That Germany was only belatedly a colonialist nation is not disputed. In 1899, one year after the passing of Theodor Fontane, a young English scholar of history and future Member of Parliament made an intellectual pilgrimage to Berlin to study under Theodor Mommsen. L. S. Amery recalls his brush with academic celebrity in the preface to his book *The German Colonial Claim* (1940), and he paints a pithy picture of certain conditions surrounding the period during which Fontane was active as a writer of prose fiction:

I remember a visit to Mommsen, the great historian, then well in his eighties and a stately and magnificent presence. I had come, still fresh from my own historical studies, full of eagerness to sit at his feet and to learn more of the government of Imperial Rome. Instead I was treated to a diatribe on England's wickedness: how we had filched an empire while Germany was weakened by the Thirty Years' War and subsequently engrossed, for nearly two centuries, in the long and costly struggles between Prussia and Austria or against France. Now the time had come to change all that. . . . It was all stuff that I had heard and read many times before in current publications. . . . It was only a little later that I read Treitschke, and realised that for twenty years already the doctrine of the wrong done to Germany by our existence as a world Power, and of the necessity of
displacing us by force, had been systematically preached in those professional
and pedagogic circles which have always exercised so great an influence on
German policy. (11–12)

Amery wrote this recollection as German colonial sentiment was being
rabidly revived in the mid- to late-1930s, and he stakes out the area around
1879 (implied by the phrase “for twenty years already”) as the origin of mili-
tant German expansionism. Not coincidentally, in that same year Friedrich
Fabri published Bedarf Deutschland der Colonien? [Does Germany Need
Colonies?], which would ultimately become, according to Russell Berman,
“the most influential manifesto of the colonialist movement” (Enlightenment
136).

Like the German proponents of imperialism, who discovered after unifi-
cation in 1871 that other European powers had long outpaced them in con-
quering the globe, fiction in German was somewhat slower to take on—and
take in—the world. Recent scholarly attention to imperialism in German
literature has foregrounded this notion of belatedness, both in German
literature’s delayed self-implication in the world and Germanistik’s delayed
analysis of it. Fontane, whom Heidenreich and Kroll have called the Poet of
German Unification, chronicled as perhaps no other author this period of
German history and was himself a late arrival, publishing his first novel in
1878, when he was fifty-nine. Unlike Balzac’s France and Trollope’s England,
Fontane’s culture was only beginning its imperial days when he commenced
his twenty-year career as a novelist. Because his case and the case of German
imperialism in the nineteenth century are unique, it may be useful first to
chart the gradual and simultaneous arrival, in Fontane’s earlier works, of two
inextricable and important aspects of his later novels: the world and the city.
As Berlin’s rise parallels the increasing interconnectedness of the globe, the
enchantment once represented by distant places is drastically transformed,
as is the perception of rural Prussia from Fontane’s early novels. While
Fontane’s sweeping novelistic debut, the historical Vor dem Sturm, focuses

1. Amery joined an international chorus of scholars in responding to defenses of German
imperial claims. In 1936, for example, Johannsen and Kraft published their stern report on what
they call Das Kolonialproblem Deutschlands (1936), translated with little delay into English as
Germany’s Colonial Problem (1937). They laud “Herr Hitler, the Leader and Chancellor,” in the
preface, and appeal to the issue of “the unequal distribution of the earth’s surface” (6–7). The slew
of rebuttals in subsequent publications include Amery’s book (1940); Germany’s Claim to Colonies,
the Royal Institute of International Affairs’ official and critical 1938 response to expressions of
“Germany’s right to share in the work of world colonization” (3); Taylor (1938); and Bullock (1939),
who debunks the German need for Raum. Bullock recalls that Germany was only the fourth most
densely populated European country, with roughly half the density of the Netherlands, the most
populous (270).

2. Hansen’s study of German colonialism traces the German imperial impulse to around or
before 1815, as Said also does, citing Taylor (Culture and Imperialism 58–59). Kwame sets the date
much later, at 1884 (97). Brunschwig locates fifteenth-century commercial expansion by (largely
Hanseatic) German interests as the root of later imperial expansion.
on an emergent Prussia within a traumatized Europe, his fiction over the next eight years depicts a unified Germany that becomes increasingly open to and enmeshed in the wide world. This process culminates in the depiction of greater mobility in 1886's underestimated *Cécile*, and the moment at which, in that novel's words, “Berlin becomes a metropolis” [Berlin wird Weltstadt] (I.2.250).3

(a) Nation and World in Fontane’s Early Fiction

“German cultural studies comes belatedly to the investigation of colonialism and postcoloniality”—so begins the introduction to the groundbreaking collection of essays on the German *Imperialist Imagination* edited by Sara Friedrichsmeyer, Sara Lennox, and the late Susanne Zantop (1). They resist, though, the notion of belatedness in German imperialism itself, because “the term implies . . . that there was a proper moment for colonialism” (19). Yet others, like Todd Kontje and Nina Berman, have readily accepted what the historical facts bear out: that German colonial projects on any national level began well after those of other European nations. This delay is a direct result of what Russell Berman calls “Germany’s ambivalent situation within Europe,” which gives rise, in his opinion, to a “German colonial discourse” that is “interesting because it is different from the more emphatically universalizing claims of British and French colonial discourses” (10). The above sections on Balzac and Trollope have argued that what Berman sees as “emphatically universalizing” in British and French colonial discourse is actually more complex, especially in the literary evocations of this discourse. Yet Berman’s attempts to separate Germany from Britain and France are indicative of a few larger problems in attempts by Germanists to engage in the ongoing examination of imperialism from the perspective of cultural studies.4 As Berman himself makes clear, the imperial project was not a strictly nationalized one; Germans participated in important voyages like those of Cook, whose cartographer, Johann Reinhold Forster, Berman profiles at length. Adhering to a rigidly national view of imperialism encourages one to ignore imperialism writ large. One of the most intriguing chapters in Fontane’s *Vor dem Sturm*, in which a tale from Greenland with openly

3. Translators invariably render Weltstadt as metropolis, and so has Radcliffe in his translation of *Cécile*, but it is important to keep in mind the idea of the Welt or world in the German word.

