Gemeindekind" was not one of them because it portrayed "heartless nuns" and was "anti-clerical." See Doris M. Klostermaier, "'Not Recommended for Catholic Libraries': Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach and the Turn-of-the-Century Catholic Revival Movement," *German Life and Letters* 53 (2000): 171-172.

the foregrounding of the inner world possible. In this part of the narrative, Pavel has just saved the life of a rival character in front of his fellow villagers who are gathered for a church festival.<sup>33</sup> The villagers are waiting for the elderly baroness, Milada's adopted mother, to enter the church before following her. Now a strong, well-groomed man of twenty-one years who has returned to his village after serving time in the imperial army, Pavel stands to the side observing. The scene mirrors one seven years earlier when he was a ruffian dressed in rags, unaware of his self worth, observing the feast day procession. The narrator repeats the sentiment "alles war, wie es immer gewesen" (GK 101),<sup>34</sup> several times, even though it is apparent that this is not the case. Pavel's transformation in this later scene depicts a shift in power from the old system in which the nobility wielded power, to a transition period in which the unenlightened populace is expected to assume some of its own governance.<sup>35</sup> The delinquency of the community in accepting Pavel's care when he became their ward signifies the problems with this transition. The community seems to have emerged from that dark period of transition, however, because the crops that were once poor are now bountiful. The narrator announces that all the pending deals at the market are to be finalized only after Mass has been given, leaving the reader to anticipate that something significant involving Pavel, the new hope of the community, will also come to pass.

As in the scene described above, the ring of a bell marks the first of several short changes to present tense. Several lines depict how the villagers file by Pavel, who is

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<sup>33</sup> The village commemorates the feast day of St. Egidius on this day, 1 Sept. Egidius is one of fourteen holy helper saints, the patron of beggars and the infertile. See Tatlock 150 (note. 19).

<sup>34</sup> "Everything as always" (TP 97). Karlheinz Roszbacher builds an interpretation around this phrase. He notes the irony with which the narrator uses this phrase because by the end of Pavel's narrated experiences, he has proven himself upwardly mobile in a social (and I would add economic) sense. Roszbacher also notes the temporal setting of the narrative. It takes place between 1860, the year that liberalism began its rise in Austria and ends in 1870 when it is at its highpoint. At the points when Ebner was writing the narrative, in 1886, Roszbacher notes that liberalism had long been out of power. See Roszbacher 259-266.

<sup>35</sup> Tatlock calls the stage that the villagers of Soleschau, where Pavel lives, "civic adolescence," referring to an unfortunate result of political conditions after 1848. See Tatlock, "Introduction" xii.

standing to the side. The tense shifts back to the preterite, building tension with the slight disruption in narrative tempo, and drawing attention to what is now being described, the women filing by. He has reached an age and status at which he might be able to consider marriage, but his negative experiences with women as sexual beings taint his attitudes towards finding a mate. They stem from the grudge he holds against his mother for not being able to stand up to his father. He struggles at the sight of the women and tries to convince himself that they no longer exert power over him.

This tumultuous episode playing out mostly inside of Pavel's head ends with several elements that allude to Schopenhauer. As Pavel controls his sexual urges and remains aloof even while several of his former temptresses confront him, he enjoys his perceived superiority over women. He hisses something under his breath that is reminiscent of Schopenhauer's misogynistic rantings: "Die Weiber, pfui, zu nichts gut als zum Schlechten!" (GK 103).<sup>36</sup> At another point in the scene, the narrator directs Pavel's attention to a symbol of nature, to a "großen himmelanragenden, abgestorbenen Ast" of an elm tree, that reminds him of "den blühenden Leib eines geliebten Wesens das Zeichen schweren Seichtums" (GK 102-103).<sup>37</sup> Immediately thereafter, when he hears a feminine voice calling him, he feels "die feurigen Krallen, [die] ihm die Brust zusammenpressen und ihm den Atem rauben" (GK 103).<sup>38</sup> These perceptions threaten to crush him even as they viscerally connect him to nature and the lives of those in the community around him. It is unclear whether he perceives these symbols as a sign of a struggle from which he has emerged victorious or if this is the voice of the narrator. She may be showing him his place, caught between the feeling that he has control over his

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<sup>36</sup> "Women, pah! They're good for nothing but evil!" (TP 98).

<sup>37</sup> "a dead branch stretched toward the sky," "as if he had uncovered the symptom of a serious disease on the rosy body of someone he loved" (TP 97-98).

<sup>38</sup> "those fiery talons, squeeze his chest and rob him of breath" (TP 98).

body and the recognition that he cannot divorce himself completely from the world of the will. He has for now withstood the temptations of sex, considered by Schopenhauer to be the greatest test of the will.<sup>39</sup> His strong performance on this test does not mean that he will not have to return to the same temptations, which are nature's way of convincing him to recognize bonds of connection to the rest of humanity and nature. The narrative's resolution of these matters is the subject of the following interpretive segment.

The analyses above illustrated the active role of Ebner's narrator in encouraging Pavel to decide how to incorporate his circumstances and experiences into his understanding of self. Fontane's narrator in *Effi Briest* does not intervene like this. He conducts himself rather like Fontane as the young boy depicted in his *Kinderjahre* autobiography and often hides his presence behind skillful reproduction of life-like dialogue.<sup>40</sup> A segment of dialogue from the opening scenes that makes up the focus of my interpretive attention in the last section, shows how Effi begins her task of deciding what part of the outer world she should incorporate into her inner world.

Effi is positioned as a third point in the constellation of her engagement with Innstetten, the man who might have been her father if desires of the heart had taken precedent over matters of social convenience when he and Effi's mother were about

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<sup>39</sup> Schopenhauer claims that he takes an original view towards love by seeing it for what it is, purely physical. He writes that it is: "nächst der Liebe zum Leben sich als die stärkste und tätigste aller Triebfedern" and that it "die wertvollsten Verhältnisse auflöst, die festesten Bande zerrei t, bisweilen Leben oder Gesundheit, bisweilen Reichtum, Rang und Glück zu ihrem Opfer nimmt, ja den sonst Redlichen gewissenlos, den bisher Treuen zum Verräter macht, demnach im ganzen auftritt als ein feindseliger Dämon, der alles zu verkehren, zu verwirren und umzuwerfen bemüht ist" ("next to the love of life, the strongest and most active of all motives," and "[it] destroys the most valuable relationships, ruptures the most durable bonds. It requires the sacrifice sometimes of life or health, sometimes of wealth, rank, and happiness. It makes unscrupulous those who were once honest, and makes traitors of those who have till now been loyal. [I]t plays the part of a malevolent demon who is trying to pervert, confuse, and overthrow everything") Arthur Schopenhauer, "Ergänzungen zum vierten Buch: Kap. 44: Metaphysik der Geschlechtsliebe" in *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Cotta-Insel, 1960), 681-682. Trans. from: Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea Abridged in One Volume*, ed. David Berman, trans. Jill Berman (North Clarendon, VT: Everyman, 2004), 263-264.

<sup>40</sup> See p. 65, note 50 of chapter one for a discussion of Fontane's boyhood love of hiding.



Effi's age.<sup>41</sup> This portion of my interpretation centers on several appearances of the words and the theme of "das Andre" ("the other"). The concept appears first in these opening scenes and haunts the narrative like the Chinaman's ghost whose presence Effi senses in her strange new home with Innstetten in Kessin. In the last textual incident that is discussed in this section, "das Andre" returns in social conversation with a woman who has made a happy life for herself even while circumventing social restrictions, Mariette Trippelli. The incidents discussed all occur before Effi's dalliance with Major Crampas, something that is not treated directly in this analysis. It is, however, touched upon in the next section as part of an interpretation of a segment of the narrative in which "das Andre" appears under a different name.

In an entry on "das Andre" in a compendium of themes from Fontane's life and works, Stefan Neuhaus quotes Fontane's formulation of the English proverb that the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence:

Es läuft darauf hinaus, daß immer 'das Andre' besser ist. Eine Frau, die einen Schöngest hat, sehnt sich nach einem Kürassieroffizier und eine Frau, die einen Kürassieroffizier hat, sehnt sich nach einem Schöngest. Ist man klug, so kommt es auf Stattlichkeit und ist man stattlich, so kommt es auf Klugheit an. [ . . . ] Wie man's auch einrichten mag, zur Hälfte kommt man schlecht weg.<sup>42</sup>

In Effi's mind, the grass growing in the garden of her childhood bounded by the ivy-covered wall is perennially green. This is where she prefers to stay, though she has vague ambitions of leaving it. On the day she becomes engaged to Innstetten, Effi identifies herself to her friends as a kind of half person, "das Andre" in relation to Innstetten, the

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<sup>42</sup> "It follows from that, that 'the other' is always better. A woman who has an aesthete always longs for a cuirassier officer, and a woman who has a cuirassier longs for an aesthete. If one is bright, then a fine figure matters, and if one has a fine figure, then intelligence matters. [ . . . ] Any way one is able to arrange it, with a half one gets away with a bad deal." See Stefan Neuhaus, "Das Andre" in *Stefan Neuhaus Fontane-ABC* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1988), 35-36.

visitor her mother is expecting that same afternoon.<sup>43</sup> Her definition of herself is an anti-climactic conclusion to the story about the “Liebesgeschichte mit Held und Heldin, und zuletzt mit Entsagung” (EB 9).<sup>44</sup> The story features Innstetten and her mother, and the narrator shows how it is hard for her to find the right way of telling her playmates this story. She believes she is telling a story about the would-be lovers, when, in fact, she is really telling a story that will become her own. She begins narrating several times and, as if she were not aware of the conclusion, or as if she senses that the conclusion will be written in the future, is sidetracked by tangential thoughts before her friends prompt her to tell them how this all relates to her. They ask: “Und wie kam es nachher?” (EB 11).<sup>45</sup> Her answer reflects the ambiguity of even well-established relationships such as that of her parents that have produced children as she explains why Luise chose Briest over Innstetten: “Nun, es kam, wie’s kommen mußte, wie’s immer kommt. [ . . . ] Und das andere, was sonst noch kam, nun, das wißt ihr . . . das andere bin ich” (EB 11-12).<sup>46</sup> She makes this slightly sad statement in a matter of fact way. One of her friends notes the sad tone and makes a point of reassuring her before urging her to continue with the story. Thus the importance of the statement becomes buried by the continued conversation, but Effi’s statement reflects something important about her understanding of self. She is half

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<sup>43</sup> Herman Rapaport reads *Effi Briest* through a Freudian and Lacanian lens that is a model for the readings I do in my fourth chapter. He emphasizes the mismatch of timing throughout the novel as well as most of Fontane’s protagonists. Desire matters little because it is never matched with the “thing” it seeks. Into the space that desire leaves, the ghost appears. He explains that the “Chinese Phantom” occupies the Real, as does Effi by the end of the novel once she shifts/disappears there as a the “it”/Freudian thing. His article is too rich in detail to summarize all of the important points here, but it is perhaps coincidental to note that, along with identifying her as a “thing (a shifter or place holder)” and a “phantom (or substitute), Rapaport calls Effi a “point of anchorage which binds even as it transgresses relationships.” This is something whose relevance I would like to consider in a reworking specifically in my identification of Effi with ivy and the will. See Herman Rapaport, “*Effi Briest* and *La Chose Freudienne*,” in *Criticism and Lacan: Essays and Dialogue on Language, Structure, and the Unconscious*, eds. Patrick Colm and Lalita Pandit (Athens, GA: U Georgia P, 1990), 230-238.

<sup>44</sup> “a love-story complete with hero and heroine, and ending in renunciation” (EB Trans. 7).

<sup>45</sup> “So what happened then?” (EB Trans. 9).

<sup>46</sup> “What happened was what was bound to happen, what always happens. [ . . . ] And the rest, what came after that, you know. . . The rest is me” (EB Trans. 9).

a person, the child who refuses to grow up, someone who will be strongly encouraged to step into a role as a whole person in this story that she is reluctantly telling.

Effi is comfortable with the story of her childhood because, as far as she understands it, it requires no conclusion. At the outset of the narrative she is full of a purposeless striving energy that has an indeterminate ambition. As an only child who has been raised in the sheltered environment of her parents' house and garden, and as the dominant girl in her small group of friends, there is little reason for her not to expect that everything she desires will be fulfilled. There are many problems with an immature girl entering into marriage with a much older man who is not attentive to her needs, but one of the worst is that Effi is not able to tell herself realistic stories about the life on which she has agreed to embark. Luise describes their daughter's attitude to Briest, Effi's father: "Effi ist anspruchslos; sie lebt in ihren Vorstellungen und Träumen" (EB 24).<sup>47</sup> The narrator finishes what he thinks is a half-truth in Luise's point that Effi is able to forgo certain things if she is compensated with something extraordinary. He clarifies: "in diesem Verzichtenkönnen lag etwas von Anspruchslosigkeit: wenn es aber ausnahmsweise mal wirklich etwas zu besitzen galt, so mußte dies immer was ganz Apartes sein. Und *darin* war sie anspruchsvoll" (EB 25).<sup>48</sup> The fantastic stories she is telling herself seem to be the primary preparation available to her for her future. It is not clear whether she really believes these stories that her life will suddenly become extraordinary when she is socially promoted to the position of wife to a man who is sometimes invited to Bismarck's table for dinner. It is clear that the mismatch between her inner stories and the outer world will pose a problem for her and her marriage.

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<sup>47</sup> "Effi isn't demanding; she lives in her own imagination and dreams" (EB Trans. 17).

<sup>48</sup> "and doing without had an element of the undemanding; but when, exceptionally, it came to really wanting something, that something always had to be quite out of the ordinary. And in *this* she was demanding" (EB Trans. 17).

Effi marries Innstetten and moves to his unusual house in the sleepy provincial town of Kessin in Pomerania on the Baltic Coast, which has international shipping connections to exotic ports and thus also a mildly exotic atmosphere in comparison to Hohen-Cremmen.<sup>49</sup> Unfortunately, this touch of the exotic is not enough to keep Effi occupied while her husband pours all of his energies into his work just as he has done since the time when Luise broke his heart. The young wife cannot imagine how she can make sense of her new role. Innstetten is not sensitive enough to alter his personal and professional habits so that they might grow together as a couple. Nonetheless, he gradually realizes that he needs to do something so that she will begin to tell herself that she needs to accept the limitations of her new life. Simply telling her directly would sound too harsh. He seizes at the chance to incorporate something *ganz Apartes* (“quite out of the ordinary”) into their lives in the form of a ghost, a Chinese man who was

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<sup>49</sup> In his article, Peter Utz explores the historical story behind the story of the Chinaman’s ghost. He provides background for why Effi’s shudder at her suggestion that maybe Kessin has some exotic residents, a Chinaman for example, also causes Fontane’s readers to shudder. Most interesting for the context of my interpretation is how Utz relates the communication problems and the imbalance of autonomy in the Innstetten marriage to perceptions of a “yellow scare.” He relates the “double bind” between Innstetten’s expectations that his wife both obey and love him to the position he takes on the matter of the ghost. Effi cannot possibly dispute the balance of power in their relationship because she recognizes that it is responsible in maintaining “order.” Likewise, she does not dispute Bismarck’s position of “hidden god-father” pulling the strings of the Prussian puppet theater behind the curtains of their lives. See Peter Utz, “Effi Briest, der Chinese und der Imperialismus: Eine ‘Geschichte’ im geschichtlichen Kontext,” *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 103 (1984): 212-214, 218-220. Utz does not mention one possible hidden connection to China featured in the landscaping of the Hohen-Cremmen garden, rhubarb. According to Björn Kjellgren of the Dept. of Chinese Studies at the University of Stockholm, Sweden, rhubarb was a source of tension between the Russians and the Chinese as well as the Chinese and other European colonizing powers. He suggests that the first Opium War (1839-1842) could have been called the Rhubarb War because of a diplomatic communications oversight. It is interesting to note that when Briest compares Effi’s name to the name of the plant “Epheu” (ivy), he also compares Innstetten’s name, Geert, which he says means “schlank, aufgeschossenen Stamm” (“tall, slender stem”), like that of the bitter, edible part a rhubarb plant. See EB 19, EB Trans. 14. In the opening garden scene, rhubarb is planted around the roundel next to the canna lilies. Rhubarb first came to Europe through Venice (1608) around the same time as the Briest family began to inhabit their house, during the reign of Elector Georg Wilhelm (1620-1640). While playing tag with her friends, Effi momentarily hides behind one of the large rhubarb leaves. See EB 14, EB Trans. 12. These are poisonous when eaten, restricting breathing. The roots of the plant were first used as for their purgative properties. In the final scene of the novel, Effi purges herself of all negative feelings and breathes deeply of the air that hastens her death. See Dan at rhubarb dot com, “Rhubarb History,” 1 Sept 2004, *The Rhubarb Compendium*, <<http://www.rhubarbinfo.com/rhubarb-history.html#TOC9>>.

brought back to the area by a ship's captain as his servant, but who eventually became more like his friend. He hopes that Effi's preoccupation with the ghost will keep her busy, and most of all, transform her into the kind of wife he would like her to be.

The Chinaman's story becomes another facet of "das Andre" with which Effi first identifies herself in the opening scene. It is not clear whether the ghost is something real or just Innstetten's game. Effi has much in common with the Chinaman, though she cannot initially recognize this.<sup>50</sup> As Effi will eventually do, he trespassed into a sexually forbidden area and paid for it with his life. Even though his is a story that people in Kessin cannot seem to forget, they want to forget him as a person. He was not allowed a proper burial in the churchyard and neither is Effi.<sup>51</sup> After death has relieved them of their pain, their memories are both relegated to the no-man's land that is tantalizing to discuss, but lies outside the realm of decency.

The gradual introduction of the theme of the ghost and its recurrence as a narrative within the larger narrative shows that the ambiguity surrounding the ghost's existence and not story itself is the theme's most important factor. The theme makes recurring appearances before Effi and Innstetten deal with it directly in a conversation. It

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<sup>50</sup> George C. Avery sees a connection between how Effi looks at the Chinaman's grave in different ways at different times. Not until she goes riding with Crampas does she gaze at it openly, symbolizing her changing attitude towards transgression. Avery shows how Fontane connects Effi's fate like a psychograph would. He sees her returning to her nocturnal nature, where the Chinaman's identity was also situated. This, her true character, was both her doom and her unrealized potential. Avery takes a different position from my negative one, in his interpretation of the utterance that haunts Innstetten, "Effi komm!" He reads this as a positive memory, something that Innstetten himself wishes he could call out, but cannot. See George C. Avery, "The Chinese Wall: Fontane's Psychograph of *Effi Briest*," in *View and Reviews of Modern German Literature: Festschrift für Adolf D. Klarmann*, ed. Karl S. Weimar (Munich: Delp, 1974): 18-38.

<sup>51</sup> The text specifies that Effi's request for her gravestone to read her maiden name with no markers of class was honored. It says nothing specifically about her grave being in the garden. Valerie D. Greenberg interprets Effi's death and burial wishes to be acts of resistance to the roles that she was expected to assume. Her observations that Effi escapes out the window to liberation resemble those of Walter-Schneider's in my first chapter about Fontane's formulation of his memory of stars. (See p. 69, note 58). It also coincides with Ebner's idea as a girl that she could flee to her dead mother's arms through the window. See Valerie D. Greenberg, "The Resistance of *Effi Briest*: An (Un)told Tale," *PMLA* 103 (1988): 778.

is not a straightforward conversation. Innstetten seems reluctant to talk about the topic, but Effi insists he tell her more because “Solang ich es nicht weiß, bin ich, trotz aller guten Vorsätze, doch immer ein Opfer meiner Vorstellungen” (EB 97).<sup>52</sup> She tells him “Erzähle mir das Wirkliche. Die Wirklichkeit kann mich nicht so quälen wie meine Phantasie” (EB 97).<sup>53</sup> She is asking him to give her reasons why the ghost has become a feature of her inner world even as it is unclear that it exists in the outer one.<sup>54</sup> He will not, or perhaps cannot give her specific answers, only a recommendation for her to interpret the story as a warning. In life, the Chinaman let his desires that should have remained internalized guide his actions and expectations. Innstetten is handling this matter with the supposition that if experiences in this world cannot teach Effi that her desires are of little importance, then an otherworldly teacher will.<sup>55</sup>

Like the will, “das Andre” has to be acknowledged. The strange and sad circumstances behind the Chinaman’s life, death and haunting match Effi’s strained marriage and its end in ways that indicate that free will, if only a powerful illusion nurtured in one’s inner life, occupies a place within our perceptions that should not be

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<sup>52</sup> “As long as I don’t know what it is, with the best will in the world I am still a prey to my own imaginings” (EB Trans. 61).

<sup>53</sup> “Tell me the truth. The truth can never be such a torture as my imagination” (EB Trans. 61).

<sup>54</sup> Ulrike Rainer reads the ghost as Innstetten’s pedagogical aid gone wrong. In her interpretation, the ghost is a symbol of Effi’s psychological state. She conjured it up from what she imagined after hearing the Chinaman’s story, and seeing the picture that Johanna pasted on the chair back. Rainer argues that a product of her mind finds expression in her body, as not being able to talk about the ghost with her husband drives her into Crampas’ arms. For a while, it plagues her, but after the Innstettens move to Berlin, the ghost is gone and replaced with something much more frightening, knowing that her chances for happiness are gone and will never return because society will not let them. See Ulrike Rainer, “Effi Briest und das Motiv des Chinesen: Rolle und Darstellung in Fontanes Roman,” *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 101 (1982): 545-561.

<sup>55</sup> Robert L. Jamison interprets Effi’s love of fear, for example of the sense she could fall while swinging, as nothing aberrant, but rather something productive that contributes to her development. He interprets the lessons of fear that Innstetten teaches her as preparation for what she will have to learn to be the wife of an ambitious civil servant. Fear actually becomes her hope for the future. Jamison argues that when the worst happens, Effi no longer has cause to fear, but she also has no future, so she cannot hope. She dies because she has developed beyond society and it no longer has a place for her. See Robert L. Jamison, “The Fearful Education of Effi Briest,” *Monatshefte* 74 (1982): 20-32.

ignored. Society's rules do not usually accommodate free will, but it serves as a counterbalance to them in both positive and negative ways.

All of this is demonstrated by another figure who is connected to "das Andre" in the novel, Mariette Trippelli, the daughter of a pastor who publicly advocated for a dignified burial for the Chinaman. Because of her father's involvement in the aftermath of the strange death, she is surely aware of the ghost stories associated with the house where Effi lives, as she is aware of the community's discomfort with her for sharing liberal views with her father and leading an unconventional life. During a party, Effi tells Trippelli how she admires her for singing so bravely about ghosts and confesses that she wishes she were similarly brave, but they frighten her. Trippelli, like Innstetten, cannot explain anything definitive on the topic, but rather confirms that what Effi is describing is "etwas anderes, das ist ja wirklich oder kann wenigstens etwas Wirkliches sein" (EB 108).<sup>56</sup> She could mean this as an encouraging word from one free-spirited woman to another, telling Effi that she should not discount her inner perceptions or her dreams no matter what her husband says. A little later in the conversation, however, she touches upon how being attuned to "das Andre," makes one vulnerable: "Es gibt so viel schlechte Menschen, und das andere findet sich dann auch, das gehört dann sozusagen mit dazu" (EB 109).<sup>57</sup> Everyone has their own illusions of free will, and the desires of some can be harmful.

This interpretation cannot explain or account for the many facets of the blended themes of "das Andre" and the Chinaman's ghost in this novel. Still, it illustrates how these themes make it possible to point out two conflicting forces at work in Effi's life: the individually beneficial illusion that free will exists and the sense that something like the

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<sup>56</sup> "something real, or something that could be real" (EB Trans. 68).

<sup>57</sup> "There are so many bad people, and you find the other thing too, you might say the one goes with the other" (EB Trans 68).

will, an unseen and uncompromising force, undercuts this illusion. The three separate incidents in the narrative interpreted here involve acts of telling about the two unsettling themes, the vine and the ghost, and the two forces that are necessary for constructing them, the will and the illusion of free will. Without unearthing hidden clues or piecing together disparate shards of evidence, my selection and interpretations of the incidents prove nothing definitive about the themes or the forces. What they do show, however, is how the forces operate relative to and sometimes in conjunction with one another to create a picture of ambiguity. Characters narrate new stories to themselves in their inner worlds and to others in the outer world so that they can fabricate a harmonious connection between the two worlds. It is unimportant whether these connections are believable or not, as long as they keep the teller and listener preoccupied. What Effi seeks when she asks Innstetten to tell her the reality that will put her fantasies to rest is an opportunity to listen to his version of the story.

In *Effi Briest*, the power of narration is like the power of magic that promises to tie things together when they threaten to pull apart. It is the power that keeps the illusion of free will alive and keeps the will as Schopenhauer understands it at bay. It serves a similar function in “Das Gemeindegeld,” even though the narrator flatly denies that this is how she is manipulating her narrative. As shown through the interpretations of narrative incidents of brief, dramatic time shifts in “Das Gemeindegeld,” narration can serve another, more intrusive purpose. By using time shifts to halt the rhythm of narration, the narrator’s influence moves into the space she left open for herself in the opening scene, deferring a description of the features of Pavel’s face until she had more opportunities to redraw them. When Milada is removed from Pavel’s daily life, the narrator takes over her function of encouraging the development of Pavel’s humanity. As the final narrative incident of tense shifting indicates, the narrator’s technique proves



effective, though in order for it to be convincing, ambiguities must remain. After all, in the narrator's own words describing the miserable setting of the clay pit several paragraphs after the opening scene, interpreted above, Pavel and Barbara may do everything in their power to change their reality, but "zu hexen [vermögen] sie doch nicht" (GK 6).<sup>58</sup> With this contradiction, the narrator seems to be lending story telling special redemptive properties that other kinds of activities, in this case backbreaking work, do not have.

Thus far, I have used violence as a frame and Schopenhauer's idea of the will as a backdrop for depicting the ambiguous elements of the narratives. I have also shown how the act of narrating connects inner and outer worlds and impacts the relationship between the illusion of free will and the unrelenting impact of the will. In the following final interpretive section of this chapter, I reflect on what role ambiguity plays in the conclusions of these narratives and propose what this means for each character's idea of self.

### **The Indefinite Direction of Human Affairs (Establishing Roots and Cutting Threads)**

In his aphorism, Schopenhauer expresses his view that an audience thinks more highly of a play if the playwright can make it have an outcome that is clearly sad or happy. I read the outcomes of *Effi Briest* and "Das Gemeindekind" as ambiguous, the most accurate tone for describing what Fontane and Ebner portray with these narrative conclusions: the indefinite direction of human affairs, to borrow loosely from Schopenhauer. I supply brief overviews of the conclusions of the narratives in the context of my final interpretive discussions in which I concentrate on the alternatively

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<sup>58</sup> "they [are] certainly [unable] to work magic" (TP 2). I have changed the tense of "vermögen" from preterite to present in the original version and in the translation to fit the context of my quote.

rising and falling motion of the wave that represents the process of the formation of self. The falling, the more negative portion of the action, is the aspect of life to which Schopenhauer devoted his philosophy, but it is also one that makes it possible to create a space for the illusion of the existence of free will.

Judging whether a character finds that he or she is falling or rising in terms of his or her understanding of self is difficult because the reader is supplied with the information that the narrator sees fit to report. As illustrated in the last interpretive segment, the narrator in “Das Gemeindkind” takes a notably active role in steering Pavel in the direction that she feels is best. The message that she conveys is that Pavel’s understanding of himself is growing. This kind of positive development is not completely believable, however, as painful events that are also narrated at the conclusion temper the optimistic tone. The most painful of these is Milada’s death.

As previously mentioned, Milada’s character is virtually flawless, making it difficult to interpret how her sense of self develops throughout the course of the narrative. In fact, her development in terms of self is forced to move in the opposite direction from her brother’s. Fate has rewarded her with the means for a good education and a place to live where she is not physically deprived. Instead of being allowed to use these advantages to develop her strengths, she is forced by the nuns who act as her spiritual and physical jailors to repent for the sins of her parents. Her sense of self as someone who has influence over others, the self that she possessed already at the outset of the narrative, is sucked out of her. She has been forced to remain segregated from the concerns of the world, most importantly from Pavel and her mother who were the centers of her pre-convent life. Without these key people in her life, she cannot sustain a physical existence.

While he is saddened and angered at Milada's death, Pavel cannot recognize that despite his considerable success in bettering his physical and mental circumstances, he is pursuing a path parallel to his sister's. She sacrifices her life for the salvation of her family, and it seems that he will sacrifice his possibilities to marry and have children for the ethical salvation of the community that his former teacher and mentor, Habrecht, sees him someday leading as mayor. At the narrator's insistence, he proposes that he can effect positive change in the community even as he holds it at a safe distance from his personal life.

He maintains the same custom that we saw him assuming at the Church festival, staying separate from the community. Pavel is unaware that Milada is dying, because at the time of her death, he is celebrating the wedding of a friend and a woman he might have courted. Tatlock sees the wedding as a new beginning for communal life because it is a celebration of a new order (Tatlock xiii). The young people stand in as the family and attendants of the bridal couple implicitly promise to provide better leadership than was provided by the generation before. Though Pavel's reaction to the women in attendance is less negative than it was previously, his refusal to entertain thoughts of finding a partner casts a shadow on the possibilities for a future that the narrator has so optimistically imagined. Like Milada who was convinced by the nuns that solitude and prayer were the more important than her instinctual need to be connected to her family, he feels that his free will should be able to take precedent over his natural needs, Schopenhauer's will.

The final chapter of the narrative is filled with yet more ambiguous messages, but the narrator is trying her best while she still can to complete her task of drawing the features onto the face she left without description in the first scene. Pavel pursues his desire to visit Milada following the wedding, as if to substitute a visit with her as

compensation for his refusal of close human contact. Unfortunately, he is held in check by her requests that he wait to see her for a time. By the time he is able to come to her, she has died. His grief and anger are great, but he does not express them. He blames the nuns for not respecting the trust that the baroness has placed in them for the care of his delicate sister. When he hears that she died while he was celebrating, his resolve to remain separate from humanity is hardened, but his decision is tested as soon as he arrives home again. His mother is waiting for him.

