Realism's Empire

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Published by The Ohio State University Press


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CHAPTER EIGHT

THE IMAGINATIVE GEOGRAPHY OF EFFI BRIEST

It’s the maps that are always dangerous.
—Theodor Fontane, Effi Briest

No, I merely mentioned his name. But a Chinese man is already a story in and of himself . . .
—Theodor Fontane, Effi Briest

One image in particular from Fontane’s Effi Briest has readily facilitated recent critical attempts to implicate the novel in the discourse of imperialism: the Chinese ghost. Critics who focus on the colonial resonance of Effi Briest do so in deference to the ethnicity of the Chinese ghost, but these same readings tend to ignore the “ghost-ness” of the ghost. Colonial-minded exgeses shy away from the potential of quasi-spiritual matters in discussion of this quasi-spiritual matter, and the supernatural properties of the Chinese ghost remain largely unarticulated.1 In a manner reminiscent of Said’s “secular criticism” or J. P. Stern’s absolutely empiricist realism, most critics have followed the example of Fontane’s Baron von Innstetten and simply rationalized the ghost away. The apparition that haunts Effi has been explained in several different ways, all of which rigorously diminish its theoretically supernatural possibilities either as a psychic projection of Effi’s repressed longings,2 as a strictly pedagogical tool,3 as the return of the oppressed colo-

1. Scholars who do focus on the ghost-ness of the ghost, like Chambers and Reichelt, tend to be uninterested in its ethnicity, or link it, like Hirsch and Guidry do, to classical mythology divorced from its spiritual origins.

2. See Subiotto, for example, who promises to fill the void left by readings that deal “with the Chinaman rather than his ghost, a sociological rather than a supernatural phenomenon” (137), only to admit later a preoccupation more “existential” than spiritual (148). Ingrid Schuster claims that “the Chinese man . . . represents young, passionate (that is, unconventional) love” (117). For Swales, the ghost is “the uncanny that derives from repressed psychic areas” (123), and Avery sees the ghost as “a symbol for a Chinese Wall of dissimulation and intolerance, an artificial barrier erected by reserve and guilt” (34). Müller-Seidel psychologizes the ghost as an “artificially introduced ‘Symbol’ of a psychologically motivated angst” (“Fontanes »Effi Briest«” 47).

3. See Gault and Jamison.
nial or female Other,\textsuperscript{4} as a penchant for the exotic,\textsuperscript{5} or as a systematically thematized allusion to political and social history during the period of the novel’s production.\textsuperscript{6} If the wealth of scholarly scrutiny of the Chinese ghost seems academic overkill, it must be remembered that virtually all critics emphasize the ghost’s pivotal role as an enabler of the novel’s plot, just as Fontane himself did when he famously labeled the apparition “a fulcrum for the whole story” [ein Drehpunkt für die ganze Geschichte] (\textit{Fontanes Briefe} 386).\textsuperscript{7}

I consider here both components of the Chinese ghost, because it functions as indicator of, simultaneously, the colonial and the supernatural. This more inclusive reading might contribute to the construction of a framework for reading problematically “realist” works whose fiction seems to generate itself out of figures imported from the cultural margins. Fontane’s novel and its reception both highlight the cautious resistance to treatment of the supernatural and the implications that this resistance has for our critical capacity to account for certain aspects of the imperial imagination and of realist novels. As I demonstrated in the introduction, numerous critics and major novelists have theorized a deeply disenchanting backdrop to imperial ambitions, which they tether to the historical narrative of secularization. The work of these critics, and especially of Edward Said, helps to show how Fontane’s novel mobilizes the contradictions of its particular historical moment. The spectral and colonial Chinese ghost has a decisive and decisively troubled impact on the novel’s arrangement of rationalism and enchantment, and it blurs both the comfortable imperial divisions between zones of domestic

\textsuperscript{4} See Ryan, discussed more substantially later; and Evans, who argues that the ghost plays the role of “threatening ‘chaotic’” force normally allotted to “female characters . . . in Fontane’s novels” (38–39).

\textsuperscript{5} Guthke constructs an exotic/domestic binary that becomes so central that the reading begins to claim larger and larger areas, as long as they are non-Prussian, for the exotic in a way that elides crucial cultural asymmetries (103). Rainer holds that “The Chinese man is only the most extreme example of not-belonging in the novel. He serves as a variable for all outsiders, as well as a foil to all others: in contrast to them, he never made compromises with convention” (553). Her final assertion that Effi as “nature-child [Naturkind] is, in Kessin, a sight as foreign and exotic as the man from the Far East” forgets harsh realities of colonial history (561). Finally, see also Andermatt and Ingrid Schuster.

\textsuperscript{6} See Bernd, who draws very useful Bismarck connections (esp. 68–71); Müller-Seidel; Parr; Storch; and Utz, who provides illuminating information on Germany’s perception of China (esp. 214). Utz is the first critic to tangle explicitly with \textit{Effi Briest} as a critique of empire, arguing that the novel does not become “critical of imperialism” through the numerous trivial allusions to empire but rather “through the Chinese man” (223). Sittig asserts against Utz that \textit{Effi Briest} is not critical of imperialism, that it “follows . . . in central passages the rules of contemporary colonial discourse” (544).

\textsuperscript{7} In a letter to Joseph Viktor Widmann dated 19 November, 1895, Fontane writes: “You are the first to point to the haunted house and the Chinese; I don’t understand how people can see past them, since this ghost is, first of all, at least as I picture it, interesting in and of itself, and second, as you’ve pointed out, not placed there for fun, but rather as a fulcrum for the whole story [ein Drehpunkt für die ganze Geschichte]” (\textit{Fontanes Briefe} 386).
order and zones of mystery, and the hierarchies of city and country. Upset-
tting distinctions that are both acknowledged and reproduced in *Effi Briest*,
Fontane articulates the tension between the spiritual imagination and the
secular rationalizations of geographical expansionism. It attempts to envi-
sion, in the carefully attempted but ultimately failed recuperation of the mys-
terious, a means of unmapping the mapped and ordered world and restoring
uncertainty to a text that both craves and fears it.

**(a) Unreal Realism: Imperial Knowledge and Space**

Judith Ryan’s essay on *Effi Briest* anticipates a measurable resistance to
recent theoretical trends in the description of literary evocations of empire.
This resistance pertains especially to the field of German cultural studies,
according to Friedrichsmeyer, Lennox, and Zantop. One could postulate
a variety of reasons for the supposed disciplinary insularity, but, even if it
does show signs of its own demise, it is certainly at play in Ryan’s appeal
to Germanists everywhere to hoist German realism “out of the purdah into
which” it “has been relegated on the international scene,” so that *Effi* can
take her “place with the great English novels of the Victorian era” (383). It
is worth examining exactly why the novel’s Chinese ghost is so crucial to an
imperial reading of *Effi Briest* (recalling that, in Fontane’s opinion, it was
crucial to *any* reading of *Effi Briest*). In 1984, Peter Utz became the first to
attend to the colonial implications of the Chinese ghost in *Effi Briest*, in an
article to which all ensuing analyses acknowledge their debt. Utz’s case is
built on traditional historical and comparative scholarship rather than on the
postcolonial theory that informs the most recent contributions to this discus-
sion. He details Germany’s involvement in and perception of China around
the turn of the twentieth century, arguing that Wilhelm II’s and Bismarck’s
overt military incursions both represent the “culminat[ion of] a half-century
of German policy toward China” and corroborate contemporary literary evo-
cations of the Far East (215). Utz briefly mentions Karl May’s “China novel,”
*Der blaurote Methusalem* (1892), which was first published as *Kong-Kheou,
das Ehrenwort* (1888–89), alongside Jules Verne’s *Les Tribulations d’un

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8. Ryan; Kontje; Lennox, Friedrichsmeyer, and Zantop; Noyes; and Nina Berman are just a
few scholars engaging imperialism in German literature and culture from within the discourse of
what one might call cultural studies (as opposed to the more traditionally historical study ably
and importantly represented by scholars like Utz and Müller-Seidel). See also Russell Berman’s
*Enlightenment or Empire*, which explicitly opposes the use of the sort of contemporary theory
to which Ryan and the others have turned. Berman denides what he terms “deconstructive
antilogocentrism” as “a fraudulent basis for a critique of empire” (7). His views of imperialist
conceptions of space, however, come very close to those of Said (3).
Part III: Fontane and the Problem of Familiarity

Chinois en Chine (1879) and Kipling’s travel writings from China, “which appeared in English newspapers between 1887 and 1889” (217). While Fontane composed Effi Briest, Utz recalls, a German flotilla stood off China’s shores to safeguard what had by then become “the prime example of a German commercial empire.” In addition to the discovery of Chinoiserie in dinnerware referenced by Innstetten in the novel, Ryan’s attention to the long history of Prussian and German missionarization and diplomacy in China in the mid-nineteenth century bolsters the connections Utz draws between Germany and China. In Effi Briest as in Cécile, the notion of empire-building and global expansion is a recurring, if often subtle, preoccupation. Beyond the often remarked Chinese associations of Effi Briest, critics have touched also on Fontane’s glance toward Africa (with the character of Gieshübler’s servant Mirambo, for example), another locus of German imperial interest. The historical specifics of Fontane’s gestures to colonialism through the Chinese ghost have, by now, been convincingly established. What has not been addressed, though, is the manner in which the novel’s construction of space is deeply affected by the marginal figure of the Chinese ghost.