4. Berman has expressed discomfort at the trend toward “cultural studies” and away from more traditional historiography. He asks, “How does one verify, for example, observations about historical fantasies?” (“Der ewige Zweite” 22). He explains the rise of such approaches in *Germanistik* circles by pointing out that “German colonialism [is], because of its brevity, relatively poor in empirical material,” implying that scholars have had to make more out of less evidence (20).
colonial importance is told at length, relates to multinational religious imperialism in a Danish colony. Moreover, Cécile’s Herr von Gordon, an avowed participant in various British colonial projects and in the construction of the technological infrastructure responsible for the shrinking of the world, is obviously pertinent to any reading of Fontane invested in empire, despite the fact that Gordon does not serve as a stand-in for a specifically German imperialism.

Germanists interested in confronting imperialism in German literature have tended toward one of two strategies, both of which help to explain the reception of certain of Fontane’s works. These two approaches choose between the analysis of colonialist fantasy and colonialist history, a problematic dichotomy that neglects the mutually reinforcing nature of the two terms. Edward Said, one recalls, sees both history and fantasy in the Orientalist mindset. Susanne Zantop’s important study of Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family, and Nation in Precolonial Germany, 1770–1870 focuses, as the title implies, on the structures of knowledge that contributed to the desire to obtain colonies. Zantop specifies that she is “less concerned with the colonial reality of the late nineteenth century than with the formation of a sense of German difference” (3) and of “exclusivity and moral superiority . . . constructed in the writings of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century authors” (8).

Consider, then, on the other hand, the work of Nina Berman and John Noyes, who both focus on literature specifically of or about the German colonies or on orientalist travel fantasies like Karl May’s Orientzyklus (1881–1888). The result of this methodological split—between attention to either domestic colonial fantasies or distant colonial realities—is a lack of scholarship on domestic realities (and thus the entire realist canon) in the burgeoning German empire. We thus lose the opportunity to investigate the subtle but important ways in which the imperialist shrinking of the world brings colonial difference into the domestic sphere and allows it to complicate the act of representation. For this reason, Judith Ryan’s essay on “The Chinese Ghost” in Effi Briest and Claudius Sittig’s article on Gieshübler’s servant, Mirambo, in that same novel, represent an interesting development in such readings of Fontane, because they attempt to reconcile the two

5. In this sense, Zantop’s work seems only peripherally to address colonialism as a unique phenomenon separable from more general racism with colonialist inflections. This is equally true of Kontje’s central chapter on Herder. Such methodologies are similar to those of Holocaust studies and the manner in which a culture of German superiority may have provided the underlying potential for catastrophic action. Nina Berman’s and John Noyes’s work relies on a methodology organized specifically around colonial concerns, rather than more abstract notions of otherness, and yet their work simultaneously relies on texts set only in the colonies. Russell Berman’s essay, “Der ewige Zweite,” offers a nice, cogent documenting of general means of grappling with colonialism in German cultural and literary studies.

6. Claudius Sittig’s definition of Kolonialliteratur adds the element of propagandism: “By ‘Kolonialliteratur,’ I understand any literature whose setting [Schauplatz] is the German colonies and which makes a propagandistic contribution to political agitation for colonialism” (546–47).
strategies. Ryan aims to subject German novels to the sort of analyses she claims already exist in studies of English literature, showing that a novel like Effi Briest is “in some sense ‘about’ empire even though it does not always make this explicit” (367). It is important that she chooses, as exemplars from the English canon, Great Expectations and Jane Eyre. Ryan considers the manner in which empire is coded and written into German domestic life and German realism not necessarily as pure fantasy, but as an increasingly palpable presence and socioeconomic reality. This sort of approach permits us to chart, within Fontane’s early fiction, the increased fictional profile of the notions of both empire and the imperial city. Both are central to the fate of disenchantment as it is portrayed in and troubled by nineteenth-century realist fiction.

Vor dem Sturm is a fitting debut for Fontane’s novelistic output, because it introduces certain narrative habits and thematic game that remain important throughout his œuvre. A story of the first stirrings of Prussian nationalism against Napoleon’s troops in the winter of 1812–13, the novel is set in and around the fictional Hohen-Vietz, located in Brandenburg, just north of Frankfurt on the banks of the Oder. The centripetal importance of Berlin is already palpable, if muted, in the novel; Fontane sets several important scenes there, and the city’s role as a sort of national indicator is implied by the quick manner in which Lewin, just arrived from Berlin, is immediately asked how “the mood” [die Stimmung] there is (I.3.33). The empirical narrative epistemology of Vor dem Sturm is recognizable from Fontane’s extensive earlier travel writings, as observations are laid out in detail and then followed by insights into them, the same strategy we saw in the novels of Balzac discussed above. Proceeding by vision and deduction, this approach sits well with the occasional detective elements in Fontane’s fiction: the investigation of the burglary at Hohen-Vietz in Vor dem Sturm’s chapter called “The Search,” for example, or the “half-detective novel” Ernst Bloch saw in Fontane’s Unter dem Birnbaum (Under the Pear Tree, 1885) (Bloch 261). At one point in Vor dem Sturm, in what amounts to a metacommentary on poetic language by the pastor Seidentopf, poetry is praised not for its sentiment but for its optics and acoustics: after reciting a stanza describing a wedding party in great detail, Seidentopf exclaims, “That is what I call language. I can see the bridegroom in his worsted waistcoat and hear them all clicking their heels together as they dance” (I.3.111; my emphases). Following this empirical predilection, all events of questionable veracity—that is, events with supernatural implications—are offered only framed within stories told by characters, so that the narrator’s and the novel’s empirical sympathies are never tested. This strategy has its precedents in German fiction in the nineteenth century, extending back at least to Jeremias Gotthelf’s Die schwarze Spinne (The Black Spider,
1842) and Annette von Droste-Hülshoff’s Die Judenbuche (The Jews’ Beech Tree, 1842). Empirically dubious events are embedded within characters’ tales and gossip, safely isolated from a determinedly objective and empiricist narrator. Fontane’s narrator is well aware of what gets termed “the romantic need for the spectral [Spukhaft] and dreadful” or, later, the “need for specters and ghosts” [Spuk- und Gespensterbedürfnis] (I.3.22; I.3.77). Such “romantic” needs are contained outside of Berlin in Vor dem Sturm, but they already foreshadow Effi Briest’s longing for the Chinese ghost.