On the surface of her narrative, the narrator is gushing with emotion as she describes the final scene in which Pavel welcomes his mother into the home that he built for his family. Below the surface, the narrator's emphatic optimism covers up cause for serious concern that the conclusion is artificially optimistic. The final scene reads like a depiction of free will releasing and neutralizing the pessimism that could not be countered any other way. Old wounds begin to heal as Barbara confesses to him that she always regretted not being able to tell him and Milada that she was innocent of the murder for which she was punished. They cry together over Milada's death, but quickly console themselves that she is in heaven, where they too will meet her when they die. The two plan to live together in the house that he built from his own toil with the bricks of the clay pit where the story began. She blesses every brick of the house and then pronounces something that he repeats for effect in the last few lines of the narrative: "Die Ärgsten werden oft die Besten, wenn sie einen brauchen" (GK 153).<sup>59</sup> The narrative ends, seemingly happily ever after. Nonetheless, in Barbara's piece of wisdom lies the sense that the conclusion is not necessarily as simple or as positive as it first appears. No magic has happened (the narrator ruled that out at the beginning of the narrative), and yet suddenly their world is healed and whole because two people who need each other are

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<sup>59</sup> "The worst ones often become the best ones when they need someone" (TP 147).

united. The rest of their community, “die Ärgsten,” needs them, and yet the two have physically separated themselves from those in need because the villagers have repeatedly proven themselves irredeemable. They damaged the bricks he made for the house and secretly stole the wheat that he had cultivated on what was now his property. His world is stable, and yet unsustainable. His domestic world will be missing its heart now that Milada is dead. There will be no children in his future to replace her spirit. Outside of the house in the communal world, a threatening, dispossessed populace watches his success.

The narrator of “Das Gemeindegeld” has been able to make something positive out of the violence of Pavel’s experiences. He has listened to her voice telling him he is in control of his will. At the narrative’s conclusion, his inner life appears more serene even as the world around him has seen relatively little change. Effi has also listened to the voices telling her stories about her possibilities for determining her inner life and has reached a similar conclusion about the power of fantasy. Unlike Pavel, however, her need for fantasy puts her in danger when she succumbs to the lures of Crampas, a man who is a better storyteller than Innstetten. Storytelling continues to be a danger years after her sexual dalliances have ended. It behaves like “das Andre” of before in that it is a compellingly personal and powerful force, but it takes on a new name, “das tyrannisierende Gesellschafts-Etwas” (EB 278).<sup>60</sup>

The existence of this “something” is the reason that Innstetten uses to justify his actions to duel with Crampas and therefore also nullify his marriage. Not only is the “something” intimately connected with society, it is also connected with the deeper instinct of self-preservation. One tries to negotiate a path through the tyranny by telling stories that assist in interpreting one’s individual position in relation to this force, but it is

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<sup>60</sup> “that social something that tyrannizes us” (EB Trans. 173).

exactly this telling of stories that constitutes an important aspect in playing along with the “something.” When his discovery is fresh, Innstetten contacts his friend so that he could tell him the story he had reconstructed about Effi and Crampas. He wants to make sense of the intrusion of the outer world into the private sphere of his limited emotional life. He feels he has to defend himself and his accumulated social power against the force about which he had once warned Effi against when she requested his account of “reality” in relation to the ghost. Wüllersdorf completely comprehends his friend’s position and confirms that the “something” is real. He uses the words “die andern,” the same term that Innstetten and Effi had previously used when addressing this uncanny thing: “Die Welt ist einmal, wie sie ist, und die Dinge verlaufen nicht, wie *wir* wollen, sondern wie die *andern* wollen” (EB 280),<sup>61</sup> whoever these unspecified others may be. The “something” has now become personified. The continued conversation reveals that these others are, in fact, the two men themselves. The act of telling this story and listening to it has given them some solace that they are not the only ones who recognize this conundrum. Unfortunately, the cost of their momentary solace is that now they must resort to violence to restore the balance between inner and outer worlds, fantasy and reality. As we know from a subsequent conversation that occurred years after this first one and the interpretation that I offered in my introduction, this balance is nothing but an uncomfortable illusion. Innstetten’s actions and reactions are understandable and even justifiable according to the rules by which he and Effi have tacitly agreed to lead their lives. If one remembers the violence that was subtly present as Effi and Innstetten entered their marital contract, it does not seem surprising that violence also marks the dissolution of that contract.

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<sup>61</sup> “The world is as it is, and things don’t take the course *we* want, they take the course *other people* want” (EB Trans. 174).

Free will plays no role in this watershed moment of Innstetten's life, and by connection, Effi's. The behavior of others, possibly the others who were included in Wüllersdorf's statement, substantiates this. Most or all of the townspeople of Kessin, where the duel takes place, know about the duel. Undoubtedly some would like to stop it, but none feel free to follow their reasonable inclinations because they have their own social positions to protect. The new story of the duel will undoubtedly be added to the story of the Chinaman's ghost as the most interesting local conversational materials. The possibilities for telling stories multiply even as the larger meanings of the stories escape the tellers' grasp. Innstetten tells Wüllersdorf as they ride by his haunted former residence in Kessin, that old story was: "Wundervoll zu erzählen, aber nicht jetzt. Es spukt einem doch allerhand anderes im Kopf" (EB 284).<sup>62</sup> Free will makes him believe that he possesses reason that will help him make sense of the accumulating stories, but the "something"/the other blocks comprehension. He once thought he could use the undefined space between the illusion of free will and the other in the form of Schopenhauer's will as a tool to control his life and those in it, such as Effi. This new story of the duel that had to take place teaches him that his knowledge of the space is just as limited as Effi's.

The following, last interpretation of the chapter shows how Effi's understanding of herself must develop in ways unconnected to what has dominated her life up to this point. The interpretation of her story as that of a fall is prefigured at the beginning of the novel by the comment of her childhood playmate Hulda Niemeyer, who advised her: "Man soll sein Schicksal nicht versuchen; Hochmut kommt vor dem Fall" (EB 9).<sup>63</sup> It is true that she falls from the position that she once occupied, but as the pairing of her

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<sup>62</sup> "Makes a marvelous story, but not now. There are all kinds of other things flitting through my mind" (EB Trans. 177).

<sup>63</sup> "One shouldn't tempt Providence. Pride comes before a fall" (EB Trans. 7).

identity with the ivy vine in the opening of the novel indicates, she never occupied that position fully. Her presence in Innstetten's life was like that of decorative foliage that made him feel his life was complete. I argue that a more suitable image is that of a sudden transplant to an environment in which she is free let her self expand unhindered from the effects of the will, Innstetten's "tyrannisierendes Gesellschafts-Etwas."

Her transplant is not handled by a gloved pair of hands, gently shifting her to another environment, but rather a pair of scissors that appears briefly in the text as Effi learns that her life as it was has been uprooted. Effi unwittingly uses the scissors to begin transplanting herself to a new existence. The scene opens in the garden of a spa where Effi has been sent to remedy her inability to conceive another child. While she is away, her daughter falls and injures herself and during a search for a bandage, the bundle of correspondence between Effi and Crampas comes to light. There is chatty conversation until Effi receives a registered letter. Effi uses a "Stickschere mit Perlmuttergriff" (EB 299)<sup>64</sup> to open the envelope which she sees contains a letter from her mother and a bundle of money. It is as if the red-marked paper wrapped around the currency is like the bandage for which the maids at home were searching to bind her daughter's bloody head when they came across Effi's secret bundle of letters. All her life she has been dependent on the currency of her class and her status as Innstetten's wife, and now this money must replace the loss of her social currency. The scissors make subtle reference to the embroidery task that could not hold Effi's attention in the opening scene. Their decoration refers to Effi's uncomfortable position between Luise and Innstetten. *Mother-of-pearl*, the coating of an oyster's inner shell, and not the oyster's small treasure, a pearl, decorates the scissors' handles. Innstetten once served with the Perleberger Regiment of the Prussian army. In the letter that Effi removes from the envelope by making a long

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<sup>64</sup> "mother-of-pearl-handled embroidery scissors" (EB Trans. 186).



cut, Luise writes that she and Briest are cutting off contact with Effi “weil wir Farbe bekennen” (EB 301).<sup>65</sup> This is another reference back to the first scene in which embroidery threads of many colors are strewn across the table and Effi, like a twisting vine, rises from amongst them, gracefully doing her exercises. In that scene, Luise’s primary goal was to take her daughter’s vine-like energy and intertwine it with her own unfulfilled dreams. She encouraged Effi, whose attention was wandering to other things, to embroider her excess energy into the cloth of society’s expectations. Years later in this second garden, the cut that Effi makes in the envelope frees her energy so that it can pursue an alternate path to the one that she has taken all her life. Effi cuts the thread that her mother embroidered into the cloth that she had created. At the moment Effi makes the cut in the envelope and sees the letter’s content, she feels the blood circulate away from her head. She faints. Her illusions are gone. She has cut herself free from the tangle of multiple meanings. The tendrils of her expansive self hang for a while on her old notions, but they receive no nourishment from the soil where they had once grown.

Effi’s companion at the spa, Frau Zwicker, summarizes what she has witnessed to a friend in another letter, emphasizing the significance of telling a story: “Die Geschichte heute mit dem Briefe – da steckt eine wirkliche Geschichte dahinter” (EB 305).<sup>66</sup> Frau Zwicker carries a meaningful name, the German word for pince-nez. Like the young Theodor Fontane of his *Kinderjahre* autobiography and like Cécile’s friend Leslie-Gordon whom will be introduced in the following chapter, Frau Zwicker loves to search for a good story. She shares with Effi and the rest of their society the publicly social longing to entertain herself and the more hidden longing to clarify her own position in regards to self and society. She will undoubtedly continue telling stories so that she has

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<sup>65</sup> “to show what we stand for” (EB Trans. 187). More literally: “because we are declaring colors.” Luise’s comment resembles one that Christine makes to her brother Arne in *Unwiederbringlich*, the novel interpreted in chapter four. The phrase is “Fahne wechseln” (“changing flags”). See p. 207 in chapter four.

<sup>66</sup> “The business today with the letter – there’s a real story behind that” (EB Trans. 189).

the feeling that her inner world stays engaged with the outer world. Most importantly, storytelling also helps her to maintain the feeling that she is in control of her own life's narrative, a feeling that Effi and Innstetten have learned is an illusion.

I skip over Effi's soliloquy, her last words of the novel, and interpret the atmosphere depicted by the narrator after Effi finishes speaking. Her mother leaves her and she is alone. In this moment, her solitude does not make her anxious or melancholy as it often did in the time since she cut herself loose with her mother-of-pearl-handled embroidery scissors. There are no more stories to tell, because there are no positions to assume, not even in regards to herself. Even nature is still. The leaves of the plants outside are motionless, signaling the opposite of the atmosphere that afternoon when she first met Innstetten as her fiancé and seemed like the small-leaved ivy quivering in a breeze of fear. She wills nothing, but absorbs what she senses: the stars twinkling and the cool night air. She hears a soft noise like minute drops of rain falling on the plane trees, known for their tolerance of polluted air. The atmosphere is cleansed. There is no space between her and the stars as she seems to dissolve into the night, no longer wandering restlessly like the vine her energies once imitated.

This conclusion and that to "Das Gemeindegeld" share the ambiguous tones of melancholy release from the violence that permeated the narratives, but in different ways. Fontane's narrator lets Effi slip away peacefully into the unknown after death, whereas Ebner's narrator all but pushes Pavel and Barbara into their bright future. Only Effi knows how her novel concludes. That information is hidden even to those, even Frau Zwicker, who make considerable effort to search for the answers. Although Ebner's narrator tries to figuratively replant the damaged harvest that Pavel has lost to his neighbors, she cannot convincingly guarantee a rosy future for her hero and his community after the narrative concludes and slips out of her control. The baroness's

failing eyesight is a detail that she seems to have included to underline a wide variety of possible developments for Pavel's future. Throughout his childhood, she played the role of both tormentor and benefactress. Now, when she bequeaths him the plot of land in which he will plant the seeds of his future, she is unable to see his face. This means that she cannot see to recognize the work that the narrator has invested in developing his character. To her eyes, and to those of the probing Frau Zwicker, the narratives' conclusions indicate an indefinite direction of human affairs.

### 3. Gazing into the Panopticon: Focalizing the Observation of Women

Sigmund Freud's famous question "What does a woman want?" was preceded by a career that sought to discover the true nature of what Freud called "the feminine soul."<sup>1</sup> This question is the same one asked by the two primary texts analyzed in this chapter, Fontane's 1887 novel *Cécile* and Ebner's 1891 *Erzählung* "Margarete," much to the same troubling and inconclusive effect. The question presumes that Cécile and Margarete are enigmas rather than full characters possessing selves just as valuable as those of their questioners. Starting from this false premise, it triggers a damaging investigation of their desires instead of enlarging the question to reflect on the identity and the desires of all individuals caught within the patriarchal social system. In the cases of the two title characters in these narratives, the result of the investigations is not enlightening information about how society treats its female members, but suicide.

This chapter examines the spectacles into which the narratives gradually and persistently transform the two title characters. It observes how males make themselves feel powerful by watching women and how women suffer as objects of observation. It does this by paying attention to how the stories that the narratives tell about the two female title figures are constructed. Mieke Bal's explanation of a simple, but powerful tool of focalization from the study of narratology, is used to explore how Cécile and Margarete are presented to the reader. The interpretation borrows the Panopticon concept from Michel Foucault to show how the narrative voices in the texts focalize the characters into a prison-like atmosphere, from which they cannot escape because even

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<sup>1</sup> Freud's quote is cited by Shoshana Felman, who uses it as a title to her book. See Shoshana Felman, *What Does a Woman Want? Reading and Sexual Difference* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993), 153.

their own minds become confines. My interpretation also relies on Laura Mulvey's theory of the gaze to show how the male characters derive pleasure from the visual form of the evidence they gather in their investigations. The examinations that they conduct are threatening and ultimately deadly ordeals for the two women. Though Mulvey's theory applies directly to narrative film and the on-screen space it creates within the darkened theater, I adapt it to the case that I am building which shows how my comparison of works by Fontane and Ebner contributes to the wider understanding of realism. I argue that the words that make up these literary realist depictions help the reader to construct pictures of what is happening in a text and project them onto the screen of meaning. This chapter's interpretation of women as projections of men's desire shapes a piece of my argument that begins to answer the question posed in this dissertation: how does a realist text convey the composition of self?

Writing characters like Cécile and Margarete seems to be a new idea for the time. Fontane wrote in a 1887 letter that he felt he had depicted "einen Charakter [. . .], der soweit meine Novellenkenntnis reicht [. . .] noch nicht gezeichnet ist."<sup>2</sup> Daragh Downes interprets this as meaning that Cécile's character is an original because she, like many of her contemporaries in real life, suffers from what was thought to be an illness of the nerves (Downes 564). Cécile's originality was apparently not convincing enough to spur an easy publication process. Both *Westermanns Monatshefte* and *Die Gartenlaube* refused to publish it. A newly established publication, *Universum*, agreed to publish it in 1886 (Downes 564-565). Likewise, only a new publisher, Emil Dominik of Berlin,

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<sup>2</sup> "a character [. . .], that as far as my familiarity with novellas goes [. . .] still hasn't been drawn." Note that Fontane uses the verb "zeichnen" (to draw). He proposes to draw images onto his reader's minds. See Fontane's letter to Paul Schlenther 2 June 1887 in Theodor Fontane, *Theodor Fontane: Der Dichter über sein Werk*, vol. 2, ed. Richard Brinkmann (Munich: dtv, 1977), 354-355.

expressed willingness to publish the novel in book form.<sup>3</sup> Ebner's character Margarete is a much heartier specimen of literary womanhood than the sickly Cécile, too much so in fact, for the taste of many publishers. Ebner finished writing the story in 1878, but evidently could not find an "appropriate publisher" to take it up.<sup>4</sup> In her biography of Ebner, Klostermaier notes that Ebner submitted a manuscript to Julius Rodenberg<sup>5</sup> and to Karl Emil Franzos. Neither of them liked it, though another, Fritz Mauthner, finally published it in his journal *Magazin für die Literatur des In- und Auslandes* in 1881. Ebner was not able to publish the story in book form until 1891, when Cotta agreed to publish it. The uniqueness of the two female characters is only part of the reason why Ebner and Fontane had difficulties finding publishers. Fontane comments on the sensitivities that his novel touches, and that are quite similar to those elicited by Ebner's story: "moralisch ist sie [die Geschichte], denn sie predigt den Satz: 'sitzt man erst mal

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<sup>3</sup> Cécile's character was not the only distinguishing factor in the novel that made it controversial. The male main character, Robert von Leslie-Gordon, bore some resemblance to members of the Siemens family, a leading industrial family. See Hans Joachim Funke and Christine Hehle, eds. "Anhang," in Theodor Fontane, *Cécile* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2000), 225-229. Christian Grawe finds that Fontane modified his characterizations about *Cécile* not to reflect on the observation that scholars agree is the main topic of the novel. Fontane seemed to be trying to match the tastes of the readership of the time: female readers who wanted most of all to be able to feel compassion with literary heroines. By relying on letters to potential publishers and personal letters, Grawe depicts Fontane as being aware of his innovative literary skill and critical of the narrow, pretentious tastes of the time, but captive to their judgment because pleasing contemporary tastes meant he could support himself and his family. Grawe finds that the statement quoted above reveals little about the kernel of the novel, and repeats the title of his study, "Die Zauber steckt immer im Detail" ("The Magic Always Hides in the Detail"), to note that the reader must search carefully for hidden messages in Fontane's works. See Christian Grawe, "*Cécile*: Fürstenmätresse in bürgerlicher Zeit," in 'Die Zauber steckt immer im Detail: Studien zu Theodor Fontane und seinem Werk 1976-2002' (Dunedin, NZ: Dept. of German, U Otago, 2002), 269-270.

<sup>4</sup> Klostermaier and Steiner briefly mention "Margarete" and Ebner's difficulty publishing it briefly. See Klostermaier *Victory* 264. Steiner 109-111.

<sup>5</sup> Rose mentions that Rodenburg refused to publish "Margarete" because he did not like it and because he was sure that readers sensitive moral taste would not take well to the "'bacchanalia'" featuring such an unusual female figure. Rose cites Anton Bettelheim's 1920 book *Marie von Ebner-Eschenbachs Wirken und Vermächtnis* for this information. See Rose 111-112 (note 59). In the course of my research, I have found no published interpretations of "Margarete" except for scattered comments here and there in larger studies about Ebner and her work in general.

drin, gleichviel ob durch eigne Schuld oder unglückliche Constellation, so kommt man nicht mehr heraus. Es wird nichts vergessen.”<sup>6</sup>

The narratives makes it seem that nothing is average about these two female characters. Comparing the stories, we find that their physical presence elicits admiration and curiosity from male voices in the stories, as if something about their appearance or demeanor is out of place. The question posed in *Cécile* by one of the two main male characters, a civil engineer, Herr von Leslie-Gordon, to an informant “wer ist Cécile?” (C 60),<sup>7</sup> is the initial question on which the novel pivots. It soon expands into the question, what does she want, but it begins with the expression of desire to know more about her. “Welch ein Weib! Nicht wahr?”<sup>8</sup> the exclamation from a doctor upon first encountering Margarete could serve as a reaction to Leslie-Gordon’s question. The characters’ appearances as *etwas Apartes* (something out of the ordinary) as Fontane likes to put it, create a haunting and addictive effect in the sensations and minds of the male figures who encounter them. To the male characters that encounter them, Cécile and Margarete pose a challenge that encourages them to find out if they can capture these creatures’ attention. The geographical origins of these beautiful female figures add to the male characters’ fascination of becoming involved with them because these are places on the boundaries of Prussian or Austrian power that have been brought under control only after costly military and political investment. Margarete and Cécile are even more out of place than they might already be in the imperial centers of social and political power, Vienna and

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<sup>6</sup> “it [the story] is moral, because it preaches the point: ‘once one is sitting in it, whether by one’s own fault or by an unhappy constellation, then one can’t get out anymore. Nothing is forgotten.’” Fontane’s letter to Mathilde von Rohr, Berlin 19 April 1887. See Fontane, *Der Dichter über sein Werk* vol. 2, 354.

<sup>7</sup> “Who is Cécile?” All translations from Fontane’s *Cécile* are taken from Theodor Fontane, *Cécile*, Stanley Radcliffe, trans. (London: Angel Books, 1992). This will be abbreviated as C Trans. All quotes from Fontane’s novel will be taken from the following edition, which is hereafter abbreviated as C. Theodor Fontane, *Cécile*, Theodor Fontane, *Das erzählerische Werk*, vol. 9 (Berlin: Aufbau, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> “What a wench! Don’t you think?” Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, “Margarete” in Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 3. (Berlin: Paetel, n.d.), 289. All quotes from this narrative will be taken from this edition, which is abbreviated as M.

Berlin. The plot situations are complicated by the presence of two male characters in each narrative who maneuver against each other for the female figures' attention. Neither lands with a male partner who she feels addresses her needs, and this contributes to the numerous other factors to create tense personal configurations that in both narratives first turn vulgar and finally tragic. The comparison of the narrated experiences of Margarete and Cécile reveals a connection to the construction of place that played a contributing role in my first chapter.

The foundation on which Mulvey builds her theory of the gaze, psychoanalytical theory, assists me in showing how the two female characters become spaces on which the male characters who investigate them write their identities. The appropriation of these identities is a key aspect of realism, the portrayal of what lies at the core of the perception of reality, how one's own personality colors perceptions. Before getting to what Mulvey calls "to be looked-at-ness" (Mulvey 19) in terms of the two female characters, the first step in the study of these looks is to see what they produce.

### **Narrative Introductions and the Construction of Stories**

The opening scene offers first impressions of the narrative. The first lines of *Cécile* and "Margarete" incorporate symbols, a train and a plate glass window, that accent the usefulness of focalization as a tool for understanding how the two female characters are presented in the texts.

The train into which the two people whom the reader will come to know as Cécile and her "Oberst"<sup>9</sup> are climbing will take them to Thale. The "Spiegelfenster," literally

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<sup>9</sup> In both Prussian and Austrian societies of the time, military service was highly regarded. It was common for military men, whether on active duty or retired, to be addressed by their military title even by civilians. Thus, it is a sign of respect that Pierre St. Arnaud, is addressed by a servant repeatedly as "Herr Oberst. ("Mr. Colonel"). The title comes from the superlative of the adjective "oben" which means up or above and adds the connotation to the military title that this is someone superior. See C 5.



mirror window, through which the young man wearing an impressive collection of military medals on the breast of his ulan major's uniform is looking, offers him a particularly clear view of the small snowflakes falling through the light of a bright winter morning outside of his comfortable study.<sup>10</sup> The train in Fontane's novel is moving away from Berlin, where Cécile feels out of place, to a vacation destination in the Harz mountains, a place full of mythical symbolism and meaning for the German identity. The falling snow seen through the window in the opening scene of "Margarete." Interpretations from "Unsühnbar" in the next chapter show that snow is a symbol that Ebner likes to use. The plate glass in the window, the same exceptionally clear type that is used to make mirrors, thus the German word "Spiegelfenster," will help the ulan deceive himself into thinking that his vision of the world is accurate. The unfortunate circumstances of his initial encounter with Margarete in one of the following scenes challenge this belief. The significance of these details only become apparent upon finishing the text, then re-reading it. They also take on significance when the reader notes how focalization is used within the text.

First, a definition of focalization and what it does is in order. Bal defines focalization as "the relationship between the 'vision,' the agent that sees, and that which is seen" (146). She is careful to differentiate between who or what is doing the seeing and telling, a way of looking at a text that allows a separation of narrative aspects that otherwise become easily entangled with one another. Attending to how the text focalizes its message is a way to analyze the methods used in the investigations at the core of these two texts. Bal proposes that focalization helps the reader understand the message being conveyed by separating it from the voice that utters them and the words that comprise the

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<sup>10</sup> An ulan is a light lance and an ulan soldier is a mounted lance bearer. The word originally referred to a part of the Polish army. "Ulan," *Duden Deutsches Universal Wörterbuch A-Z*, 2nd ed., 1989. It is foreboding that this character is trained to wield a lance.

message. She explains that focalization involves asking “what is being proposed for us [readers] to believe or see before us, hate, love, admire, argue against, shudder before, or stand in awe of” (Bal 224). This tool makes it possible to take the narratives apart so that it becomes apparent how they function. The investigating vision that drives the two texts originates from a structure that is housed within their narrative bodies. An analysis based on focalization does not turn the apparatus used in the investigations around to investigate those conducting the investigation, but rather goes to the heart of why the investigations are being pursued in the first place.

Using focalization as a lens to read the first scene of *Cécile* makes it possible to sort out a potentially confusing matter in this interpretation. Fontane is gifted at producing realistic dialogue in his prose. One of the side effects of his gift, intended or not, is that his narrator slips into the background. This is exactly what happens in this first scene, as illustrated shortly. Another potentially confusing feature of this particular narrative is that the identity of the omniscient narrator who is not inside the world of the text is a mystery. Though the text supplies no explicit evidence of the gender of the narrator, it seems obvious that he is a male because of how engaged he becomes in the investigation that soon commences. He shows himself to be just as attracted to Cécile as the major male characters.

Having established how focalization can be a useful tool to interpret a text and having assigned a probable male identity to Fontane’s narrator, let’s move on to the opening scene itself and see how or if this knowledge or these presumptions change impressions about Cécile’s character. Using focalization as a lens to read this first scene helps the reader to not be taken in by the narrator’s devices when he pronounces later in the scene: “Täuschte nicht alles, so lag eine ‘Geschichte’ zurück” (C 8).<sup>11</sup> The narrator

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<sup>11</sup> “If appearances did not deceive, there was a ‘history’ behind it all” (C Trans. 11).

puts his best foot forward with the first line of the narrative by making it a terse question-answer exchange. An unknown voice, begins the novel with the utterance: “Thale. Zweiter . . .,” an incomplete statement that the next line: “Letzter Wagen, mein Herr,” shows to be a question (C 5).<sup>12</sup> The reader feels that she is in the railway station with the male speaker, forgetting for an instant that she is not alone with the characters and their conversation. The narrator’s disembodied voice enters the scene in the third line, filling in information about the man inquiring for directions (he’s a healthy fifty-something) and also mentioning that he is not alone: “der ältere Herr [. . .] reichte seiner Dame den Arm und ging in langsamem Tempo, wie man eine Rekonvaleszentin führt” (C 5).<sup>13</sup> The reader can establish that the narrator is focalizing this scene. He is choosing where to begin his account and what to report. He twice confirms as proper the actions of the older gentleman. He uses the word “Bescheid” (C 5)<sup>14</sup> to describe the information that came as the answer to the gentleman’s query. The word fits the context perfectly, as it describes a piece of authoritative, official information, but this word choice also colors the scene, making it unusually business-like and dry, a strange way to proceed into what will be the description of a personal relationship between a man and a woman. Together with the forceful confirmation of the correctness of the instructions that the narrator reports is also posted on a sign, it lends the impression not only that the gentleman is proper and careful, but also that the narrator’s rendering of the scene is accurate.

All this information is packed into just a few lines, but there is also a calculated omission. The woman, identified only as “seine Dame” (C 5),<sup>15</sup> is meant to be the center

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<sup>12</sup> “Thale, Second class . . .” and “End carriage, sir” (C Trans. 9).

<sup>13</sup> “The elderly gentleman, [. . .] proffered his lady his arm and walked at a slow pace, like someone leading a convalescent” (C Trans. 9).

<sup>14</sup> Radcliffe translates this as “instruction,” but this does not convey the sense of resoluteness in the German word (C Trans. 9).

<sup>15</sup> “his lady” (C Trans. 9).

of attention, even though the narrator's apparent reluctance to openly identify her as such indicates that does not want to seem impudent about putting her in that position. The little information that he indirectly supplies about her suggests that she is somehow lacking in a way that forces the gentleman accompanying her to make allowances, to curb his sharp and energetic manner. These impressions mirror the first line of the novel, an utterance that ambiguously resembles a statement, but functions like a question. Interpreting the narrator's focalization this way, the reader senses that the walking, breathing question mark into which the narrator is subtly transforming the woman will not take lightly to inquiries like the one made about the train. She would rather not have it made known where she is going and from whence her life journey originated.

The imbalance of information supplied mostly about the man and the interest directed subtly towards the woman continues as the narrator describes her doing something. She deliberately chooses a place for them to sit. The narrator's comment on her apparent hesitancy in completing this action seems to be spoken sarcastically out of the side of his mouth: "so hatte man denn die Wahl, aber freilich auch die Qual" (C 5).<sup>16</sup> He calls attention to how she has difficulty handling even this simple, and rather unimportant task, the first she undertakes in the novel that is not directly supported by her male companion. The narrator could be reframing Freud's famous query as a statement of exasperation about this woman and women in general. He seems mildly irritated with her actions that are of no significant consequence to him or anyone else, wondering to himself what she can possibly be hoping to gain from taking such care in making this little decision. His attitude asks the question: what is it that she really desires?

The focalization of this brief scene highlights the narrator's curious unbalanced treatment of these two figures. It shifts the power away from the narrator, who is probing

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<sup>16</sup> "so that one had the liberty, but also the agony, of choice" (C Trans. 9).

this female character he is pretending to ignore, and deflects it back onto him. The question that he poses about her desire becomes more appropriate when accompanied by the same question about his desire. Why is he so keenly concerned with this couple? Why does he react so strongly as he observes her indecision in choosing a place to sit? His interest echoes the Woman Question, a significant cultural issue of the time that included a debate about the nature and social place of women. His treatment of this seemingly lacking female figure indicates that his opinion is that if a woman like this one were entrusted with more complicated choices, such as the enlarged freedom of self-determination that advocates of women's rights were demanding, her lack could pose a danger to herself and to those around her.

The narrative continues the process of setting the plot in motion. The train has not yet begun moving, but anticipation is building. On the surface of the narrative, the couple and several figures passing through the scene are handling the business that has to be accomplished before the journey commences. The narrator links the woman's selection of seats with the man's actions by labeling both with the phrase "ähnliche Unruhe" (C 5).<sup>17</sup> Hectic energy is not an unusual atmosphere for the commencement of journey, and yet it adds to the sense that the narrator is trying to stoke the coals of the engine so that it can fire off the probing questions that will form the driving energy of the narrative.

Nothing more is added to the meager information about the female character except that she is slender and wearing black. One might miss seeing her if one was just glancing at the scene. The narrator has thus far not endowed her with much personality. The reader knows that there is something missing, but what? Anticipation grows. Meanwhile, the elderly male character's verbal exchanges with the incidental figures

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<sup>17</sup> "similar unease" (C Trans. 9).

whom the narrator mentions in a by-the-way manner only serve to enlarge the man's importance. They all recognize him as a former military officer and address him in the appropriate deferential language. The reader is signaled to expect that little more will be added to this scene when the conductor verifies the couple's tickets as if to confirm that not only the tickets, but also they as people are legitimate. Nothing extraordinary has been depicted and yet the narrator has succeeded in interjecting curiosity into the reader's mind about the dynamics of the couple's relationship. Fueled by this curiosity, the engine of the plot lurches into motion.<sup>18</sup> The train with its passengers sitting in various areas of the interconnected cars glides along rails constructed of steel through the geography of the social and physical world to a destination timelessly famous for its vacation opportunities. It represents the complexities of environment, both man-made and natural, the realities of maneuvering through the challenges of life.