The Chinese ghost’s impact on the negotiation and spatial organization of enchantment in Effi Briest is profound. Yet critics who emphasize the Chinese half of the ghost largely ignore its spiritual or supernatural component. This hybridized colonial-supernatural symbiosis forces to the forefront a preoccupation with disenchantment, which Fontane’s novels register acutely. A return to Brontë’s Jane Eyre—to which Spivak, Ryan and Effi Briest all gesture—illustrates the point. One can footnote Jane Eyre, along with Dickens’s Great Expectations, as a perfect example of a great English novel that “implicitly involves an exploration of empire,” as Ryan puts it (367). This is too modest, though, for Brontë’s exploration of empire is entirely explicit, represented powerfully in the character of Bertha Mason, the madwoman in the attic. Bertha Mason is, as Spivak reminds us, a “white Jamaican Creole” animalized by Brontë’s narrative; through her very physical and violent pres-

9. Friedrichsmeyer, Lennox, and Zantop offer a cogent summary: “By 1885, then, Germany had acquired its entire, not unsubstantial, colonial empire: four African territories (Southwest Africa, Togo, Cameroon, and German East Africa) and several territories in the Pacific (northeastern New Guinea, part of Samoa, the Bismarck, Marshall, Caroline, and Mariana Islands, and Kiaochow on the Shantung Peninsula in China)” (10). Sittig rightly disputes this, pointing out that Kiaochow does not become an official colony until 1898 (551); ties to Kiaochow were well established by 1885, however, in the form of commerce and missionarization. Overly dismissive of the China connections and of all preceding critical attention to them, Sittig instead grounds his article on very close readings of the few passages in the novel that involve Gieshübler’s African servant, Mirambo, whom he treats in noteworthy depth (555–59).

10. Jane Eyre is ignored in the reception of Effi Briest, which has primarily linked Fontane’s novel with Flaubert’s Madame Bovary and Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina. Ibsen’s Nora Helmer, from A Doll House, is also occasionally factored in. See Stern’s “Effi Briest: Madame Bovary: Anna Karenina”; Rollins; Bonwit; Seiler; and Warning’s chapter “Flaubert und Fontane” (185–239). Furst’s essay gives a useful history of comparative work on Flaubert and Fontane (124–25).
ence in *Jane Eyre*, she articulates an anger sparked by a colonial background story central to the development of Rochester’s character (Spivak 247). Despite the striking but unremarked symbolic affinities between the very real madwoman in *Jane Eyre*’s attic and the ontologically dubious Chinese ghost that haunts Effi in Kessin, there is a vast difference between the physical and spiritual presence of these two colonial Others. If one considers Bertha Mason a prototypical figure for the exploration of empire in *Jane Eyre*—as Spivak does—then an examination or mobilization of empire in *Effi Briest* needs to confront the crucial distinction between the colonial Other who physically hunts Jane Eyre, and the colonial Other who metphysically haunts Effi Briest.

Partly at issue in allying empire with realist narrative—in *Effi Briest* as in any novel of the age of empire—is the notion that the imperial endeavor was indispensable to the mimetic project. Imperialism, Spivak contends, was a vital frame of reference in order for English readers to recognize themselves in a novel. In the passage from *Orientalism* that has already borne some analysis, however, Said specifically derides the very realism so common in novels of the period, and at which Spivak’s notion of readerly identification hints. Said asserts that “Orientalism very generally is a form of radical realism,” and whoever practices it strives to “designate, name, point to, fix what he is talking or thinking about with a word or phrase, which then is considered either to have acquired, or more simply to be, reality” (72). While Orientalism is “absolutely anatomical and enumerative,” however, it is also paradoxically “a form of paranoia, knowledge of another kind, say, from ordinary historical knowledge.” Said’s diagnosis of Orientalism as paranoia is useful for a reading of *Effi Briest*’s Chinese ghost, just as it opens the collision of empiricism and enchantment so central to Balzac’s *La Peau de chagrin* and *La Fille aux yeux d’or*. The Orientalist mindest as Said describes it can be more broadly considered as just one aspect of a general ideology that grounds any colonial project. Central to such projects is what Said calls “imaginative geography” (71). This capacity to envision the ordering of space has been discussed already, above, and several prominent scholars have taken concerns of space very much to heart in their work on German imperialism. Russell Berman, for example, claims that colonialist “progress . . . entails an ongoing conquest of space. That is, colonial discourse is implicated in some underlying epistemological questions relating to the construction of time and, especially, space, and these issues are prior to any specific or crude program of domination or ideologies of a civilizing mission. For the analysis of colonial discourse, then, the key question is one of space, not race” (3). Said similarly holds that “The geographical sense makes projections—imaginary, cartographic, military,
economic, historical, or in a general sense cultural. It also makes possible the construction of knowledge" (*Culture* 78). Said does not elaborate here or, to my knowledge, elsewhere, on the capacity of geography to structure knowledge. He shares common ground, however, with Fontane’s Briest, and Briest’s repeated allusions to the “too wide a field” [zu weites Feld], a quite spatial image for what can and cannot be known with certainty.

If the run-up to the climactic battle scene in *Vor dem Sturm* turns a reconnaissance mission into a narrated cartography in miniature, geography is also deployed early on in *Effi Briest* in a way that must shape any reading of Effi’s relationship to the colonial-era project of mapping the known world and the effects of this undertaking on the possibility of knowledge. During the garden scene at the novel’s outset, Effi reminds Hulda Niemeyer that unfaithful wives in Constantinople are drowned in punishment. Both are quick to underscore the difference between the domestic and the foreign:

“But not here.”

“No, not here,” laughed Effi. “Here things like that don’t happen. But in Constantinople—and you must know about this as well as I do, since you were right there when Mr. Holzapfel spoke of it in Geography class.”

“Yes,” said Hulda, “he always talked about such things. But one forgets them again.”

“I don’t. I remember them.” (I.4.15)

Effi seems to emphasize the conceptual cleft between the homely and the exotic rather than the actual geographical separation, and Innstetten later casts aspersions on the extent of Effi’s actual geographical knowledge. Jokingly contrasting Gieshübler’s African servant Mirambo with the latter’s more notorious namesake, he teases, “The real Mirambo is the head of a band of thieves in Africa, Lake Tanganyika, if your geography reaches that far [wenn deine Geographie so weit reicht]” (I.4.82). Men with maps are apparently a running theme in the nineteenth-century novel. St. Arnaud remarks to Cécile, as he describes the transnational movements of Gordon in *Cécile*, “You won’t be oriented, but I can show you on the map” (I.2.192). Flaubert’s *L’Éducation sentimentale* contains a similar scenario: “Rosanette thought that Lebanon was in China; she laughed at her own ignorance and asked Frédéric to give her some lessons in geography” (2.234). In casually asserting the authority

11. Berman does not engage Said’s elaboration of space in the imperialist project, and the declaration that the “key question” in colonialism is one of “space, not race” is problematic. Clearly, colonial discourse is animated by questions of *both* space and race, and it is difficult to see removing all considerations of ethnicity from an examination of empire.
of his geographic learning, Innstetten situates himself as the rationalistic European geographer in *Effi Briest*. Moreover, Frau Briest insinuates that he would be incapable of visiting the “Walhalla” on his honeymoon without in essence numbering its “art treasures” (I.4.37) and cataloguing the contents of every gallery (I.4.42). If Innstetten is not himself a collector, he is nevertheless described as having a collector’s aura of order. Effi’s father includes the Baron among the forces of bureaucracy, in a telling bit of dialogue; after raging against all manner of officialdom (“Antibeamtliches”), Briest quickly adds, “Pardon, Innstetten” (I.4.21). Innstetten then “nodded mechanically [mechanisch] in agreement.” And it is Innstetten who, when pondering the later move to Berlin, expressly prefers a home situated between conveniently ordered and tamed exotic spaces, “between the Tiergarten and the Zoo” (I.4.191).

Innstetten’s rationalizing impulse, most visible in his reaction to the ghost, colors his interaction with everything. One instance, though, almost comically links concerns of cultural otherness (within an imperial context\(^\text{12}\)) to their rationalized control and to their role in the production of literature. The “Maschinen- und Baggermeister Macpherson,” a veritable Highland Scot and Kessin resident, is trotted out by Innstetten as an example of a clearly domesticated, even modernized, savage. When Effi asks whether Macpherson actually exhibits the bearing of a true Highlander, Geert replies, “No, thank God, no, because he’s a wizened little man, of whom neither his clan nor Walter Scott would be particularly proud” (I.4.46). Macpherson earns his keep creating order in Innstetten’s garden, and yet Fontane may have chosen the name for its romantic associations with the name of the author of the Ossian hoax (Trollope may have done the same in *Phineas Redux*, as I argued above). Innstetten similarly makes Macpherson antithetical to the romances of Scott, just as Trollope’s *Phineas* novels attempt to unwrite Scott’s Highlands. Fontane’s scripting of this exchange between Effi and Innstetten reveals intolerance of the stuff of romance, and does so with distinctly civilizing undertones. Innstetten’s chosen alliance in this equation seems fairly clear, even if Fontane complicates it later in the novel—but Effi’s relationship to the tension between disenchantment and enchantment stands at the center of the novel, alongside the Chinese ghost.