A point of contact and contrast between Vor dem Sturm and Balzac’s Peau de chagrin illustrates to what extent Fontane’s early fiction seems uninterested in questions of the larger world into which Germany will “belatedly” venture. The hobby of collecting in Vor dem Sturm certainly owes more to Scott’s Antiquary than to Balzac, but reading it against the collection in La Peau de chagrin is illuminating. I argued above that the international make-up of the items in Balzac’s antiquities shop attests to the function of Paris as a sort of nexus of imperial undertakings, as artifacts from the Americas mingle with those from Asia, Africa, and Europe. The whole world, objectified, is in Balzac’s Paris, but Fontane’s collections in Vor dem Sturm are almost entirely composed of ancient German finds, especially the archaeological remains of the Wends assembled by Pastor Seidentopf, “a passionate collector” (I.3.84). Major-General von Bamme, too, collects “Germanic” [Urgermanisch] artifacts (I.3.151), as does Chamberlain von Medewitz (I.3.153–54). Fontane’s novel remains largely in the same confines as the architect’s collection in Goethe’s Die Wahlverwandtschaften (1809), whose narrator states that “Most of these objects were German in origin [Ursprung]” (6.367). In fact, the artifacts from furthest afield in the Vor dem Sturm’s collections were “excavated at Herculanum and Pompeii” (I.3.573). Fontane’s fiction still has not left Europe. These collections, with their archaeological devotion to the prehistory of Germany, can be read in conjunction with a larger, unstated purpose of the text as a novelistic construction of a German nation.

Saree Makdisi argues, in Romantic Imperialism’s persuasive reading of Scott’s Waverley, that Scott essentially uses a past episode (the novel’s subtitle, of course, is ’Tis Sixty Years Since) to build Scotland as against England in the novel, by creating a history and a geography on which a nation might stand, independent.7 Heide Grieve, Hans Vilmar Geppert, and Lambert Shears have probed the debt that Fontane’s novel owes to Scott’s novels—and especially to Waverley—and so one could suggest that Vor dem Sturm’s apparent European insularity and intensely Prussian focus imply a

7. See also Trumpener’s chapter “National Character, Nationalist Plots: National Tale and Historical Novel in the Age of Waverley, 1806–1830,” in Baltic Nationalism (128–57).
project akin to the one Makdisi sees at work in *Waverley*. Indeed, Fontane’s novel explicitly knits Germany together at times, as if mapping out a coherent national space. Space is crucial to the novel’s conception of history and narrative; this much is clear at the outset of Aunt Schorlemmer’s tale from Greenland. She asks, “Well, what shall we begin with?” [Nun, womit beginnen wir?] and Renate, eager to hear the story, answers, “With the beginning, naturally; that is, with the land itself [mit dem Lande selbst]” (I.3.254). The most significant instance of this land-based approach introduces the climactic battle near the end of the novel, which is preceded by a reconnoitring tour that shows the characters and the narrator piecing the region together into a continuity: “The next village was Clessin,” one paragraph begins, and the next paragraph continues the progression, “And then Cliestow too lay behind them” (I.3.600). The idea of national unification is further alluded to in the collapsing foreignness of other Germans in the build-up to battle. Bamme asks Bernd von Vitzewitz about the standard being flown by Revenue Officer Mollhausen of Lietzen, who has come to join the fight: “The standard that the old guy is carrying?” Bamme asks, “Red and white. I’ve never seen it before in all my life” (I.3.595). The notion of foreignness within Germany is bundled alongside national unity in this image; Bamme may not have seen that particular flag before, being flown by his soon-to-be comrade in arms, but the red in it looks beyond an isolated Prussia to the red of the German imperial flag. Fontane might also refer to this imperial red later in *Der Stechlin* (1897), when a character considers (and finally rejects) the idea of repairing a tattered black-and-white Prussian flag with a bit of “red” [was Rotes] (I.5.15).8

This brief discussion of the quite long *Vor dem Sturm* highlights two important things. First, Fontane’s fiction does not start out in the globally cosmopolitan territory it will inhabit from approximately 1886 (in the form of *Cécile*) on, with agile plotlines that can carry mobile characters all over the world and back or, at the very least, with characters who can claim to have traveled all over the world and back. Second, despite what appears, on close examination, to be a gradual if not belated insertion of Germany into the world between *Vor dem Sturm* and *Cécile*, Fontane’s primary interests and narrative strategies remain constant, even if he consistently develops more sophisticated means of elaborating them. Space is of persistent importance in his fiction, and the anecdotal elements of colonialism in Aunt Schorlemmer’s story of Kaiarnak hint in 1878 at an imperial theme that will become less anecdotal as Fontane’s fiction progresses. (Some Danish writers—Peter Høeg, for example—have even begun reckoning in their novels the lingering

8. The revolutionary associations of the color red are, to be sure, another means of reading this passage in *Der Stechlin*. Without arguing for a sort of deliberate narrative construction of nationhood in *Vor dem Sturm*, Osinski and Vom Hofe both nevertheless read the novel as an exercise in patriotism.
postcolonial relationship between Denmark and Greenland.) Similarly, the theme of empire begins to refuse the Romantic shade it possesses in Kiar-nak’s story, which reads like Chateaubriand’s Atala (1801) or René (1802), or Longfellow, perhaps even Cooper. This is not to suggest that there are only Germans in the Germany of Vor dem Sturm. Indeed, Berlin is home to a host of Europeans from France, Russia, and Poland, for example, the result of Napoleonic upheavals and resettlements. But with the exception of the Greenland interlude, which segues into a triumph of religious imperialism and ultimately becomes a stock conversion story, one never leaves Europe in Vor dem Sturm.