The opening scene ends with the short exchange between the couple, the revelation that her name is Cécile, the title character, and yet one more small detail about the male character. His way of looking is depicted as a "scharfer und beinah stechender Blick" (C 6)<sup>19</sup> that is accentuated by a deformity in his left eye, probably a dueling wound. They express to one another the desire to be able to stay alone in the compartment that she so carefully selected, but the conversation ends there. There is

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<sup>18</sup> Several other conclusions about the engines that drive the plot about Cécile can be drawn with Andrea MhicFhionnbhairr's argument that vanity is the chief source of difficulty for each of the main characters. Each of the characters is imprisoned in his or her own circumstances and does not realize their faults. Another interpretation that MhicFhionnbhairr's analysis builds is that this novel, like Fontane's other works, features many anecdotes. According to MhicFhionnbhairr's conclusions about Fontane's use of anecdotes, those that the narrator and Gordon try to build about Cécile do not necessarily need to be true and they should incorporate an element of surprise as well as something strange. Anecdotes also need to be exchanged within a conversational group, something that MhicFhionnbhairr points out that the St. Arnaud couple can enjoy only while on vacation in the Harz, where they are not known as social outcasts, as they are in Berlin. She also notes that Cécile rarely shows interest in these anecdotes unless she finds something in them that directly relates to her. See Andrea MhicFhionnbhairr, *"Anekdoten aus allen fünf Weltteilen": The Anecdote in Fontane's Fiction and Autobiography* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1985), 53-54.

<sup>19</sup> "sharp, almost piercing gaze" (C Trans. 9).

nothing noteworthy about them preferring not to share the small space with strangers, but in the context of the building anticipation, something seems unusual about this ordinary wish. The narrator is leading the reader in a definite direction that he tries to excuse because of his unusual interest for this female character. In the space of an empty line that follows the conclusion of this introductory episode, there is nothing for the reader to do but to conjecture about the reason or to lose interest in the game of cat and mouse that the narrator is playing. The clues the narrator lays out by lead the reader to expect that the reasons have something to do with her illness and his excessive masculinity.

After this short pause, the narrative continues, easing somewhat with its incitement of curiosity. The narrator has already shown that he can retreat when he wants to and make his presence subtle, but after the pause, he does not want to allow the anticipation that he's worked so hard to stir up to be for naught. He takes a step to the fore to remind the reader of his presence when he labels the travelers as "ours," to make sure she and any other of his other readers, the group of invisible eyes watching Cécile, understand that this couple is a noteworthy focus of our attention even as we might be tempted to turn it elsewhere. The focus on the Berlin landscape unfolding outside the window helps to provide a momentary distraction, forming the everyday prosaic wallpaper that accentuates the glimpse into the intimate sphere of the relationship compartmentalized, literally in this situation by Cécile's choice of seats, but more figuratively by the narrator's curiosity. That is at least what the juxtaposition between what is being described as happening inside the compartment and outside the train window might convince the reader. Chances for quick glimpses into candid moments in others' lives are offered to the couple and to readers as the train passes by open bedroom windows. Yet none of what is glimpsed outside holds as much interest as the two figures inside the compartment. Letting the focus widen to the outside world is only a

momentary lull in the narrative tempo; the tone soon switches. The prosaic surroundings become noteworthy as the column erected to celebrate the Prussian victories of the series of wars in the 1860s and early '70s rises up like a ghost and the elephant cages of the zoological gardens appear. None of this captures Cécile's fancy, though she has clearly captured that of the narrator, and when the train makes a brief stop in Potsdam, the interest of a retired general who greets her enthusiastically, then avoids coming closer. The general's strange behavior confirms the validity of the narrator's interest, even as the focalizing of the scene made his scrutiny look excessive.

The reader accesses only the material the narrator chooses to present, and thus the "story" that he wants to read into the signs and convey to the reader is the dominant one. Likewise, male character in relationship that is the center of attention is the dominant figure, no matter how much I, as a twenty-first century, feminist reader would like to imagine Cécile has more power than she does in her particular situation and at this historical point in time. It seems plausible that the torment that the narrator reads into her selection of a compartment is actually her tension at having to be in this compartment with this man heading towards this destination. She might feel that any compartment is just the same as another because there is nowhere she can escape her companion's scrutiny, nor that of whomever else might be observing her, like the retired general or the invisible narrator. She is captive to her situation. Like those other once proud powers that the Prussians congratulate themselves so heartily for having militarily defeated, she might feel that her essential essence has been devalued.<sup>20</sup> She might also feel a kinship

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<sup>20</sup> The Prussians fought and won the war for Denmark in 1864 and this forms the background for the political situation in 1859 in Schleswig-Holstein in Fontane's novel *Unwiederbringlich* analyzed in chapter four. For a concise overview of this conflict, see Sven-Aage Jørgensen, "Nachwort" in *Unwiederbringlich* by Theodor Fontane (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1971), 289-311 but especially 295-297. The Prussians defeated the Austrians at the battle of Königgrätz in 1866. They defeated the French at Sedan in 1870 and took Paris in 1871. These victories are all commemorated by the *Siegestsäule* (the Victory Column) in Berlin. See Christian Grawe, "Anmerkungen," in *Cécile* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1982), 192-193, note 4.



with the elephants, those intelligent kept creatures that stand around in their pens at the zoo that they saw from the train window. Like the elephants, she has had to leave the environment where she once felt comfortable. The focalization of the text does not give her much room to express her version of what is happening, or she is not bold enough to command that room. Regardless of her feelings, she cannot or does not change her situation at the moment. Her companion, the Colonel, observes her gives her lack of positive response to the things and people in her environment and gives a suggestion that might be a veiled order that she should be at ease.

These opening scenes bring up associations with Foucault's Panopticon. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault introduces a chapter on Panopticism with descriptions of how communities used systems of surveillance to regulate disease and death (Foucault 195-200). The first descriptions of Cécile indicate that she resembles a convalescent. Though it is not explicitly presented in this way, the proximity of the statement that a restless atmosphere characterizes the scene makes it seem that her condition is part of the cause for the commotion. In any case, her companion conducts himself in relation to her with a mix of irritation and concern. If one considers the actions of the Colonel and those of a prison guard side by side, one sees that a comparison can be drawn and similarities emerge. In both situations, in this train compartment and in a jail, there is a large difference of power between the person who is on watch and the person being monitored. Also, the guard functions as someone who enforces a punishment and oversees reform. The Colonel is someone who is well-versed in the benefits of rigorous discipline, having made a largely successful career as a Prussian army officer. It seems that these similarities warrant further comparison.

Briefly explained, the Panopticon, a word meaning "all-seeing," is an architectural figure conceived in the 1780s and credited to the British Utilitarian

philosopher and legal reform theorist, Jeremy Bentham. Its design allows observers to monitor a captive subject, be it a prisoner, a medical patient, or a child, without the possibility of the one being observed being able to observe the observers. The observed is isolated, no longer part of a group. The design is meant to change the observed subject permanently, to make that person aware that she or he can always be subjected to a higher social power. The awareness of the possibility of being observed at any moment encourages self-correction of behaviors or attitudes that the power deems inappropriate. Foucault argues that the power of the watcher becomes independent of this kind of surveillance, that eventually the observed make themselves bearers of the power that they once challenged, and that finally these power relations ingrain themselves in everyday existence (Foucault 200-209).

From the narrator's focalization of the features of her person, it can be concluded that Cécile has become accustomed to being the subject of careful surveillance and that she is well aware of the dynamics of power tilted against her that govern her life. The Colonel offers her only amenities rather than the respect and affection that sustain a marriage, though at this early point in the narrative, she remains "seine Dame" ("his woman," C 5), and thus the status of their relationship is left deliberately unclear. To a certain degree, she follows her companion's advice, making herself appear comfortable with the pillow and the blankets he has offered her, and pretends to sleep. She is not like the inhabitant of a Panopticon because if she looks, she can see one of her keepers. However, the unseen narrator is her keeper in an insidious way because his observations convey her character to the reader, whom he invites to join him in observing her. Observation becomes increasingly pervasive, and damaging. Cécile takes her companion's suggestions to make herself comfortable by cutting off interaction with him. She makes a gesture that draws a boundary between her and her observers, whose

potential presence her social conditioning has made her aware; she pulls the blanket up a little higher and closes her eyes. Her action might be an insolent protest at her condition or it may be simply self-protection, but it effectively blocks visual access to parts of her body as well as her eyes, one of her most expressive physical features.

Before the train journey ends, the reader is faced with a decision: to let herself be convinced by the narrator, the voice in the text that has already become the most influential aspect of focalization, or whether to remain skeptical. If the reader finds the story compelling, her participation as an active recipient of his narration adds another layer of observation focused on Cécile and her situation. She might recommend the novel to other readers, who will add other pairs of eyes to the group standing outside the house of fiction and looking in.<sup>21</sup> Whatever stance she decides to assume, simply continuing to read employs the reader's eyes in the "investigation" of Cécile. Combining focalization with Foucault's interpretation of the Panopticon to this opening scene shows how Cécile's character is constructed not out of her intrinsic features, but rather by how she is perceived and treated by others.

Ebner's title character does not appear in the opening scenes of the story about her. As the young ulan major sits at his desk in the comfortable study, she is nowhere present in his realm of awareness. He is inside a protected world that is even more special than it first appears because this day is his wedding day. He will soon marry the girl of his dreams, a "holde Geschöpf" (M 281)<sup>22</sup> whose picture is displayed in a miniature frame above his desk. Margarete is outside of this sphere, part of the world bathed in the glittering sunlight and crisp cold snow of the winter day that he can observe in sharp relief on the other side of his *Spiegelfenster*. As it does in the opening scene of

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<sup>21</sup> See my p. 70 reference to Henry James's foreword to his novel *The Portrait of a Lady* in chapter 1.

<sup>22</sup> "lovely creature"

“Unsöhnbar,” the snow symbolizes possibilities that are both full of promising beauty as well as dangerous threats.

Ebner employs a third-person narrative voice that does not play a role in the action and yet whose knowledge of the inner-workings of the characters is insightful but not absolute. This voice is more impartial than Fontane’s. It does not seem as manipulative, or as quick to jump to conclusions as his, though it definitely has a point of view. Her narrator tells the story in a similar fashion to Fontane’s, moving aside to relate conversation and comments made by other characters, but this does not happen nearly as frequently or convincingly as it does in Fontane’s text. As with Fontane’s narrator, the gender of Ebner’s narrator remains unspecified, but for reasons that match my assignment of a male voice to his narrative, it makes sense to presume that her narrative voice is female. Though the development of Margarete’s character is driven by her male characters’ observations and opinions of her, the surveillance to which Ebner’s narrator subjects Margarete is not all pervasive, as is the case in Fontane’s novel. The reason for this is a subtle empathy that Ebner’s narrator has for Margarete resembles the sympathy that another female character, the ulan’s fiancée, shows her. The perceived genders of the narrators impact the possibilities for interpreting focalization, highlighting how even the narrator’s compassion cannot alleviate the damage inflicted by the critical surveillance of an oppressive patriarchal society.

Though Fontane’s narrator paints a restrictive picture of Cécile, Ebner’s narrator focalizes the story so that it depicts how Margarete’s situation and environment restrict her. She does the same thing in depicting another female character in the story, thus showing how systems of social control limit even those females who behave as if they feel at home within it. Priska von Walsegg, the young woman smiling sweetly from within the confines of the small frame above the ulan’s desk, is this kind of a figure. She

feels secure because she knows that her fiancé, the ulan officer at the desk, Count Robert Vohburg, considers her his “herrliche[r] Besitz” (M 281).<sup>23</sup> The narrator calls him a “Liebling des Glücks” (M 281) because of his successes in life that are crowned by winning such a virtuous woman to be his bride. The encounter with Margarete intervenes in his wedding day as if it were proof that life is not as simple as he had first experienced it. If he were to spend time gazing out of his *Spiegelfenster* onto the idyllic, snowy morning, he would be blinded by the sunlight that is like his pride, too bright to allow him to take in the complexity of scene. The two glimpses on his dreams, the ones of the two women as represented by the portrait and what might be seen outside through the plate glass window, conflict with one another even as they share in their experience of being women. As he hurries to the cathedral to wed the bride who is waiting there for him, he is hit with a complication, or rather he is the one who hits the complication.

Ebner’s decision to make Margarete’s name the title of her narrative, but start it with an exchange between two male characters shows that Margarete is not really the center of the narrative. She is an object of men’s struggles, both with their peers and themselves. Priska’s introduction in the form of a wall decoration indicates that even as a woman of the most powerful class who will be the wife of an accomplished and conscientious man, her position is not completely different from Margarete’s. Although it is clearly the most fascinating aspect of the narrative, Margarete’s character is placed on the margins. Vohburg may consider Priska the most precious part of his life, but as it later turns out, she plays a role of emotional decoration for him. She is the embodiment of not only Vohburg’s desire, but also that of his friend, Count Steinau. The relationship between the two men has a sexually competitive dynamic that is given new expression on

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<sup>23</sup> “a favorite of luck,” “marvelous possession” The adjective “herrlich” is formed from the masculine root noun “Herr” or gentleman.

their way to Vohburg's wedding. On the way, their coach accidentally strikes a child, Margarete's "verkörperes Glück" (M 307),<sup>24</sup> her only family in the world. This tragic event leads the two aristocratic men to her. From that point until the end of the narrative, the three characters assume their positions in a love triangle.

The exploring gazes like the ones that follow Cécile are not present in the first chapter of "Margarete." The narrator focalizes the narrative as if she were an unseen presence at all of the events that take place in the story. Two kinds of looks play roles here: the two characters' nearly holy regard for the portrait of the bride-to-be, and the crowd that gathers to peer onto the scene of the accident. These looks build the reader's anticipation for the moment at which the two women, particularly Margarete, will make their separate appearances. The looks of the crowd foreshadow the tone Margarete's interactions with the two men will take. Whereas Vohburg and Steinau are struck with Priska's virtue and beauty, circumstance intervenes to make Margarete's emotion and sensuality striking. The spectators that surround the scene of the accident incite Steinau's anger, an emotion that feeds his psychological commitment to sexually conquer Margarete. The narrator calls the crowd a "Volkshaufen" (M 285), an undifferentiated mass of common people. Soon, when the men encounter Margarete, they meet another unruly body, one that will strike them as uncontrollable feminine mystique.

Steinau proceeds to the church as Vohburg takes the injured and unconscious boy to his home that lies in the opposite direction, away from his good fortune. Vohburg is now on the other side of the *Spiegelfenster*, beyond the area of his comfort in which he feels he can arrange things, like the portrait of Priska, so that they are "geräumig" and "traulich" (M 281) to his view of the world.<sup>25</sup> The narrator tells of this first encounter

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<sup>24</sup> "embodied happiness."

<sup>25</sup> "roomy and familiar."

with Margarete and focalizes it through Vohburg, who collects impressions that escalate his already heightened level of stress. The scene starts dramatically, with a “laut kreischend” (M 285)<sup>26</sup> woman, the caretaker of the house, announcing his entrance. Humbled by Vohburg’s distinguished appearance, she leads him to where the boy lives with his mother. As she leads him carrying the boy up the many flights of stairs, she tells him of the besmirched reputation of the boy’s mother. For example, the child is illegitimate and the mother could earn quite a lot, but does not because she is lazy. When the caretaker calls her one of “diese Leut’” (M 286),<sup>27</sup> the reader remembers the threatening crowd that gathered around the scene of the accident. As Steinau proved, such people only have to be handled with authority before they will behave obediently.

The caretaker’s characterization of Margarete may or may not be accurate, but her delight in judging another weakens it by showing her own display of poor character. She is notably obsequious in her attention to Vohburg as a social superior, but shows no concern whatsoever about the child. The narrator notes the poor clothes that the boy is wearing and the obviously poor condition of their lodging, and the reader doubts the caretaker is telling the truth that Margarete can get rich by practicing her profession, which she identifies as embroidery, and still raise her child alone.

The ambiguous impressions of what to expect about Margarete continue. She answers the caretaker’s ring in a way that creates a positive impression, with a “tiefe, wohllautende Frauenstimme” (M 286),<sup>28</sup> but hesitates in opening the door because she is only half-dressed, something that is rather strange because of what one can assume about the hour. The schedule for a wedding and the streets full of people indicate that it is not early in the day. As Margarete opens the door, the mixed impressions continue. The

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<sup>26</sup> shrieking loudly.”

<sup>27</sup> “these people.”

<sup>28</sup> “a deep, pleasant woman’s voice.”

description that the narrator gives of her physical presence is appreciative; she is a striking example of a “junges, blühendes Weib” (M 286),<sup>29</sup> standing there half-clothed with her hair partially braided. She is suspicious of the stranger and then she sees her injured child. Her maternal instincts take over and she becomes a “Tigerin” (M 287),<sup>30</sup> fiercely devoted to protecting and nurturing her offspring. She attacks Vohberg, threatening him with her wrath, even as she treats her son with “unaussprechlicher Zärtlichkeit” (M 287).<sup>31</sup> The confusion and drama of the moment are the aspects that Vohburg’s focalizations emphasize. His fascination with this feminine energy is reflected in the appreciative exclamation/question of disbelief and awe from the doctor who has been summoned. The doctor’s remark (“Welch ein Weib! Nicht wahr?”) is the quote that I linked to Freud’s question about a woman’s desires. It reflects the male sexual interest that appreciates this woman’s physical beauty, but is repulsed by her emotional and mental turmoil.

Has the narrator, who appeared at first to be impartial, retained this perspective?<sup>32</sup> Already in the scene where she is introduced, Margarete becomes the object of observation. It would seem that this is simply because of unlucky circumstances and because her presence affected by this stress creates such a sight that the men who see her cannot believe their eyes. But this impression is derived from Vohburg’s focalization of this scene, and his perspective as an aristocratic male. She is depicted as reacting with pure emotion, and while this is believable, it differs from the how the scene might look if it were told from an angle more closely aligned by class, gender, or experience with

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<sup>29</sup> “a young, radiant wench.”

<sup>30</sup> “tigress.”

<sup>31</sup> “inexpressible tenderness.”

<sup>32</sup> In a 1994 dissertation, Nancy Rucks Kuechelmann concluded that Ebner’s dominant choices of narrative types are both omniscient, but differ in whether they are biased or unbiased. See Nancy Rucks Kuechelmann, “Narrative Perspective and Thematic Issue in Selected Short Prose Works of Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach” diss., State U New Jersey, 1994, 24.



Margarete's perspective. Even though the narrator attempts to depict the story in a way that shows sympathy for Margarete by standing on the sidelines, her inability to put herself in Margarete's shoes also indicates that there are problems with her impartiality.

The cracks in the narrator's impartiality lead to impressions that are skewed against Margarete. In addition to the high emotions that lead Vohburg to take momentary control of the narrative, Margarete appears to suffer from a clinical depression that makes it difficult for an impartial observer to relate her story fairly. "Voll Haß und Hohn," she commands Vohburg: "Fort mit Ihnen, zu Ihresgleiches, die Sie bewundern. Das Elend bewundert euch nicht – das verachtet euch und euren Firlefanz [. . .] Fort!" (M 287).<sup>33</sup> The several different focalizations of Margarete's introductory scene create confusion about her character.

The narrator's depiction encourages a generally critical impression of all of the characters. The heartlessness of the building's caretaker and the lack of professionalism from the doctor have already been mentioned. The narrator describes Steinau as a man with an attitude resembling "eine gewisse resignierte Geringschätzung," who seems to be always on the verge of speaking his real thoughts: "Es tut mir leid, ihr Menschen, daß ich euch verachten muß!" (M 282).<sup>34</sup> Though he is cynical, Steinau has judged his friend Vohburg in a light that reveals insight. The reader senses that he sees the situation in a more rational light than Vohburg, whom he calls a "Romanheld" (M 285)<sup>35</sup> behind his back because his emotions have become engaged by his hyperactive sense of duty and the belief that his actions will further his purpose. Steinau's comment that Vohburg's "Eingebung des Augenblicks," his "Gefühlsluxus" will come back to haunt him as "den

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<sup>33</sup> "full of hate and scorn. 'Away with you, to your own kind, those that admire you. Misery doesn't admire you. It despises you and your trumpery [. . .] Away!'"

<sup>34</sup> "a certain resigned contempt" and "I am sorry, you people, that I have to despise you."

<sup>35</sup> "hero of a novel."

kostspieligsten den es gibt!" (M 285)<sup>36</sup> reads like a warning. In the midst of these unproductively critical voices is the story of characters who cannot keep their distance from one another as they become involved in a dramatic incident and its life or death consequences.

Margarete's son is her dearest blessing and deepest vulnerability. She follows his wishes, even when they seem contrary to her well-being because she feels that a good mother sacrifices herself for her child. His affection for Vohburg, the man who he believes rescued him, creates confusion for her that she struggles for the rest of her life to overcome. When Vohburg becomes the father figure for her son, her emotions swing wildly from her initial hate to a blinding obsession.

Margarete's position is a thorn in the side of the system and must be readjusted. This is Vohburg's view as well as that of all the other characters as focalized through the voice of the unseen narrator. Her position is a regrettable one, but as far as the laws of her social system are concerned, she is a living sign that the system is broken, and as such she cannot be permitted to continue cultivating this kind of identity. Even though the accident is the force that shatters the glass shell of a life that she has tenuously constructed around herself and her child, the laws of society have found her and not Vohburg, Steinau, or the driver of their carriage, responsible for her son's misfortune. She had no involvement in the accident itself, but she can be blamed for the disorder that has become her life. Her son eventually dies of his injuries. She does not accept her place in the world and seems to be actively trying to tempt Vohburg out of his place as an upstanding member of society. Of course, his temptation is not as serious as her behavior that tempts him. As a woman of low class, Margarete's flaws make her

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<sup>36</sup> "inspiration of a moment," "luxury of feeling," and "the most costly that there is!"

dangerous because they make her an ineffective candidate to offer what a man desires in a woman, a mirror image of all that makes him feel good about himself.

The identity that Margarete carries with her from her place of birth and class also mark her as a potential that. She resembles the flower that shares her name, the daisy, an unassuming yet sturdy and beautiful flower, an import from a place that is abroad and yet an integral part of the culture's heritage, so simple and yet so beautiful that every man would like to pick her.<sup>37</sup> She does not have the same outlook in life as most working-class girls because she was born into a higher class, the daughter of a leading industrialist. Due to her parents' financial hardship and untimely deaths, she had to fend for herself. She came to Vienna alone from the exotic Italian south, from Trieste, an Istrian port city on the Adriatic that had long been held by the Habsburg crown, but enjoyed relative autonomy. Ethnically, she seems to be an Italian, a group that, according to historian Alan Sked, was treated preferentially in terms of political representation, but that was not dependable in supporting the crown.<sup>38</sup> The overwhelming majority of Trieste's inhabitants were Italian, a factor that played a role in the Habsburg fear that nationalist political sentiment might challenge Austrian hegemony.<sup>39</sup> Reminiscent of the way Austria dealt with the Italians in a show of (losing) force in 1859 and 1866, Margarete needs to be taught a lesson about power.

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<sup>37</sup> The ox-eye daisy is called *das Margarite* in German. This website supplies information about St. Margaret, a Biblical figure who is the patron saint of mothers, called on especially to relieve a woman's labor pains. St. Margaret often wears a crown of pearls, and more rarely of daisies, a flower that was originally imported from the Near East during the Crusades. See "Mapping Margery Kemp: Iconography of St. Margaret," 24 March 2005  
<<http://www.holycross.edu/departments/visarts/projects/kempe/devotion/stmarg.htm>> See also Steiner 109.

<sup>38</sup> Alan Sked discusses political balance in various parts of the Dual Monarchy, including Cisleithania after 1867. For information particularly about Trieste, see Alan Sked, *The Decline and Fall of the Habsburg Empire 1815-1918*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Harlowe, U.K.: Longman, 2001), 230.

<sup>39</sup> Robert A. Kann discusses Cisleithania in terms of problems amongst the nationalities. See Robert A. Kann, *A History of the Habsburg Empire 1526-1918* (Berkeley, CA: UC Press, 1974), 351.

The idea that Bentham had for his Panopticon system, as described and discussed by Foucault is what society seems to apply to Margarete. She is not a criminal, but she is a dangerous, non-productive detriment to society as long as she goes on living the kind of life she does. Many of Ebner's contemporaries would take the view that those who look like they are likely to step outside the law should be preemptively reformed and later punished if they do not take to this reform. The lives of all who live in a society are easier when everyone complies to the smooth functioning of the social system. The rules of her society dictate that she must be monitored and disciplined so that she will give up her disruptive behavior.

Priska, the woman the reader first met as a wall ornament and whom Vohberg marries on the same day he destroys Margarete's life, subscribes to the same kind of view of Margarete as the rest of the characters. She pities her and wants to help, but she also recognizes a threat to her own identity. Priska is the model of proper femininity that helps to define Margarete as improper.<sup>40</sup> She makes Margarete her reform project, her "Rettungswerk" (M 318),<sup>41</sup> offering her opportunities so that she can improve her life. Reforming Margarete contributes to her sense of personal and ethical success that is a key component to her identity and also gives her something to do. It is also a socially

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<sup>40</sup> Pykett coined the terms "proper" and "improper feminine" to further break down gender definitions within the contradictory discourse that surrounds the topic of femininity in the Victoria age. The qualities that make a woman proper or improper mark feminine qualities as different from masculine ones. Female qualities that too closely resemble male qualities are labeled as "improper," whereas qualities that mark the feminine as passive or dependent are labeled as "proper." See Lyn Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (London: Routledge, 1992), 11-18.

<sup>41</sup> "rescue work." In her May 13, 1881 journal entry, Ebner wrote: "Die Begegnung zwischen Priska und Margarethe, die sollte der Glanzpunkt der ganzen Geschichte werden. Die Barmherzigkeit mu **endlich** siegen" ("The encounter between Priska and Margarethe, this should become the highlight of the whole story. Compassion should finally win.") Mercy does not prevail, despite Ebner's and Priska's best efforts. Indeed, Priska's gestures appear paternalistic. See Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, *Tagebücher II 1879-1889*, in Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, *Kritische Texte und Deutungen*, vol. 3 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993), 119.

acceptable way for her to combat the sexual attraction that she knows is distracting her husband from their marriage.

Margarete is not devoid of properly feminine attributes, but even these are tinged with hint of the improper. For example, embroidery is not just her vocation, but also her extraordinary gift. One can translate this into sexual terms. Most nineteenth-century women learned to sew, keeping their fingers busy and their minds from wandering to areas in which their participation was unwelcome. Sex, whether with a partner or with one's self in the form of masturbation, distracts from boredom, but women of this period were supposed to be asexual beings, or at least be effective at pretending they were. Margarete is more gifted at producing something with her busy fingers than most women, but she refuses to engage in what she considers to be busywork. This could be interpreted as meaning that she would offer a partner more sexual satisfaction than other women do, but she is reserving access to her special talent until her criteria have been met. She is only interested in fulfilling her heart's desire, taking care of her son. When this pursuit is taken away from her, she becomes a sign of sexual danger to married women, specifically to Priska.

Margarete is a spectacle, but one that too closely represents real life for the comfort many of Ebner's contemporary readers. She is someone whom fate dealt a hard blow, and whose weakness threatens those who are lucky enough to stay above her financially and socially. She resembles an overblown opera character, and in fact, may have been inspired by the character of Gretchen in the popular opera by, Charles Gounod *Faust et Marguerite* (1859 premier in Paris),<sup>42</sup> known in many countries by the title of *Margarete*. The flamboyancy of Margarete's emotional state might be something that

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<sup>42</sup> For general information on Gounod, see François Davin, *Charles Gounod, His Life, His Works: Faust*, 13 May 2005 <<http://www.charles-gounod.com/vi/oeuvres/operas/faust.htm>>.

would be more acceptable in the Italian culture of her origin, but it attracted uncomfortable attention in Vienna.<sup>43</sup> She reminded people, including the doctor who exclaims his awe for her, of what makes them uncomfortable, whether it is a revolutionary past, or a private matter that slipped into public knowledge.<sup>44</sup>

One of the ways to deal with discomfort is to try to control the what instigates the feeling. Foucault begins *Discipline and Punish*, the book that contains the study of the Panopticon, with the depiction of a gruesome execution. This is the display of power that he shows the industrialized societies of Europe trying to forego as they experiment with ways to make the system of social control work more efficiently. He sees Jeremy Bentham's eighteenth-century Panopticon concept being modified and furthered throughout the nineteenth century. He writes:

Our society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance; under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth; *behind the great abstraction of exchange*, there continues the meticulous, concrete training of *useful forces*; the circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and a centralization of knowledge; the play of signs defines the anchorages of power; it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is *amputated, repressed, altered* by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully *fabricated* in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies (Italics are mine. Foucault 217).

Foucault describes a larger social process, and while he maintains that the individual's totality remains intact, their extremities, whether psychological or physical, might not.

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<sup>43</sup> Steiner adds a simple and valuable insight to interpretive possibilities when he suggests that Margarete's behavior can be attributed to mental imbalance. He points out that this was a factor in "Unsühnbar" for Maria and her mother and for the major female characters in "Das Schädliche." He also notes that Ebner herself suffered from "lower levels of psychic dysfunction." I have not seen anyone else mention this about Ebner. See Carl Steiner, *Of Reason and Love: The Life and Works of Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach (1830-1916)* (Riverside, CA: Ariadne, 1994), 170-171.

<sup>44</sup> One such matter might be suicide/murder of the Crown Prince Archduke Rudolf and his lover Baroness Maria Vetsera at the hunting lodge Mayerling in 1889. William M. Johnston devotes a whole chapter of his social history of Austria to death and a part of that chapter to suicide. For this and for information about Crown Prince Rudolf, see William M. Johnston, *The Austrian Mind: An Intellectual and Social History 1848-1938* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1972), 34-36, 174-180.

The fabricated replacement does not feel the same as the part of themselves they lost as part of the transition to a new kind of system.

Margarete loses her “Glück, ihr Leben, ihr Ein und Alles” (M 287)<sup>45</sup> when her son dies as the result of the accident. She is left with a longing for what is gone, something like the feeling an amputee sometimes still has for a limb that has been removed in order to insure the health of the whole body.<sup>46</sup> Her loss is not to be replaced with something useful, even as Count and Countess Vohburg hope it will if she puts her gifted fingers to work producing something that can be exchanged. Her fingers could be used in another kind of exchange. What the Vohburgs have in mind, of course, is that she should exchange her ability to do her embroidery for monetary income and self-esteem. Vohburg tells her: “Sie müssen Ihrem Leben ein Ziel stellen, [. . .] Sie dürfen nicht planlos hinträumen von einem Tag zum andern” (M 316).<sup>47</sup> His advice to her is also something that he is trying to tell himself. With her intense grief and anger, she proves to be an unwilling subject for his reforms and he dreams of how to control her. He tries to slip into the role of a parole officer, but finds himself without a successful plan, falling into the danger that Steinau warned him about with his disparaging remarks after the accident. Instead of maintaining his image of himself as the hero of a novel, he becomes the hero of a romance, controlling the woman whose gifted fingers have more than an economic value.