\(^{12}\) Fontane viewed England’s relations with Scotland as indisputably colonial, perhaps a reverberation of his long admiration of the works of Scott. The Scottish character Armstrong in *Irrungen, Wirrungen* tells his hosts in Berlin stories of the Scots’ stealing horses from the English as retaliation for the English practice of “stealing countries” [Länderraub] (I.2.468). Compare Andrew in Scott’s *Rob Roy* (1817), who defends his smuggling in similar terms: “It’s a mere spoiling o’ the Egyptians . . . puir auld Scotland suffers enough by thae blackguard loons o’excisemen and gaugers, that hae come down upon her like locusts since the sad and sorrowfu’ [Act of] Union [in 1707]” (231).
Part III: Fontane and the Problem of Familiarity

(b) Secularization and the Place of Enchantment

There is a certain affinity between the reception's constant "naturalization" or "rationalization" of Effi Briest's Chinese ghost, and the problems associated with a potentially overly secularizing approach to investigations of imperialism. Dipesh Chakrabarty's warning in Provincializing Europe against an overly secular mindset is appropriate here. Such paradigms, he contends, set troubling "limits to the ways the past can be narrated," and "one has to take these limits seriously" (89). Effi Briest has always stood as an exemplar of German realism, and yet Fontane's Chinese ghost, if read as both disembodied spirit and historical substance, creates problems for the traditionally absolutist secularization of realist narrative. Such absolutism has the potential to generate hermeneutic inadequacies like those at work in, for example, J. P. Stern's verdict on Effi Briest: "The only blemish in the novel—the imagery of a mysterious Chinaman which Effi discovers on a set of chairs in Kessin, symbolical of her longing for freedoms far away—is a very minor one, a piece of bric-à-brac left over by 'poetic realism'" (Re-interpretations 319). Radcliffe likewise demeans the "motif" of the Chinese ghost as a mere leftover from the "Gothic' or trivial novel" (39). Such readings are better at dismissing the ghost than interpreting it. Besides, as Christian Grawe points out, "That the ghost really exists is asserted nowhere in Effi Briest" (112). Stern and Radcliffe are stating their case against, apparently, a novel's mere mention of a supernatural being, even where that mention is a point of conversation for the characters that is not substantiated by the supposedly objective and authoritative realist narrator. The worries these critics betray are analogous to the reading practices of "secular criticism" as Said describes it; in The World, the Text, and the Critic, Said even relates "secular criticism" to his definition of "realism" in Orientalism (The World 290). This relationship might be especially fraught in the German context, because German literary realism, more so than its French or English counterparts, often enmeshes itself in religious concerns and yet is still read by some critics as a straightforward exercise in secularization. Russell Berman's "Effi Briest and the End of Realism," for example, explicitly opposes the religious to realism (343), bluntly claiming that "literary realism participated in the larger movement of nineteenth-century culture toward secularization" (359). It is worth

13. Berman's essay offers the most holistic recent view of Effi Briest, but he consciously operates with the same modernist stereotypes of realism that Levine, Marshall Brown, and others have problematized. Berman writes of "the naïve epistemology of realism, the notion that its literary language provides a transparent window on the world" (345), bolstering both his earlier claim that realist novels "prohibit speculative speech and, in particular, philosophical discourse" (340) and his later claim that "realist referentiality" needs "to assume and assert an unproblematic presence of things" (355). Philosophical debates and arguments over representation are precisely not absent from realist novels, as Levine has recently shown in a reading of the "new epistemology" of Eliot's
Chapter Eight: The Imaginative Geography of Effi Briest ~ 183

...asking how, exactly, the impulses of realism and secularization operate in Fontane’s novel.

Effi Briest, for one, posits the process of secularization as somehow bound to that of imperial and commercial expansion. In an irreverent rhyme written on a Christmas card attached to a gift from Gieshübler redolent of japonisme, Effi reads:

Three kings did come to the blessed Christ,
One was a Moorish king;
A Moorish chemist
Appears today with dainty things,
Instead of incense and myrrh, they wouldn’t do,
He brings pistachio and almonds

[Drei Könige kamen zum Heiligenchrist,
Mohrenkönig einer gewesen ist; —
Ein Mohrenapothekerlein
Erscheint heute mit Spezereien,
Doch statt Weihrauch und Myrrhen, die nicht zur Stelle,
Bringt er Pistazien- und Mandel-Morselle] (I.4.97)

Gieshübler’s little poem radically modifies the Christian rendering of the Three Kings, first by inserting Mirambo, his African assistant, and then by substituting kitschy imported gifts for the traditional frankincense and myrrh. Trade and empire, in this otherwise superfluous poem, displace Christian tradition, just as critics have assumed literary realism does. The more important questions, though, go to how the text reacts to such displacements, and what effect they have on the form of the novel.

It may be useful at this point to briefly characterize Said’s sponsorship of secular criticism and its potential drawbacks, for Said’s work and its influence have made its advantages abundantly clear. How can this sort of criticism read texts that deploy figures—Chinese ghosts, for example, or Magic Skins—of an existential status at best questionable, according to empirical standards of truth? Bruce Robbins has written of “the messiness of the word secular” itself, a messiness that is perhaps “a necessary antidote to [the] invocation of world capitalism, which might be described as overtidy or even theological” (Feeling Global 123). For Said, as for others, Robbins argues, “the word secular has usually served as a figure for the authority

Daniel Deronda, which, Levine claims, “is explicitly about knowledge” (Dying to Know 171). Such debates instead, and fittingly, take the shape of narrative, where they are sustained, enacted, and tested by the plots and characters.
of a putatively universal reason or (narratively speaking) as the ideal end point of progress in the intellectual domain” (117). Might secularism also be conceived of as an endpoint, “narratively speaking,” to the supposedly disenchanting teleology of realism and of realist emplotment, or to that of technological progress? Said’s insistence on secularism in the conclusion of *The World, the Text, and the Critic* can itself almost be seen as theological; religion of any stripe is partnered with authoritarianism and “closure,” and Said advocates instead “a purely secular view of reality” (290–91). McClure notes that if Said’s articulation of secularism relies on “familiar binary equations” like “secular/religious,” as it does, then it “can also serve as an agent of closure” (*Partial Faiths* 101). In addition to McClure’s concerns, Said here reduces or runs afoul of his stance in *Orientalism* discussed above, where he phrases the damaging Orientalist mindset not just as “a form of paranoia, knowledge of another kind, say, from ordinary historical knowledge” but also as a “radical realism” (72). Said’s paradox of Orientalism challenges any notion of a binarized colonialism driven only either by colonial fantasy or a colonial reality of domination and bureaucracy. *Orientalism* acknowledges both those drives in the imperial imagination, and it thus exposes potential shortcomings of the “secular criticism” Said later sponsors. Similarly, the intersection of disenchantment, literary realism, and otherness in *Effi Briest* challenges the most absolute definitions of realist narrative. Fontane’s novel embraces these complications and even organizes itself around them.

Critics who shy away from dealing with the ghost as a spiritual phenomenon defer to the same modes of rationalization that form the backbone of Effi’s society, according to Fontane’s novel. Sidonie von Grasenabb, for example, unwittingly highlights the problematic constraints of rationality and normative Christianity, telling Effi, who believes she is hearing things in her new house, “Those are deceptions of the senses [Sinnestäuschungen]. . . . You’re neurotic. You’re hearing voices. Pray God that you’re also hearing the right voice” (I.4.157). Sidonie’s responses begin in a blunt vernacular, shift quickly into a pseudoscientific psychological vocabulary, and finally rest on a religious injunction that, in its speculation over the origin of the alleged hallucinations, contradicts the initial doubt over their actual existence. Fontane structures this conversation in a way that troubles Sidonie’s efforts to dispense with the spirit and reveals an ambiguity mirrored in Innstetten’s changing reaction to the ghost over the course of the novel. Like Sidonie von Grasenabb, Innstetten is nonplussed by the initial allegation that a specter is haunting his Kessin house, in the telling exchange between him and the maid Johanna after the ghost’s first appearance:
“My lady . . . just had a dream, but perhaps it was also the other.”

“What other?”

“Milord knows, I’m sure.”

“I know nothing. . . . And what did she dream, or for all I care, what did she hear or see? [Und was hatte sie geträumt oder meinetwegen auch, was hatte sie gehört oder gesehen?] What did she say?”

“It crept up on her, right past her.”

“What? Who?

“Him, upstairs. Him from the room or from the small chamber.”