Increased mobility becomes explicit in L’Adultera (1882), Fontane’s fourth work of fiction and the first to be set in his contemporary Berlin. Fontane’s fiction begins consistently to see outside of Germany. Ebenezer Rubehn returns to Berlin after time abroad in New York, and the novella sends its protagonists, Rubehn and Melanie van der Straaten, on a makeshift honeymoon to Italy. Planning a similar honeymoon itinerary in Schach von Wuthenow (1883), Schach and his betrothed, Victoire von Carayon, consider going even further, as they plan

to cross over to Sicily and sail past the islands of the Sirens, “whether unfet-tered or tied to the mast he would leave up to Victoire and her trust.” And then they would want to go on to Malta. Not because of Malta, no, certainly not. But on the way to it there would be the site where the mysterious Black Continent would for the very first time hold discourse in reflections and mirages with the Hyperborean native of fog and snow. (I.1.672)

Schach von Wuthenow postulates a mixture of north and south, of Europe and Africa unexpressed in Fontane’s previous fiction. The broader gaze and the more widely imagined mobility are, admittedly, largely cosmetic in that novella and in L’Adultera. However, they become crucial to Cécile’s presentation of Berlin and of Herr von Gordon, who comes to stand for the wider world, its inmanent reduction, and the consequences of this reduction for Berlin as it enters the global stage and becomes a Weltstadt.

9. Chateaubriand’s René was published in the same year as his essay Génie du christianisme, in which he spells out the parable of the Mandarin that Balzac finds so useful in Goriot. If the Kiar-nak episode in Vor dem Sturm betrays the possible influence of these writers, Hayens suggests that Fontane made similar stylistic borrowings—from Cooper and Harte in particular—in the writing of the American half of Quitt in 1891 (101).

10. Grete Minde (1880) and Ellernklipp (1881) are both set in the rural past, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, respectively, in Tangermünde and in “one of the northern valleys of the Harz,” the future destination of Cécile (I.1.105).
(b) Region, Romance, and the Rails

_Cécile_ is the exception amongst the fiction Fontane produced in the early- or mid-1880s, which has not received as much scholarly attention as his major, later works, like _Irrungen, Wirrungen_ (Delusions, Confusions, 1888), _Unwiederbringlich_ (Beyond Recall, 1892), _Effi Briest_, or _Der Stechlin_. Yet it has often been read as an introduction to themes—adultery especially, or general decadence—that pervade Fontane’s other novels and novellas. Friedrich writes, for example, that _Cécile_ “is valid above all as a preliminary stage [Vorstufe] for Fontane’s great Berlin novels at the end of the eighties and in the nineties. Fontane takes the first step, here, into a new area: the representation of contemporary Prussian nobility” (520). _Cécile_ has more value in and of itself than Friedrich might allow, yet this novel is indeed useful toward an exploration of Fontane’s development of Berlin as a fictional site. As Henry Garland notes, in the introduction to his _The Berlin Novels of Theodor Fontane_,

Most of the “Berlin novels” are not concentrated solely on the capital. _Vor dem Sturm_ alternates between Berlin and the New March. The scene of _L’Adultera_ shifts for a time to Italy; _Cécile_ begins in the Harz mountains. _Effi Briest_ includes the Old March and Pomerania. _Die Poggenpuhls_ has an interlude in Silesia, _Der Stechlin_ commutes between the Middle March and Berlin, and the posthumous _Mathilde Möhring_ moves briefly to West Prussia. In all of these novels Berlin is the focus and pivot, and its centripetal pull is constantly evident. (vii)

_Cécile_ stands out in this group as a novel that, according to Garland, begins elsewhere and moves surely and irrefutably into Berlin; moreover, the novel highlights this movement, just as it seems to underscore movement in general. The new mobility in _Cécile_ demonstrates the novel’s substantial investment in concerns of colonialism and globalizing commerce, and their effect on the city that Garland rightly singles out as “focus and pivot.” The undercurrents that critics have seen in _Effi Briest_—adultery, duels, empire—are already present in _Cécile_, and their negotiation in the novel offers a useful context for the next chapter’s discussion of _Effi Briest_.

_Cécile_, as a novel, is actually born in motion, on a northbound train. Garland’s claim that it begins in the Harz mountains, only later moving to Berlin, misses this. The novel’s first word, “Thale,” is spoken on the train platform in Berlin by Colonel Pierre St. Arnaud, Cécile’s husband, as he gives their destination to the porter (I.2.141). Once St. Arnaud and Cécile are seated on board and the train has started to move, St. Arnaud begins “to study a map marked with thick lines which showed the railway network in the immediate
vicinity of Berlin. He did not get far with his orientation [Orientierung], however, and it was only when they skirted the edge of the Zoological Gardens that he seemed to get his bearings” (I.2.142). Already in the opening salvos of the novel, Fontane’s narrator introduces Berlin, the railways, the newness of the railways—St. Arnaud, for one, appears unfamiliar with their route—and the maps meant to render them navigable. The entire first chapter is devoted to this journey, the narration of which positions Thale far from Berlin, but not too far; it is, after all, within a day’s journey by train. Yet the narrator’s lingering on this journey simultaneously allows for the introduction of tension into the relationship between St. Arnaud and Cécile—it is clear from the reaction to them on the train that there is some mystery in their past—and the spatial articulation of the distance between Thale and Berlin as we leave the urban:

Soon one passed this congestion of streets [Straßenenge] . . . and the journey continued over the Havel bridges, first Potsdam Bridge, then Werder. . . . After an interval [Cécile] opened her eyes once more and looked out at the landscape, which was constantly changing: cornfields and orchards and then again broad expanses of heath. . . . And now the conversation came to a stop again, and faster and faster they sped on, first past Brandenburg with its St Godehard Church and then past Magdeburg and its cathedral. At Oschersleben they were joined by the Leipzig train, and at somewhat slower speed because the ascent was beginning to make itself felt, they travelled on towards Quedlinburg, behind whose abbey church the heights of the Brocken already rose up. (I.2.142–44)

The narrative makes the most out of the distance to the final destination, the Ten Pounds Hotel, positioning it at quite a fictional distance from Berlin, the story’s origin.