The two symbols that the authors place at the outset of each of these stories, the train and the *Spiegelfenster*, take the primary relationships between men and women to places that begin to address their desire. Through the focalizations of the narrators, the

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<sup>45</sup> “happiness, her life, her one and all.”

<sup>46</sup> This image echoes Austrian fears of losing parts of the territorial body of their empire. Alan Sked notes that starting in the 1890s, but even with hints much earlier, there was widespread feeling that the Habsburgs would soon lose their Empire, either to an annexation from Prussia or to nationalist forces in the non-German areas. See Sked 223-239.

<sup>47</sup> “You must set a goal for your life [. . .] you may not aimlessly dream one day into the next.”

reader gets her introductory views, of Cécile and her relationship with the Colonel as they sit in a train compartment, and of Margarete's world that is on the other side of the plate glass window, a place through which Vohburg and Steinau usually only travel through in a carriage. Cécile and Margarete are introduced in ways that are colored by the narrator's intent. They become what the narrator wants them to be, the center of a good story.

### **Two Male Observers**

This section addresses the costs of producing a good story. Two male characters are added to the narrative cases of investigating how to control Cécile and Margarete. They arrange exchanges by which they can profit from the neutralization of these two female characters who make them sexually restless. The personal interactions involve each figure playing pretending games. The men are pretending to want to help the women by giving them what they think they want, while they are really fulfilling their own desire to experience sexual adventure. Later, my analysis of "Margarete" turns to the surveillance that Steinau conducts on Margarete, but first I will shift to doing a close reading a scene from Fontane's novel in which Cécile finds herself observed by another man. Adding another male observer to the interpersonal equations and following how focalization integrates these third characters illustrates how the Panopticon system functions to keep Margarete and Cécile captive in roles that they would rather shed.

At the place where I last left off with my interpretation of Cécile's story, she was pulling up a blanket to protect herself from prying eyes. As the train takes Cécile and the Colonel further away from Berlin, the scenery outside of the window becomes more picturesque. After Cécile opens her eyes again, the conversation turns to the topic of happiness and how she would like reality to resemble a fairy tale. The Colonel denies that this is possible, but nonetheless claims that he will soon make her feel special and



that the charming landscape and magical atmosphere of the Harz will cooperate to help him fulfill his plans. He has an obvious interest that she recapture her sense of happiness and with it her health, or else it would reflect negatively on him and on the life that he has provided for her. Even at the early stage of the narrative, appearance rather than happiness is clearly his major concern. The train has served as a metaphor for the vehicle that drives the text's interest and brings it to its destination, a place in which more information about Cécile can be uncovered. The fairy tale atmosphere that is evoked and simultaneously denied is a metaphor that indicates that what can be learned about Cécile may not be as tantalizing as her appearance and manner might suggest.

The novel's following chapter that describes scenes from the first day of the couple's vacation begins with the short description of a factory, which in terms of the tourist industry seems poorly located because it borders the resort. The products of the factory and of the investigation that the narrator has set in motion from the very first scene of the story will be juxtaposed with one another in this chapter and lays the foundation for a conflict of the novel: the costs of production of the meaning of self .

The factory that seems out of place in such a famously picturesque vacation area is not at all incongruous in another way, in its place in the text. The tourists arrive by train at the resort. "Hotel Zehnpfund," (literally "ten pounds") the setting that instigates the social interaction that is at the core of the novel, is located within easy strolling distance of the train station. The connection between leisure and travel convenience in late-nineteenth-century Germany that makes the story possible is due to factories such as this one that produces iron and enamel, a combination of products that is significant to the processes of surveillance to which Cécile is being subjected. In her dissertation comparing moral ambivalence in various works by Edith Wharton (1862-1937), Anthony Trollope (1819-1882) and Fontane, Melina Ali mentions how the Utilitarian movement,

with Jeremy Bentham, the inventor of the Panopticon concept as a leading figure, sought to reposition happiness as the greatest good. The movement defined happiness in terms of material success, going against the traditional connection of happiness with Christian morality (Ali 17). The narrator in *Cécile* seems to have succumbed to the Utilitarian arguments. He claims that the factory with its smoke-belching chimneys that create a constant background din of “fernes Stampfen und Klappern” does not detract very much from the seductiveness (he uses the word “Reize”) of the picture of the landscape (C 10).<sup>48</sup> Indeed, if one assumes that the vacationers know that their lifestyle is only made possible through the ugly inconvenience of such factories, it is not surprising that they don’t mind the fact that industry sullies the beauty of nature. The tradeoff is clear. Individuals are not consulted, but as we see in Cécile’s case, they are directly affected.

Cécile is similar to Margarete in that she does not fit easily into this picture of prefabricated, uniform happiness. Her beauty, like that of the region in which she is vacationing, makes her stand out. Tourists like to appreciate the lovely landscape through binoculars. One guest at the resort, Robert von Leslie-Gordon, likes to appreciate the landscape of Cécile’s beauty. In the logic of the political and economic systems, it makes sense to utilize beauty so that it becomes productive. This is the case for both the landscape and for this beautiful woman. The first step to harnessing a resource is to investigate its potential. This is the incitement that makes the narrator and Robert von Leslie-Gordon curious. Gordon will soon occupy a point on a love triangle with Cécile and the Colonel, something that makes other observers on vacation at the resort take note of what one snippet of conversation overheard by the narrator and reported to the reader refers to as “der reine *Wallensteins Tod*” (C 23).<sup>49</sup> This literary

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<sup>48</sup> “distant thudding and clanking” (C Trans. 13).

<sup>49</sup> “straight out of *Wallenstein’s Death!*” (C Trans. 23) Fontane’s choice to name this character Leslie-Gordon and make him have connections to Scotland is partially tied to characters from Schiller’s tragedy *Wallensteins Tod* (1790) in which the Scottish commander of the Fortress at Eger under Gen. Wallenstein’s

association foreshadows the complicated and deadly predicament into which the characters are stepping.

As established by the first mention that the narrator makes about her, Cécile is or has been sick, and the hope is that at Hotel Ten Pounds, she will gain weight so that she will be a better symbol for the ego of the Colonel. She longs for fresh air, but will not get it at this resort. She has to make do with the layer of less polluted air in the valley while the more polluted air is blown onto the mountains, where it presumably detracts from the view. The views are an important aspect of how the people around her spend their free time. Not being able to see the famous mountain scenery such as the high Brocken with its “Hexentanzplatz” (“witches dance floor”)<sup>50</sup> makes the guests indulge in an activity that gives them enjoyment in any case, concentrating on the closer view of their fellow guests. Everyone is examining everyone else, and apparently enjoying it.

The factory’s products, the application of which have a direct and indirect consequence on the making of this scene, are noteworthy in two ways: iron is invaluable as an industrial material and comprises the backbone of manufacturing; enamel is important in the finishing of a product, lending it a beautiful surface. In a section of the first chapter, the narrator proposed that the story or history that he presumes lies behind the coupling of this older man and significantly younger, extraordinarily beautiful woman involves a victory that has been won “unter allerlei Kämpfen und Opfern” (C 8).<sup>51</sup> His words ring an association with Bismarck’s famous words that the German nation will triumph through investments in “Eisen und Blut.” Cécile as the walking question mark

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command, Johann Gordon, and one of his subordinates, a Scotsman by the name of Leslie, are involved in a plot to murder Wallenstein. The plot of the tragedy underscores the conflict between doing one’s duty and following one’s heart. See Funke and Hehle, “Anhang” 277, 279 (note 23). See also Grawe, “Nachwort” 266.

<sup>50</sup> The *Brocken* is the highest point in the area. *Hexentanzplatz* is prominently featured in Goethe’s *Faust I*.

<sup>51</sup> “prize of all manner of conflicts and sacrifices” (C Trans. 11).

represents a gap that the narrator would like to fill so that he can more easily come to terms with the struggles and sacrifices that Germans have made in order to start this kind of industry and form the kind of cultural identity that supports it. First the “we” who are lending our eyes and our imaginations to this detective game see her sitting in the Panopticon-like train compartment. Early in the second chapter, the narrator again emphasizes that “we” are treated to the sight of her on the deck of her resort hotel surrounded by the red-and-white-patterned tablecloths fluttering in the breeze as a kind of by-the-way reference to the colors of the defeated Habsburgs who once ruled the land from which she originated, Silesia. Gordon as the researcher of resources presumes that somewhere in between Cécile’s backbone, the steel of her physical make-up, and her beautiful appearance, the enamel of her finishing appeal, lies the information he needs to harness her beauty for his purposes.

The product that interests Gordon is satisfaction of his sexual desires. The narrator seems to be motivated by similar desires as his gaze scans the landscape of the holiday setting. He describes how “das saftige Grün der Wiese das Auge labte” and adds that “[d]er Anblick mu te jeden entzücken, und hing denn auch das Auge der schönen Frau” (C 10).<sup>52</sup> The scene is bursting with so much life that it is as if the narrator were a bee that is buzzing with excitement at the sight, smell and the anticipation of taste of flowers waiting to be pollinated. Cécile, whom the narrator mentions for the first time specifically as the spouse of the older man, places herself amongst these tantalizing flowers, apparently enjoying the intoxicating, sensual effect of spring, and waiting for a man to buzz into her bud. The flowers are likewise arranged around her in the form of a large bouquet of lilacs that has been placed on the couple’s table. Cécile comments on

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<sup>52</sup> “the lush green was soothing to the eye” (I rely here on Radcliffe’s translation, but have changed the word order.) “The sight was one to delight anybody, and so the eye of the beautiful woman” (C Trans. 13).

seeing a pair of playful swallows and wonders whether they are mates or simply siblings. The birds (and the implied bees) are certainly present visually as well as in the couple's imagination, but her husband answers her question coldly, suggesting that couples that one presumes are mates sometimes only look that way. His remark implies that they do not engage in sex frequently enough to satisfy his taste. The comment does not seem meant to produce a negative reaction from her, but as if to punctuate his veiled complaint about her disinterest in sex, she complains she is chilly. He retorts that this is because she doesn't get enough movement, i.e. because she doesn't allow herself enough sexual movement. She contradicts him by saying that she hasn't slept well, a way of complaining that if he didn't bother her so much for sex, she might sleep better and consequently have more energy. She says she'd like to go lie down to nap for a while, which might mean that she is giving him hope that he'll have an opportunity to seduce her during her naptime. As she gets up, he accompanies her and they exchange greetings with the people at the neighboring tables, including with a young man who catches her attention by offering a particularly sincere greeting. At this moment, she changes her mind and tells her possibly hopeful, possibly exasperated husband (the reader can't really tell which), whose arm she takes, that he is right, she needs more movement. As they stroll off, the narrator reports that she is suggesting going to find the spot where the swallows nest. In other words, she's expressing the desire to seek inspiration about how she can remedy her feelings of insecurity and thereby also get her sexual juices flowing so that they can be happier as a couple.

A gap of an empty line follows this point in the text, indicating a pause and a transfer of focalization and a breaking point in the transmission of information. Up until this point, the narrator has been focalizing the couple's exchange, but after the gap, the narrator cleverly arranges for the waiter to introduce the reader to Herr von Gordon, who

begins to share in the focalization. It is as if the narrator has passed a file of partial information that he has been collecting on Cécile and hands it to Gordon through the waiter. The waiter's gesture makes the two men colleagues of a sort. Later, the text provides the information that Gordon is a civil engineer specializing in laying telegraph cables in exotic places. The nature scene that has just been described makes it seem likely that he would enjoy going to work on the exotic location of Cécile's body. His work makes it technologically possible for people to establish lines of communication, but his personal lines of communication are not working properly. He is relying on what he sees, whereas he has missed the audible clues that the narrator has reported to the reader. His eyes see only a question mark. "Who is Cécile?" is the question he poses to himself later in the narrative. He asks what she wants so that he can make himself appear polite, but he is not interested in what she wants beyond what he can do to convince her to give him what he wants. His questions resemble malfunctioning cables. They are not conducive to conveying information. Instead, they keep the circuit localized, not allowing it to carry information from outside.

The novel is characterized by pretense and inaction instead of action. Cécile pretends to sleep on the train, but she is really giving herself a break from prying eyes. The Colonel pretends to be lovingly attentive to his wife, but his behavior is neither whole-hearted nor consistent. Gordon, a man of the world, pretends to read the newspaper when he is really only interested in criticizing the foreign correspondents' abilities and thereby combating his insecurities. They are all pretending not to recognize what bystanders see at a glance. They do not want to see the potential that beauty, unfulfilled desire, and pent-up frustration set against the backdrop of this joyful spring atmosphere may develop into a dangerous situation. The interplay of various levels of illusion – fairy tales with happy endings, a new and powerful national identity fortified

by industry, a technological web of communication that is more accurate than ever before, all resembling different levels of reality – satisfies the senses with its fullness and yet still does not yield the answer to the question of the nature of desire that overlays the observations on observation like a glossy coat of enamel.

The factory in the background is producing tangible things that boost the economy and fortify the new nation's identity of strength. The social system organized like a Panopticon is also making a product: a method of social control, intangible and yet just as influential at changing life as the products of industry. Cécile enjoys Gordon's flattering attention. Part of the benefit that her husband appreciates about their marriage is having his trophy wife admired by other men. The bored and rather lonely Gordon engineers sexual and social entertainment from his surveillance. At first, reactions to the application of the products are positive, but later the cost of the production proves expensive. Not just hurt feelings and pride, but also security of identity and life itself are threatened. The Panopticon that is meant to produce a uniform and secure source of happiness for the larger society is not able to mold the intricacies of an individual identity into the same kind of standardized shape that a factory is able to achieve with its products. The raw human material is simply too different from the materials that make up factory products.

The products of industry are built in a concrete process that has a definite beginning and ending. Although conceptualized by Bentham to make society run as efficiently as a factory, the system of observation that is conducted outside of the architectural structure of the Panopticon itself is hard to confine to a timetable of production. When there is something wrong with the production line in a factory, the solution is more obvious than when something goes wrong with the production process of

shaping individuals to fit into the social mold. Cécile and Margarete are examples of this kind of failure in the Panoptic system of conditioning.

Cécile and Margarete are human elements that the patriarchy cannot categorize, simultaneously aggravating in their lack of behavioral malleability and captivating because they are different. Two quotes illustrate the category into which the narratives place them. The first is from a diary entry that Fontane made noting one of the sources of his idea for the novel. He recalls hearing a story from an acquaintance about an officer who challenged his superior to a duel because of the latter's reaction to his engagement announcement. Fontane records the superior officer's offending comment: "solche Dame liebt man, aber heirathet man nicht."<sup>53</sup> The second comes directly from "Margarete." Vohburg is telling Steinau about the mixed feelings Margarete evokes in him: "diese Margarete mit all ihrer Schönheit, all ihrem unleugbaren Zauber - sie könnte mich vielleicht einen Augenblick berauschen – lieben könnte ich sie nie!" (M 328).<sup>54</sup> The quotes show how the women's appeal is essential to their characters, but how this appeal is denied almost as soon as it is recognized.

Sometimes even those who seem like they are outside of the system get pulled into it by their desire to normalize the wild human elements in their social midst. The third character in the sexual triangle in Ebner's story, Vohburg's friend Count Steinau who was also a passenger in the vehicle involved in the accident that resulted in the death of Margarete's son, becomes a part of this constellation once he makes circumstantial contact with Margarete. He becomes as predatory as Gordon in Fontane's *Cécile*.

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<sup>53</sup> "one loves such women, but doesn't marry them." This comes from an entry that Fontane made in his diary on 21 Jan 1882. He heard the story that inspired him to write *Cécile* while he was at a dinner party at the house of Count Philipp zu Eulenburg. For more information, see Funke and Hehle, "Anhang" 219.

<sup>54</sup> "this Margarete with all of her beauty, all of her undeniable magic – she could maybe intoxicate me for a moment – but I could never love her."



The scene in which Steinau first encounters Margarete is the last one that I use to show how the focalizers in the narratives place the two female characters in Panopticon-like conditions of observation, defining them in ways that confine them to identities from which they would like to escape, but cannot. The scene appears more than halfway through the narrative, after the death of Margarete's son, her rejection of an upstanding and financially sound suitor who loves her, and the failure of the plan that the Vohburgs put forth for her moral reform. Steinau is preparing to ascend a high point in his career, expecting to be appointed to a diplomatic post at any time. He is also preparing to make good on matrimonial overtures he has been making towards Priska's sister. The narrator reads his thoughts that life seems finally ready to put him in the place of honor in which he belongs, and yet curiosity and desire intervene.

Steinau has not yet met Margarete, though she has been the subject of his conversations with Vohburg. The rivalry between the two friends is a factor that seems to make inevitable some kind of connection to this figure whom Vohburg has tried unsuccessfully to banish from his fantasy. Steinau feels he must meet her, if only because of curiosity. It is dawn and Steinau is returning from a ball at which he has made himself listen to Priska's assertion that her husband is a paragon of virtue. He is thinking about how he can compete with a man who is almost worshipped by his saintly wife as well as by a woman who tried to hate him. He is strolling through the quiet streets of Vienna, watching the city awaken. His spirit and senses are also awakened as he reaches St. Stephen's cathedral and the square that marks the heart of the city. The impression he gets from the building foreshadows the sexual rush he is about to experience in this religious space: "wie steingewordene Sehnsucht schwang sich der Turm zum Himmel

empor” (M 335).<sup>55</sup> His attention moves from one group of figures on the square to another, and then settles on one woman. Of course, the reader guesses that this unidentified woman is Margarete, but she cannot be sure, and suspense is created as the narrator depicts what Steinau sees. Her appearance is markedly different from the first one that was described in my last textual interpretation, but the careless way she is clothed, except for the small veil on her hat that modestly covers part of her face, the warm yellowish tone of her skin and the way she sucks the cold air in with shallow breaths all convey that she remains the contradictory figure that Vohburg cannot forget. She shows generosity to a poor, old beggar woman sitting at the entrance of the cathedral, but hesitates to enter, as if struggling with conflicting impulses.

Steinau shows no sign of moral compunction in deciding to follow this figure. Except for the supposition of curiosity, the narrator gives no indication of his reason for doing so. She does not suggest that he guesses her identity and their tenuous connection to one another. He watches her from behind one of the columns, as engrossed in his secret observation as she is in her private expression of suffering. The narrative voice draws a comparison between her and Eve: “So weint die Verzweiflung, die hoffnungslose Sehnsucht; so weinte das erste Weib an den Pforten des verlorenen Edens” (M 336).<sup>56</sup> After feasting his eyes on her intimate turmoil, he sees an opportunity to make contact with her when she drops the piece of exceptionally stitched embroidery she is carrying, the handiwork of her gifted fingers. The reader’s supposition that this is Margarete is confirmed, and Steinau must by this point also strongly suspect her identity as he returns the dropped cloth to her. They conduct themselves with one another with the bare

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<sup>55</sup> “like longing that had become stone, the tower swung itself up to heaven.” The narrative positioning of this cathedral tower is a more tame phallic symbol than the *Siegessäule* that Cécile and the Colonel view from their train window.

<sup>56</sup> “Despair, hopeless yearning cries in such a way; in such a way the first woman cried at the gates of the lost Eden.”

minimum of courtesy and he asks her permission to accompany her to the place she is taking her work. This must seem like an odd request to Margarete, one that understandably raises her guard even higher than it already is in reaction to this aristocratic man who is obviously watching her and exhibiting predatory tendencies. She cannot help but consent because the place she must go is only a few steps away from the public place where they are standing. He takes more liberties and, from a discrete distance, follows her further to confirm his guesses about her identity. After going home, he passes a sleepless night, feverish with desire, but is finally able to rest when he comes up with a plan of how he might renew their contact. Her longing and pain that he witnessed her expressing inside the cathedral will not be remedied. They remain bottled up inside of her, eating away at her like an abscess.

The prop that Steinau employs to facilitate their connection represents his image of her. He thinks of a piece of embroidered cloth that he acquired on a trip to the Orient which he imagines as once decorating the lid of a ornamental box that belonged to a Persian princess. He has to embellish the story he attaches to the box with a touch of the erotic, as he imagines that the former young owner was a “‘mit Ölen gesalbten’ Königsbraut” (M 338).<sup>57</sup> He has hesitated to entrust the job of recreating the missing portions of the cloth to someone of average talent, but he thinks Margarete could do the job justice. The subtext of his motivations is obvious. Margarete, the exotic other, excites him in a way that no feminine other who is appropriate for him in social status and characteristics inherent to that status can. He criticizes Vohburg for thinking that he is superior to others because it puts him in danger of taking a great fall from the heights he feels he has ascended. His insight into his friend’s arrogance does not translate into

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<sup>57</sup> “an ‘oil-anointed’ bride of a king.”

recognition of his own as he identifies himself with the same fine and rare qualities he ascribes to the cloth.

In the first parts of my interpretations, the train and the *Spiegelfenster* functioned as congruent symbols that put each female character in positions set up for observation. The iron and enamel factories and the decorative cloth are symbols that take up where the other two symbols leave off by representing how the system's infrastructure holds the female characters in place. Even though nothing is known about them except for what can be surreptitiously observed, they are fixed in their places by these secret investigations, by the associations with which their observers connect them, and by the systems of production that strengthens the ideas produced by the investigations and associations.

### **Threatening Images**

Neither of these two characters have children. Cécile has never had children and Margarete's child, who is anyway fatherless and thus is marked with psychological lack from the beginning of his life, dies. Childless women have less secure positions within the system of patriarchy than do mothers. This is because they have no glimpse of hope to acquire a phallus, a psychoanalytical concept that will play a role as an interpretive aid in the next chapter and that represents the power to signify within the patriarchal system. The two female characters never move beyond lack to produce a child who will perpetuate the patriarchic system. The energy that they would have invested into rearing a child is excess energy that is a threat to the system. This is part of their allure and challenge that the male figures who are drawn to them want to tap and add to their own social value.

Laura Mulvey bases her 1975 theory of the gaze on psychoanalytic theory, one of the major theoretical threads that I use to tie the interpretations of this dissertation together and the theory that incorporates the idea of the phallus. She limits her theory to film, but parts of it are applicable to literature as well, especially to narratives such as these two that derive so much of their impact from the focalization of images. As a movement, realism is impacted by the technological invention and development of photography, which gradually encourages people to follow what might be an inherent human tendency to weigh visual representations of their experience more heavily than their other senses. Fontane and Ebner achieve their success late in their lives at a time when photography was becoming more sophisticated and common. *Cécile* and “Margarete” produce images of women as lack even as the narratives question the validity of this kind of construction. Mulvey’s theory of the gaze deals with this point by showing how it can be simultaneously productive and threatening. The Panopticon-like system of surveillance can produce similarly ambiguous effects.

Mulvey’s early argument uses the psychoanalytic interpretation of the passive image of woman and the active gaze of man in traditional narrative film to produce a space in which the gaze minimizes the threat that women as lack pose (Mulvey 25). The two ways she sees the gaze neutralizing the threat that women’s lack poses are when it works to produce voyeurism, which is the pleasure in looking, and taking this pleasure further, when it activates a narcissistic aspect of relating with the image on the screen. The first is tied to sexual drive and the second to the formation of self (Mulvey 16-19). Both recreate the initial ego-formation through which every subject has passed, a baby’s identification with its mother’s face and then with its image in a mirror. The ways the gaze works contradict each other unless they are connected with an image, that which is seen on the screen. While the interplay of screen images seems to transcend the

contradiction on which it is founded, transcendence is just an illusion. The presence of lack cannot be denied even when fullness seems to prevail. The images of woman that are consumed by viewers produce a kind of “to-be-looked-at-ness” (Mulvey 19), a spectacle in which woman’s castration is forgotten, or at least covered over by sexual appeal, even as it is closely examined. Mulvey argues that film is unique in producing this effect because the camera fashions what is available for the audience to look at in a way that makes it impossible to gain distance from the image being presented.

Though the reader of these two realist texts by Fontane and Ebner is not sitting watching the images projected onto a screen that in a darkened theater, her enjoyment of the full effect of the text is heightened if she follows the steps built by the logic of the narrative that allow her to enter the space that the text creates. To do this, she must, to a certain degree, let herself be persuaded by the versions of the images the focalizers present. This is the case even if she is aware that their depiction of the female character is not one balanced by the character’s own representations, which may in any case be corrupted by the critical judgments to which society has long subjected her. The gazes of the focalizers in the texts function like directors that cue the cameras of the reader’s imagination to encourage a belief that a female character represents something captivatingly mysterious and dangerous.

If Mulvey’s theory on film has opened up a possibility for me to interpret the gazes that surround the women in these narratives, I also become interested in my own reaction to these observations. I participate in the process of observation, but what do I gain from my participation? Revisiting the question that introduced this analysis, we could add another dimension to the investigation of the images of these two female characters, asking not only what the woman and the males observing them want, but also what I as a reader want to gain out of reading this story. Mulvey illustrates how the

power of a woman's "to-be-looked-at-ness" as created by film is a cycle of pleasure and threat. The same cycle of pleasure and threat occurs within the plot rhythms of these two narratives. The women appear at their most captivating soon before their falls.

Cécile falls several times both within the story that the narrator and Gordon focalize, as well as in the novel that Gordon convinces himself lies behind the story that he is able to observe.<sup>58</sup> Her final fall, or rather her climbing out of the uncomfortable place she finds herself, is taken outside of the of a realm where she can be observed. When she smothers herself after reading the report about the duel between her husband and Gordon in a newspaper at the conclusion of the novel, her suicide and the suicide note she leave behind are interpreted rather than directly depicted. The reader, along with the Colonel, learn of what has happened through a letter written by the minister who was her friend and spiritual adviser. My interpretation touches on small portions of Cécile's story, the ones that occur in the first portion of the novel in the Harz, before Gordon is informed about Cécile's personal history and subsequently changes his impression of her. The interpretation then skips ahead in the narrated time to the end of her story to note some details about her death while it draws its conclusion. My interpretations of various scenes from the novel are obviously not meant to provide a summary impression of the novel, but rather to supply enough detail about the construction of Cécile's character so that it may be compared to the construction of Margarete's character. What becomes

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<sup>58</sup> Eda Sagarra puts men in the middle of the *Frauenroman* (Women's Novel) and notes that they too suffer from the roles that they are expected to assume. She sees in Gordon a figure of hope for the modernization and globalization of a recently united German Empire. With all of his expertise in technology, his inability to navigate human relations is particularly ironic and tragic. She finds him power hungry, an authoritarian personality like St. Arnaud, the Colonel, who mistreats Cécile as if she were an object. In the process he also mistreats himself, bringing about his own death. The only character of the novel that Sagarra interprets as being free from the vices on display in the novel is Rosa Hexel, the artist. She is not at all physically attractive, but all the more personally so. See Eda Sagarra, "Vorurteil im Fontaneschen Erzählwerk: Zur Frage der falschen Optik in *Cécile*," in *Theodorus victor: Theodor Fontane, der Schriftsteller des 19. am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts: Eine Sammlung von Beiträgen*, ed. Roland Berbig (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1999), 121-136.

clear through these interpretations is that these women are not allowed to form the identities of their choosing, rather their “to-be-looked-at-ness” becomes the Panopticon-like cages in which they are confined.

Next, I will note several details from a cluster of scenes in which Cécile, the Colonel, Gordon, and Fräulein Rosa, an emancipated woman artist who becomes a friend during their stay in the Harz, are touring the Quedlinberger Castle. The scene uses the presence and absence of several visual props to show how Cécile is denied the opportunity of changing the impression that has been built around her thus far in the narrative. This episode resembles a scene that was previously interpreted because the narrator is preparing Gordon for something exciting. In fact, Gordon is about to write to his sister to inquire whether her connections to Silesian society can supply him with background information on Cécile’s past. The expectations that the narrator establishes once again seem to feed Gordon’s excitement. The narrator is depicting the behavior of individuals within the group as they look at one another looking at an important cultural and historical site that reflects their identities back to them.

At the outset of the tour, the narrator describes the castle as “eine wahre Musterniete” and adds: “Was es vordem an Kostbarkeiten besessen hatte, war längst fort, und so lag ihm, dem Hüter ehemaliger Herrlichkeit, nur ob, über Dinge zu sprechen, die nicht mehr da waren” (C 48).<sup>59</sup> The narrator is directly referring to the objects that are or are not in the castle, but of course he is also commenting on the state of the investigation that he has given to Gordon. The self-reflexive comment of the narrator about the castle keeper’s struggles, how “er seinen Vortrag rasch wieder aufnahm, um durch Erzählkunst den absoluten Mangel an Sehenswürdigkeiten auszugleichen” (C 49)<sup>60</sup> shows that he is

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<sup>59</sup> “Whatever treasures it had once possessed had long since gone and so it fell to him, the guardian of erstwhile splendour, to speak only of things no longer there” (C Trans. 42).

<sup>60</sup> “he rapidly resumed his lecture in the hope of compensating by narrative skill for the lack of visible items of interest” (C Trans. 42).



aware that he could land in a similarly embarrassing situation if he is not soon able to develop his story into something more than suppositions. The castle is the site of myth and history, but few concrete artifacts remain. Narrative must step up to substitute for this absence. The most promising objects of stories are the prince-abbesses, the women beside the male rulers of the Holy Roman Empire, a political entity that is no longer in existence. The story told by the castle keeper that most interests his listeners, excluding Cécile, concerns a rare mirror that is missing from the historic holdings. She is bored by the story and would have rather seen her reflection in the mirror. The reason why she feels this way is left open to interpretation, but the view from a terrace where she has retreated rather than to hear the end of the story offers an indication. It includes a curious obelisk that the guide claims was erected in the honor of a faithful dog owned by one of the last prince-abbesses. The inscription on it reads: “Jedes Geschöpf hat eine Bestimmung” (C 51).<sup>61</sup> Gordon thinks it foolish to erect a monument to a dog, but Cécile seems particularly touched by it.