“Nonsense [Unsinn], I say.” (I.4.77)

Innstetten gives the same rational response to Johanna that he gives later to Effi, even if his exchange with Effi is a bit more diplomatic. Repeating the words of Sidonie von Grasenabb, the Baron says, “You see, a dream, a deception of the senses” [Siehst du, Traum, Sinnestäuschung] (I.4.79). This does not, however, dispel the puzzling ambiguities of his conversation with Johanna. When Johanna points to “Him from the room or from the small chamber,” Innstetten quickly interjects, “Nonsense,” without asking to whom or to what Joanna is referring; clearly, this is not the first time he has heard a ghost story involving his Kessin house. But his denial of the truth of the tale is only with difficulty reconciled with his earlier question: “What did she dream, or for all I care, what did she hear or see?” Like the arc of Sidonie’s conversation with Effi, Innstetten’s question begins by relegating the ghost to the status of dream, but then introduces other possibilities, among which the reader must include the Baron’s openness to the notion of his wife’s actual sensory experience of this apparition: gehört (heard), gesehen (seen). Despite the novel’s general portrayal of Innstetten as imminently rational, these are not the protestations of a man cloaked entirely in the mantle of rationalized doubt.

Innstetten’s final assessment of the ghost in this exchange, though, in his concluding dismissal of it, is likely indistinguishable from the reaction of anyone else of his rational intellect and class position. Effi Briest thus clarifies the secular environs of the novel. Innstetten later explains to Effi that they cannot switch houses for the sake of untenable superstitions: “I can’t have people in the city saying that Baron Innstetten is selling his house because his wife took a drawing of a Chinese man for a ghost in her bed. I’d be lost, Effi [Dann bin ich verloren, Effi]. One never recovers from such ridicule” (I.4.80). Ingrid Schuster ascribes Innstetten’s nervousness on this point to his fear of the “ridicule of too tender a bond of love” for which the Chinese ghost is “emblem” [Sinnbild], but Fontane’s concerns here seem
more entangled in the disenchantment of the supernatural than in romantic
passion (120). Innstetten’s worry over embarrassment stems not from his
fear of public displays of tenderness, but rather from his certain knowledge
that public avowal of belief in ghosts is simply not acceptable; it is, rather,
ridiculous, lächerlich.¹⁴ For the same reason, he tells Effi in Berlin, after she
has decided to bring along a picture of a saint in order to protect herself from
the picture of the Chinese man, which Roswitha carries with her in her purse,
“Oh, do what you like. But don’t tell anybody” (I.4.208). (This is almost too
typical a dramatization of Jameson’s notion of “smuggling” enchantment
in The Political Unconscious—the ghost’s image has to be imported from the
terrestrial margins, from a port city linked to the outside world.) In such
secularized environs, any revelation of susceptibility to superstition would
be fatal, Innstetten’s reaction affirms, be it in Kessin or in Berlin. Although
the Baron’s penchant for ghost stories during his active military service
complicates this, the seriousness of his fear of public humiliation in the Kessin
conversation cited above cannot be underestimated, and Fontane’s narrative
underscores this by creating a point of contact with another crucial textual
moment. If word of the superstition gets out, Innstetten swears to Effi, “I’d
be lost” [Dann bin ich verloren] (I.4.80). One must at this point bear in mind
Effi’s soliloquy before her mirror, certainly a dramatic climax of sorts, where
she says to herself, “Effi, you are lost” [Effi du bist verloren] (I.4.169). We
recall the metaphor of “lostness” from the previous chapter’s discussion of
Cécile, and these moments of congruence (the twin verlorens) are not the
only effort Fontane makes in Effi Briest to bind the ghost to the adultery.
Consider the similarities between the narrator’s description of Effi after her
first “encounter” with the ghost, when she is presented as “totally pale” [ganz
blaß] and Innstetten’s look after he discovers the hidden Crampas letters
revealing the affair; he, too, is “ganz blaß” (I.4.78; I.4.232). Fontane’s parallels
place Innstetten’s stigmatization of superstition right alongside Effi’s social
ruination caused by adultery, a comparison that paints the embarrassment
of public belief in a quite serious light.¹⁵ That the shame of adultery is only
social and not religious, as Effi decides in Berlin towards the novel’s end,
amplifies the secular environs of the novel (I.4.219).

Innstetten’s resistance to metaphysical matters is undercut by the novel’s
spatial organization of them, and much separates Berlin from Kessin. John
McClure’s notion of the “basic imperial division of the world (metropolis and

¹⁴. Chambers argues that this view is Fontane’s, that there is “no place in the reality of the
modern world” for such “mystification” (188). This may be true, but the novel nevertheless subjects
such views to major complications.

¹⁵. Mittenzwei ascribes equal narrative importance to Effi’s admission of belief in the ghost—
and fear of it—to Crampas: “This conversation is decisive [entscheidend]; it determines all to come”
(141).
colonies or potential colonies)” is helpful here, because it employs “a familiar romance division, with the West represented as a zone of relative order, security and secularity, the non-Western world as a zone of magic, mystery, and disorder” (7). A closer look at the inner geography of Effi Briest problematizes any idea of a uniform domestic level of disenchantment. Fontane’s novel, rather than merely reproduce the familiar imperial divisions to which McClure refers, instead reveals the manner in which increased mobility and changing spatial relationships have altered the terrain. Berlin as metropolis may not be completely impervious to reenchantment—apparently, one can smuggle it in, in a purse—but Kessin seems to see it flourish. Effi and her friends already see Kessin well divided from the civic center that is Berlin: Bertha hasn’t even heard of it (I.4.13), Effi’s imagination positions it halfway to Siberia (I.4.28), and Roswitha simply states, “Kessin, well, yes . . . but it’s not Berlin” (I.4.187). It may be just this distanciation of the town from the metropolis—a distance both real and conceptual—that grants the former a certain status as a locus of openness to magic and mystery. Immediately prior to the move to Kessin, Effi goes so far as to place the town’s remoteness from the comforts of the metropolitan in terms befitting a colonial imagination. Kessin is “a whole new world” [eine ganz neue Welt], she says twice (I.4.45). The colonial shadings are reinforced later, when we learn that the Kessin home is adjacent an area referred to by the townspeople as “the plantation” [die »Plantage«] (I.4.48–49). The phrasing is no accident, as Fontane repeats it twice later and keeps it usually within quotation marks (I.4.59–60). Russell Berman has pointed out that Effi Briest “unfolds primarily in Hohen-Cremmen, Kessin, and Berlin—distinct locales, to be sure, but all in the Prussian northeast,” but Fontane goes well beyond what Berman terms “the semiotics of local particularity” in his scripting of Kessin (“Effi Briest” 348–49). The language of the novel sets Kessin up as a sort of imperial outpost, adding to its removal from the metropolitan space of Berlin. Effi explicitly notices the internationalism of Kessin, which, despite its size, contains people and things from all over the world, thanks to its thriving port. Innstetten explains to Effi the significance of the mixture of people that occurs in “commercial towns” [Handelsstädten]: “Their interests lie in the areas where they trade and as they trade with the whole world and have connections with everybody, you’ll find people among them from every corner and end of the world” [Worauf sie angewiesen sind, das sind die Gegenden, mit denen sie Handel treiben, und da sie das mit aller Welt tun und mit aller Welt in Verbindung stehen, so findest du zwischen ihnen auch Menschen aus aller Welt Ecken und Enden] (I.4.45). Though no metropolis of global renown, the port town and its commercial undertakings nevertheless organize links between disparate places and people.
Innstetten himself divorces the town from the essence of rationalist certainty, complaining, “everything is uncertain [unsicher] here” (I.4.44). Much later in the novel, when their sleighs are caught during the fateful homeward journey from a dinner party, a narrated style indirect libre clearly meant to reflect the thoughts of Innstetten allows that, “People here were superstitious, even fearful, while it actually didn’t mean much [wenig zu bedeuten habe]” (I.4.160). With its air of mystery, uncertainty, and foreignness (to which Effi and Innstetten repeatedly allude), Kessin is a site of porous boundaries, of nascent cosmopolitanism, where one sees perhaps some of the mapped-out magic imported to the mainland. We are reminded by Innstetten, after all, that nobody in Berlin lives in a haunted house: “There’s one good thing about Berlin: there aren’t any haunted houses there [Spukhäuser gibt es da nicht]. Where would they come from?” (I.4.183). It is in Kessin that the ghost makes its appearances. The divisions between metropolitan and rural space in Effi Briest recall those between Berlin and the Harz in Cécile, but an important distinction must be made: Kessin’s mysteries and foreignness are largely imported from faraway lands by international shipping concerns, while the Harz is enchanted by a uniquely Germanic past. Innstetten himself affirms this difference in his dismissal of the Chinese ghost, disparaging the idea of a foreign haunting by virtue of its being “made” [gemacht] rather than “natural” [natürlich] to the house or the land (I.4.207).