Heinrich Heine’s essay Die Harzreise, which was first published in 1826, lends dependably romantic shadings to the region portrayed in the first half of Cécile. Fontane clearly has a literary precedent and tradition from which to draw, but, as the recodings of romantic space in Trollope’s novels demonstrate, nothing can be taken for granted later in the nineteenth century. The deliberate performance of the distance between the city and the Harz as a rural tourist site is just one important factor in Cécile’s rendering of the Harz in romantic, mysterious, nonurban light. The distance is necessary, if Fontane’s narrator is to re-secure the rural Harz as a site of potential romance in the face of the very unromantic means of journeying there. Paul Youngman has argued that the rails in Cécile are a marriage of myth and technology, but their effect on the novel’s geography is complex.
Youngman (95) and Helen Chambers (106) both emphasize the so-called Hexentanzplatz, “Witches’ Dance Floor,” and a scene in which the narrator claims that “it almost sounded as though a constant succession of trains was coming” down from this mystically named place (I.2.207). Heine’s Harzreise mentions a hill called der Hexenaltar (60), and, bearing this in mind, Gordon makes it clear that the romance is in the region and not the rails, that it is the land if anything that is bewitched: “Wherever one stays one is under some obligation to acquaint oneself with the characteristic features of the region, in Samarkand the temple doors and their guards, in the desert the king of the desert, and in the Harz the witches. For the witches here are a local product [Landesprodukt]” (I.2.165). Cécile herself repeats the regional ties later, saying that Gordon was right (I.2.259). Trains are momentarily linked, in the Harz, with talk of the supernatural, but they eventually become again a call back to reality and the urban. The narrator explicitly opposes the railways to the realm of dreams and fantasies, in a manner that also links this new technology to the city. Leaning against her husband, Cécile “remained in this reverie [Träumen] until suddenly the signals were changed along the railway line and the sharp sound of the departure bell rang out from Thale. And not a minute later the whistle of the locomotive was heard, followed immediately by a coughing and snorting and now the train was steaming scarcely a hundred paces away past the Lindenberg” (I.2.207). After the train passes, St. Arnaud points out that it is headed for Berlin, and Cécile, the romantic, turns away from it.

While the rails are an interruption to dreams and are linked to the urban, Thale and its environs are portrayed quite differently. The painter Fräulein Rosa complains to Gordon that Thale is being ruined by “too much dust and too many Sunday trippers” (I.2.220), but the novel itself undercuts this claim. One of the first descriptions of the local color in Thale is Gordon’s of an abandoned “villa densely overgrown with wild vines” (I.2.157). Cécile calls it “magical” [zauberhaft] and remarks that it “is indeed the enchanted castle of fairy-tale” [ist ja das ›verwunschene Schloß‹ im Märchen]. Gordon quickly removes the villa into a darker Gothic: “A dark spirit [finsterer Geist] goes through this house and its last occupant shot himself here, by that window (the second-to-last one on the left), and when I look at it, it is as though he is still looking out and seeking the happiness that he could not find. Places with blood on them fill me with dread [Plätze, daran Blut klebt, erfüllen mich mit Grauen].” Later, a guesthouse is likened to “a medieval Rodenstein castle” as even the infrastructure of tourism is made over to fit an image of the rural past (I.2.227). Despite his skepticism, St. Arnaud plays on the relationship of the rural and the Romantic toward the end of their stay in Thale; gently ridiculing Cécile for seeing a blackbird as “unheimlich,” St. Arnaud tells her,
“Those are feelings one gets when lost in the woods. But we shall be spared that little bit of romanticism [dies Stück Romantik]” (I.2.236). St. Arnaud frames the rural in the very romantic terms in which the novel in general appears to view it.

St. Arnaud’s recourse to an idea of being lost, though, merits closer attention, for the act of losing oneself speaks to an unaccomplished navigation, a failure of familiarization, and thus the sort of shaky new ground of uncertainty and complication. I argued above that becoming lost serves, in Balzac’s La Fille aux yeux d’or, to render a familiar Paris foreign, in essence reenchanting it, and that the impossibility of becoming lost in Trollope’s London—except for Felix Carbury when drunk—reveals the extent to which the English capital has been rendered all too compact, knowable, and navigable. St. Arnaud, in Cécile, rehearses these same questions. While he casually relates being lost to Romantik, Cécile herself pairs being lost—in spatial terms—both with romanticism and adultery, in a revealing conversation with her husband. Following a brief discussion of Gordon, St. Arnaud says,

“I should be curious to know what you might be inclined not to find trivial.”

“Well, the Regensteiner11, for instance. He is so much more romantic. And if it can’t be the Regensteiner, well then, adventures, tiger-hunting, the desert, getting lost . . .”

“Geographically or morally?”

“Both.” (I.2.193)

Under the larger umbrella of the romantic, Cécile links a lack of geographical orientation to a lack of moral orientation, speaking favorably of both, and this particular evocation of the spatial possibility of adultery becomes central to Effi Briest, as does the idea of “lostness.” More important, this entire exchange occurs as a result of Cécile’s denigrating Gordon’s professional work, his involvement in international projects laying telegraph wires. Cécile is unimpressed by such labor, and, as one might expect, she specifically opposes it to romance. The opposition is essential, for it complicates the overall picture of Gordon, whom one is tempted to read as a mysterious if not exotic energy in the text.

11. Most likely an allusion to the exploits of Prince Albrecht II of Regenstein (1310–1349), which had recently been recounted in Julius Wolff’s Der Raubgraf: Eine Geschichte aus dem Harzgau (1884). The ruins of the Regenstein castle are nearby, in the Harz.
(c) **Business as Usual: Berlin and the Banality of the Foreign**

What excites the traveler is the new; when the foreign [das Fremde] has become the everyday, it looks completely different.