Throughout the tour, she has become noticeably uncomfortable, possibly because she must be asking herself about her purpose in life, to what ideals or what group she can be faithful. Her still hidden background makes her able to relate to these historical women who gained their power by capitalizing on their beauty, as well as by maneuvering themselves sexually. She is trying to make the visible signs of her background disappear because they are out of line with the precepts of morality and taste in the circumstances of her current life. The signs of the rule of the prince-abbesses have largely disappeared, save for stories, the structure that housed them, the monument to a dog, and some portraits, but she who has shared experiences similar to theirs is still there. She knocks on the wall where the mirror had been, unconsciously mourning that the

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<sup>61</sup> “Every creature has a purpose” (C Trans. 45).

special mirror in which these women of the past could observe themselves is gone.<sup>62</sup> Her reflection viewed in it might have helped her to form an ideal image of herself so that she could at least pretend that she were a unified personality. She is denied the enjoyment of looking at herself, even while others are deriving pleasure from observing her.<sup>63</sup>

The concluding portion of the scene reveals Gordon's thoughtlessness in his interactions with this figure for whom he has developed a serious infatuation, but its purpose in the narrative is to heighten the effect of Cécile's lack that has already been well-established even this early in the narrative. Gordon is heaping derision on the presumed identities of the prince-abbesses' as depicted in the many portraits hanging on the walls. He is trying to talk Cécile out of her reaction that the likeness of one in particular is so strikingly accurate because she has read about her in a novel. His words are ironic because they describe his own folly as the same one to which Cécile is succumbing: "wer will an Bildern Echtheit oder Unechtheit beweisen?" (C 53).<sup>64</sup> Pictures are only illusions, as are realist novels, and historical ones like the one Cécile

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<sup>62</sup> Hiltrud Bontrup interprets *Cécile* as the opposite of a Pygmalion story in that art "mortifies" her character. At the same time the narrative incorporates art, it also circumvents art's mortifying effect by employing multiple word meanings, multiple perspectives, fragmentation of the use (using up) of materials, and accentuation of textuality (193). Bontrup argues that the text does not portray the typical, but instead what is different. Therefore she concludes that the text portrays characters trying to become individuals. She also concludes that death is represented as the boundary between sense and meaning, and as an empty concept represented in the openness of the texts. She recognizes signs of modernity in these textual features (193-194). See Hiltrud Bontrup, '...auch nur ein Bild': *Krankheit und Tod in ausgewählten Texten Theodor Fontanes* (Hamburg: Argument, 2000), 189-194.

<sup>63</sup> Bettina Plett reads *Cécile* as dealing with the problems of linguistically and artistically representing observation, most importantly the representation of women. She argues that this is the reason it is not a *Frauenroman* (women's novel), but rather a novel about pictures of women. For her, the scene with Cécile's helpless reaction to the missing mirror is central because it denies her character with an image of herself. She points out that as Cécile is denied her image, the reader is denied a "naked image," a realist or possibly naturalist view of the protagonist (175). She concludes that the observation of Cécile reveals the violent and damaging properties of male fantasies that should be dismantled and replaced by more reasonable images, an idea that she borrows from another scholar, Norbert Mecklenburg. (See Plett's note 36 on p. 178). See Bettina Plett, "Rahmen ohne Spiegel: Das Problem des Betrachters bei einem 'Mangel an Sehenswürdigkeiten' in Fontanes *Cécile*," in *'Weiber weiblich, Männer männlich'?: Zum Geschlechterdiskurs in Theodor Fontanes Romanen*, eds. Sabina Becker and Sascha Kiefer (Tübingen: Francke, 2005), 159-178.

<sup>64</sup> "who would wish to prove genuineness or its absence in pictures?" (C Trans 46).

enjoyed reading, but so are identities as seen in reflections from mirrors. Gordon goes off on a small moral tirade in which he calls the portraits a dead and ugly collection, a “Galerie von Magdalenen (selbstverständlich von Magdalenen vor dem Bußestadium)” (C 54),<sup>65</sup> the purpose of which is to satisfy the men who kept these women, but could not enjoy them in the flesh, but had to also have portraits of them made. The group’s new friend, Rosa the painter of animal portraits, defends Cécile by playfully criticizing Gordon’s adoption of virtue. “Doch Sie *täuschen* mich nicht, Herr von Gordon. Es ist ein alter Satz, je mehr Don Juan, je mehr Torquemada” (C 54, italics mine).<sup>66</sup> She has hit the nail on the head, and she also uses the same word that the narrator uses in the first scenes in the train when he stirred up interest in this investigation of Cécile. Rosa identifies that Gordon has a problem recognizing, as he puts it “die wirklichsten Wirklichkeit” (C 54).<sup>67</sup> He criticizes others for playing with images, but this is what he is doing when he insists on seeing the world through various lenses depending on his moral judgment. The effect is not romantic in the sense of Don Juan, but rather like the torture of an inquisition, the spectacle that Foucault claims was replaced by the Panopticon system of surveillance and discipline.

Looking and images, whether they are imagined, captured in a photograph, or in film, are the new spectacle. Mulvey holds that the most complex interaction of looks is specific to film (Mulvey 26), but this scene and the ones that build up to it in the novel show that realist narrative can be complex in a similar way. The “unerträglich hohen

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<sup>65</sup> “gallery of Magdalenas (naturally of Magdalenas before their state of repentance)” (C Trans 47).

<sup>66</sup> “But you don’t deceive me, Herr von Gordon. There is an old saying: the more the Don Juan, the more the Torquemada” (C Trans. 47). This quote is an example of Fontane’s frequent use of cultural references from art, music, history, and current affairs/politics. According to Christian Grawe’s notes to the text, Don Juan here refers to the figure in Mozart’s opera *Don Giovanni* (1786). He also notes that Thomas de Torquemada was the first Grand Inquisitor of the Spanish Inquisition, an executor without compare. See Grawe, “Anmerkungen” 217 (note 47).

<sup>67</sup> “the most immediate reality” (C Trans. 47).

Grad von Narrativität,”<sup>68</sup> as Daragh Downes describes the atmosphere built by the narrative that eventually suffocates Cécile to death is many layers thick in this scene. All of the characters are fooling themselves, even as they insist they are not.

The final scenes of “Margarete” read like the script for a Hollywood blockbuster. A Margarete dressed up in exotic and alluring costume finery is playing the role of Cleopatra at a ball held by her lover and keeper Steinau. Vohburg leaves his pregnant wife at home to attend another party, but can’t resist entering this one as he happens to pass by its entrance. The outside world seems to melt away and he enters the time and space of this make-believe world ruled by the mesmerizing Cleopatra. The party guests seem to be overwhelmingly male and all eyes are on the Egyptian queen, who is playing with the heart of an adolescent, a performance commanded by her Caesar and enthusiastically acted out when Vohburg enters the scene. Adding to the spectacle for onlookers, she and Vohburg duel openly with their pride. Their positions vis-à-vis one another have changed since she has become Steinau’s mistress; she no longer serves as the supplicant to him. The narrator reports that Vohburg recalls the sword of judgment he swung over her head, even as he is realizing that the weapon’s capacity to defend him has been compromised by the way he wields it and by the eyes that are focused on their present confrontation. Margarete has a dagger strapped to her body, ostensibly as part of her costume, functionally as a symbol of the phallus that she has gone about claiming in unconventional and socially distasteful ways. It is her secret weapon that she pretends to have captured. It allows her to speak, taking the words from Vohburg’s mouth as Vohburg’s once stiff image of himself has become limp. She is finally able to accuse him for destroying her happiness. He and the world listen, but they are not struck by her

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<sup>68</sup> “insufferably high degree of narrativity” (Downes, *Fontane-Handbuch* 574).

words or the reason of her accusation. That would be tantamount to acknowledging her lack and its threat to them. They only see the power of her sexual allure.

Part of the scene is concluded as Vohburg is escorted to the door, but the scene with the adolescent must still play itself out. Margarete gives the boy-man the promised kiss, and drunk with intoxication, he snatches her dagger and threatens to kill himself if she does not become his. Fortunately for him, onlookers rescue him from her deadly spell. A doctor makes an offhand comment that he once saw a colleague stab a fatally ill female patient. This is an insinuation that Margarete has an incurable and possibly also dangerously communicable disease, and that she should possibly be put out of her misery. The revelers return the weapon to her as Steinau comments that she might need it to kill herself when she hears of his first infidelity. Her retort is her wild behavior: “Wie eine Mänade, gefolgt von ihrem Troß, erschien sie im Ballsaal, wo ihr die Schaulust der Menge einen glänzenden Empfang bereitete. Es war, als ob bei ihrem Eintreten ein neues Leben sich in die Adern aller Anwesenden ergossen hätte” (M 372).<sup>69</sup> Eyes are feeding on her performance until “mit einem Gelage in den Gemächern Margaretens endete das Fest” (M 373).<sup>70</sup> She sacrifices herself at this bacchanal. She has commanded the phallus for an evening, but in the morning, Steinau treats her like his prostitute, and she makes her way to her child’s grave. Standing on the grave, exactly a year after her son’s death, she plunges the dagger into her heart, claiming the phallus forever in death because she knows it will elude her in life.

“Doppelte Verlockung also -- das Kind zu lieben, und den Sturm zu bändigen” (M 328):<sup>71</sup> Steinau posed this as the reason for the pleasure and the problem when it comes to

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<sup>69</sup> “Like a worshipper of Dionysus, followed by her retinue, she appeared in the ballroom, where a voyeurism of the crowd gave her a sparkling reception. It was as if her entrance poured new life into the blood vessels of all those present.”

<sup>70</sup> “With an orgy or drinking and eating in Margarete’s chambers the party ended.”

<sup>71</sup> “Thus a double enticement - - to love the child or tame the storm.”

dealing with Margarete. Vohburg also seemed stuck in this pattern of thinking. Whether they view her in a positive or negative light (for one can be sure that they are viewing her), the two men place always themselves above her in the dominant position. As long as they can see her as someone who will submit to control, she complements their masculine identities. If they were to treat the child's or the storm's potential seriously, they would get a different, more accurate reflection of her person and of their own humanity.

The scenes analyzed in this final section reveal Margarete's and Cécile's differences. In some ways, the women are the opposite of one another. This analysis did not treat this point, but it has appeared frequently as a supposition that underlies the interest generated in Cécile that she has a disreputable past she is trying to hide. In contrast, by the end of her story, Margarete is living in a disreputable present that makes public representation of Steinau's appropriation of her body her position in life. Their situations put them in different places, but they share the experience of possessing exotic physical qualities make them attractive objects of observation for those, particularly males, whose eyes are hungry. They are the movie stars of their stories, constantly in the spotlight as everything else in their surroundings, save for the men who occupy the triangles of desire with them, fades into the background. For a short while at the outset of both stories, the men are content to enjoy looking at the object of their pleasure, wondering at the effect it produces in them and wanting to investigate its sources. This is the first way they try to escape Cécile's and Margarete's threatening pull. Then, when their investigations produce nothing useful in dealing with her inherent threat, whether intended or not, they make her the victim of their cruelty or the object of pity that needs saving. They cannot bring themselves to leave her alone or treat her with respect.

## **Conclusion: Visual Spaces for Realism**

Something happens in these stories that are full of nothing but watching because they each end in suicide for the female characters and uncertainty or death for the male characters occupying points on the triangles of desire. What, besides discomfort, the instigating reaction for this dissertation, do these stories produce? What information do the investigations of the narrators' and male characters' yield? Does the cruelty that the men show towards the women provide them with an escape route to distance themselves from the threat of castration that these women embody? There is no satisfactory resolution, just a return to Freud's question that opened this chapter: "What does a woman want?" It seems that Cécile and Margarete want the same thing as the male characters do, though possibly in a different form; they want to be valued for their individual uniqueness. This would mean that they would not find themselves subjected to rigorous, Panopticon-like observation and isolated from society.

Is the information that these investigations of feminine nature produce only empty information? Messages are being transmitted, and that proves the worth of technology, whether it is in the form of telegraphic cables, Gordon's specialty, or diplomatic negotiations, Steinau's former career hopes, or surveillance done on the occupant of a Panopticon cell. The transmitting and sharing of information, whether that information is useful or not, signals progress, if one is convinced by the logic of the dominant culture.

Looks do not physically touch an individual, especially when they are made surreptitiously, but gazes are different from looks. Gazes penetrate the consciousness and have the power to change its nature. This is the desired effect of Bentham's idea of the Panopticon. The gazes to which these women are subjected for prolonged periods of time damage them. The pale enamel of Cécile's beauty becomes worn and the striking,

intricate embroidery of Margarete's aura becomes tattered. Once their form has lost its novelty, they can be discarded, a realization that contributes to their motivations for suicide.

The process of surveillance damages the observers as well because it dulls their connections to their own humanity. When he prepares himself to witness the suicide scene, Steinau can only feel bitter at Margarete's ungrateful deed. His reaction of emotional collapse moments later at the sight of her unrealistically positioned corpse reads like Ebner's hastily executed touch to make a scandalous story end in a more properly dream-like scene. The Colonel shows that Cécile's story will not end so melodramatically when he writes to her, not to tell her of the duel in which he killed Gordon and was himself nearly shot to death, but to tell her he expects her to join him in exile: "Aber nimm das Ganze nicht tragischer als nötig, die Welt ist kein Treibhaus für überzarte Gefühle" (C 213).<sup>72</sup> It is easier to concentrate on reforming or criticizing others than it is one's self.

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<sup>72</sup> "But don't take the whole affair more tragically than necessary" (C Trans 171).



#### 4. The Sublime Virtue and Ironic Ambiguity of Female Death

It is striking how many of Fontane's and Ebner's characters die in circumstances ranging from dramatic to mundane. The introduction to this dissertation identifies the theme of death as one of several features that led me to compare the prose writings of Fontane and Ebner, but death is only the conclusion of a series of other significant life events that are compelling material for realist depiction. Ebner's "Unsühnbar" (*Beyond Atonement*, 1890) and Fontane's *Unwiederbringlich* (*Beyond Recall*, 1891) offer poignant narrative portraits not only of female death, but also weddings, births, and funerals. The portrayals of these events and the themes that accompany them allow the authors to address one of their central areas of interest: the beautiful and dangerous irony of feminine virtue.

The two virtuous female figures from these works are Ebner's Countess Maria von Dornach *née* Wolfsberg and Fontane's Countess Christine von Holk, born Baroness von Arne. Their stories depict efforts of emotional reclamation that are comparable in notable ways suggested by their similar titles. Each aristocratic female character is virtuous to such an impeccable degree that this characteristic verges on what I call the sublime. Each loses one or both parents while growing up and suffers the death of a child. Issues of adultery play a role in their marriages, though only Maria is an adulteress. Their deaths at the culmination of each work, can be seen as suicides. The many points of similarity contribute to my argument that their sublime virtues become detriments as they negotiate problems in their marriages. Language produces and aggravates their desire to recover feelings of peace and happiness that they feel they have lost.

Maria and Christine see their virtues as their most precious possessions, a sentiment that is shared to a certain degree by their husbands and their communities. That these virtues contribute to their downfalls makes their stories, especially their conclusions, so ironically ambiguous. The characters' self-identification with these virtues is equivalent to their understanding of themselves as speaking subjects. Silences punctuate these narratives as both retreat from their virtuous identities and seek refuge from language. Language is an inescapable part of human existence. Identity is closely tied to language because it structures thought and communication. As a system of ever-shifting and receding referents, language cannot perform the functions the speakers desire from it. Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theories explain the individual's relation to language. I summarize the major points of his theory, but focus on several that offer the best interpretive explanations for why these characters' efforts to recover lost happiness end in premature death: the creation and repetitive ebb and flow of *jouissance* and the letter as a symbol of the constant invasion of death into life.

The interpretations and insights gleaned from the application of Lacanian theories of language to the suicidal culminations of two virtuous female figures contribute to the understanding of how realism works by identifying the possibilities and impossibilities of their search for fulfilling lives. This is reflected in the titles of the narratives, a detail to which I return throughout my interpretation. The characters struggle for authenticity in life means atoning for past misdeeds and recapturing what was lost, or in other words, retrieving a previous state. They are never gratified. In fact, gratification of their lofty goals is never quite possible, something conveyed by the negative "un" prefixes in the titles that are punctuated with an implicit question mark.

The not-quite possible goals of characters are reflected in language. The reasons for the ambiguity of their goals, and the results of the pursuit of them are beautifully

simple in their complexity. What Ebner's Maria hears fate telling her: "Du liebst die Wahrheit, wandelst in der Lüge" (US 72),<sup>1</sup> resonates in Lacan's idea that there is no truth beyond the Real, the unknowable and potentially frightening void that underlies the fictions of lives lived in the Symbolic, the order of consciousness that is governed by language. The disappointment of unattained goals seems negative, but the questions spurred by the details of their pursuit result in rich interpretive possibility.

In this chapter, I interpret Maria's and Christine's stories by concentrating on three themes: sublime virtue, irony and ambiguity, and death. The discussion of these themes is complementary in each work and therefore I intersperse the interpretations, moving from one work to another and one theme to the next. These interpretive results are finally formed into conclusions about the roots and boundaries of realism.

### **Sublime Virtue**

It would seem that the more virtuous the character, the easier it would be for her to find her happiness, but this is obviously not the case in these two narratives. Perfect though they may seem, Christine and Maria view themselves as failing at their attempts to reconcile their experiences with their unchanging inner identities and synthesize them into a rewarding sense of peace. Their struggles share some commonalities with the ones that Fontane and Ebner personally undertook in their *Kinderjahre* texts as analyzed through the lens of Schiller's ideas on aesthetic education in my first chapter. The characters are trying to realize and appreciate their own humanity, but their sense of self becomes mixed up with notions of virtue. Virtue is like language, a system of referents.

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<sup>1</sup> "“You love truth; now live a lie”" (BA 62). All quotes in the original German are taken from Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, *Unsühnbar*, Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, *Kritische Texte und Deutungen*, vol. 1 (Bonn: Bouvier, 1978). This source is cited with the abbreviation US. All translations will be taken from Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, *Beyond Atonement*, trans. Vanessa Van Ornam (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1996). This source is cited with the abbreviation BA.

Though an individual does her part in acquiring virtue, she has little power to decide for herself to what degree her personality will be accepted as having value within the system of mores. Sublime is a fitting label to attach to Maria's and Christine's virtues because it describes how basic virtues are taken to an ultimate degree.

Sublime and virtue are words that have strong connotations that become overwhelming when combined. Exploring definitions of the words is a good way to begin a consideration of how they can be combined to reflect issues that play a role in depictions of feminine death. *Merriam-Webster* supplies two definitions that seem the most appropriate: "to elevate or exalt something especially in dignity and honor" and "to render finer (as in purity or excellence)."<sup>2</sup> Even with these dictionary definitions, complex relative terms such as "dignity, honor, and purity" blur meaning. What is stressed in each of these definitions is not the intrinsic state of the thing before its process of elevation, but the new, precariously high position. While the height of the new position may be desirable, the risks of falling to one's previous, lower position seem greater.

Virtue might seem more simple to define, but the seven definitions that *Merriam-Webster* supplies indicate that it is not. The most applicable of these are "a conformity to a standard of right: morality," and "chastity especially in a woman."<sup>3</sup> Being chaste means strictly controlling sexuality, limiting it to a proper context, a central conflict posed in these narratives that deal with adultery. Another definition notes that virtue in the plural is the name of an order of angels,<sup>4</sup> obviously unrealistic role models for any mortal, but a popular image in Victorian English literature, as in Coventry Patmore's "

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<sup>2</sup> "sublime," definition 2, 12 Oct. 2004. *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, <<http://www.webster.com>>.

<sup>3</sup> "virtue," definition 7, *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*.

<sup>4</sup> "virtue," definition 2, *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*.

Angel in the House.”<sup>5</sup> Other possible definitions of virtue, “a beneficial quality or power of a thing,”<sup>6</sup> and “a capacity to act,”<sup>7</sup> are particularly ironic when considered together because they seem to counteract one another. Does one become virtuous by acting, or by remaining in the passive state of being as one naturally is? The possession of virtue can empower a nineteenth-century woman, so that she is free to take limited action in ways that might not otherwise be available to her. The dark side of this empowerment can be seen in Maria’s and Christine’s justifications for judging themselves harshly. For them virtue becomes a suicide weapon.

Etymologically, the word virtue comes from roots that mean man or male.<sup>8</sup> This contributes to the sense that virtue is not something that is necessarily inherent in a woman, but can be one of a cluster of characteristics that are imposed on her to make her more agreeable to a male world. Considering etymology, the nuances of various definitions of virtue, and the close semantic relationship between virtue and morality, it can be surmised that women are presumed inferior to an imaginary fallen version of themselves if they do not possess virtue.

Another meaning of sublime that is used in the context of chemistry lends depth to the possibilities for discussing how the two female characters are sublimely virtuous.

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<sup>5</sup> Coventry Patmore’s poem, “The Angel in the House” (1854), is discussed by many scholars, among them Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their famous study, *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Gilbert and Gubar note that Patmore’s angel, Honoria, holds a central virtue that “makes her *man* ‘great.’” They also note that like Goethe’s Makarie in *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (1821, 1829), Honoria is not remarkable in her own person, but instead in the way that she lives for her husband and her family. They explore the way that the angel in the house has been also called an “angel of death.” In feminine and maternal duties as nursemaid for the sick, she seems to exist in both the world of the living and the world of the dead at once. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, CN: Yale UP, 1979), 22-27.

<sup>6</sup> “virtue,” definition 3, *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*.

<sup>7</sup> “virtue,” definition 6, *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*.

<sup>8</sup> *Merriam-Webster* lists the etymology of “virtue” as stemming in part from Latin *virtut*, and *virtus* “strength, manliness, virtue,” and from “*vir* man.” The entry points to the etymology of the related word “virile” which also comes from “*vir*,” but that is related to Old English and Old High German “*wer* man.” See etymology of “virtue” and “virile” entries, *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*.

This is the definition that *Merriam-Webster* lists first: “to cause to pass directly from a solid to the vapor state and condense back to solid form.”<sup>9</sup> This definition alludes to the transformation that takes place gradually throughout the narratives that culminate with their death scenes. The two figures become less life-like and ever more ethereal. They conclude as vaporous presences, waiting to be reconstituted into a state of solid meaning for those within the texts who survive their deaths and for readers. This variant meaning of the verb sublime connects virtue to the themes of irony and ambiguity. It resonates the most when meaning is attributed to the two deaths. Before exploring the meanings of these deaths, it makes sense to explore some of the details of these figures’ characterizations as sublimely virtuous.

Like a larger veneer of realism that is built of smaller elements that presume to mirror the external world but actually only create a plausible illusion of it (Furst 16-17), virtues appear more impressive, their limitations less obvious, when considered as a cohesive group. Maria and Christine are built up to elevated degrees of heightened virtue by their circumstances, by their outward appearances, and by what others think and say about them. When they are eventually stripped of their virtues by their experiences, they become emptied of their life forces, their reasons to continue living.

My discussion of the specifics of how virtue functions in these two works begins with a look at how Ebner’s heroine Maria becomes the wife of Count Hermann von Dornach. Maria is the younger of the two heroines and thus is at an earlier stage in the development of her personal life than Fontane’s Christine. In the opening of “Unsühnbar,” bustling snowy conditions obscure the narrator’s gaze as it takes in a street scene, leading attention here and there before it settles on one individual. It is as if the steadily falling snow and the many kinds of people making their way through it represent

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<sup>9</sup> “sublime,” definition 1, “virtue,” definition 7, *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*.

details of background information that will complicate judgment about this story in which the title indicates some dramatic, inexpiable deed will be committed. The streetlight illuminates the face of attractive, tall young lady, signaling that she is a significant character. She is “barhäuptig mit klassischem Profil” (US 6)<sup>10</sup> and has just stepped into a well-appointed carriage. She cuts a positive figure, but this first scene foreshadows conflict that will test her. The additional figures on whom the narrator’s glance alights in this scene and throughout the narrative are endowed with conflicting characteristics. Each is affected by the storm, but not all have the same means to secure protection from it. Even the “demonic seducer of a virtuous woman” and “a profligate illegitimate brother,” whom the text’s English translator, Vanessa Van Ornam, sees as part of the “melodramatic tenor” of the work (Van Ornam, “Acknowledgments” v), and who is also present in this scene is depicted as being caught in the uncomfortable conditions of the harsh social elements that slow or prevent the pursuit of desires.

The snow blankets the dirt of the city street like a carpet. It falls on the laborer who seems at once familiar and threatening to the young woman. The layer of pure, white beauty cushioned her emergence from a performance of Beethoven’s opera *Fidelio* immediately before the commencement of narrated time. The snow and the title of the opera give the opening scene an ironic touch. *Fidelio*’s theme is the triumph of fidelity between a man and a woman. Fidelity is something that is later revealed as missing in the relationship that produced the threatening laborer, the marriage that produced the young woman, and the marriage she is about to enter. Snow returns as a symbol. Here it emphasizes the purity of the young woman’s character. Her name, Maria, amplifies this effect. Her beauty is as stunning as the new-fallen snow, and like the ice crystals that clump together to form the larger snow flake, there are many aspects to her personality

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<sup>10</sup> “bareheaded with a classical profile” (BA 1).

that reveal their complexity only when observed closely. If one imagines she is like a snowflake, when she falls to the ground and mixes with the rest of the flakes, one anticipates that the laborer will do his job, scoop her up, and dump her into a compacted pile. The dramatic imagery and the contrasting implications of purity and danger in the opening scene match the allure that becomes a part of Maria's story. These kind of alluring and ambiguous images repeat themselves in the narrative. This interpretation will reflect that by repeatedly emphasizing them and their psychological meanings.

This introductory scene draws the reader's attention ever closer to something that is wrong in this ostensibly quaint picture of a wintry Viennese night. At the heart of scene and the narrative sits this beautifully enigmatic young female character who exposes herself to the elements and attraction from curiously malicious strangers by going out without a winter head covering. The reader soon learns she is sensitive to the cares of others because she is filled with memories and fantasies of experiences that she has missed because her mother is dead. The reader later learns that the mother of the young laborer also died due to the philandering of the young woman's father, the supposed cause of her mother's death. Maria perceives the probability that there is more than she knows to her parents' story and that it could negatively impact her life.

Snow is as inevitable in the climate of Vienna as are burdensome social rules of the late nineteenth century. Every part of life is governed by rules, even the seemingly disorganized snow-covered street scene in which different social elements jostle for position. Maria's father, Count Wolfsberg is at the center of her world of rules. She conducts herself according to his wishes. He also conducts himself in a way that he has learned as socially appropriate. Like his daughter, he also lacked parental care as a child, as his parents both died prematurely. Society excuses his mistreatment of women, as it will also excuse others' mistreatment of his daughter, the person closest to his heart. The



snow falls on her just as it does on others, such as his illegitimate son Wolfi Forster, the snow sweeper. Wolfi's anger will eventually melt the pure white virtue of his half-sister. It is the dangerous product of a lack of male sexual self-control and of an aristocratic disregard for the pain that the inordinate power of gender and class can produce.

The elements of the story are tangled together as each male character maneuvers for his own gain. Marital arrangements are made with social considerations in mind rather than love. Until the point of reaching marriageable age, Maria does not realize her role in these maneuverings. She is confused and saddened that she has agreed to marry Count Hermann Dornach, a man she does not love. She does not yet realize that her father has manipulated her. He characterized the man she thought she loved, Count Felix Tessin, as a womanizer, a type Wolfsberg recognizes easily since he is also of that mold. Maria gets an awful feeling of having become "die Beute von etwas Fremdartigem und Unschönem" (US 22).<sup>11</sup> She does not enjoy the rewards for the virtue she has accumulated throughout her life. Instead, these rewards are exchanged and consumed by the men who, in effect, possess her.

In the course of her father's and Dornach's marriage negotiations, Maria has come to resemble her mother. The space between Maria's parents, the space she was born to inhabit, is the precarious, dangerous space of sublime virtue, into which she will beautifully, irrationally, and ambiguously fall at the conclusion of the narrative. Her ghost-like "traumverlorene" mother in the portrait painted in the first year of her marriage, the same period into which Maria is about to enter, exudes "eigentümlicher Schwermut und hilflose Schüchternheit," whereas Maria seems to be the opposite, possessing "Entschlossenheit, Seelenstärke [und] Klarheit" (US 8).<sup>12</sup> Influenced by her

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<sup>11</sup> "the prey of something strange and ugly" (BA 17).

<sup>12</sup> "lost in a dream," "peculiar melancholy and helpless diffidence," "determination, strength of character, and clarity" (BA 4).

father and by her own blurry memories of her mother's illness and death, Maria is determined not to tread the same path. Unfortunately, it seems inevitable that she cannot avoid sharing her mother's fate.

Dornach is genuine in his affections, but the flaws on which the match are built, the inescapable realities it ignores, foreshadows significant problems. As he proposes marriage to her, he implicitly encourages her to look forward to changing in a way that contradicts his attraction to her. He tells her that what he admires is that she is "stolz," "selbständig" and shows "Ernst auf [ihrer] Stirn" (US 9),<sup>13</sup> but then he tells her he hopes that their union will wipe this last feature away from her countenance. The message he conveys is that these energetic features are suitable for a fiancée, but not for his wife. A happily married woman shouldn't have to think much. She should sacrifice her personality to achieve the greater good of his satisfaction and the smooth continuation of patriarchal order. He does his part to make it so that she can "gefeit durch's Leben wandeln, gehüllt in [seiner] Liebe" (US 20).<sup>14</sup> His love elevates her to a state that is not compatible with a full life, because she is smothered by its propriety. She becomes his sublimely virtuous angel, raised to a height that will make any fall disastrous. Her fall seems pre-programmed in her suppressed affections for Tessin that fester like a parasite feeding on her psychological identity.

What Burkhard Bittrich calls her "Entehrung,"<sup>15</sup> actually begins when she takes her wedding vows, not when Tessin makes a secret appearance at Dornach's estate to take advantage of the inadequacies of her marriage. The scene in which Maria succumbs to Tessin's entreaties and his subsequent seduction forms the climax of the story. In a

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<sup>13</sup> "proud," "independent," "the seriousness on [her] brow" (BA 4).

<sup>14</sup> "travel safe and sound through life, enveloped in [his] love" (BA 15).

<sup>15</sup> "removal of honor" Burkhard Bittrich, "Kritische Deutung," in Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach *Unsühnbar*, in Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, *Kritische Texte und Deutungen*, vol. 1 (Bonn: Bouvier, 1978), 311.

rare depiction of passion in Ebner's prose, a trait of her narratives that she shares with Fontane, Maria's perfection is shattered. Even though Maria's marriage with Dornach was the first lesson that showed her she lacks the control over her life, she has not learned from it. Guilt begins to drive her existence. She might have called out for help, but her being alone with Tessin could have already made her seem guilty. What is worse, her shame is witnessed by Wolfi who played the key role in arranging for Tessin's access to her.<sup>16</sup> As if to develop this guilt, it bears fruit, and her second son is born. She has fallen from the pinnacles of sublime virtue where her father and husband have placed her. The rest of the narrative depicts her struggle not to commit suicide.