(c) Dueling Epistemologies and the Chinese Ghost

The Chinese ghost, which Fontane claimed as the novel’s center, anchors in many ways the text’s portrayal of the other key characters. Chambers points out that the ghost appears first in a terrifyingly banal capacity, as an excuse for Effi to sleep in late (197). On the occasion of Effi’s first morning in Kessin, she tells Innstetten, “For a whole hour, when I awoke in the night, it seemed to me as if shoes slid across the earth and as if dancing and almost music could be heard. But all very lightly. And then I told Joanna all about it this morning, just to excuse myself for sleeping in so late” (I.4.58). So, the ghost arises first as an excuse before it ever emerges as, depending on whom one asks, an actual apparition or a hallucination. Oddly, the novel later gives a certain material form to the ghost, or at least explains its invention as inspired by a material object, as Innstetten shows Effi around the attic in the Kessin home:

In one of them [the rooms in the attic] only were three rush-seated chairs, whose seats had collapsed, and on the back of one of these there had been stuck a tiny
picture, only half an inch or so high, depicting a Chinaman in a blue tunic and baggy yellow breeches with a broad flat hat on his head. Effi saw it and asked: “What’s the Chinaman doing there?” Innstetten seemed surprised himself by the little picture, and replied that he did not know what it was. “Christel must have stuck it there, or Johanna, for fun. You can see that it’s been cut out of a spelling book.” Effi thought so, too, and was only perplexed that Innstetten took it all so seriously, as if it did have some importance [Effi fand es auch und war nur verwundert, daß Innstetten alles so ernsthaft nahm, als ob es doch etwas sei]. (I.4.61)

The material basis of the ghost is simultaneously trivialized and made a matter of concern to Innstetten, but it is precisely this little picture that frightens Effi when Roswitha later brings it with her to Berlin.

The triviality of the ghost’s picture and of the manner in which the ghost is first used as an excuse does not diminish its terrifying effect on Effi, however, and she remains under the spell of her fear until it is rationalized away from her. The dismissive rationalization first comes, not from the reasonable Innstetten, but from his rival Crampas. Crampas builds up carefully to his speculation on Innstetten’s motives for using the ghost. He apprises Effi of Innstetten’s penchant, during his service in the military, for telling ghost stories in order to secure his advancement, a pure instrumentalization of the public experience or transmission of supernatural belief. From there it is an easy step to the point at which Crampas accuses Innstetten in absentia of cultivating Effi’s fear of the ghost in an effort to keep her faithful to him: “Education through a ghost” [Erziehen durch Spuk] (I.4.133). Innstetten, Crampas declares, is a born pedagogue, and a zealous one, but the word Crampas selects to pinpoint the nature of Innstetten’s zeal is not religiös but rather kirchlich (churchly), a word that highlights rationalistic organization rather than spirituality in Innstetten. The notion of a rational Innsetten is also at work in the narrator’s description of his alleged “calculated means of inspiring fear” [Angstapparat aus Kalkül] (I.4.134). Crampas’s rational explanation prompts Effi, it seems, to cease believing so fervently in the truth of the Chinese ghost. The next time it is referred to, albeit obliquely, Innstetten is the one broaching the topic: “And don’t worry . . . it won’t come back . . . you know, him upstairs” (I.4.172). No longer prey to her fear, “Effi laughed to herself, and it faded somewhat into melancholy.” The dreaded magic and mystery that is thus leached out of her life in Kessin comes to be missed when Effi openly wishes the ghost back in, later. To her mother, Effi writes from Kessin, “If everything is quiet, then I’m almost disappointed and say to myself, ‘If only it would come back’” (I.4.104). Finally, after she has been banished to Berlin, Effi remembers the days in Kessin as “happy
times... back when the Chinaman was haunting us [spukte]” (I.4.262). Crampas first dispels her fear of the ghost, enabling these later moments of nostalgia for it.

It is difficult to chart the status of Crampas in romance’s beleaguered negotiation in *Effi Briest*. Jamison problematizes the strict confinement of the Major to the realm of the rational, pointing out that “Fontane may have intended a subtle identification of the ghost and Crampas, for Crampas’s name is reminiscent of *Krampus*, a demon-figure common in Austrian folklore” (32). He is, moreover, linked to the horrors Effi encounters while traveling with Innstetten in the north of Germany. Near a town called “Crampas,” Effi is terrified by vestiges of a barbaric Germanic past, in sacrificial stones engineered for better bleeding of their victims (I.4.211). Such sites also frame important scenes in George Elliot’s *Daniel Deronda* (1876) and Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1891). Crampas is essential to the romantic possibilities inherent in the act of adultery, the duel, and the dunes toward the end of the novel; yet, still, it is he who attempts to dismiss the supernaturality of the ghost-image. Between Crampas’s rational explanation of the Chinese ghost and Effi’s much later longing for its return, the ghost’s only function is to cover for a sudden outburst from Effi. This outburst, as Evans, Rainer, Ingrid Schuster, and Avery have pointed out, gives Effi a rare opportunity to manipulate her husband, but it also again instrumentalizes the supernatural. Otherwise, the burden of preserving the ghost’s symbolic weight in and relevance to the narrative is shouldered by the maid Roswitha, who consults Frau Kruse in an effort to get the whole story behind the ghost. The frequent invocation of this background story, and of the desire of a few of the novel’s characters to hear it, recalls Innstetten’s remark, in a quote that has already served as an epigraph above, that narrative can easily be generated by a character so foreign in the novel’s domestic space: “a Chinese man is already a story in and of himself” [ein Chinese ist schon an und für sich eine Geschichte] (I.4.48). Innstetten’s language recalls Fontane’s statement that the ghost is “interesting in and of itself” [an und für sich interessant] in the same letter in which he declares it the *Drehpunkt* of the novel (*Fontane's Briefe* 386). If the raw materials of adventure and mystery are in short supply in the culture Fontane describes, then strange and exciting stories like that of the Chinese man represent a tantalizing possibility. In an era in which the thorough exploration of the world and its attendant mapping have striven...
to eradicate what Jameson calls “magical content,” it is possible that Effi’s Chinese ghost is “smuggled” into the narrative “in order to find symbolic appeasement,” in order to generate fiction (Political Unconscious 134). The word “smuggled” is especially apposite here, given the opinion of so many critics that the ghost is merely an unwanted addition to an otherwise exemplary realist novel.

Certainly, though, while the culture depicted by Fontane in Effi Briest perceives itself as bled dry of romance, glimmers of enchantment emerge in Kessin. On arrival, as Innstetten describes some of the town’s inhabitants, Effi exclaims, “This is marvelous, Geert. It’s like six novels” (I.4.47). Innstetten later remarks, similarly, that Kessin was “rich with characters” [reich an Figuren] (I.4.222). Kessin sparks Effi’s imagination, and “all sorts of thoughts” [allerhand Gedanken] come to her just by looking around (I.4.56). After touring the house for the first time, while it is still uncharted territory for her, “Effi felt none of this loneliness, for her imagination was still with the wondrous things that she had seen just before, during her look around the house” (I.4.59–60). At the end of that very chapter, however, a prescient narrative moment affords us, in the person of the town pharmacist Gieshübler, a look at the disenchantment that has already taken up residence, as the narrator describes Gieshübler’s momentary impulsiveness at first meeting Effi: “Gieshübler would have preferred to make a declaration of love to Effi, begging to be her Cid or Campeador, to fight for her and die. But since that didn’t happen and his heart couldn’t bear it any longer, he stood up” to leave (I.4.65). The point is driven home again, toward the novel’s close, in Berlin, through Frau Zwicker’s assertion that “the actual Don Juans always end up disappointing [erweisen sich jedesmal als eine Enttäuschung]” (I.4.257). In this she rephrases a conversation from 1891’s Unwiederbringlich during which a group of characters discusses mythical heroism. The narrator tells us that Westergaard and Lundbye “chimed in together to point out that, where the most important form of heroism, the heroism of passion [Heldenmut der Leidenschaft], was concerned, times never changed and that they personally would guarantee that love could still perform the same wonders [Wunder] as in former days” (I.2.756). Ebba retorts, “The same wonders. . . . That is impossible, because such wonders were the product of something that has been lost [Produkte dessen, was der Welt verloren gegangen ist].” Frau Zwicker, like Ebba in Unwiederbringlich, maintains that the classic models of adventure and romance are out of place.