—Freytag, *Soll und Haben*

Herr Robert von Gordon-Leslie, a civil engineer, is not quite an analogue to other narrative complications from outside domestic space, like the Magic Skin or the Girl With the Golden Eyes in Balzac’s novels, or Augustus Melmotte in Trollope’s *The Way We Live Now*. He considers Germany his “Heimat,” and Cécile too seems to accept this. Yet much is made in *Cécile* of Gordon’s Scottish roots and ancestry, mostly by St. Arnaud, and this Celtic background accounts for a distinctly romantic side to his character. On a day trip while at Thale, St. Arnaud hands Cécile a plaid travel rug, joking to her, “Herr von Gordon will drape it artistically about you; he owes that to his Gordon clan. And then we shall have you as a Highland apparition between us. Lady Macbeth or something of the sort” (I.2.237). Later, St. Arnaud warns Cécile of his fear “that once [Gordon] has got something into his head then he’ll charge at things head foremost [so will er auch mit dem Kopf durch die Wand]. The Scottish still haunts [spukt] through him. All Scots are headstrong [hartköpfig]” (I.2.258). The use of the verb *spuken* is curious but further highlights a fantastic romanticism in Gordon and in the value of Scottishness. To Cécile and St. Arnaud, Gordon’s romantic aura has precise literary associations. Gordon gives Cécile “the impression of being a born guide and scout [Pfadfinder],” and St. Arnaud instantly associates Cécile’s word “Pfadfinder” with the Cooper novel of that name, *The Pathfinder* (1840), first translated into and published in German in 1841 (I.2.157). Continuing his wife’s thought, St. Arnaud sees in Gordon “an echo of [Cooper’s] *Leatherstocking* [Reminiszenz aus ›Lederstrumpf‹]. A closer examination of Gordon’s name, however—an examination which the narrator openly invites—stresses the complications in Gordon’s romance. His position between enchantment and disenchantment is a deeply ambivalent one.

Gordon’s name is not actually “Gordon.” When St. Arnaud asks him if he is related to the infamous British General Charles George Gordon, he replies, “No, my dear colonel, hardly even related, for I am actually a Leslie. The name Gordon only came into our family by adoption [durch Adoption]” (I.2.154). Nowhere does the novel explain precisely why or how the name was “adopted” into Gordon’s family, but it proves very convenient for the novel, as a means of rendering Gordon simultaneously mysterious and indefinable and suggestive of a concrete historical association. The other char-
acters’ reactions capitalize on these multiple possibilities. The Berliners—so the narrator calls the two unnamed members of the tourist party at the Ten Pounds Hotel—envision him as “straight out of Wallenstein’s Death” [der reine ›Wallensteins Tod‹] (I.2.156). Encouraged by the romantic possibilities inherent in the presence of a Schiller character at the hotel, they wryly comment on the beginnings of tension between Gordon and St. Arnaud, knowing that St. Arnaud has already allegedly killed one rival in a duel. Hungry for excitement at the prospect of such tension, they relish the thought that “we really could see something at the end” [da könnt man am Ende noch was erleben], clumsily foreshadowing the novel’s fatal conclusion. It is St. Arnaud, though, the military man, who adduces the less literary, more historical namesake for the novel’s Gordon, and in so doing he ushers in the first of many allusions in the novel to British imperialism. As Fontane was writing Cécile, which he began in June of 1884, British General Charles George Gordon was fighting to retain command of Khartoum, to which Mahdists under the command of the Sudanese Muhammad Ahmad laid siege for ten months between March 13, 1884, and January 26, 1885. The siege concluded with the death of Gordon and the British loss of the city. The name of Cécile’s Gordon may only be an “adoption,” but it constructs him as a self-consciously complex character, weighted on one side by heroic literary associations, and on the other by British colonialist projects of which Fontane was a savage critic, that Cécile herself labels “trivial,” and that the novel will equate with disenchantment.

This second, disenchanted, “trivial” side of Gordon is elaborated in a lengthy description of his accomplishments by St. Arnaud:

[H]is career as chevalier errant begins as trivially as you could imagine. He was stationed at first with the pioneers in Magdeburg, then with the railway battalion under Golz, a unit that is usually much too clever and shrewd to distinguish

12. On duels in Fontane, see Radecke.
13. Roch, in his study of Fontane’s Berlin, describes the circumstances surrounding Fontane’s most strident and prescient outburst on British colonialism, in a letter to an English friend:

In 1897, at the outbreak of the worst uprising that the English had yet had to defeat there, Fontane wrote to [the London doctor James] Morris:

English rule in India must fall apart, and it is a wonder that it has held to the present day. It is failing, not because of mistakes or crimes—all of that counts for little in politics. No, it is failing because the clock has run out. . . . The time of the conquistadors, where twenty thieves could drive much more civilized people apart and burn alive the kings of these better peoples, just because those thieves had muskets—this brutal time is past, and juster days are upon us. The whole politics of colonization is lunacy. . . . With a shudder I read now daily of the dubious measures England wants to take in order to preserve the old way [den alten Zustand] at any price. Up to now one could think, looking at England, that there was at least one people in Europe who still believed in another ideal than a “million soldiers.” If England willingly abandons this colossal preference, which is inseparable from human understanding [Menschenverstand], and begins forcing a rifle into everyone’s hands, then England will fall from the heights that she has held until today. (281)
itself by falling into debt. But every rule has its exceptions. In short, he could not maintain his position and emigrated, if one can speak of emigration in such a situation, to England, where he hoped to put his scientific knowledge to use in a practical way. And he succeeded in doing this and went to Suez in the mid-seventies to lay a cable through the Red Sea and Persian Gulf in the service of a big English company. You won’t be familiar with the geography but I can show you on the map [Du wirst nicht orientiert sein, aber ich zeige dir’s auf der Karte]. . . . Later he entered Persian service and then, after completion under his overall direction of a telegraphic link between the two main cities of the country, Russian service. . . . He is now managing director of the same English firm in whose service he started his career and is at the moment engaged in plans to lay a new cable in the North Sea. (I.2.192)

The geographical range of Gordon’s activities compares favorably with Melmotte’s in *The Way We Live Now*, but the focus on telegraphy and the military is almost absolute in Gordon’s professional life, which seems to alternate comfortably between military service and the laying of cable. Fontane does not make as much of this as Trollope does toward a thematization of the telegraph’s contribution to the shrinking of the wide world—recall the moment at which Melmotte turns the western United States into “suburbs of London” through the use of the telegraph. But Gordon’s travels on behalf of the telegraph manage a similar feat. St. Arnaud mentions Russia, Persia, the Suez, the Red Sea, and the North Sea, but Gordon can also casually refer to having seen the Himalayas, for example, and come back somewhat unimpressed (I.2.210, I.2.215). A dinner in Berlin, to which Gordon is invited by a business colleague, sums up for Gordon an idea that *Effi Briest* expresses even more drastically, the idea that the world has become small. “The evening in Charlottenburg,” the narrator reports, “had been delightful and Gordon had once again convinced himself ‘how small the world was.’ Mutual friends had been discovered, in Bremen, England, New York and last of all in Berlin itself” (I.2.249).