It is ironic that the happiest period of the Dornachs' marriage comes after the birth of an illegitimate son, whose paternity is never questioned. They travel to Italy so that Maria can regain her health and strength that everyone notices she has lost during the pregnancy and birth. Once there, they enjoy an atmosphere in which "“Sterbliche Unsterbliches geschaffen haben”" (US 80).<sup>17</sup> The description of this state of heightened appreciation of each other and of the marriage that each of them had imagined might be possible to create out of their combined caches of superior virtue is reminiscent of what is possible when one is able to employ Schiller's play impulse. However, the effects of happiness are not shared equally, but instead benefit Dornach disproportionately. Even in

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<sup>16</sup> Gender works in a different way here than it does in *Effi Briest* when Wüllersdorf is witness to Innstetten's knowledge of having been cuckolded. Maria has no option of dueling to right her personal problems. The logic of the narrative seems to indicate that Wolfi must die because of his role in this incident of sexual abandon. Van Ornam notes that the site of the adulterous act is the same place where Wolfi dies, an eighteenth-century summer house. Maria was able to summon help for Wolfi from the summer house, so she could have also called someone to remove the intruding Tessin. Van Ornam cites a study on novels of adultery by Tony Tanner that describes two kinds of settings and thus two kinds of punishment for adultery. If adultery takes place in the "nonsocial space" of the field, where the woman's calls for help might have been heard, then she is less culpable. If it takes place within the "social space," then the adulterers are subject to more stringent punishment. Van Ornam sees the summerhouse as a kind of mixed space, still on the grounds of the estate and not far from the order of the manor house, but as a structure from the previous century, a time characterized by different sexual mores. See Van Ornam, "Introduction" ix-x.

<sup>17</sup> "“mortals have created the immortal”" (BA 70).

her greatest happiness, Maria lives exclusively for her husband: “Wie oft atmete sie auf, frei und leicht, und sah ihr eigenes Bild so rein, wie die Seele ihres Mannes es widerspiegelte” (US 80).<sup>18</sup> Her happiness is not her own representation of herself as living art, but his.

The intertwining strands of guilt and human weakness become bittersweet in the romantic atmosphere of Italy. The couple tries to start their relationship again on a different footing. She fights the ghosts of the past because “Sie sind die Feinde eines Glückes, das ungetrübt zu erhalten ihre wichtigste Aufgabe war, vor der alles andere zurücktrat, des Glückes Hermanns” (US 80-81).<sup>19</sup> He makes a confession that he has committed “ein Verbrechen an dir – ein unsühnbares” (US 80)<sup>20</sup> by forcing himself on her when he knew that she did not love him. She is the one who is doing penance for his confession and for hers that she feels is much worse and thus cannot bring herself to divulge to him. She feels that her burden of guilt becomes heavier after he has washed himself of his perceived sin. She wants to feel as if she were created by his best talents, even though he has confessed that he used his moral strengths to gain an immoral advantage as a suitor. He is the instigator of the marriage that she only now has come to appreciate; he wants her to become the reflection of his best intentions, an exhibit of sublime virtue. They are both living according to their shared, but unspoken belief that “die Verirrung eines Augenblicks,” can be atoned “durch ein ganzes Leben der Rechtschaffenheit und Pflichterfüllung” (US 80).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> “How often she breathed freely and easily and saw her own image as pure as it was reflected in the soul of her husband” (BA 70).

<sup>19</sup> They were the enemies of happiness – Hermann’s happiness. Preserving that was her most important task, compared to which everything else was insignificant” (BA 70).

<sup>20</sup> “a crime against you – one beyond atonement” (BA 71).

<sup>21</sup> “a moment’s error,” “by an entire lifetime of rectitude and performance of duty” (BA 70).

Maria's lack of control over her own life terrifies her, but she nevertheless goes on trying to control herself to be as the patriarchal system has trained her. She is too consumed by her guilt to critically analyze her situation. Control bursts, however, when the hand of fate intervenes, causing the sudden drowning deaths of Dornach and his legitimate son. The narrative creates tension in the scene previous to the father-son deaths, as Maria almost confesses her secret to her husband. It also depicts the most intimate moment the couple shares in the narrative. Maria maintains control and does not reveal her secret, but she does bring up the topic in the guise of a hypothetical situation. The answer she receives confirms that it does not matter whether she has already fallen or whether her position of sublime virtue in his eyes still suspends her for a fatal fall. He replies to her query with disbelief, but tells her that he would still love her, but "dann wäre mir genommen, was meinem Dasein den Wert gibt" (US 109).<sup>22</sup> His moral worth would be irretrievably stolen, and therefore he tells her: "Ich kenne dich und wei , da du zugrunde gehen müßtest am Bewu tsein einer Schuld" (US 109).<sup>23</sup> Even as he is saying the most sincerely loving things he can to her, he is confirming that she lacks her own identity. Her sublime virtue is what is of value to him as a symbol of his worth. It does not matter that her virtue is a figment of their imaginations.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> "then what gives my life value would have been taken from me" (BA 96).

<sup>23</sup> "I know you and I know that you would be destroyed by the awareness of your guilt" (BA 96).

<sup>24</sup> Patricia Howe argues that realism is closely connected to idealism because it models a moral design of the world (46). She uses examples from *Effi Briest*, *Unsühnbar* and Saar's *Schloß Kostenitz* (1892) to show how this pairing of morality and realism, marked by the identification of the author with the narrator, and thus also the narrative with the moral position of a work, begins to break down. She reads both Saar's and Ebner's narratives as participating in the deterministic debate because they juxtapose moral absolutism with instinct. Though the heroine's recognition of guilt makes these narratives different from *Effi Briest*, they also address the validity of the rules of social order. She concludes that the effect of the questioning of moral codes through the incorporation of experiments on the formal and referential levels encourages reflection on the relationship between fiction and truth. See Patricia Howe, "Realism and Moral Design," in *Perspectives on German Realist Writing: Eight Essays*, ed. Mark G. Ward (Lewistown, NY: Mellen, 1995), 45-63.

Readers of *Unwiederbringlich* meet Christine, a noblewoman like Maria, after she has become accustomed to the leaps of imagination necessary to maintain her identity of virtue. She has received many more lessons in this area of life than Ebner's younger character, Maria. Christine has been married for seventeen years to Holk, the suitor of her father-figure's choosing, has raised two teenagers, the eldest a girl, and youngest a boy, and suffered the death of baby boy at the outset of *Unwiederbringlich*. Whereas the death of Maria's mother left her with one parent, Christine lost both of her parents at some unspecified time in her childhood, a detail that is not revealed until her character has been strongly established. Christine's childhood exposure to death is something that remains a small detail in her background, but throughout the novel, the reader senses that it acts as a key emotional source of many of her behaviors.

*Unwiederbringlich* is the story of a failing marriage that breaks up, eventually gets reestablished, but shortly thereafter is dashed to pieces by the female character's suicide. More narrative focus on Holk than was given to Dornach combined with the longer history of the Holk couple mean that the analysis of Christine's individual difficulties will be more complicated than the previous discussion of Maria's situation.

In the seven relatively happy years that pass between the shift in housing and the beginning of the narrated time, several other significant changes occur in the family's life. Christine invites a companion, Fräulein Julie von Dobschütz, a childhood friend from her boarding school days, to live with them. Dobschütz's presence detracts from the couple's intimacy. Another point of relational deterioration is that as the two children grow, differences of opinion in the areas of educational and religious preferences become more pronounced. These matters are significant themes in the novel, but the family's

change of residence, the point some years previous to the narrated time at which the narration begins, acts as a catalyst to these other areas of friction between the spouses.<sup>25</sup>

As is also the case with *Effi Briest*, interpreted in chapter two, Fontane begins with a description of a domestic setting, which in the case of *Unwiederbringlich* is the new Holk family residence. The narrative sketch of geography and architecture gives an indication of the plot that is to follow. The structure and location of the Holk residence are introduced even before the characters can be connected to the structure of language that houses the characters' consciousness and sense of being. The importance of this description appears negotiable as one begins reading the novel for the first time, but when one returns to it after reading the whole novel, an outline of major themes emerges.

The description in the first sentence indicates a situation that is not quite one thing while also not the other. The novel opens: "Eine Meile südlich von Glücksburg, auf einer dicht an die See herantretenden Düne, lag das von der gräflich Holkschen Familie bewohnte Schloß Holkenäs, eine Sehenswürdigkeit für die vereinzelt Fremden, die von Zeit zu Zeit in diese wenigstens damals noch vom Weltverkehr abgelegene Gegend kamen" (UW 5).<sup>26</sup> From this long sentence, the reader can form several expectations about the plot. First, this will not be a happy novel. The geography of the nearby contested national border and the confluence of land and sea, together with the name of Glücksburg, all indicate that boundaries will be issues. Castle Holkenäs is within close

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<sup>25</sup> This interpretation matches one by Dagmar Lorenz in which she reads the novel as depicting an atmosphere of dissolution in the privileged classes of the late nineteenth century. She points out that the novel is marked by interruptions that mark the irretrievable loss of ideal communicative moments. Julie Dobschütz's presence in the Holk household is only one example of interruption. Lorenz argues that ultimately, not only Christine, but also Holk, the Princess, and Brigitte Hansen, are spiritually alienated from their present, which results in their loss of personal control. See Dagmar Lorenz, "Fragmentierung und Unterbrechung als Struktur und Gehaltsprinzipien in Fontanes Roman *Unwiederbringlich*," *German Quarterly* 51(1978): 493-510.

<sup>26</sup> "Holkenäs Castle, the family seat of Count Holk, was built on a dune sloping down to the sea, a mile south of Glücksburg; an impressive sight for the occasional visitor to a district at that time quite off the beaten track" (BR 1).

walking distance of Glücksburg.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps happiness lies guarded in Glücksburg, unable to extend itself a little further, but it is largely missing in the atmosphere at Castle Holkenäs. Second, the castle and, by extension, the people who live inside of it, occupy a precarious position. Any dune on the shore of the sea will erode with time, and the process will be especially accelerated if the shore is pummeled by storms. In any case, dunes are usually made up of sand, not a solid foundation for a structure as large as a castle. Dunes and the ocean are familiar motifs symbolizing hidden danger and shifting conditions, another point of symbolic similarity we remember from *Effi Briest*. Finally, the out-of-the-way location might be provincial, but even this simple place is touched by historical, political, psychological and sexual currents of change.<sup>28</sup>

Whereas the description of the setting shows the larger context of the story, information about the structure of the residence that houses a seventeen-year-old marriage and its fruits gives the reader clues about the individuals in and around the family structure. Christine's brother Baron Alfred von Arne of Arnewiek, whom everyone calls Arne, speaks of the new castle as "einem nachgeborenen Tempel zu Pästum" (UW 6).<sup>29</sup> The narrator comments on the tone of Arne's analogy in two

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<sup>27</sup> Glücksburg is a real town with a real fortress located just south of the present-day German-Danish border in the federal state of Schleswig-Holstein on the Baltic Sea coast. The English translation of *Glück*, the topic of my first chapter, is happiness or good fortune. A *Burg* is a fortress.

<sup>28</sup> In arguing for classifying *Unwiederbringlich* as a historical novel, Anne-Bitt Gerecke makes an innovative argument about *Geschichte* as both history and story. She points out that possibilities for harmony in most aspects of life fade in the conclusion of this novel, but that classifying the work as a historical novel, a genre with a closed narrative model that is guided by tradition, is a gesture that compensates for the other forms of dissolution in the narrative. She reads the novel's conclusion as the subversion of Fontane's contemporary literary concept of *Geschichte*. Positivist narration of history and story become relativist by virtue of the different and confusing perspectives from which the reader must choose. The failure of values is presented by what she calls the emptying of the transcendental signification of *Geschichte* both inside the text and as the text. See Anne-Bitt Gerecke, "Theodor Fontanes *Unwiederbringlich*: Das Ende des historischen Romans?" in *Kunstaunonomie und literarischer Markt: Konstellationen des poetischen Realismus, Vorträge der Raabe und Storm Tagung vom 7. bis 10. September 2000 in Husum*, ed. Heinrich Detering (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2003), 111-122. Gerecke's argument is reminiscent of Peter C. Pfeiffer's point that the sketch form of Ebner's "Meine Kinderjahre" is a criticism of history from a male viewpoint. See p. 48, note 19 in chapter one of this dissertation.

<sup>29</sup> "a latter-day temple of Paestum" (BR 3).



contrasting sentences that effectively cancel out the other's meanings. "Natürlich alles ironisch. Und doch auch wieder mit einer gewissen Berechtigung" (UW 6).<sup>30</sup> Ironical or substantive, the reader can choose which interpretation to believe. In any case, this opposition suggests that the people who live inside find themselves at an unclear junction in their lives. Their challenge is to make the interior of their house worthy of its construction as a temple of domestic contentment, rescuing it from being demoted in value to an attractive veneer. Less than a decade after its completion, the castle is no longer the home of a family whose positive attributes can humanly compliment the grandiose exterior.

The original Temples of Paestum were part of Johann Joachim Winckelmann's archaeological finds in the 1750s, and the concrete way of inspiring admiration in German imaginations for Greek, and to a lesser extent, Roman antiquity. By selecting this ancient Greek style to build a "Schloß am Meer" (UW 7),<sup>31</sup> as the structure to represent his family's history and future, Holk is stating his preference for secular inspiration in terms of beauty and wisdom. Trying to convince himself and others he is a sophisticated "Hofmann und Lebemann" (UW 266)<sup>32</sup> rather than a provincial nobody, he mixes Greek style with strong Italian influences because it looks more culturally

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<sup>30</sup> "Ironically, of course, yet with some justification" (BR 3). Uwe Petersen connects Holk's castle with the Palladian style of Italian renaissance architecture that Goethe particularly admired and that he notes Innstetten and Effi also visit during their honeymoon in Italy. He argues that the castle's location and its style show that Holk is trying to create a happiness that is well proportioned and regularly symmetrical. He notes that what Holk cannot accept is that there is a dialectic tension between the normative and the freedom of spontaneity. Happiness cannot be a constant presence in life. The atmosphere of the castle reflects this too. When Holk returns at Christmas to tell Christine he wants to leave her, the castle has lost the bright charm that graced it during the summer. Petersen interprets Arne's comment about irony as a reminder of the tension inherent in the construction of happiness. See Uwe Petersen, "Poesie der Architektur—Architektur der Poesie: Zur Gestaltung und Funktion eines palladianischen Schauplatzes in Fontanes Roman *Unwiederbringlich*," in *Studien zur Deutschen Literatur: Festschrift für Adolf Beck zum siebzigsten Geburtstag*, eds. Ulrich Fülleborn and Johannes Krogoll (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1979), 246-254.

<sup>31</sup> "castle by the sea" (BR 3).

<sup>32</sup> "courtier and man of the world" (BR 270).

metropolitan than the family's ancestral lodging that resembled an "Inspektorhaus" (UW 6)<sup>33</sup> and not the residence of a local nobleman with high aspirations. Holk wants to make a big impression with this new structure. He succeeds because, as seen from the water, his castle really does look like a temple. The substance that lies behind this impression is rather mundane, as one sees when one looks behind the columns that conceal the rather ordinary living arrangements within.

Most Greek or Roman temples of antiquity were built to serve as shrines housing the spirits of deities. The closest thing to a goddess inhabiting the temple-like "castle by the sea" is Christine. Like a Greek goddess, she has characteristics that make her extraordinary, but she also has significant flaws that couple with her sublimely virtuous exterior. If she is indeed a goddess in her house, her most important worshipper, Holk, has lost his faith in her and has ceased to act according to her wishes. Construction of the temple-like residence is motivated not by his desire to honor the virtuous Christine, but instead to satisfy his "Baupassion" (UW 6).<sup>34</sup> The woman whom another husband might have revered for her extraordinary virtue is reluctant to live in the "temple." It takes her a long time to even *want* to be content there. As she tells Holk after he announces his intentions to build the new residence: "Wenn man glücklich ist, soll man nicht noch glücklicher sein wollen" (UW 7).<sup>35</sup> Apparently, she understands Holk's drive to build the

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<sup>33</sup> "house of a minor government official." Trans. is mine.

<sup>34</sup> "passion for building" (BR 2). Fontane writes of a childhood passion for building in his autobiography, *Meine Kinderjahre*, which is interpreted in the first chapter of this dissertation. There, he writes that he loved to cut and paste paper materials together, mostly because he enjoyed seeing something tangible emerge from his efforts. It's easy to interpret this as an early stage of his development as a writer, pasting materials of his imagination together to make a written product. His passion for building texts contributed to tensions in his marriage, for example when in 1876 he botched the possibility to remain in the coveted and financially secure position of *Erster Ständiger Sekretär der Akademie der Künste in Berlin* (First Standing Secretary of the Academy of the Arts in Berlin) because it wasn't well suited to his personality. See Heinz Ohff, *Theodor Fontane: Leben und Werk* (Piper: München, 1995), 259-267. Ironically, in *Unwiederbringlich*, the indirect product of Holk's passion for building is a demolition of the atmosphere in his marriage. This prompts him to look forward to his opportunity to take up his courtier position in Copenhagen again, where he builds relationships that further detract from his marriage.

<sup>35</sup> "If people are happy they should not try to become any happier" (BR 3).

new residence to be a pronouncement that he is not content. She senses that when he pins expectations for something better on a mere change of location and structure, his focus is on the aesthetics of the structure, not the practicality of a form that will accentuate its content, the area that she feels is a more important element. Holk makes no room in his plans for her doubt about their new domestic façade. He placates her with praises for her goodness and beauty in the hopes that they will override another of her prominent characteristics, melancholy doubt.

Exterior facades serve to conceal things that those who maintain the facades wish to remain hidden. Like her new residence, Christine has a mask that hides her inner workings. “Beautiful” is the adjective that is used most often to describe her because it matches her less visible “höhere Eigenschaften” (UW 11).<sup>36</sup> Her mask hides her inner emotions not only from others, but also from herself because she forgets that she is wearing it. When their parents died, Arne who is older than she by many years, decided to send her to a boarding school run by the Herrnhuter, an orthodox Lutheran religious sect, in Gnadenfrei, Silesia. Her indoctrination into this rigorous brand of Protestant belief does not inoculate her against the influence of superstition, reactions to her inner emotions that she would rather not face. Her imagination is easily sparked by fantasy, and she finds meaning in things that the Herrnhuter would frown upon. Much of her fantasy life surrounds the topic of death, and it can be suggested that this stems from her parents’ deaths. For example, she perceives the presence of her dead child’s ghost in her old residence. Her reluctance to part from the ghost inspires her to make plans for a new family mausoleum.

Religion and morality have become Christine’s mask of truth, just as Maria’s coping mechanisms after her adulterous encounter center around fulfilling her social and

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<sup>36</sup> “higher characteristics.” Trans. is mine.

familial responsibilities. These two bases for Christine's behavior protect her against criticism from others, primarily her husband and brother, because they make it almost impossible to dispute that she is right. She does not consciously use the mask. With the encouragement of Arne and society, she has perfected her mask to such a degree that it has become a substitute for her self, making her forget about the other elements that contribute to her character. She is better at supporting the values of society, the patriarchy, than he is, but since she is a women, this is intolerable for Holk and for other men.

Ironically, Holk's list of aggravations about Christine bears a striking resemblance to the list of traits that first attracted him. What undoubtedly aggravates him most is his fear that his male virtues might be inferior to her female ones. This in turn saps most of the energy that would be required for him to relate to her positively. Her mask becomes even more important to her as a defense against his aggravation. The mausoleum renovation project is her attempt to propose something that they can both be excited about, but it misses this purpose entirely. He is building so that the world can appreciate his edifice of virtue. She is building down into the deep issues that connect her to religion and morality. Her excitement about a new mausoleum only shows him how his desires for building are frivolous, and hers address spiritual needs, an area of consideration that he would rather avoid.

In addition to the virtues that consume Christine's and Maria's identities, another point of comparison is how virtues are transmitted from one generation of women to the next. In terms of "Unsühnbar," I discuss this issue in the next section of the chapter when I interpret what messages the long unread diary of Maria's dead mother holds for her. The parts of Christine's relationship to her teenaged daughter Asta that are portrayed in the novel consist of Christine's concern that Asta relies on the moral lessons her

mother has taught her as she makes the transition into adulthood. In one of the last conversations Christine has before she kills herself, Dobschütz remembers her wiping a tear from her eye when she referred to the inevitability of Asta's upcoming entrance into society. Christine knows that if she succeeds in encouraging Asta to become as virtuous as she has, her daughter may well encounter the same kinds of problems as she does. Holk is basically a good person, and there are many men like him who would be a suitable husband for Asta, but Holk and men like him are weak when it comes to accommodating and appreciating a woman's strengths. If Christine gets her way and sends the children away to boarding schools run by the Herrnhuter, they will receive a similar education to her own. They will also be vulnerable to similar difficulties choosing between virtue and realism. Holk is adamantly against this course of action, but can present no credible counterproposal.

The children's future is the topic around which the couple's inherent differences with one another center. Each parent feels there is much at stake. Christine cannot see what educational opportunities would be available if the children stayed at home and continued learning with private teachers. Holk does not want to have his children far away from him. A scene between Asta and her best friend, Elisabeth Petersen, the granddaughter of the local pastor, illustrates how Asta is put at risk by her mother's inability to compromise and her father's lack of ideas. The two girls sit in a graveyard, a place that is as symbolic as the description of the family residence in the first sentence of the novel. Each of them has a family member buried there; Asta's baby brother is there and Elisabeth's mother is too. Asta wants to peek into the family mausoleum to look at the small grave. She climbs up on a headstone and is stretching to glimpse through the window when a brick she is leaning on comes loose and gives her a fright as it topples into the enclosed space. There is shocked silence, as if Asta could have fallen in, as if

could have been the one who had died instead of her brother. When the girls find a more comfortable place to overcome the fright, albeit a place that is next to a carpentry site that probably supplies the church yard with coffins, the topic of conversation reveals the dual nature of virtue: how it can be beneficial, but also personally damaging.

Asta is telling her friend about Christine's plans to send her away. She says her mother made her swear that even when life is hard, she should always keep in mind that "man lebt nicht um Vergnügen und Freude willen, sondern man lebt, um seine Pflicht zu tun [. . .] denn daran hinge Glück und Seligkeit" (UW 61).<sup>37</sup> Christine is fixated on duty, convinced that it will bring security to a life that she knows can turn from happy to tragic in a moment. It is easier for her to imagine how she can secure a place in eternity rather than make the most out of this life. Her outlook does not balance with Holk's apathy for serious matters. As Asta describes her parents to Elisabeth: "die Mama bedrückt uns oft, aber sie sorgt doch auch für uns, und der Papa erfreut uns jeden Augenblick, aber im ganzen kümmert er sich nicht recht um uns. [. . .] Da ich auch eine Seele habe, daran denkt er nicht, vielleicht glaubt er nicht mal daran" (UW 60).<sup>38</sup> At the end of this scene, the church bell chimes noon, time for Asta to head home. The chimes also mark the commencement of an important event that will set in motion the major processes at work in the plot, Holk's departure for his duties in Copenhagen as a courtier to a Danish princess that triggers Christine's descent into despair. Copenhagen is a city of what Christine considers loose morals, a harbor full of ship captains and crews who have sailed to the Orient. While Holk is away enjoying the distance between him and Christine, she

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<sup>37</sup> "we must not live for our own pleasure and enjoyment but to do our duty [. . .] in that way we shall always be happy and blessed" (BR 59).

<sup>38</sup> "Mama often scolds us but she does care for us whereas Papa is amusing all the time but he doesn't really trouble himself about us very much. [. . .] He doesn't stop to imagine that I have a soul as well, perhaps he doesn't even think that I have" (BR 57-58).

stays behind, without her children, but with Dobschütz to keep her company, in the castle as the dune on which it sits shifts closer to the sea.

Faith is that which Christine believes will be “einen Anker für die Stürme des Lebens” (UW 60),<sup>39</sup> but anchors are plunged into the water and sink to the bottom. They secure a strong ship, but do not compensate for structural weaknesses. Faith is a complex matter that is not necessarily influenced by reason, and thus is difficult to learn or unlearn. Christine is naturally receptive to religion. Her identity becomes conflated with her beliefs, leaving room for little else but her insistence that she is correct, and the worries and frustration that accompany her moral intransigence. Her religious education is not a matter of her own choosing, nor of her parents’, but something that Arne instigated. His decision to set her along the path of her fervent devotion can be interpreted as an effort to present her with a coping mechanism to deal with loss.

Her way of compensating the loss, her moral development that she undertakes as a duty to honor her brother’s wishes, does not please Arne after he sees the final product of his vision of a virtuous sister. He sees that tensions are growing in the Holk household, and applying a typical double standard, assigns the blame squarely to Christine. As he tells a clergyman and family friend who he feels might be influential in convincing her to change, he would like her to understand “daß die rechten Liebe von diesem versteckten Hochmut, der nur in Demutsallürren einhergeht, nichts wissen wolle, mit anderen Worten, daß sie sich ändern und ihrem Manne zu Willen sein müsse, statt ihm das Haus zu verleiden” (UW 40).<sup>40</sup> It does not seem to occur to him that the opposite is also true; Holk is making their house equally unbearable for her, the one who

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<sup>39</sup> “an anchor for the storms of life” (BR 58).

<sup>40</sup> “that her attitude is nothing but self-righteousness, that real love has nothing to do with this hidden pride that is merely parading as humility, in other words, that she must mend her ways and fall in with her husband’s wishes instead of making the house unbearable for him” (BR 36).

is bound to the house. Arne expects her to “Fahne wechseln” (UW 66),<sup>41</sup> the phrase Christine chooses to depict what seems to her as her brother’s regrettable change of conviction, even though she is convinced that her belief is not a matter of loyalty. To her, her beliefs, and by extension, her reasons for living are absolute matters. The renunciation of them precipitates what might be called a small death, a concept that I elucidate shortly.

She questions Holk’s and Arne’s way of thinking, but she feels pressured to conform to their will even as she instinctively feels this would be the wrong thing to do. Having matured away from family and community while in Gnadenfrei, she became used to assuming a degree of personal authority in her personal beliefs and behavior, especially when she feels she can base her authority in religious teachings. This reaction comes naturally to her because after all, her parents’ death caused her to mature faster than she might have otherwise, and led her to receive the kind of education that she would not have otherwise. In fact, she feels that looking at the world the way she does is the responsibility of a person acting in accordance to her faith. Arne wants her to be more malleable. His immediate purpose is to convince her to take her cues from Holk’s beliefs, even though they are less consequential than hers. He feels this is the best way to save the union of two people he loves. His suggestion that she change the attitude that he himself chose to inculcate in her seems arbitrary and could result in quite unintended outcomes. Perhaps taking Arne’s advice would encourage her to take another look at all her established beliefs, and put them to the rigorous critical analysis that she would not have been capable of when she acquired them as a child recovering from serious loss. Following Arne’s advice to take a more relative approach to her situation could conceivably lead her to more strongly reject the idea that she should unquestioningly

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<sup>41</sup> “change sides” (BR 64). This literally means to “change flags.”



adopt Holk's approach to life simply because he is her husband, a man, and therefore her superior in judgment. Arne's approach inadvertently opens the door for her to start doubting the value of her feminine virtues, and is a significant factor precipitating her slide towards despair and eventually suicide.

The character sketches that I have made of Ebner's Maria and Fontane's Christine show how their most precious possession, the virtues that they have taken extraordinary care to cultivate, can become a life-threatening burden. Recognition from others, both positive and negative, calls the characters' own attention to their attributes and leads to self-questioning and pressure. They begin to glimpse the inherent paradox of their femininity that virtue implies strength of character, which in turn implies a sense of self-preservation, whereas being virtuously feminine means being resolute in their subservience to the patriarchal system that benefits from keeping them weak. They question their emotions and their reason, essentially their own character, and feel gradually stripped of a vital essence, as if their identities are evaporating into the air around them.

### **Irony and Ambiguity**

Placing the topic of virtue in such a harsh context and showing how there are many interconnected factors that suggest how something so positive can trigger such negative results are ways that Ebner and Fontane highlight the irony and ambiguity of the women's fates. The reasons for Maria's and Christine's suicides are especially powerful when experienced in a bundle of emotions: confusion, self-doubt, exhaustion, and isolation. Ellie Ragland, a scholar of Lacanian theory, interprets how Lacan theorizes about the intricate connection between desire and death as represented in the primal scene. She explains that in this context, Lacan is not referring to the scene of a sexual act

between one's parents, but instead to the "the claustrophobic desires and hurts closeted within family novels, those traumata that produce unassimilated, almost forgotten knowledge – the terror of the all too familiar." (Ragland 95). "Unsühnbar" and *Unwiederbringlich* are aesthetic renditions of primal scenes, about how the women's virtues pull them in opposing directions and how the stress that is thus produced is more than they can sustain.

Returning again to the works' one-word titles, one can see that they summarize the two-sided nature of the women's predicaments. The verbs that form the root and thus the substance of the adjectival titles, *wiederbringen* and *sühnen* (to bring back and to atone), suggest positive possibilities that the individual herself has a role in influencing. The negative prefix *un-* snuffs out the sense of optimism that the root verbs convey even before they are named. The titles strongly implicate that the tone from which the plots will unfold will be ironic and ambiguous. Pleasure and pain are inextricably connected in ironic ways, as are gain and loss.

What is perceived as ambiguous can be rendered comprehensible with the aid of several of Jacques Lacan's key theories. These are complexly nuanced and are difficult to explain in the limited context allowed me in this chapter, nonetheless I explain briefly how they are appropriated for my readings. One of Lacan's ideas that especially resonates in these two works is that underneath the women's searches for meaning and identity lies a void, the Real. In other words, unity of consciousness is nothing but a fiction that camouflages emptiness. This idea adds a profound and perhaps problematic dimension to my contention that the women's suicides are their loudest statements. For one thing, how can their choices to permanently silence themselves be statements that register within the system of language, what Lacan calls the Symbolic Order, when committing suicide means actively removing one's self from that order? How can they

speak to expose the open secret of the void/Real at the same time they are silent? The works' titles, relations between people, and the individual's hopes charge Maria and Christine with the task of bringing back something they never fully possessed, or of atoning for an indefinite wrong. What they try, but fail, to restore is the power of the fantasy of wholeness in themselves and their relationships.