17. Herr von Gordon in Cécile makes a similar observation regarding the twenty-year age difference between St. Arnaud and Cécile: “There’s a novel in all this [Dahinter steckt ein Roman]. He is more than twenty years older than she” (I.2.149). Apparently, in the arithmetic of Fontane’s characters, while an unusual marriage is worth one novel, a Chinese man in Germany is worth six.
The duel between the opposed terms of disenchantment and romance supports a durable tension in Effi Briest. Crampas may not be anything but a disappointment, finally, but there is nevertheless something of the Don Juan in him, bravely at first and somewhat shamefacedly at last. He wants his romantic “soldier’s death” [Soldatentod], as he tells Innstetten, a declaration that elicits sarcasm: “That will be difficult, Crampas, unless you take up service with the King of Turkey or under the Chinese dragon. There, they’re still killing each other off. Here, that whole story—believe you me—is thirty years gone [Hier ist die Geschichte, glauben Sie mir, auf dreißig Jahre vorbei]” (I.4.124). Heroism and war are relegated to foreign space, and so is grand history, if Innstetten’s use of the word Geschichte is any indication. The past is elsewhere, according to him, and Germany stands poised for a future that outpaces the past. Crampas still manages to find his death in Germany, but it is most assuredly not that of a soldier in battle, and instead of explosive glory Crampas accepts it with a “melancholy resignation” [wehmütige Resignation] not unlike that of the disillusioned Effi (I.4.239). In staging a duel between Innstetten and Crampas on the dunes of Kessin, Fontane injects into the novel a trope of romance that one might be tempted to pass over as a thoroughly quotidianized literary mannerism. The narrative, however, resists this interpretation.

Even if Fontane does not send his duelists across the Channel to a foreign beach, as Trollope does in Phineas Finn, or up into the mountains, as Balzac does in La Peau de chagrin, Effi Briest’s narrative goes to great lengths to thematize the liminality of the act within the domestic space of the novel. Prior to the duel, Innstetten’s conversation with Wüllersdorf, his faithful second, highlights the extreme nature of dueling, and Fontane details Innstetten’s journey via rail and steamer in a manner that makes the ultimate destination seem quite distant from rational Berlin. This outbound journey is accomplished much in the same way as St. Arnaud’s and Cécile’s departure from Berlin in Cécile. Innstetten’s return trip, by contrast, fits into one sentence—“On the night of the same day, Innstetten stepped again into Berlin”—before the prose elaborates on his avoidance of Kessin, where he leaves to “the two seconds the task of notifying the authorities” (I.4.242). This stark difference between the outbound and homebound legs of Innstetten’s journey recalls the difference between similar legs of journeys in Trollope’s fiction: the journeys to Loughlinter and Königstein, for example, which begin excitingly but end with a quotidian rail journey back home. Fontane lingers on this outbound journey to Kessin for a long paragraph full of reflections

18. Herbert Josephs contends that, beginning in the Enlightenment, the cradle of Weberian Entzauberung, Don Juan’s status and the erotic in general are mythologized, their import transferred to the realm of the magical.
on earlier moments in the novel. En route to the duel, Innstetten even opens himself to sentiments of which he was imminently wary earlier. As he passes by the old Kessin house, “the feeling of the uncanny [des Unheimlichen], over which Innstetten had so often argued with or ridiculed [belächelt] Effi, now it overcame even him, and he was happy once they were past it [als sie dran vorüber waren]” (I.4.241). Still more could have been made of the legal or social marginality of the duel, perhaps, had Fontane clung more tightly to the Ardenne case on which Effi Briest is rudimentarily based. As Jean Leventhal reminds us, the real Ardenne served actual prison time for his adherence to an officer’s code and duelling (183). But the stand-off in the dunes is billed by Effi Briest’s narrator as the stuff of romance, and not least because of where it takes place.

(d) Effi’s End: Disenchanting Enchantment

In the imaginative geography of Effi Briest and the distribution of what enchantment remains, Kessin looms large, but the dunes at its outskirts are even more significant. They are, first and foremost, the location of the grave of the Chinese man, as Innstetten points out to Effi during their first tour through Kessin (I.4.45). In addition to the drawing of the Chinese man in the attic, there is this spatial reference for the Chinese ghost as the story is spun out through a series of interrupted segments. Innstetten relates in chapter 10 that a Chinese man came to Kessin with a sea captain named Thomsen and a woman said to be either Thomsen’s niece or granddaughter (I.4.85). It is strongly implied by Frau Kruse later that the Chinese man and the niece/granddaughter became romantically involved until she married another man (I.4.174–75). The siting of the grave thus becomes a convenient shorthand for all of the related ideas that the story of the Chinese ghost represents—the foreign, the supernatural, the idea of forbidden love—and Fontane puts it to frequent use, allowing the implied presence of the ghost to haunt the narrative. When Effi first meets Roswitha, their gaze ultimately leads to the resting place: “Over there lay the enclosure where the white stone glittered and shone in the afternoon sun” (I.4.114). Not much later, after the first walk in the dunes with Crampas, “Effi looked towards the stone and the fir tree where the Chinaman lay” (I.4.133). These moments serve as the ending of chapters 13 and 16, respectively, allowing the narrator to let the weight of the allusion sink in as each chapter comes to a dark close.

It is in the dunes during this first recreational ride that Crampas, in one of his earliest and most provocative conversations with Effi, discourses on “das Romantische” and on New World deities like the Mexican god “Vitzliputzli”
from Heinrich Heine’s poem (I.4.138). Zantop, too, references this poem in her book *Colonial Fantasies*, even quoting a whole stanza as an epigraph to her final chapter:

To my enemy’s own homeland,  
Which goes by the name of Europe,  
Will I flee to take my refuge  
And begin a new career there.

[Nach der Heimat meiner Feinde,  
Die Europa ist geheissen,  
Will ich flüchten, dort beginn ich  
Eine neue Carrière.] (qtd. on 202)

If Heine’s poem is an example of Romanticism, however, it is scripted specifically as against modern disenchantment associated with empire. “Vitzliputzli” is only able to achieve its romantic tones by explicitly forgetting the disenchanted present in favor of the pre-Encounter past, as its first lines make clear. The “Präludium” begins:

This is America!  
This is the new world!  
Not today’s, which already  
Withers away Europeanized.—

This is the new world!  
As Christopher Columbus  
Pulled it out of the ocean.

[Dieses ist Amerika!  
Dieses ist die neue Welt!  
Nicht die heutige, die schon  
Europäisieret abwelkt. —

Dieses ist die neue Welt!  
Wie sie Christoval Kolumbus  
Aus dem Ozean hervorzog.]

“Vitzliputzli” is as much a poem of disenchantment as it is an instance of Romanticism; it is thus especially appropriate here, for disenchantment per-
vades Effi’s and Crampas’s attempted romance, although they do not seem aware of it. In addition to Heine, Effi and Crampas delve into the poetry of Brentano, bolstering a distinctly Romantic link to the open nature of the seafront. The reader later learns, as Innstetten peruses the long-concealed correspondence between Effi and Crampas, that the dunes were the focal point of the affair. In one of Crampas’s letters to Effi, Innstetten reads, “Be in the dunes again this afternoon,” and in another, “Be in the usual place [ander alten Stelle] again today” (I.4.232–33). The interaction of Crampas and Effi in the dunes, from their early conversations there to their later use of the location as a meeting place, seems to—or at the very least seems to want to—fashion the area into a zone of romantic permissiveness and romantic indiscretions, a field of possibilities outside the strictures of bourgeois marriage morality. Crampas is ultimately a let-down on these very sands, just as Frau Zwicker claims all Don Juans are, but the dunes emblematize more powerfully not only the edge of Kessin but the frontier of the domestic and thus the instance of its commingling with what is not domestic, what may not yet have been fully rationalized.

Fontane’s mapping of adultery, a recurring theme in his novels and one that periodically marked him as a controversial writer in his day, reveals an intriguing pattern that has consequences for our understanding of the place of disenchantment. The three novels in which adultery figures most prominently—L’Adultera (1882), Cécile (1887), and Effi Briest (1895)—all involve complications within marriages between older men and younger, teenaged women, the very twenty-year age difference that prompts Gordon in Cécile to see possibilities for the generation of fiction: “There’s a novel in all this [Dahinter steckt ein Roman]. He is more than twenty years older than she” (I.2.149). The plots of all three texts also hover unmistakably around the city of Berlin, and this is no coincidence. Berlin is essential to the mapping of adultery in these three works, not as a condition of its possibility but rather because it becomes, in a complex way, an apparent location of its impossibility. Moretti briefly refers to Effi Briest as one in a cluster of “novels that arrive from the center, with provincial malaise as one of their favorite themes,” but malaise hardly captures Fontane’s Kessin (Atlas 166). When one recalls that the abortive adultery of Cécile begins in the rural Harz and ends as the scene shifts to Berlin, and that Effi Briest’s clandestine meetings

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19. Because of this thematic confluence, Friedrich has asserted of L’Adultera, just as he has of Cécile, that the work is most often read as mere “Vorstufe” to Fontane’s later fiction (“Das Glück” 359). Tebben has argued that Fontane found the theme of adultery so appealing because, arising as it does in his novels from a forced marriage, it served as a convenient metaphor for his own personal attempts to reconcile his chosen career as writer with his “forced” role as father and husband.
occur on the dunes at the outskirts not just of a port town but of the new Germany itself, then the case of *L'Adultera* sheds interesting light on the development of this theme. This earlier novella is organized entirely around adultery, and, although the spatial situation of it is quite different, the key difference is revealing. While the liaison between Melanie van der Straaten and Ebenezer Rubehn, recently arrived from America, does indeed begin in Berlin before moving to Italy, Fontane’s narrative goes to great pains to remove it from the rational metropolis. The unmapping or remapping is not as broad and deliberate here as it is in Balzac’s *La Fille aux yeux d’or* or in Trollope’s *Phineas* novels or *The Way We Live Now*. Yet Fontane carefully constructs links between the extramarital relationship and a domestic space suddenly recoded as nonurban and tropical.