It is surely not a coincidence that the novel reinforces Gordon’s perception of the smallness of the world in introducing the very passage during which he will declare Berlin a metropolis, a world-city. Fontane’s narrative raises, within this same passage, the possibility of Berlin’s value as a site of disenchantment and of Gordon’s contribution to this disenchantment. Gordon, the Civil Engineer, has already been linked to science by St. Arnaud, who claims that Gordon moved “to England, where he hoped to put his scientific knowledge to use in a practical way” [nach England, woselbst er seine wissenschaftlichen Kenntnisse praktisch zu verwerten hoffte] (I.2.192). The rationalization and exploitation of science are marked here, because
the German *verwerten* denotes *to put to use*, as Radcliffe’s translation has it, but carries the etymological traces of *worth* or *value*; Gordon goes to England in order to give value to his scientific knowledge, to make it worth something by using it for commercial ends. Gordon himself reinforces his ordered and rational side when, surveying the scattered objects in his newly acquired room in Berlin, he says, in what feels scripted as a sort of declaration, “And now, . . . I suppose I ought to create order out of this chaos” [Und nun sollt’ ich wohl . . . in diesem Chaos Ordnung stiften] (I.2.249). Gordon’s presence seems set consistently to invoke and yet frustrate enchantment once in Berlin, until the duel at the end. When he surprises Cécile and her guest, Privy Councillor Hedemeyer, in her box at the opera, the narrator’s *style indirect libre* reveals Hedemeyer’s view of Gordon as “the ‘Canadian’ who in the great world outside had broken free from ‘Europe’s whitewashed politeness’” [de[r] draußen in der Welt von »Europens übertünchter Höflichkeit« frei gewordenen »Kanadier«] (I.2.300). Like Cécile’s and St. Arnaud’s earlier associations of Gordon with the frontiers of Cooper, the reference here is also a literary one, to the first lines of Johann Gottfried Seume’s “The Hospitality of the Huron” (“Die Gastfreundschaft des Huronen,” 1801) and its “Canadian, who did not yet know Europe’s whitewashed politeness” [Kanadier, der noch Europens / übertünchte Höflichkeit nicht kannte]. Fontane’s narrator has changed the Huron from one who “did not know” European politeness to one who “had broken free” from it. The change is significant, because it parallels the novel’s careful reversal of Gordon’s alleged ignorance and savagery, with all their romantic connotations. St. Arnaud, incensed at Gordon’s treatment of Cécile, tells her that “Gordon is a man of breeding [von Familie], of polite society [Welt] and of discrimination, and such a man does not operate with undetermined purpose [handelt nicht ins Unbestimmte hinein]. He assesses the situation” (I.2.308; emphases mine). St. Arnaud’s language returns Gordon to the reality of exchange (*einhandeln*), science, and order, far from contingencies (*das Unbestimmte*), and this is all linked to Gordon’s embodiment of the *world* and his knowledge of its rules.

Gordon is, as St. Arnaud pronounces him to be, a man of the world. His arrival in Berlin coincides with its transformation to a declared *Weltstadt* in *Cécile*, and the novel frames this within a process of disenchantment and a progress expressed in terms of the foreign rendered accessible and familiar. Gordon’s labors on behalf of telegraphy are just one example of this, and they depict a tightly bound globe in 1886 to which Gustav Freytag’s *Soll und Haben* was yet unprepared to submit in 1855. Freytag’s hero Anton Wohlfart revels at length in the romance and poetry he sees in global trade, but trade is only made romantic because the novel rejects the historical present. The
narrator confesses early on to preferring and depicting the older arrangements of distance, a world “rare nowadays, when railroads and telegraphs unite sea and inland [See und Inland verbinden]. . . . Back then [Damals], the sea was far off” (47). The nostalgia of Freytag’s setting describes a business in which commerce is more difficult, subject to complication, and thus more poetic and heroic. Gordon undoes the distance in Cécile, however. His very anti-romantic notions of travel—an area in which one would have to consider him an expert of sorts—foreshadow the jaded view of the exotic in Wilhelm Raabe’s Stopfkuchen (1890) or in Fontane’s own Effi Briest, whose La Tripelli claims that, even in the middle of Africa, one is now bound to bump into an acquaintance. In a letter to his sister, Clothilde, Gordon writes, “I love journeys around the world and wouldn’t want to miss them in the future, although I feel the passion diminishing, but on the other hand I am no friend of ordeals as such, and the more comfortably I can travel up and down the Congo, so much the better. Economy of forces [Ökonomie der Kräfte]. But enough of the Congo!” (I.2.186). Gordon would gladly trade romance for comfort, erasing the difference of distant, even exotic, places in exchange for ease and familiarity. Even his moments of fantasy in pursuit of Cécile are scripted as disenchantments. Thinking, en route to visit Cécile at home, that he can tell from the address which house the St. Arnauds occupy, Gordon says to himself

They will be living in the Diebitsch house. A touch of the Alhambra, that is most appropriate for my beautiful Cécile. To be sure, she does have the almond eyes and the deeply melancholic strain of a Zoë or a Zuleika. Only the colonel, with all due respect, does not stem from the Aben Ceras, least of all does he represent the poetic end of their line. If I am to fit him into those Moorish regions à tout prix, then he is either the rebel leader Abdel Kader or a Riff pirate from the Moroccan coast. (I.2.252)

The reality is a slight disappointment, as it turns out; the St. Arnauds’ house is “not the house with the Alhambra dome.” Contrasting Berlin with Delhi, where he apparently had an affair, Gordon imagines that the sheer size of a metropolis like Berlin should make erotic dalliance easy: “What was possible