*Unsühnbar* and *Unwiederbringlich* are explorations of the two female minds, the effects of their psychological states on their marriages, and their struggles to resist the siren call of death. The stories reinforce time-honored ideas about feminine virtue and call them into question at the same time. Struggles to recover the sense of wholeness the characters imagine they once possessed, together with growing skepticism towards personal characteristics they and others considered virtuous, relate closely to the pursuit of the literary realism, particularly at this late point in the movement. In realism, language is the material used to build illusions that encourage readers to conclude that they comprehend the world. The appropriateness of expecting language to perform in this way leaves much to be desired. This contradiction forms the point of departure for Lacan's theories. The characters and the works in which they appear reflect the growing perception in the late nineteenth-century that traditional tools for understanding life are no longer adequate for the task because science, social, economic, cultural, and political changes are making the idea of reality seem more and more subjective.<sup>42</sup>

Unfulfilled desires, such as the two figures' longing to recover the happiness they feel they once had, are the remaining traces of discomfort from our process of entry into

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<sup>42</sup> Hubert Ohl reads *Unwiederbringlich* as more of a modern novel than a realist one. He notes that Fontane combines poetry and realism to create an almost modern effect that still relies on tradition. The clearest example he gives of this is that the narrative's representation of what is happening in the marriage is as opaque to the reader than it is to the characters involved. He comments that what makes the novel a good read one century later is that its form transcends what it depicts. See Hubert Ohl, "Zwischen Tradition und Moderne: Der Künstler Theodor Fontane am Beispiel von *Unwiederbringlich*," in *Theodor Fontane: The London Symposium*, eds. Alan Bance, Helen Chambers and Charlotte Jolles (Stuttgart: Hans-Dieter Heinz, 1995), 235-252.

(the system of) language, Lacan's famous theory of the Mirror Stage. The Mirror Stage itself is not directly important to my interpretation, though the three orders that are associated with it are. None of the orders completely shuts out all awareness of the other two, but once an individual fully acquires language, she is more or less caught in the Symbolic order. She has arrived there during her childhood, when she is first acquiring language, the process that involves fitting herself into the pre-existing system of shifting signifiers. She does this by first shedding her association with the Real, the underlying structure of all existence, a kind of void in which nothing is separate from anything else, and then passing through the Imaginary order. In the Imaginary, the small child experiences the narcissistic process in which she is gradually forced to accept a formation of the concept of self that matches the image she observes in the mirror. Even though this image is a fragmented representation of the self, she has to accept it as if it were whole if she wants to fit herself into the Symbolic. Occasionally, the pretense of wholeness wears thin and she glimpses the frightening void of the Real. The Real underlies both the Symbolic and the Imaginary, and feels familiar and terrifyingly incomprehensible at the same time because it cannot be understood within the representative systems of language or culture. Periodic glimpses into the Real stimulate searches for the missing something that will bring her wholeness, the *object a* that she feels she lost, though she forgot how, as she tried to claim a place within the Symbolic order. She is never able to reclaim the *object a* because *jouissance*, or the sensations of pleasure and pain that keep her distracted from the lack of the Real, always steer her away from attaining satisfaction.

The attraction of the Real and the *jouissance* that distracts attention away from it have a close relationship to the death drive (Ragland 82). Perhaps one of Lacan's most famous and memorable concepts is that the letter or the word kills the thing. Put another

way, once something is represented within the system of language, the representation fragments the subject's knowledge of the original object. According to this idea, a subject meets two deaths: as she enters into the Symbolic, and when her life as an organism ends (Ragland 87). Ragland suggests that death is the key to Lacan's theory in that "there is a failure in representation itself, its first instance being a failure of any innate unity of body parts or mental processes" (Ragland 97). She shows how life and death do not oppose one another, but are intertwined with one another. The presence of death is something that belongs to life, the repetitive cycle of pain and pleasure driven by *jouissance* in order to produce *jouissance*, and thus divert attention away from the ultimate truth of the Real.

The fact that Maria and Christine incite their own deaths indicates that they perceive the connection that exists between fulfilling their deep desires to achieve peace and the trauma that is inherent in the pursuit of that desire. The childhood loss of one or both parents leaves them vulnerable to the awareness of the constant presence of death in every aspect of their lives and is a constant danger to their mental health. Parental death functions like a flaw in what Lacan in his "Mirror Stage" article calls "the finally donned armor of an alienating identity" (Lacan 6). Lacan characterizes this process as putting on a "rigid structure" and "the shattering of the *Innenwelt* to *Umwelt* circle" that makes one feel naked without the structure of language. Lacan's choice of words here is reminiscent of the Schopenhauer quote that I use to introduce chapter two (p. 77). Schopenhauer was commenting on what he regarded as the vital and violent essence of a novel, a depiction of the primary interest, the inner life, that doesn't expend the energies of the outer life. Of course, Schopenhauer wrote his philosophy long before Freud's psychological revolution, and so for the post-Freud reader, ideas of what constitutes inner and outer life have changed, but Lacan's image of the shattered circle between the two worlds evokes

similar images of violence as Schopenhauer's. This violence is the unchanging proximity of death that is hidden behind the Symbolic structures that propose to ignore death.

Loss visits the female characters again in the form of the sudden, accidental deaths of Maria's husband and their son and in Christine's painful separation and subsequent divorce from her husband. Each of these losses is connected to the role that letters and writing play in the narratives. Desire and trauma are represented in the smaller written texts that are incorporated into the larger texts of the stories. Each textual layer reveals ample proof of an overproduction of *jouissance*, reenactments of their first deaths and signs that their biological deaths won't be far away.

Although I have already mentioned how death concludes Maria's marriage, it makes sense to return to an earlier part of "Unsühnbar," before her wedding, to see the role that letters of death and desire play. Wolfsberg presents her a locked gold enameled box containing the unread diary on the eve of her wedding. He is probably not aware of what he has given his daughter except that he thinks that she should have something that belonged to her mother. The box represents a miniature coffin in which secrets have lain buried for many years. Once Maria is able to unlock it and read its sensitive contents, the box becomes a portal that connects her to her origins, including details of her parents' marital joys and sorrows. It is a Pandora's box containing not a new kind of evil, but rather a familiar and potentially terrifying reminder of the constant presence of death within life.

Whether they represent a coffin or a portal, the contents of the box, the letters written into the diary that cry out to Maria like a disembodied, pleading voice from beyond the grave, highlight the dangerous and sensitive physical divide between life and death. Maria's old scars are reopened as she repeats the trauma of having to limit herself to the formation of a fragmented identity while reading of similar traumas that eventually

killed her mother. This painful process isn't completely negative, however. It also fills her with hope, because mixed in with the uncanny written contents of the box is the concept of truth, a concept on which Maria places a high value. Truth is what her mother is trying desperately to convey by using the constructs of language and culture. These are the armor-like structures of the Symbolic that hinder the expression of deeply held convictions even as they purport to function as perfect mode of conveying them.

Maria learns that her much sought-after truth is not absolute, but relative as she attempts to apply it to her life's options. She does not want to believe her mother's accusations about her father's sexual infidelity, but also cannot imagine that her mother would lie. She burns the papers. Her desire to learn about her mother's death may seem to have been fulfilled, but since desire is insatiable, she replaces her original wish with related ones. She wishes to keep the information she has learned a secret, and to decipher what this uncomfortable inheritance means for her own life. Her wishes are contradictory. It is not possible to keep this vital part of her family's past secret while at the same time incorporating its meaning. Instead of giving her pleasure, her desire becomes pain that she repeatedly inflicts on herself. She may have thought that she could banish the destructive evidence of hurt that has emerged as if from beyond the grave, but she cannot prevent the letters that have already branded themselves into her psyche during the Mirror Stage from smarting at these recent painful revelations that she has attempted to incorporate, or make a part of her body. She is reminded that she is not as dissimilar from her mother as she and her father might wish.

As my analysis skips ahead in the narrated time to the period of her marriage after she has succumbed to her sexual longings for Tessin, and after she has borne an illegitimate son as a result, Maria is being overwhelmed by her sense of being fractured as well as by the continuing surges of *jouissance* that pummel her. *Jouissance* expresses

itself in her perceptions as two competing forces: her guilt at not living up to her own values and her instinct for self-preservation that is embodied in her desire to care for her family. In a quote that my reader will recognize from the introduction to this chapter, her pain is expressed by the narrator as “der verdammende Schicksalsschlu der über sie gefällt war”: “‘ Du liebst die Wahrheit, wandle in der Lüge’” (US 72).<sup>43</sup> She feels that her will to live according to her established principles has little to no influence over the way she lives her life. She seems driven by the Schopenhauerian will to life that is impassive to suffering. Lacan might have described her conflict differently, as we see from one of his more quotable formulations from *Écrits* in “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious” that bears similarity to the above quotes from “Unsühnbar:” “We get used to reality [*réel*]. The truth we repress” (Lacan, #521, 160). As she is pummeled by waves of *jouissance* that swirl one way and then another, even the truth becomes an unclear category of knowledge.

Confusion about the nature of truth and an individual’s capacity to steer her life according to it are major factors in understanding how Maria’s actions make sense to her and within the context of the story that is narrated according to the logic of realism. Some critics and readers contemporary to Ebner felt that the plot of this narrative did not make sense.<sup>44</sup> Some said that it seemed implausible that such a principled woman would succumb to sexual temptation and commit adultery. As mentioned in the introduction to

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<sup>43</sup> “fate’s damning decree for her,” “‘You love truth; now live a lie’”, I added the adjective “damning” to Van Ornam’s Trans. (BA 62).

<sup>44</sup> Critics who find Maria’s actions unbelievable include Erich Schmidt, an important representative of modern German literary criticism at the time (257), and Fritz Mauthner, Ebner’s friend and editor of the *Berliner Tageblatt* in the late 1880s, which published Ebner’s story “Margarete” (252-253). Marco Brociner, journalist and author, writes in a review that appeared in the *Neuen Wiener Tagblatt* (259) that the role that coincidence plays in the deaths of father and son “billige Effekte dem Leser Thränen zu entlocken” (“cheap effects to coax tears from readers”) (260). Alternatively, Ebner also received praise for this work from August Sauer, a leading Austrian literary historian (273) and Wilhelm Bölsche, a leading theoretician of naturalism who also liked *Das Gemeindekind* (274). Pages numbers in parentheses refer to Bittrich, “Text und Wirkungsgeschichte.”



this dissertation, conjectures about the inner workings of the subconscious and its impact on the causes of mental disturbance were only beginning to take form in Freud's research at the time when Ebner created and published this narrative. Freud's theories, the basis of Lacan's elaborations of them, contradict the realist view that truth can be better understood if it is presented within a context that is a recognizable rendition of the reader's world.<sup>45</sup> As Ragland explains, Lacan considers it not at all unusual when someone acts once or even repeatedly against her own best interests (86-87). This is something that cannot be depicted in a way that makes sense to readers who are trying to cover up signs that the Real exists not only in this fictional representation, but in their own lives as well.

What is usually called the logic of the narrative is not at all logical in "Unsühnbar." The structure of the plot follows the structures of Maria's mind so that her conflicted inner emotions are somehow connected to the events of the outside world. The properties of water are similar to those of *jouissance* and connect Maria's two worlds, disrupting both of them. Maria experiences a sudden, debilitating loss when her husband and legitimate son drown.<sup>46</sup> One minute, the Dornach family and neighbors are enjoying a festive outing, and the next, Hermann Jr., falls into the swift moving water of a stream that in other places flows as a peaceful creek. His father's efforts to save him bring about a second death. The water representing surging *jouissance* is a sign that fragmented images of self are a danger as well as a necessary condition of participating in the Symbolic.

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<sup>45</sup> Steiner's interpretation of Margarete's behavior noted in ch. 3 (pp.157-158, note 42) attributes Margarete's and Maria's actions to the same reason, mental illness. Steiner's insight lends credibility to my suggestion that Freud's theories changed the root causes we attribute to actions.

<sup>46</sup> Concurring with some of Ebner's contemporaries, B. J. Kenworthy finds this element of the narrative's plot unbelievable. Though he is convinced by the description of the deaths, he feels that the motivation of the deaths are unsatisfying because they depend on the flimsy degree of human folly. See Kenworthy 484.

The sudden tragic development makes sense in a psychologically rich narrative centered on Maria as does her confession that follows in the wake of her loss. According to the way that she has tried to make sense of her life, the two Hermanns, the socially correct husband whom she loves more like a brother than a life partner, and their son, his rightful heir, enter into her life as her rewards for the high costs of maintaining her virtue. They are arbitrarily taken away from her while the surviving son Erich, the illegitimate son who can be interpreted as representing the ambiguous role of *jouissance* in her psyche, survives. Néstor A. Braunstein writes of *jouissance* that it “appears in guilt, in remorse, in confession, in contrition, more in paying than in being paid, in destroying more than in conserving” (Braunstein 108). In reaction to her sudden loss, Maria confesses her transgression as a way of releasing herself from a load she feels she can no longer bear, her *jouissance*. As the quote from Braunstein indicates, her action only shifts it to another area. She wants to pay for her wrongs, but in doing so, she is harming Erich, whom she has previously shunned, but begins to love desperately after tragedy befalls them. Her pain does not allow her to consider the possible results of her confession. She can only think of releasing her pain.

She hopes that she can rid herself of the sensations of a daydream that she experienced after her transgression and before the accident. The dream reflects her feelings about the direction her life has taken, but also her recognition that suffering is inseparable from existence. In the dream, she envisions a violently stormy ocean literally comprised of dead and dying creatures, including humans. A boat loaded with people merrily celebrating, oblivious to the danger that will also touch them is floating on the ocean. Occasionally a star shines on the horizon, giving hope to those who have noticed their impending doom, but its light soon fades. The masses sink back into the sea of hopelessness. Her dream is interrupted, and she returns to her everyday world. She takes

a look out of window, hoping the view will differ from the dreamscape. She sees a beautiful, snow-covered, countryside landscape. Reality appears to have frozen the waves of water from her dream and turned them into drifts of pure, white snow.

The snow reminds the reader of the opening scene of the narrative, the wintry Viennese street scene outside of the opera house, interpreted previously as representing Maria's virtues that cover up her father's secrets and lies positioned at the foundations of her personal history. The snow in the opening scene and the snow that she sees covering the landscape outside of this window create false idylls that are nonetheless an important part of the various levels of perceived reality and its separation from the uncomfortable truth of a fragmented self. Even from the warm confines of her carriage or the Dornach manor house, the frozen, glistening scenes of snow are only temporary states that resemble order and wholeness. The idyllic image outside eventually melts away, just as it is melting away in dreams that function as reminders of fragments of self.

My interpretation that snow and water are used as powerful psychological symbols in "Unsühnbar" is matched by the fact that they also play memorable roles in *Unwiederbringlich* as forces that erode Christine's grip on life.<sup>47</sup> Water separates her from Holk during his stint as a courtier to a Danish princess in the port city of Copenhagen, gateway to the Nordic north and to exotic ports of the Asian east. The negative mood of their marriage is the strongest force separating them, but the sea becomes a physical boundary that adds to the relationship's strain. The symbolic power of these watery elements grows throughout the plot. The following are examples of

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<sup>47</sup> Anke Kramer reads both Christine and Ebba as being closely associated with the sea. She explains Christine's mixture of strong, masculine features and her distinctly feminine ones with her transgressive, mermaid-like qualities. She attributes Fontane's use of material from medieval legends as opening possibilities to negotiate boundaries between what is magical and real as well as what can be regarded as real about the meaning of gender within the social order. See Anke Kramer, "'Ganz wie ein Meerweib': Tradition und Transgression in Fontanes *Unwiederbringlich*," in *'Weiber weiblich, Männer männlich'?: Zum Geschlechterdiskurs in Theodor Fontanes Romanen*, eds. Sabina Becker and Sascha Kiefer, (Tübingen: Francke, 2005), 207-236.

incidents in which this is the case. Holk's involvement with Ebba von Rosenberg, a lady in waiting to the princess, is dramatically punctuated by snow, fire and ice. Large flakes of snow fall heavily and steadily through the conclusion of one of the most poignant scenes of the novel, blurring the narrator's and Holk's view of Christine and Dobschütz as they leave the castle by the sea and the Holks' first marriage behind them. Finally, as she commits suicide, Christine enters the water and wills it to enter her and wash her pain away. Just as the dykes holding back the seawater are a prominent feature of the landscape in Schleswig, water is a constant presence in the story, a force that moves like *jouissance*, and looks alternatively menacing or inviting.

Water in its various forms holds attraction and danger for husband and wife in a similar, though perhaps less pervasive way than does language. The Holks' homeland, Schleswig, has been reclaimed from the sea, and they wish to use this reclamation as an inspiration. The couple is working to reclaim (*wiederbringen*) their relationship and their individual understandings of self so that it can avoid being submerged by their problems. In order to devise a reclamation plan, they have to do what Ragland calls "time traveling" in their conversations with one another. Ragland points out that Lacan thinks of language as time travel (he refers to it as discourse of the Other), because it refers to its place of origin, the thoughts or feelings that it takes time to translate into the system of shifting and fading signifiers that require a speaking subject to fragment herself before she is able to use the system (Ragland 90). Holk, the "Augenblicksmensch," whose motto is "*nach* uns die Sündfluth" (UW 38),<sup>48</sup> is less gifted with linguistic expression than is Christine, who busies herself by thinking on many different levels and about different times at once, looking into her and her family's future and past as well as trying

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<sup>48</sup> "man of the moment," and "after us the deluge," Fontane, (UW 32). The literal translation is mine. Colloquially translated it means that he doesn't care what happens after he is gone. Parmée uses a French phrase for his translation: "Après nous le deluge" (BR 35).

to fathom eternity. She tries to use the structure of language to build an ark to prepare for the difficult times (the *Sündfluth* that Holk ignores) she perceives lie ahead. The doves she releases to search for the salvation of the marriage, her letters to Holk while he is at court and her confrontation of him when he returns home on Christmas Eve to tell her he wants to leave her, are unable to locate a dry haven for their relationship. It seems that the floodwaters will destroy all that they have built together.

The narrative's subtle reference to a flood of Biblical proportions when first describing Holk's character indicates that there is an impending disaster, when actually, the problem boils down to something more commonly terrifying. Christine and Holk each have difficulties saying what they mean and thus also cannot make their actions match their words. But, as Christine says to Dobschütz: "wie Ehen sind, das wissen immer nur die Eheleute selbst, und mitunter wissen's auch die nicht" (UW 74).<sup>49</sup> Language is the most obvious proof of their everyday relationship, but it is a poor one. Feelings for one another and feelings about themselves mingle together in their relationship and create frustration. Christine tells Dobschütz that sometimes when she has an issue to discuss with Holk, she finds him alone with Holk and they are quiet (forgo speech), when "Niemand sieht es und Niemand hört es" (UW 74),<sup>50</sup> things seem good again. But then she realizes "mitunter mir selbst zum Trotz" (UW 75),<sup>51</sup> that the tender moment will fade away and be replaced with their usual frustrating linguistic exchanges and irritations. Emotionally, the couple still is in love with one another, but practically, they cannot make one another come to terms with the images each has of the other. For his part, Holk confirms the correctness of Christine's criticisms of him of being "schwach

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<sup>49</sup> "only husbands and wives themselves can ever know what a marriage really is and sometimes even they do not know" (BR 72).

<sup>50</sup> "no one ever sees or hears it" (BR 72).

<sup>51</sup> "sometimes even in spite of myself" (BR 73).

und eitel” (UW 65, 75)<sup>52</sup> unable to engage himself in any kind of “ernste Kämpfe” (UW 65).<sup>53</sup> As the narrator reports: “seit einiger Zeit aber hatte der Wunsch [für sich eine weniger vorzügliche Frau zu haben] doch auch sprechen gelernt” (UW 11).<sup>54</sup> Stronger than the couple’s love for one another is an attachment to their illusions that a spouse can fill up the frighteningly empty space that they sometimes sense is the basis of their existence. Instead of complimenting his strengths, Holk feels that Christine accentuates his weaknesses. His insecurities ultimately result in weakening her so much that she cannot bear to live any longer.

Poetry offers a way for the couple to discuss their feelings in a way that evokes absence as much as it does presence. Early in the narrative, as he is trying to convince Christine that their new residence will help them return happiness to the place it once held in their lives, Holk quotes a poem to her that she identifies as written by Ludwig Uhland, “Das Schloß am Meere” (“The Castle by the Sea,” 1805). He recites the first stanza that paints a “golden und rosig” (UW 7)<sup>55</sup> picture of their future, while her trepidation is given a formalized voice as she responds by reciting a subsequent stanza that features a “Klagelied” and “Tränen” (UW 8).<sup>56</sup> Christine foresees unknown sadness in their future. The foreboding beauty of the moment rests in the vague but hauntingly meaningful stanzas of recited poetry. Poetry adds to a significant moment in their relationship, but it is unclear whether either of the participants receives the message that the other meant to send. Even if they could understand what the other is trying to convey, their challenge would be to know what to do with that understanding.

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<sup>52</sup> “weak and conceited” (BR 73).

<sup>53</sup> “serious discussions” (BR 63).

<sup>54</sup> “but for some time now this wish [for a rather less outstanding wife] had indeed learned to speak” (BR 7).

<sup>55</sup> “golden and pink” (BR 3).

<sup>56</sup> “mourning song,” “tears” (BR 4).

As illustrated by Maria's daydream about an ocean of suffering souls, dreams are a way for the individual to grapple with discomfort. Christine narrates to Dobschütz the contents of an important dream she had on the eve of Holk's departure for Copenhagen. Her two-sentence description embodies the emotionally conflicting sentiments that the previously discussed poetic fragments aim to represent: "Ein Trauerzug war es, nur ich und du, und in der Ferne Holk. Und mit einem Male war es ein Hochzeitszug, in dem ich ging, und dann war es wieder ein Trauerzug. Ich kann *das Bild* nicht loswerden" (UW 72).<sup>57</sup> Her description is short and simple, and when analyzed through a Lacanian lens, the mention of the image of which she cannot rid herself comes to the fore. Even in this short description, it is not clear which image she is referencing, the funeral procession or wedding procession, or Holk's separation from her and Dobschütz. All of these images appear in the plot of the novel. What seems most significant is not the dream, but Christine's tears and the "unbestimmte Angst" (UW 71)<sup>58</sup> that accompany her narration of it.

According to Ragland, for Lacan, dreams are linked with desire as coded in the signifying system of language, a code no longer accessible to the dreamer once she awakens. The dreamer remembers the images, the feeling of longing or wishing for something, the *object a*, but cannot make sense of her memory. Lacan holds that the dream must be narrated and fictionalized before the dreamer can retrieve any kind of meaning from it because content must be considered separately from structure (Ragland 91-92). Proceeding to an interpretation with this in mind, it can be noted that the word for procession in German is "Zug," which comes from the verb "ziehen" which can mean

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<sup>57</sup> "It was a funeral procession, just you and I and Helmut in the distance. And then all at once it was a wedding procession and I was in it and then it was a funeral procession again. I can't rid myself of *the picture*." Italics are mine. Trans. of the last sentence is mine. Parmée's trans. is less literal "I cannot put it out of my thoughts" (BR 68-69).

<sup>58</sup> "vague fear" (BR 69).

to go, as in a procession. In its most common usage, the verb also means to pull. Christine feels as if the forces of society and culture are pulling her in different directions, from low emotional points to high ones, as in the German word for wedding, “Hochzeit,” which literally translates as high time. In the dream, the forces pulling her do not affect Holk, who is visible in the distance. He is the Other, the one towards whom she directs her desire, the one she wants to please. To her dismay, she is separated from him and left with Dobschütz, the Other whose presence reminds her of her emotional difficulties. The dream’s configuration of characters is the same as their configuration in waking life. Many things in the couple’s lives pull at them: habits, duties, beliefs, emotions, language and desire. They are pulled apart and pushed together in unpredictable ways.

Clearly, the dream is important to the structure of the narrative because it prepares the reader for the major events that the couple experiences in the course of the narrative.<sup>59</sup> Yet, as I have already shown, it isn’t the events that occupy the reader’s attention, but the bundles of tangled emotions that plague those experiencing them. Christine recognizes two deaths in the two funeral processions of the dream, and they seem not to surprise her. One of them is what Lacan calls a familiar kind of terror (Ragland 95), being used as a reminder that one has to live disconnected from the Real. She is awakened from the

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<sup>59</sup> Heide Eilert takes a different view of the dream. Her interpretation is based on a reading of the novel that shifts away from traditional attention paid to Holk as the man caught between two women or the problem of his being only half a man (530). She interprets the dream as well as the rest of the novel as a psychologically insightful criticism of the damaging effects of Victorian marital and sexual mores. Eilert uses Christine’s fascination with Waiblinger’s lyrics to a folksong and other extra-textual material, including Freud’s insights about repressed sexual urges, to conclude that the dream represents two opposing wishes: a desire for a renewed chance of sexual attentiveness and romance in her relationship with Holk and a longing for peace that death would bring. Her society will not sanction her sexual fulfillment even within marriage and still allow her to cultivate an image of virtue. Eilert points out that, with reservations, Christine accepts Arne’s advice to embrace a rigorous form of pietism. Religion becomes an inadequate compensation for the fulfillment of her natural urges. Death allows her to free herself from her opposing drives for social recognition and sexual fulfillment. See Heide Eilert, “. . . Und mehr noch fast wer liebt:” Theodor Fontanes Roman *Unwiederbringlich* und die viktorianische Sexualmoral,” *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 101 (1982): 527-545.



dream by her desire to let the familiar things of everyday life distract her from what she knows to be true, but is actively trying to deny. She loves maintaining her illusions, such as that she knows the right way to believe and to act, while at the same time, just like Maria, she hates living a lie.

Letters and telegrams in the novel serve more as cries for help than efforts to secure communication of each character's feelings and needs in the structure of the Other, the way that Lacan characterizes language.<sup>60</sup> The couple's tensions over the future of their children and their separation are stimulated by the arrival of letters or telegrams. They invest hope in the content of the letters and are excited about the consequences their arrivals bring. When Holk leaves for court in Copenhagen, the narrative focus shifts to his experiences while he's away, and Christine is reduced to the presence of ink on paper. Each of them anticipates that the separation will give them a break from their tensions. The narrator puts a bright face on their prospects: "Wie bei vielen Eheleuten so stand es auch bei den Holkschen. Wenn sie getrennt waren, waren sie sich innerlich am nächsten [ . . . ] sie fanden sich auch wieder zu früherer Liebe zurück und schrieben sich zärtliche Briefe (UW 64)."<sup>61</sup> Absence makes the heart grow fonder because it alters the levels of *jouissance* within each of the individuals involved in the relationship. However, as we saw before with Maria, *jouissance* is more likely to cause pain than it is to cause happiness. Out of sight usually means out of mind except for the small reminders of the

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<sup>60</sup> Frances M. Subiotto joins Eilert in putting Christine's character the center of the story. She views the many letters in the novel as signals that the psychology of a relationship, in particular Christine's mental state, is the most important part of the story. She notes that even when Christine is physically absent during the portion of the narrative that takes place in Copenhagen, she maintains her importance to Holk like "an unopened letter" sitting on his desk (314). Subiotto calls attention to Christine's aborted attempts to strike just the right tone, something that both spouses failed to do during their separation, even while writing her suicide note to Holk. See Frances M. Subiotto, "The Function of Letters in *Unwiederbringlich*," *Modern Language Review* 65 (1970): 306-318.

<sup>61</sup> "The Holks were like many other married couples. When they were not together, they felt closer to each other [ . . . ] they found themselves recovering their former feelings of affection for each other and even used to write each other loving letters" (BR 62).

difficulties she causes Holk and in occasional letters that elicit varying reactions depending on Holk's mood. Christine is pushed into a passive position of enduring her fear and pain alone while others tell her there is no foundation for her feelings.

The narrator's optimistic prediction is obviously not fulfilled. Their already stressed relationship grows smaller and is finally reduced to written correspondence. They invest their hope for reconciliation and growth in communication that is, as Lacan's theories conclude, ineffective in the best of circumstances, let alone across a distant separation. The parasitic letters that they as speaking subjects consented to grafting onto their inwardly fragmented, but apparently whole conception of themselves become the sole representations of themselves to one another. The letters never adequately represent the messages they want to convey. That they could now be the relationship's salvation is an illusion.

After the narrative shows Holk only intermittently corresponding with Christine in letters that reveal his concern does not lie with her and their children, the presence of Christine's letters in the story is reduced to descriptions of irritation from Holk. The last words on her behalf before the personal confrontation of their separation scene come not from her, but from Dobschütz and her brother Arne. Where the two of them once advocated to Christine that she should be more trusting of her husband, they are now accusing him of seriously disrupting the moderation of things. She has fallen seriously ill and as a result of his inconsideration. Disruption, however, is the status quo, not the exception. While it occurs to him that his actions are logically indefensible, Holk argues that "die Trennung ist selbst nötig, und ich darf wohl hinzusetzen, ist Pflicht, weil *wir uns* innerlich fremde geworden sind" (UW 240).<sup>62</sup> He does not realize that the "we" of

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<sup>62</sup> Italics are mine. "part we must and I think it is our duty to do so, because *we* have become complete strangers *to each other*" (BR 243). The English translation does not convey the inherent ambiguity in Holk's statement. One could understand it as meaning that the couple has become estranged from one another or that they have, as individuals, become estranged from themselves.

whom he is speaking is not he and Christine, but rather the necessary separation of the whole self from the speaking subject that inhabits the Symbolic order.

The couple finally ends their farce of communication<sup>63</sup> with a discussion that reflects Lacan's idea of the intertwining of life and death in words. In this excerpt from the exchange between the soon to be ex-spouses, Holk again blames Christine for their failed marriage, but he is also describing how language shapes desire or vice versa to make every subject invest his/her belief in fantasy. His remarks indicate how he unknowingly alludes to Christine's all too frequent glimpses of the Real and her sense that she cannot recover a part of her that has already died. Her insight disturbs him because it destabilizes his fantasy of cohesiveness:

du bist [. . .] vor allem so glaubenssicher in allem, was du sagst und tust, da man es eine Weile selber zu glauben anfängt und glaubt und glaubt, bis es einem eines Tages wie Schuppen von den Augen fällt und man *au er sich über sich selbst gerät* und vor allem darüber, da man den Ausblick auf einen engen, auf kaum zehn Schritt errichteten Plankenzaun mit einem *Grabtuch* darüber für den Blick in die schöne Gotteswelt halten könnte. Ja, Christine, es gibt eine schöne Gotteswelt, hell und weit, und in dieser Welt will ich leben, in einer Welt, die nicht das Paradies ist, aber doch ein Abglanz davon (UW 254).<sup>64</sup>

He is speaking of his *jouissance*, his pursuit of the *object a* colliding with Christine's

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<sup>63</sup> Ingrid Mittenzwei's analysis focuses on not only *what* the language that describes the Holks' relationship does, but *how* it does it. The phrase that she repeats several times in her interpretation is "mitleidslose Wirklichkeit" ("compassionate reality") made out of language that cannot establish a "Maß der Dinge" ("moderation of things"), the avoidance of empty words that hide the self of the person speaking them and the search for communication that articulates "Substanz des Menschen" ("substance of a person") and takes "Miteinander" ("mutual living") into consideration (131). See Ingrid Mittenzwei, *Die Sprache als Thema: Untersuchungen zu Fontanes Gesellschaftsromanen* (Berlin, Zürich: Max Gehlen, 1970), 119-133.