From the outset, Melanie’s husband, the cynical Berlin native, Commercial Councillor van der Straaten, envisions the novella’s adultery as an inevitability. He shows his wife the copy he has had made of Tintoretto’s *L’Adultera*, referring to it as a sort of “memento mori” (I.2.15). The effect of this painting as a pronouncement on the fate of the novel feels almost oracular. What begins with the certainty of mythologized fate does not come to fruition, though, until Rubehn’s visit to the van der Straaten residence in Berlin. As he peruses part of van der Straaten’s collection of tropical plants in the private garden of the Berlin home, Rubehn is overcome: “Oh, Frau van der Straaten, what an enchanted garden [Zaubergarten] you live in! A peacock sunning itself, and so many and such tame doves . . . as though this veranda were Saint Mark’s Square or the island of Cyprus itself!” (I.2.48). In a Berlin garden that seems not to be in Berlin, the flirtation begins. The association between potential adultery and an urban space rendered exotic is emboldened in a chapter called “Beneath the Palm Tress.” After a picnic in the park, they walk toward “the center of the whole layout,” toward “a couple of palm houses with high glass domes . . . after the manner of the famous English Gardens at Kew. One of them was joined to an old-fashioned greenhouse [Treibhaus]” (I.2.76). As they walk through the palm house, Melanie and Ebenezer finally come to the threshold of the greenhouse: “A few more steps brought them to what seemed like the entrance to a tropical forest, with the huge glass structure arching above them. This was where the finest specimens of the van der Straaten collection were to be found: palms, drakea, and giant ferns” [Wenige Schritte noch, und sie befanden sich wie am Eingang eines Tropenwaldes, und der mächtige Glasbau wölbte sich über ihnen. Hier standen die Prachtexemplare der van der Straatenschen Sammlung: Palmen, Drakäen, Riesenfarren] (I.2.81). The language even evokes the yielding to temptation alluded to in the notion of the *Schritt*, or *step*; Fontane’s *L’Adultera* and *Effi Briest* both repeatedly adduce Ernst Wichert’s 1873 play about adultery, *Ein
Schritt vom Wege [A Step Off the Path].

Heide Eilert has read the greenhouse (Treibhaus) as an allusion to styles of decadence in European culture in the late-nineteenth century, but it has particular resonance in relation to adultery in L’Adultera. The passion between Melanie and Rubehn becomes explicit in the greenhouse and coheres with an earlier scene in the novella through a weak phonological similarity. In the chapter, “Wohin Treiben Wir?” [Whither Are We Drifting?], Rubehn and Melanie float down the Spree and ask each other—in a clumsily repeated leitmotif—in which direction they are drifting. Probably indebted to George Eliot’s Mill on the Floss (1860) and Maggie Tulliver’s accidental but scandalous river journey with Stephen Guest, Fontane’s scene likewise pairs lack of navigational control (being “lost,” again) with a temporary freedom from social strictures. The scene, in L’Adultera, is already rampant with allusive speculation as to their impending affair, but when the treiben of the drifting is paired with the Treibhaus of the later chapter, even these earlier allusions to adultery are brought under the umbrella of the collected exotic and tropical. In Effi Briest, Effi will similarly be said twice to let herself treiben, linking her perhaps to the drift of adultery in the earlier novella: “She likes to let herself drift” [Sie läßt sich gern treiben], Roswitha says of Effi, and the narrator similarly asserts that, under the influence of Berlin, Effi has a tendency “to let herself drift to the left” [sich nach links hin treiben zu lassen] (I.4.216; I.4.225). Fontane’s narrative carves out a reenchanted space, within a rationalized Berlin ably represented by Melanie’s husband, for an adultery offered up as an alternative to domesticated and rationalized European culture. The happy ending to the adultery story in L’Adultera clashes with the conclusive later tragedies of Cécile and Effi Briest, both of which end not with an extramarital harmony and declaration of feminine independence, but rather with dead rivals and either disillusionment (Effi Briest) or inexplicable, sudden religious fervor (Cécile). Yet the careful mapping of adultery in L’Adultera corroborates Cécile’s inability to imagine it within the city as such, and it hints as well at Effi Briest’s location of adultery in the dunes at the periphery of novel, land, and nation.

In their role as site of the impermissible and the peripheral, the shifting dunes also recall Innstetten’s telling of ghost stories during his military service. Crampas tells Effi of her husband’s reputation as teller of ghost stories among his men in the army, but the episode, tinged with both mysticism and the simultaneous exploitation of it, is ambiguous. Innstetten had, Crampas says to Effi,

20. The play is performed in the town in Effi Briest, and so when Innstetten discovers the correspondence between Crampas and Effi, he finds as well a series of photos taken of her around the time of the play’s performance (I.4.232).
a predilection for telling us ghost stories [Spukgeschichten]. And when he’d gotten us all worked up and even worried some of us, he would suddenly make it seem as if he had only been amusing himself at the expense of all those who had been so gullible [Leichtgläubigen]. To cut a long story short, once I responded, “For goodness’ sake, Innstetten, that’s just a performance [Komödie]. You’re not deceiving me. You don’t really believe that any more than we do, but you want to appear interesting and you’ve the idea that eccentricity is a better recommendation. They don’t want ordinary people [Alltagsmenschen] in the upper ranks. (I.4.131)

If Crampas is to be believed, the upwardly mobile Innstetten tells the ghost stories for the purely strategic reasons of career advancement, and neither Crampas nor Innstetten nor the men really believe in the tales. Even if Crampas is right, though, the tales get told, and the supernatural exerts an explicit pull on the group. That such stories are repeated at all, within the very forces charged with shoring up and defending the porous frontiers of the imperium, speaks to their lingering cultural resonance.

Part of Effi Briest’s realist project is a depiction of the rationalizations and disenchantments that accompany the shrinking of the world in an era of imperial and commercial expansion. In much of Fontane’s later fiction, the world is known, and what is known is mapped, and what is mapped is rendered familiar. La Trippelli’s benign and touristic worldliness emerges early in the text as a positively valorized alternative to disenchantment, as a mindset whose cosmopolitanism renders it capacious enough to allow for even the mystical. Yet she is later quoted by Effi in a manner reminiscent of the English writers at the turn of the century to whom McClure refers in Late Imperial Romance, writers who bemoan the loss of the uncharted, the shrinking of the world and the disappearance of its secret corners. Effi remembers that La Trippelli “once said that the world was so small, and that in Central Africa one could be sure that one would suddenly run into an old acquaintance” (I.4.267). The language here repeats that of Gordon in Cécile, when a dinner party in Charlottenburg confirms for him “how small the world is.” It is odd that these jaded words are attributed to Trippelli, because, as Evans has suggested, she represents a continuing openness to the irrational (40). Reflecting Innstetten’s fear of shame at the public avowal of belief in ghosts and Effi’s parallel shame of being unfaithful, Subiotto echoes Evans’s thought: “Any belief in spiritualism” on the part of Trippelli, Subiotto writes, “is firmly underpinned by a healthy respect for the social rejection she must suffer because of her status as a Russian prince’s mistress” (140). So, what is most interesting about her character’s relationship to both the world outside and the otherworldly may not be that her cosmopolitanism passively
permits openness to enchantment, but rather that it is adduced as the sole cause of it. “My dear lady,” she says to Effi, “when you’re as old as I am and have been moved all over the place and have lived in Russia and half a year in Romania, you realize anything’s possible [da hält man alles für möglich]” (I.4.94). Departure from the comforts of the domestic, she implies early on, breeds broader understandings of the possible. The text’s portrayal of Trippe first complicates this notion when her performance of even passionate romantic songs is said to be bored and mechanical. And it finally overturns it completely in her dictum on the smallness of the world.

Immediately after Effi recalls this verdict on the shrinking of the world—actually, precisely because she recalls it—Effi is reunited briefly with her daughter Annie. The reunion leaves much to be desired, and Effi’s dissatisfaction is evident at the close of her subsequent prayer, where she complains of Innstetten, “Before he sends our child, he trains her like a parrot” (I.4.275). The image of the parrot resounds in Effi Briest, if one recalls Innstetten’s wish for exotic birds safely tucked away in the ordered and domesticated space of a zoo, within earshot of his Berlin home. One should also read into the exoticism of the parrot yet another brief gesture toward the colonies, just as it is in Flaubert’s Un cœur simple (1877). In referring to her daughter as a parrot, Effi implies that her husband has reproduced within domestic space, as a child-rearing strategy, the sort of domestication of the exotic at work in the projects of public zoos. As she realizes this during an important prayer scene, Effi ceases praying to the du of God. Instead, she turns herself to more immanent targets, declaiming against “your (plural) virtue. Away with you (plural)” [eure Tugend. Weg mit euch] (I.4.275; emphases mine). No immediate referent is provided for these second-person-plural pronouns, and they can only be assumed to refer to Innstetten and Annie, unless they refer to everybody. The secular turn of Effi’s prayer—its slide from dialogue with the transcendent to diatribe against the immanent—endows it with obvious importance for any examination of spiritual matters in Fontane’s novel. It is doubly interesting, though, in its relation to two other textual moments late in Effi Briest, moments at which the prose is lulled toward transcendence before being yanked back earthward.