14. This nostalgia for an era before rails and wires is too often omitted from readings of Freytag’s Soll und Haben in the light of globalization; most focus on a speech later in the book in which Anton sings the poetic praises of trade in goods as a sign that all beings are linked by “countless threads” (186). (See, for example, Ramponi 37–39.) Anton sees this linkage as poetic precisely because it is still only metaphorical, as objects “connect” people by moving from one to another. The earlier passage, which I cite, clearly opposes this with the newer actual linkage brought on by technology: railroads and the telegraph. It is this newer condition that the novel wishes to forget.
in an Indian garrison town must be much more so amidst the distraction of a capital city [innerhalb der Zerstreuungen einer großen Residenz]” (I.2.246). The plot of the novel proves him wrong, in a fierce and fatal rebuke. Berlin, it seems, is in fact too crowded for romantic affairs.¹⁵

A chance meeting in Fontane’s crowded Berlin offers one of Cécile’s most striking pronouncements on the relationship of the disenchanted city to what is outside it, to what is, in the novel’s words, simply draußen. The two tourists mentioned above, the natives of Berlin who relished the thought of romantic complications between St. Arnaud and Gordon in Thale, represent, according to Gordon, a stereotype of Berlin eccentricity that the novel will ultimately disappoint. When Gordon meets the two again, at random, in the metropolis, they are less than friendly, and less than interested in complication. Their behavior in the glass-covered pavilion at the Hôtel du Parc is marked by “pretended dignity” [gekünstelte Würde] and “ostentation” [Pomphaftigkeit] (I.2.253). Gordon remarks on the difference between the Berliners on tour and the Berliners at home, and voices his thoughts on the stereotype in a conversation with the proprietor of the establishment: “They were very different [ganz anders] there,” Gordon claims, “rather loud, somewhat eccentric [sonderbar], so very Berlin-style [so berlinisch].” The proprietor laughs, responding, “It’s always like that. True Berliners only really exist outside [draußen] and on journeys. At home [zu Hause] they are quite reasonable.” The dampening effect of the city and the rationality of the domestic (the zu Hause) belie even entrenched cultural assumptions about the eccentricity of Berlin’s inhabitants.

Fontane’s later works often continue the description of Berlin and Germany as part of a larger, global system. There is constant talk of America and the ease of traveling there in Irrungen, Wirrungen, the work that followed Cécile, and both of these novels linger on the elephant cages in the Zoological Gardens in Berlin (I.2.343; I.2.142), convenient symbols of the domesticated exotic.¹⁶ The opening lines of Der Stechlin even allegorize global intercon-

¹⁵. One year later, a character in Galdós’s Fortunata y Jacinta gives stronger airing to this new urban claustrophobia in a warning against extra-marital impropriety: “Madrid may seem big, but it’s very small—it’s a village” (2.79).

¹⁶. In this light, Quitt (1891) distinguishes itself as an almost romantic throwback, as its protagonist flees the murder he commits in Germany by emigrating to America. As Christine Brieger has pointed out, though, while Fontane’s America was culled partly from adventure stories by Cooper and Harte, Fontane’s most significant source was the travel writings of his acquaintance Paul Lindau, published in 1885 as Aus der neuen Welt (301). The similarities to Dickens’s Martin Chuzzlewit are also worth noting.
nectedness in a fundamentally geological manner, as the waterspouts of Lake Stechlin are said to be linked to the volcanic activity of Iceland, Java, and Hawaii (I.5.7). What Der Stechlin positions as a mysterious subterranean linkage, though, Effi Briest, with its constant references to the outer world and essential incorporation of figures from the supposed margins of that world, renders as the result of a shrinking and increasingly traversable global space. Critics have largely ignored the coding and construction of certain spaces and certain types of space in Cécile, focusing instead on the themes that stand out most explicitly; hence Hohendahl’s verdict on the “cult of honor” in the novel (400), and Jung’s attention to the historical contexts of militarism (202). Stephan, who notices a key difference between Thale and Berlin—there are witches in the Harz, one character claims—wrote off these allusions to romance and the supernatural as “Männerphantasie” (135). Friedrich correctly notes the duality of the novel’s setting, “between Harz and Berlin, between ‘Spree and Havel,’” but the ramifications of this comparison in the narrative extend beyond an opposition of town and country or of crowded capital and open rural roads (535). Thale in the Harz expresses, for the narrator and the Berliners portrayed in Cécile, an area of possibility contrasted with Berlin’s populous rationality. The world traveler and civil engineer Herr von Gordon-Leslie seems to oversee and announce Berlin’s fictional transition to Weltstadt in the novel, and he exemplifies the ambivalence of enchantment. Partly painted as a savage Canadian or a savage Celt, yet partly rendered as the embodiment of technology and disillusion, Gordon emphasizes the worldliness of Berlin as it further integrates itself—both in Fontane’s fiction and in historical fact—into the same increasingly interconnected global economy that destabilizes Trollope’s The Way We Live Now.

In Colonial Fantasies, Susanne Zantop cites Sara Lennox’s assertion that “the lack of a metropolis” in German imperial culture has, along with many other factors, “obscured the significance of colonial fantasies in the formation of German national identity and of race relations within Germany” (3). The notion of the city’s centrality here is telling. However, while “the lack of a metropolis” may pertain to Germany’s postcolonial period, with its national split and literally fractured capital, certainly Fontane’s era and its novels not only conceived of Berlin as a metropolis, but actively wrote it as a metropolis. There is an obvious difficulty in envisioning a global scale within the more condensed narrative confines of the novella, and one might argue, given the popularity of the novella over the novel in much of the German nineteenth century, that this reduced narrative scope offers at least a partial explanation for the belated arrival of the world in nineteenth-century German prose fiction. As slim a work as it is, however, Cécile goes a long way toward
articulating the Berlin that peoples much of Fontane’s later fiction and often serves as geographical center. And Cécile does so through a cast of largely imported—although, admittedly, largely European—characters: St. Arnaud from France, Cécile from Silesia, and Gordon from everywhere. The narration of their coming to rest in one place suggests a consolidation of sorts. Long ago, Lukács recognized precisely this notion of urbanization when, in a brief discussion of Fontane in his essay on German Literature in the Age of Imperialism, he refers to the “poetry of the German metropolis that was just then coming into being” [Poesie der damals entstehenden deutschen Großstadt] (19).