<sup>64</sup> "you are [. . .] above all, so stubborn in all your beliefs, in everything that you say and do that, for a while, one begins to be convinced oneself and goes on being convinced until one day the scales fall from one's eyes and *one is angry with oneself*, above all at the thought that anyone can see God's lovely world as a narrow, fenced-in enclosure covered by a *shroud*. Yes, Christine, such a world does exist and it is lovely and bright and spacious and that is the world that I am going to live in, a world that may not be paradise but at least a reflection of it." The sense of the phrase "*au er sich über sich selbst gerät*" is somewhat lost in the translation. Literally it means "to become beside one's self about one's self" (BR 258).

pursuit of the same, in which he feels she has covered up his object a with the shroud of her melancholy. He's right in his characterization of her as melancholy. What he does not realize is that his anger at himself for letting her diminish his fantasy with her glimpse of the Real is generated by nothing but an illusion, another set of scales that covers his eyes. They are both mistaken even as they are both irrevocably convinced of being right. Neither is able to see that existence rests on nothing. Words in the form of thought, spoken words, written words, words of desperation, of accusation, of defense, all speak of the pain with which they were born from the individual's separation from her or himself.

As argued throughout this section and chapter, irony and ambiguity are produced by silent expectations that clash with the predictions of failure named in the works' titles. Christine's and Maria's sublime virtues prove unable to perform the magical functions of retrieving the past or alleviating past wrongs even when combined with the best features of their husbands. The pleasure they and others take in their virtuous identities produces pain when they are ultimately unable to live up to expectations. Pain and pleasure form alternating links in the chain of insatiable desire. The infinite length of the chain can be seen as the distance between emotional and rational perceptions and a state of satisfaction. As shown previously, it is best expressed allegorically in the texts in poetry and dreams that hint at meanings beyond words.

### **Sublime Death**

Die Menschen [. . .] müssen durchaus ein Unterscheidungsvermögen ausbilden, was gesagt werden darf und was nicht; wer aber dies Unterscheidungsvermögen nicht hat und immer nur schweigt, der ist nicht bloß langweilig, der ist auch gefährlich. Es liegt etwas Unmenschliches darin, denn das Menschlichste, was wir haben, ist doch die Sprache, und wir haben sie, um zu sprechen (UW 108).<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> "men and women need to develop a sense of tact as to what can and what cannot be said; but anyone who lacks this sense and merely says nothing all the time, is not only boring but dangerous. There is

The speaker of this quote, the Danish princess at whose court Holk serves, argues that language is an essential part of identity. Language can establish and uphold virtue and it can create and pursue desire. The princess acknowledges that language is a tool that is as effective at destruction as it is at construction. Ragland writes that Lacan sees silence as one of a myriad of “cuts,” a reminder of the separations that first give birth to desire and continue to produce it (92). Silence is an aberration to the world of speech that denies the individual speaking subject as well as other speaking subjects of a group or society the fantasy of connection with one another and with the world. Ragland goes on to explain that Lacan sees the formation of the subject itself as a cut because speaking necessitates a separation from all objects, most notably the object a (92).

The temporary silences Maria and Christine adopt become permanent ones. I have stated before that death is these characters’ loudest statement, an attention-grabber that insists there can be no contrary reply, indeed that renders any reply meaningless. Death puts them beyond language, elevates them out of the system, and thus in an ironic way, confirms the view that their virtues are sublime, in the sense of being too fine to endure prolonged suffering. Their acts of claiming the sublime display protest and pride, pain and pleasure, while still resonating with ambiguity and irony in terms of the determination of consequence and meaning. If death elevates the disunities that constitute the identities of these characters to a place beyond the reach of meaning, no meaningful protests to their suicides can be registered within the system from which they removed themselves.

If twentieth-century psychoanalytic theory seems baffling with its claims that a coherent self is impossible, some nineteenth-century language about death seems so

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something inhuman about it because, after all, the most human attribute is speech and we are given it in order to be able to talk ” (BR 107).

idealistic and naïve that it almost invites interpretations of denial. One example of this in “Unsühnbar” is when Maria’s father, Count Wolfsberg, shares his memories of Maria’s mother with the reader, and not with Maria. He muses that her mother could have died “einen süßen und schönen Tod” (US 24)<sup>66</sup> if only she had not been granted what she had thought was her heart’s desire and had not been allowed to marry the man she deeply loved. He is obviously idealizing death. Instead of fading beautifully away from the picture of his illusions as if she were part of his dream, his wife compromised her value by showing him that she and her emotions are not as he had dreamed, but real. His reaction to her demands to be recognized involves continued denial of her worth. In his opinion, “Sie heuchelte nun selbst” (US 24),<sup>67</sup> by descending into suspicion, jealousy, and finally madness when she discovered he was compromising their emotional and sexual intimacy by having an extra-marital affair with her friend.

Maria’s and Christine’s deaths aren’t like the virgin death which Wolfsberg had in mind. Theirs are more poignant because they involve both matters of choice and of impossibility. A virgin death means the loss of a so-called innocent (i.e. sexually unsullied) feminine being who men like Wolfsberg imagine can just fade delicately from existence without threatening any man’s image of himself. A woman who gives up her role as wife and mother and chooses to end her life is making a statement condemning the patriarchal system, something that a virgin having no experience in sexual relations could not do. The environments over which the two characters expected to reign like benevolent figurehead queens, their households and the hearts of their husbands, have failed to support them in that role. In essence, Maria claims the death her mother had

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<sup>66</sup> “a sweet and lovely death” (BA 18).

<sup>67</sup> “She herself then dissembled” (BA 18).

been denied. She tells the truth as she sees it after her husband's and son's deaths release the pressure of the pain that kept it locked inside of her.

I interpret Maria's death as a suicide. The silence she keeps about the pain born of the conception of her illegitimate child, hurts her just as much if not more than the incident itself. Silence kills her view of herself as a virtuous woman, the central fantasy of her self-identity. It retards the release of *jouissance* and directs it back inwards. Her words of confession are weapons that she employs against the silence. Neither silence nor confession represents a rational action taken by choice. Instead they are symptoms of an overactive moral sense that could not withstand her excess desire. Her death resembles that of Fontane's character Effi Briest, whose fate is analyzed in the second chapter of this dissertation, in that she dies of a mysterious illness that can be described no more specifically than a broken heart and spirit. Maria relinquishes her life to the forces that she feels are attacking it, the *jouissance* that torments her spirit and drives her to confess that she is an adultress.

The final lines of the narrative portray the landscape that can be seen through the window at the time and place of her death, but they also supply a commentary on her virtue. There is a cloud shaped like a menacing bird of prey that is partially obscuring the light of the moon. The cloud could be interpreted as an embodiment of her dark struggle that threatens to block out the light of a heavenly object, her former fantasy identity that reflects the light that shines down on our world from above, a religious reference. In death, Maria's eyes are seen to rest on a place where the moon's reflected light manages to shine through, a place that the narrator pronounces to be the Dornach estate. She has seemed to accomplish the impossible, to reunite herself with the spirits of her dead husband and first-born son, but more importantly with her picture of herself. What Lacan pronounces as impossible in life, might be possible in fiction.

While the question of whether Maria's death constitutes a suicide or not could be a matter of interpretation, Christine's death is unmistakably a suicide. Her death has been foreshadowed throughout the novel, but is a particularly unusual twist in the standard story of adultery because she is not an unfaithful spouse who is succumbing to society's calls for retribution by removing herself. Suicide contradicts the religious convictions that she holds so dear, and yet it is consistent with the conflicting elements of her character: her sixth sense that warns her of the coming deluge of pain that Holk consistently avoids considering, and her rational certainty that she should place no stock in superstitious premonitions, even her own. Her moral rigidity that has invested so much "in Pflicht und in Gottvertrauen" prevents her from ignoring her own strong pronouncement that "was die innere Stimme spricht, das erfüllt sich" (UW 30-31).<sup>68</sup> Like Maria, she succumbs to the conflict that rages within herself. She seizes power over herself by sacrificing her degree of power because she also strongly believes that "Die Kraft ist bei denen, die nüchtern sind und sich bezwingen" (UW 32).<sup>69</sup>

She kills herself in an understated and carefully choreographed way, stating with her actions that she, unlike Holk, is capable of ultimate control of herself. She remarried him with "der gute Wille zum Glück" (UW 283),<sup>70</sup> but the original conflicts in their marriage still slumber under the surface of her silence and his charade that everything is fine, and it is obvious that this attempt to retrieve happiness will be a failure. On the day of her death, she distracts Dobschütz, and enters silently into the sea with the purpose of diluting her pain in water, the element that so closely resembles the effects of her pain. After she washes her life away and her body is recovered from the sea, her memory is

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<sup>68</sup> "in duty and in trust in God" Trans. is mine based on BR 27 which translates it as: "what [the] inner voice says will be fulfilled".

<sup>69</sup> "Strength belongs only to those who are sober and self-controlled" (BR 29).

<sup>70</sup> "the willingness to be happy" (BR 288). The original German phrase and a more literal translation of it ("the good will to happiness") resonate as an opposing idea to Schopenhauer's "Wille zum Leben."



marked in the text by two kinds of expression: the narrator's description of a funeral procession that closely resembles her second wedding, just as she had envisioned in her dream; and tellingly, also in a letter.

The description of the funeral is beautifully celebratory. Mentions of "der wilde Wein" and "eine milde Luft" (UW 290)<sup>71</sup> remind the reader of Effi Briest, the character fated for death whom Fontane had already started creating while writing *Unwiederbringlich*. The symbols of Effi's story are utilized here to accentuate the contradictory, ironic atmosphere of the day with its emptiness that is like a calming breath of air and the fullness of life's spirit that like the vine creeps purposefully further. Just as in Christine's dream, the scene resembles the couple's renewal of marriage vows: the church bells are ringing and girls from the village are scattering flowers. Instead of being pulled (*gezogen*) along in the *Trauerzug* (funeral procession), the narrator describes a nameless dead woman, who comes from the castle to the church. As the earth encloses her body, she has finally found what she was missing: "Ein Herz, das sich nach Ruhe sehnte, hatte Ruhe gefunden" (UW 291).<sup>72</sup> Her tortured spirit has sublimed (in the chemical sense); the self is whole again, as it was before it entered the system of language.

*Unsühnbar* ends with a letter, and this seems appropriate, as it reflects the reasons why and how it is possible for a marriage in which the spouses are full of the desire for peace and happiness to be broken apart by the deficiencies of language. Dobschütz writes the letter, a description of Christine's death, to religious administrator Schwarzkoppen whom Christine particularly revered, but who early on in the novel refuses to use his spiritual capital to nudge her towards a "Selbstbekehrung" (UW 42).<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> "the wild vine," "a mild air," Trans. are mine.

<sup>72</sup> "A heart that had yearned for peace had found it now at last" (BR 295).

<sup>73</sup> "change of heart"(BR 38-39).

That the letter is addressed to this particular person is ironic: the one who sought a conversion of a religiously doctrinaire woman is now receiving word of her un-Christian act of suicide.

Dobschütz begins the letter with expressions of relief that writing to him allows her the comforting opportunity to speak of her friend, a subject that means the world to her. This shows how much her expectations hang on language as a vehicle for healing, a belief that, according to this Lacanian interpretation, is a fantasy. The letter supplies the novel's only version of the events surrounding the suicide. Her story involves the different functions she remembers language performing in the time leading immediately up to and on Christine's death day: how Christine is deeply touched by the lyrics of a folksong; how she encourages Holk to participate in an upcoming hunt; how she speaks of the topic of clothing for Asta's coming-out in society; and finally how Christine asks Dobschütz to fetch their coats when she anticipates that it will become cool as they sit on the jetty and watch the sun set over the sea. These uses of language have antecedents, most to events earlier in the novel. The folksong is similar to one about elusive peace that Asta and Elisabeth Petersen sing early in the novel. The hunt is planned for the day of Christine's funeral and is reminiscent of a hunt mentioned in a conversation with Holk that she had predicted would hold more interest for him than the funeral of a loved one. The one that is most telling is the connection between Asta's upcoming entrance into society wearing beautiful clothes and Christine's statement to Dobschütz that their clothes are inadequate to warm them as the day ends. While Dobschütz is distracted by the task of fetching a protective layer, Christine enters the water, relying on her clothes, the "rigid structure" of the Symbolic that Lacan described as "shattering the *Innenwelt* to *Umwelt* circle" to become quickly waterlogged so that death would come more quickly.

Once Dobschütz has depicted the death, she continues her report with more examples of how language marks events: telling Holk, organizing a search for Christine's waterlogged corpse, and words spoken in despair and at the funeral and reported in the newspapers. Finally, Dobschütz briefly describes that the contents of Christine's suicide notes offer no further insight into her motivations except that she is incurably melancholy and hopeless. One note to Holk contains a handwritten copy of the folksong verse in which the last line, the completion of the one before it, is faintly underlined: "Wer ha t ist zu bedauern, /Und mehr noch fast, wer liebt" (UW 295).<sup>74</sup> The lyric offers a poignant example of how language becomes a referent to more language. A song once sung from text and music notes on a page, leaves a deep impression, a cut that is subsequently transferred by the hand of an injured self (Christine) to another page (her suicide note) which is reported by a bereaved friend of the suicide victim (Dobschütz in her letter to Schwarzkoppen) all of which is recounted in a novel.

The references and antecedents in this passage and throughout this novel weave an intricate web of meaning, but though following an individual strand to the source may lead to a conclusion, it cannot be a comprehensive one. The web as a structure and language as a system support an individual's fantasy that the structure can be understood. Dobschütz ends her letter to Schwarzkoppen with the sentiment that she believes his religious office and faith will protect him from the despair that she feels washing over her. She is fantasizing that if only her faith were stronger or if only she held a more important social position in the world, she might be able to come to terms with her friend's death. Christine's silence and death are cuts in the fabric of Dobschütz's illusion that the world is coherent. The cut was so deep that it expanded into a big tear that

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<sup>74</sup> "Who hates, is to be pitied/ And almost more, one who loves" (BR 52). The lyric of the folksong is by Wilhelm Friedrich Waiblinger, who was a German poet who lived from 1804-1830 and was influenced by Friedrich Hölderlin. See Sven-Aage Jørgensen, "Nachwort," in Theodor Fontane, *Unwiederbringlich* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1971), 269.

swallowed Christine whole. It now threatens to swallow Dobschütz if she is not successful in constructing new fantasies that distract her attention away from the dangerous gap between existence as she knows it and the Real. Christine is her social superior because of her marital and also financial status, but Dobschütz also considered her a moral superior. As Dobschütz puts it, until their separation she viewed the Holks as “ein Muster [. . .] was ein deutsches Haus und deutsche Sitte sei” (UW 73).<sup>75</sup> The disorientation and despair affect her, the family, and close friends deeply, but also register as a loss to the larger community that admired the Holk family.

Dobschütz concludes her letter conveying greetings from Asta and Elisabeth Petersen, the next generation of women who have formed a bond of friendship and care for one another. This ordinary epistolary signoff contains an important and open-ended question: what hope do future generations of girls and women have? Should they invest their precious energies in maintaining an illusion of virtue as Christine did? Neither the narrator nor Dobschütz offers an answer; only powerful ambiguity that attaches itself to the reader’s memory like the haunting lines of the lyrics of the folksong Christine quotes in her suicide note.

The deaths of the two female characters are not thoroughly negative events because they seem to achieve the *desired* effects of the women’s actions; death puts desire to rest and thus the suffering ends for them. Calling the deaths positive events would be ignoring the significance of the disturbance and pain the deaths bring to the social network in which they played important parts. Concluding that the deaths have ambiguous meaning is the most accurate interpretation. The deaths register throughout the interconnected systems of life that are at the same time interconnected systems of death.

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<sup>75</sup> “a paragon [. . .] what a German home and German morals can be” (BR 71).

## **Feminine Death: The Roots and Boundaries of Realism**

Ebner's "Unsühnbar" and Fontane's *Unwiederbringlich* offer narrative portraits of the joys, pains, and hopes that lie before, in between and after the benchmarks of life. This chapter holds up these two works as examples of some of the best features of German realism. They are not the most famous of the authors' works, but they are the best examples of a unique feature in the two authors' works: the poignant and complex depiction of feminine virtue intertwined with irony and death. Both authors and characters achieve the goal of making bold statements, even if they are ambiguous ones.

As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, the Women's Question was one of the burning issues of the day in Prussian and Austrian culture of the eighteen nineties when these works were written. The issues raised by these two works are connected to the Women's Question and seem as if made for realist depiction. Social issues are crucial parts of the fabric that makes up reality, which is exactly what realism claims to depict. At the same time, most social issues, including those surrounding gender, pose an inherent challenge to the establishment, of which the realist movement and particularly the elderly Fontane and Ebner are a part. The life and death questions of the existence of two aristocratic female characters, well-regarded in their respective societies in almost every way, must have seemed to them fitting subjects for their goals of fertilizing the roots of realism. The characters' stories are the authors' attempts to insure that the literary movement in which they invested their careers remained a plausible vehicle for future cultural criticism, while at the same time gently but firmly nudging it beyond its carefully expressed traditionally liberal confines.

Death is different in these two long narratives than it is in many of the other works by Ebner and Fontane in which it so frequently appears. Because two such

sublimely virtuous heroines will their deaths as the culmination of difficult, but not impossible conditions of their lives, death in these works is characterized more by irony and ambiguity than finality or inevitability, as one might expect. This differentiates the two characters' actions from those of Melanie van der Straaten, née de Caparoux, later Rubehn of Fontane's "L'Adultera" ("Woman Taken in Adultery," 1880/1882) and Lotti Feiler of Ebner's "Lotti, die Uhrmacherin" ("Lotti, the Clockmaker," 1880/1881). Melanie and Lotti each face disturbing challenges to their worldviews that might have been just as deleterious as Maria's and Christine's, but are able to slough off their irritation and disillusionment and reconcile themselves to less than perfect lives. Other works, such as Fontane's *Schach von Wuthenow* (1882), and Ebner's "Er lät die Hand küssen" (1883/1886), also depict the irony of a male characters' death. The hero's romantic relationship is significant in these works, but does not play as important of a role as the marital relationships of the Dornachs and Holks that erode the female characters' virtues and encourage them to silence themselves. The cultural rules of the authors' societies seem to have determined that feminine death is a topic that can be more artistically poignant than male death.

Though it stands out as the conclusion of the plots of these two works, death serves primarily to facilitate a nuanced and sophisticated approach to the related topic of language and its use. The narratives provide examples specific to their time, place and situation of how language can be used. Men's utterances are usually taken more seriously than women's within the context of the social system, regardless of the characteristics independent from gender that endow an individual with some degree of credibility. Whatever the intended uses of language, Ebner and Fontane show what Freud and Lacan later proclaimed in their theories: that language is the seat of our ideas about ourselves and our reality and that its promises for performance are never fulfilled.

Nonetheless, language is the material of life, one of the most interesting ones that can be used to portray a literary version of reality.

By writing stories about female characters who wish to become embodiments of virtue in order to find and keep happiness for themselves and for the men in their lives, the two authors indirectly pursue their own desires for a better world. They encourage their readers to ponder what Furst calls “let’s pretend” realities (Furst 28), built out of words that become castles by the sea or lost idyllic homes like the country estate of Dornach. The associations with these places that are made in the works and in my interpretation allude to happiness, but hold within their structural and geographic possibilities just as much disappointment as promise. Just as Dornach and the castle by the sea use artifice as a device to create a positive impression, the narratives utilize a montage of different language registers to enrich their portraits of reality. Poetry, lyrics from popular music, accounts of social and intimate conversation, personal letters, diaries, fragments of family history, as well as recollections of dreams operate as attempts to strike an elusive target of effective communication.

Although they are aesthetically satisfying, the narratives’ depictions of hope and desire or life and death do not point to any concrete conclusions on these topics. Symbols suggesting metaphoric meaning such as various forms of water further sabotage the idea that definitive meaning can be constructed if the reader concentrates and fully applies her interpretive creativity. The eloquent swaying and shifting registers and tempos in the narrative distract attention away from this lack of whole truths about the secrets whispered in fragmented meaning. Those expecting to find definitive answers to important questions in life go away frustrated if they do not learn to appreciate Fontane’s games of hide and seek or Ebner’s attempts that never quite succeed to prove to herself

and her readers that truth does exist and can be recovered through diligence and good will.

These two narratives do not radically challenge the confines of realism, but the prominence of death clearly shows that the two authors are aware of their movement's boundaries. They seem to want to foster their readers' desire to find more ways to think about big issues such as life and death. The material they have chosen and the way they present it speak to the interpretive possibilities that can be gained by reading the texts and applying knowledge of psychoanalytic theories that reflect the staggering scope of questions about reality. The accounts of the two feminine suicides leave behind vague hints of nihilism mixed with stronger hints that there is hope for the future despite the figuratively foreboding color of the narratives' skies. In the end, the tone of the conclusions seems to matter less than the satisfaction of knowing that these two characters have finally been able to make statements that cause others to hear and consider.



## The Conclusions of Realism

The late works by Fontane and Ebner represent the last phase of the literary movement of German realism. This is the conclusion drawn by the sequence of chapter topics and interpretive methodologies in this dissertation. From childhood to death, from optimism about self to life-threatening doubt, the comparative interpretations show how the narrative topics addressed in these particular works challenge the possibilities of realist representation. The titles and the suicides of the lead female characters in “Unsühnbar” (“Beyond Atonement”) and *Unwiederbringlich* (*Beyond Recall*) clearly convey that realism has reached a dead end. The unnamed object of longing that the characters try to recover through spiritual or emotional modifications is irretrievably gone. This is not surprising, given that in the decades in which the works analyzed in this dissertation were being written, Freud was laying the groundwork for his founding of psychoanalysis.

Fontane’s death in 1898 is often used as a marker designating the end of realism, but regardless of this convenient benchmark of literary history, the line dividing realism and the styles that follow chronologically or stylistically is not a bold one. Most of the other works interpreted here had already been published by that date. Of course, the exception is Ebner’s autobiography “Meine Kinderjahre,” which she wrote in the form of sketches that resemble a collage of memory and published in 1906. This text that conveys the most cohesive representation of self of any of those examined points to the end of the viability of realism. By the time she published it, the delicate mixture of poetic and prosaic elements that she presents form an idealized, yet also believable

impression of reality that is no longer what younger authors and their reading public favor.

The commonalities in theme and narrative presentation in these works make them resemble a prolonged literary conversation about late nineteenth-century issues of self. The modern reader easily misses the significance of this conversation because the homogenizing cultural effects of globalization have made her less sensitive to regional differences. Nonetheless, an exchange of ideas between a bourgeois Prussian male author and an aristocratic Austrian female author was unlikely a century ago. This is evidenced by the lack of direct contact between Fontane and Ebner despite several points of professional connection and compatible approaches to social issues in their two societies. Common topics include rigid social roles that are not viable for changing needs of the individual and aesthetically interesting realist narrative features that reflect on their limited effectiveness in representing resolution between individuals and the conflicting dictates of society.

These works by Ebner and Fontane are statements of their shared conviction that fiction can reveal deeper insights about reality than real-life experiences.<sup>1</sup> This is a central tenant of realism that differentiates it from naturalism, which both authors, and

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<sup>1</sup> Hugo Aust quotes from one of Fontane's commentaries on a naturalist play by Johannes Schlaf and Arno Holz, *Die Familie Selicke* (1889): "es bleibt nun mal ein gewaltiger Unterschied zwischen dem Bilde, das das Leben stellt und dem Bilde, das die Kunst stellt; der Durchgangsprozeß, der sich vollzieht, schafft doch eine rätselhafte Modelung und an dieser Modelung haftet die künstlerische Wirkung, die Wirkung überhaupt. Wenn ich das kleine Lieschen Selicke [aus *Die Familie Selicke*] bei Nachbarnleuten im Hinterhause hätte sterben sehen, so ist es mir zweifelhaft, ob ich geweint hätte, dem kleinen Lieschen, das gestern auf der Bühne starb, bin ich unter Tränen gefolgt" ("an enormous difference remains between the picture that life provides and the picture that art does. The process of transformation that is completed makes an enigmatic transformation and it is on this transformation that the artistic effect, the effect in general, depends. If I had seen little Lieschen Selicke [from the Holz/Schlaf play] die in the neighbors' back house, I doubt that I would have cried. The little Lieschen that I saw dying yesterday on the stage, I followed with teary eyes"). See Aust, *Verklärung* 12-13. Ebner envisions art in a more personal way. In her short essay, "Schattenleben" ("Shadow Life," 1897), she tells about games her imagination has played since she was a child. In her "Kinderjahre," she attributes them to the same characteristics of active imagination that produce her narratives. She feels herself dissolving into the air, and sees figures of all kinds materializing around her. Even though a long life must have taught her that these are daydreams, a part of her is convinced that they are more real than she is.

Ebner in particular, criticized for its stark representations. Yet attention to the focalization in these realist texts reveals that narrative logic cannot ignore the gestures that must be made to indicate that the unconscious is more real than the unified notion of self that the works intently strive to reconstruct. Alternate angles of narration that help the realist narrators tell well-rounded stories open the narratives to the perspective of multiple voices, and lessen the sense of a comforting cohesion in these stories of self. At the moment that the works definitively identify and discuss the central issues that every individual faces in the struggle to reconcile self with circumstance, they strain under the difficulties of treating the theme of self. In attempts to compensate for this difficulty, the focus of the works turns to a feminine other. The other offers stimulation and distraction, but ultimately is no more effective in the production of convincing illusions of wholeness. Anxiety deepens as realism is caught in the cycle of hope and disappointment inherent in its construction of wholeness.

These works of waning realism are relevant for both scholars and casual readers today because they reveal the rich history of nineteenth-century German intellectual development as well as signal what was to follow. The narratives represent the dramatic, age-old impetus to tell life saving stories that reinforce or repair individuals' sense of self. This was particularly important for a time in which societies and individuals were faced with crises of identity. The post-Freudian reader can see that that the progress made with these narratives in the representation of whole selves is only an illusory consolation. Nonetheless, as Freud pointed out with the help of a reference to *Effi Briest*, these illusions are powerful and necessary. Characters and narrators in every one of the works interpreted here repeat that process, which is in turn recreated whenever a reader interprets the deeper issues of those narratives. To recognize an illusion, it is necessary

to understand how illusions work and to analyze their benefits and drawbacks. Interpreting realist narratives is an effective way to do this.

Fontane expresses his commitment to explore the construction of self in his works: “Die Regel ist, daß der Künstler in seinem Nachschaffen eben kein Gott, sondern ein Mensch, ein Ich ist und von diesem ‘Ich’ in seine Schöpfung hineinträgt. Und von diesem Augenblick an, wo das geschieht, dreht sich alles um die Frage: ‘Wie ist dies Ich?’”<sup>2</sup> His statement hints that he accepts the existence of things that are beyond his comprehension, such as what will soon be dubbed the unconscious. This does not deter him from advocating his works as aids for readers to explore their own issues of self.

Ebner expresses an even greater degree of confidence in the benefits of an exploration of self. Her acknowledgment of the challenges of reaching this goal are formidable and also goes further than Fontane’s. She writes in a 1895 letter to her friend and colleague, Paul Heyse: “Ich glaube, daß wir alle, bewußt oder unbewußt, damit beschäftigt sind, das Alphabet zu einer neuen Sprache zusammenzutragen, welche dereinst von der Moral gesprochen werden wird. Da wird manches Frevel heißen, was jetzt ein edles Opfer heißt, und umgekehrt.”<sup>3</sup> She taps into the enthusiasm of her illusion of a whole self and its power to influence large change. Doubt checks her high hopes as later in the same letter, she continues: “Und jetzt sollte ich viel mehr sein, als ich bin, um das schöne Geheimnis dieses ‘Wie’ lösen und erklären zu können. Da stehe ich jedoch an der Grenze meines Vermögens. Das Bewußtsein meiner Ohnmacht liegt oft schwer auf mir”

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<sup>2</sup> “The rule is that the author in his imitative creations is no God, but rather a person, a self, and this self is carried into his creation. And from this moment in which this happens onwards, everything revolves around the question: ‘How is this self?’ This is from a letter dated 13 Feb. 1882 to Emil Dominik (Aust, *Verklärung* 11, note 20).

<sup>3</sup> “I believe that we are all consciously or unconsciously engaged with the task of putting the alphabet together into a new language, which will one day be spoken by morality. There some of what now is called as a noble sacrifice will be called an outrage, and vice versa.” The excerpted parts of a letter dated 18 Nov. 1885 are included in Heinz Rieder, “Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach: Aus ungedruckten Briefen an Dichter,” *Der Turm* 2 (1947/1948): 333.

(Rieder 333).<sup>4</sup> She candidly answers Fontane's question "Wie ist dies Ich?" by admitting that she is sometimes unconvinced by her own illusions.

These quotes offer miniature views of horizontal connections between individuals and society as well as between language and ideas that govern individual behavior. The interpretations in this dissertation employ twentieth-century theories to explore the vertical depths of self and highlight how the two authors' styles of realism anticipate later movements. The intricacies of horizontal and vertical patterns in these realist representations propose directions for further research in two directions: explorations of the intersections between late realism and modernism, and further inquiry into the connections within the movement of realism.

In the context of a detailed comparison of eight works, this dissertation also mentions points of literary connection between these two late realist authors, but does not explore them. If studied further, these connections could reveal valuable information about Fontane's reception in Austria, and Ebner's in the German Empire. What additional insights about realism could be gained by investigating the forms that it took in the larger-German-language realm that was increasingly interconnected by literary periodicals such as Julius Rodenberg's *Deutsche Rundschau*? How would a careful integration of insights gained from non-fiction materials written by the two authors add to interpretations of other fictional texts? Of interest might be Fontane's letters to his family, his journalistic, travel, and theater review work. Similarly, Ebner's surviving published and unpublished letters, journals, and notes might encourage richer readings of her works themselves, a trend that has already begun.

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<sup>4</sup> "And now I should be more than I am in order to solve the beautiful secret of this 'how' and be able to explain it. At this point, however, I stand at the border of my ability. The awareness of my powerlessness often weighs heavily on me" (Rieder 333).

The ambiguities evident in these works confirm that these interpretations have identified the tip of an iceberg of possibilities that lie beneath the surface of other late realist works. What more can be ascertained about these ambiguities through the use of interpretative tools such as those offered by narratology and psychoanalysis? How can such interpretations be further juxtaposed with realism's incorporation of earlier notions of self-knowledge? Further study would add detail to the point that late realism is not a naïve endorsement of illusion, but rather an innovative contribution to the age-old discussion about the place of the individual in the world. It would add to my original point that realism, especially in its late forms that are shaded with modernism, promotes storytelling that is necessary for the survival of self.

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