These two moments—Effi’s seemingly romantic communions with the night air through her window—occur at her parents’ home at Hohen-Cremmen. Effi’s final return to Hohen-Cremmen, although a revisiting of where she was wild and younger, is staged by Fontane rather as an embedding within an ordered space: “Here is my place,” she says, “The sunflowers down on the round, encircling the sundial, are dearer to me than Mentone” (I.4.283). The total symbolic weight of Effi’s childhood home cannot be said completely to invoke rationalism and imperialism, although it specifically bears these
marks. It also represents the comforts of home, to Innstetten, who chides Effi for her occasional degradation of Hohen-Cremmen: “I know well how much you love Hohen-Cremmen and still cling to it, but you make fun of it so often and really have no idea what silent days, like those in Hohen-Cremmen, mean” (I.4.87). However, in contrast to these testimonials of hermeticism—a hermeticism that in itself contrasts with the open Hanseatism of Kessin— that arise when Effi is or has been away from Hohen-Cremmen, there is the introductory image of her, painted in far more adventurous relief. It is one thing to read Effi’s blue and white dress as a typological rendering of her virginity and purity (in the colors of the Virgin Mary), as Peter-Klaus Schuster has done. Blue and white are also colors stereotypical of sailor dress, however; Fontane’s narrative itself invites this connection in referring to Effi’s “sailor-collar” [Matrosenkragen] and comparing Effi to a “cabin-boy” [Schiffsjunge] (I.4.8; I.4.15). This rendering of Effi as sailor situates her simultaneously as one bound for adventure and as a representative of the physical apparatus of empire-building, the pragmatic, maritime forces ultimately responsible for the eradication of the raw materials of romance. In this tension, one recalls the problematic dual-coding of Balzac’s disenchanting adventurers, who are equal parts romance and business, at the end of the opening portion of *La Fille aux yeux d’or.*

Hohen-Cremmen is thus an ambiguous place, simultaneously coded as wild and domestic, neither port nor metropolis, and Effi’s days end there. She gazes out the open window at the heavens until the very activity lays her into her sick bed, and the narrator describes this act twice, in detail. In the first instance,

Time passed. A voice rang out from across the village street: it was the old night-watchman Kulicke calling out the time, and when he stopped, she could hear, half a mile away, the clatter of the train [das Rasseln des Zuges] passing through Hohen-Cremmen. Then the noise grew fainter and died away completely and only the rustle of the plane-trees remained, like the sound of gentle rain.

But it was only the night breeze passing. (I.4.220)

This last sentence is an uncharacteristically reductive intrusion by the narrator, who breaks the spell of the prose and shrinks the moment down in almost spiteful fashion. Any effort at a divine moment—the narrator will later say Effi gazes at the “wonders of the heavens” [Himmelwunders]—is consciously attenuated by the narrative’s reminder that it is, after all, just the

21. Brunschwig points out that, of sixty-four German firms known to have had commercial ties to China in the late nineteenth century, fifty-seven were German Hanseatic companies, located primarily in Hamburg and Bremen (66).
night air. However, the next such episode allows the shadings of a Romantic communion with nature. Perhaps not coincidentally, it is also the beginning of Effi’s end. Rising from the bed, Effi “sat down by the open window to breathe in once again the cool night air. The stars were twinkling and, in the park, not a leaf stirred. But the longer she listened, the more clearly she could hear once more that a gentle drizzle [ein feines Rieseln] fell on the plane trees. A feeling of release [Befreiung] came over her. ‘Peace, peace’ ['Ruhe, Ruhe’]” (I.4.294). Fontane is clearly evoking here a moment of potentially spiritual if not religious enchantment, one that recalls the earlier scene but softens its sounds: the technology in the Rasseln des Zuges, the clattering of the train, in the first passage gives way to the feines Rieseln, or gentle drizzle, of the second. It is tempting to read the congruence of these two moments as a movement or development, as a progression from a secular containment of the religious moment toward a moment that is truly spiritualized. To do so only further accentuates the problematic position of enchantment in the novel, though, because this later scene occurs precisely as a death. The narrator specifically names Effi’s skyward gaze as the cause of her end, in the only moment in the entire novel at which the narrator addresses a character: “Poor Effi, you had looked too long up to the wonders of the heavens and thought about them, and the end was, that the night air and the fog rising up from the pond threw her again onto her sick bed” [Arme Effi, du hattest zu den Himmelwundern zu lange hinaufgesehen und darüber nachgedacht, und das Ende war, daß die Nachtluft und die Nebel, die vom Teich her aufstiegen, sie wieder aufs krankenbett warfen] (I.4.292). First addressing Effi directly, the narrator, as if self-consciously, retreats from the second-person singular into the comfortable third person. The pronouncement of Effi’s end, though (“das Ende war”), is as much a rational and scientized end to the attempted communion with nature, as it is a narratological declaration that is then made final. The doctor has the last word in this paragraph, and he tells the reader and Effi’s parents: “There’s no more; prepare yourselves for a sudden end.” The end that follows is indeed sudden. The novel closes soon thereafter on Briest’s repetition of the “weites Feld,” his familiar spatial metaphor for subjects too large to be contained or known.

In an examination of the sudden ending of Effi Briest, Ernst Nef puts a new face on an old reading of the novel as Sozialroman, concluding that, “It deals with a wholly secular totality [eine ganz sekuläre Totalität]” (75). Nef does not elaborate on his inclusion of secularization in the list of ills confronted thematically by Fontane, but he does connect it loosely to the “wholly
domesticated world" [ganz domestizierte Welt] of the novel (76). This turn in
his critique is potentially productive but finally left unelaborated. The status
of secularization in Effi Briest, where it is intimately related to a broader dis-
enchantment, is similarly nebulous, however, just as it is in the novels of Bal-
zac and Trollope. Russell Berman has clearly shown that there are aspects
of Fontane’s work altogether troubling, if not irreconcilable, to a reading of
the novel as a hermetically sealed secular totality, protected and immmuzined
against spiritual or supernatural contagion, as Stern and Radcliffe would
perhaps have it.22 Michael Minden reminds us of “Fontane’s often declared
programmatic commitment to reality,” which Fontane spoke of as “the
‘quarry’ from which the raw material of art must come” (22). Hans-Heinrich
Reuter likewise recalls that “Fontane was—in his own words—‘colossally
empirical [kolossal empirisch]’ and a lifelong virtuoso lover of all ‘details’”
(631). Fontane’s “reality,” which included conversations about and fears of
an alleged Chinese ghost, has proven difficult for some prominent critics to
accept at face value. Yet what Stern and Radcliffe call a blemish and a left-
over, Fontane calls his fulcrum or Drehpunkt, and authorial declarations like
this always end up sounding prescriptive. Thanks to Fontane’s high opinion
of the Chinese ghost, it has a prominent place in the reception of Effi Briest;
thanks to its prominent place in the reception, this spectral figuration of the
colonial is probably now the Drehpunkt, not just of the novel, but of the criti-
cal conversations surrounding it.

As critics have long noted, Effi Briest is a novel invested in the discourse
of empire, but its particular engagement with empire becomes an engage-
ment as well with the possibilities of realism. Readings of the novel that pass
over the Chinese ghost as a supernatural blemish on an otherwise exemplary
empirical realism, as well as readings of the novel that see the ghost only
as a superficial signpost for colonialism, can find new possibilities. In the
paradoxical simultaneity of a secular realism and a nonsecular paranoia in
the imperial imagination, the ghost fulfills its role as centerpoint to the novel.
The Chinese ghost is twice marginal, in the dual form of an ethnicity minor in
nineteenth-century Germany, and a supernaturality that is antithetical to the
forces of rationalization represented in the novel. In reading Effi Briest, one
cannot divorce the symbolic content of the colonial from that of the spiritual,
because they are, as the ghost makes clear, intimately related. Because of
this, Effi Briest might further complicate rigidly empiricist notions of realism

22. Berman convincingly argues that “the landscape of Effi Briest is as much religious
as it is natural, despite the secularizing predisposition of the realist program,” and he refers
to the importance of religion in the novel (360–61). Religion and the Kulturkampf are indeed
important, but placing them within the larger discourse of disenchantment allows for a reading that
incorporates the central image of the Chinese ghost and the importance of lingering and coveted
Romantic tropes in the novel.
that have largely dominated the critical landscape, just as Balzac’s and Trollope’s approaches to realism trouble the idea that it is always and unremittingly secular or empirical. Such one-sided notions of the realist novel have proven themselves unable to account for the idea of disenchantment, which was both entirely immeasurable and yet deeply felt in the era’s fictions.