

BESTSELLING BORDERS: THE MUTUAL IMPLICATIONS OF GERMAN AND POLISH
IDENTITY IN THE LATE NINETEENTH- AND EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY NOVEL

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ABSTRACT

Christine M. Kenison: Bestselling Borders: The Mutual Implications of German and Polish Identity in the Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth Century Novel
(Under the direction of Jonathan M. Hess)

This dissertation argues that engagement with the borderland in German and Polish novels of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries is grounded in recognition of the productive space engendered by the ambivalence and ambiguity of liminal spaces. This project explores how novels use those in-between spaces to construct new identities amidst social upheaval to buttress paternalistic structures to counter modernity's corrosion of interpersonal relationships.

The dissertation analyzes four novels popular with their contemporary audiences and composed by renowned authors who demonstrated sustained interest in German-Polish literary relations. Chapter I examines the role of Polishness in policing the boundaries of a nascent German bourgeois identity in Gustav Freytag's *Soll und Haben* [Debit and Credit] (1855). Chapter II treats Theodor Fontane's 1878 historical novel, *Vor dem Sturm* [Before the Storm], where the staging of multiple spheres of German identity formation reveals the paradoxical nature of identity itself. Chapter III explores how Clara Viebig's *Das schlafende Heer* [The Sleeping Army] (1904) appropriates the *Ostmarkenroman* genre to imagine a culturally unified Germany. Chapter IV examines how Bolesław Prus' *Placówka* [The Outpost] (1886) illustrates the importance of coming to terms with ambiguity and ambivalence within one Polish village.

This project joins a growing scholarly dialogue on the German-Polish borderland as a space in which to reimagine the building blocks of community. The scholarship of Maria Wojtczak, Kristin Kopp, Izabela Surynt, and Hubert Orłowski has been formative in this project's discussion of the German literary imaginary of the East. Unlike these works, my

analysis encompasses both German and Polish novels, advocating for literary border studies which transcend national traditions. This project avoids elevating one literary discourse to speaker and the other to silent receptacle. Ultimately, this dissertation represents an interpretive experiment which hosts a multifaceted symposium on a shared creative space. My analysis of these novels' engagement with the German-Polish borderland demonstrates that literature provides an alternative philosophy of ambivalence and ambiguity.

To my parents Scott and Linda Kenison for their patience and support and encouraging my passion for languages and other cultures. This is what happens when you buy a kid a GeoSafari.

To Grandma Kenison, for encouraging my love of reading and writing, and to Grandma Bozony, who always had another story to tell, no matter how far past my bedtime it was.

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INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1839, the Prussian writer and academic Theodor Mundt (1808-1861) travelled with his new bride Clara Müller to Poland visiting such renowned sites such as the shrine of Częstochowa, home of the sacred icon of the Black Madonna.¹ Much of the couple's time, however, was spent in the ancient city of Kraków. Mundt published an account of his travels based on a journal kept during the journey a year later in the collection *Völkerschau auf Reisen* (1840).² Mundt's account of what was then known as the Republic or Free City of Kraków in 1839 engages with a number of themes, including censorship, education, ancient Slavic burial mounds, and a decadent and degenerate class of nobility in Poland.³ Its most immediate preoccupation, however, lies with boundaries and the free city's location at the intersection of a number of borders. The narrative of the couple's stay in Kraków begins with a gaze into "die weite polnische Ebene," and a survey of the geographical context of the Republic of Kraków from the shadow of the iconic Wawel Royal Castle (125). This medieval gothic castle is a powerful symbol of Polish nationhood and cultural identity and served as residence for centuries of monarchs who were crowned in the cathedral housed within the castle complex. Mundt stands atop Wawel Hill with his wife, the entirety of the once vibrant center of Polish culture at his feet,

¹Clara Mundt, née Müller (1814-1873) is best known by the nom-de-plume "Louisa Mühlbach," under which she wrote some 250 volumes of popular historical fiction, most famously her three-volume cycle of novels on Frederick the Great, *Friedrich der Große und sein Hof* (1853).

² In other sections of the book he travels to southern France and the Carpathian Mountain range. Mundt, Theodor. *Völkerschau auf Reisen*. Stuttgart: Krabbe, 1840. Print.

³ The Free City of Kraków [Wolne Miasto Kraków] or Republic of Kraków [Rzeczpospolita Kraków] was founded as a result of the Congress of Vienna in 1815 and lasted until 1846 when it was occupied by and incorporated into the Austrian Empire following an insurrection in Austrian-held Galicia that same year. The city was technically under the protection of the three Partitioning Powers of Austria, Prussia and Russia, so the appellation of "Free City" is somewhat misleading. The Republic of Kraków encompassed the city proper as well as a few hundred square miles of land outside of Kraków.

and ponders Kraków's current lamentable position at the borders of the three partitioning powers of the Austrian Empire, Prussia, and Imperial Russia:

Betrachteten wir nur zu unsern Füßen die Weichsel, und ihr jenseitiges Ufer, an dem, gerade gegenüber von unsrem Standort auf dem Schlossberge, das Haus der österreichischen Mauth sich zeigte; ließen wir unsern Blick dann weiter umherschweifen zur preußischen und russisch polnischen Gränze, und wendeten wir nun das Auge wehmüthig hinter uns, wo uns zu Häupten das alte Königsschloss der Polen emporragte, in seiner wunderlich chaotischen Bauart, die so bezeichnend ist für den polnischen Charakter, zeugend von ehemaliger Herrlichkeit noch in jetzigem Verfall und jetziger Erniedrigung, jetzt verwandelt in eine österreichische Kaserne: so fanden wir uns auf diesem Standpunkt von allen den verhängnisvollen Momenten umgeben, welche das Schicksal dieses schönen Landes bilden. (125-126)

In this passage, the Mundts are standing in one of the most symbolically overdetermined sites in Poland. Wawel Hill had not only been a royal residence since Mieszko I, the first historical ruler of Poland, but the home of dragons and virtuous maidens in Polish legends.⁴ It overlooks the Vistula (*Ger*: Weichsel, *Pol*: Wisła), a river of tremendous geographic and cultural importance in the Polish imagination, flowing from the Beskid mountains in the south past the great cultural centers of Poland—Kraków and Warsaw—as well as bastions of the border between Germanness and Polishness such as Toruń (*Ger*: Thorn), the imposing Teutonic fortress at Malbork (*Ger*: Marienburg), and emptying into the Baltic Sea at the port city of Gdańsk (*Ger*: Danzig). Mundt inscribes the splendor of Polish history onto the contemporary vista of a city yellowing around the edges, as it were, with the physical legacy of its glorious past as a seat of royal power crumbling into disrepair and its majestic castle reduced to the status of a barracks for Austrian soldiers.⁵ Throughout Mundt's descriptions of Kraków, he paints the picture of a city stifled by its geography and the peculiarity of being a tiny state hemmed in by the strictly policed borders of three mighty polities. The Vistula River in particular is patrolled ad

⁴Legend has it that the caves in Wawel Hill were home to a dragon that was slain by the hero Krakus after whom Kraków was named. The maiden Wanda threw herself into the Vistula rather than marry a German nobleman. The name Wanda has been a symbolically charged one ever since in both German and Polish literature. Examples include Karl May's *Wanda*. "History of Wawel Hill." *Wawel Royal Castle*. Zamek Królewski Na Wawelu, n.d. Web. 5 June 2016.

⁵ Kraków was the capital of Poland from 1320 to 1611. Previously, Polish kings had ruled from Gniezno. In 1611, King Sigismund III Vasa moved the capital to Warsaw.

absurdum. One cannot even bathe in the river without permission to enter Austria, Mundt reports hearing:

Es sind die Österreichischen Gränzjäger, welche auf der Lauer umherschweifen. Die Weichsel bildet die Gränze zwischen Oesterreich und dem Gebiet des so genannten Freistaats Krakau. Eigentlich liegt die Gränze zwischen diesen beiden Gebieten mitten im Flusse, und der silbergraue Faden des Stromes ist es, welche sie bezeichnet. Ein Schiff, das auf dem Krakauer Theil der Weichsel schwimmt, ist steuerfrei von den Gesetzen der freien Stadt; sollte es sich durch eine auch nur zufällige Bewegung auf die österreichische Seite hinüber wandern, so würde es sofort abgabepflichtig werden. Ein Schwimmer, der sich beim Baden vom Krakauer Ufer aus Nord etwas nach den österreichischen hinüber verlöre, kann gewärtigen, mitten im Wasser von einem österreichischen Gränzjäger nach dem Paß gefragt zu werden, und es soll gefährlich sein, sich anders in der Weichsel zu baden, als mit einem von den österreichischen Residenten bezeichneten Paß im Munde. Die Natur aber in ihrer freien Lebendigkeit spottet dieser Gränzwuth der modernen Völker, und der Fluß rauscht hüben wie drüben, hier wo er die alte Burg der polnischen Könige und dort vor er das österreichische Zollgebäude widerspiegelt, auf beiden Seiten mit derselben Lust seiner Gewässer (126-127).

Austrian border guards “lurk” along the Vistula, just waiting for an unwitting vessel or swimmer to stray over the invisible border between the Free City and Austria. Yet even as Mundt describes for his readers a place choked by political boundaries, he observes nature’s innate tendency to defy humanity’s attempt to artificially divvy up physical space. The mighty Vistula River mocks the “border mania of modern peoples” as its waters rush along on either side of the imaginary line drawn by diplomats through the middle of this fluvial thread that winds its way past the city of Kraków. Whether the surface of its waters bear the reflection of the once imposing fortress of Polish kings, Mundt remarks, or of the customs post manned by overzealous Austrian bureaucrats, the Vistula flows onward through the Polish lowlands with the same unchecked vitality.

Many other German-language writers before and after Mundt’s journey had found themselves drawn to engage with the spaces between Germans and Slavs more generally, and the interstices between Germanness and Polishness in particular. These scriptural engagements run the generic gamut from travel writing such as Mundt’s narrative and Heinrich Heine’s *Über Polen* (1823), to the novellas of Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach and Thomas Mann, to the adventure novels of Karl May, and the historical fiction of Louisa Mühlbach. Broadly speaking,

we can observe throughout these works two main kinds of approaches to borders and borderlands, often coexisting within the same text: the sort embodied by the strict border enforcement of the Austrian customs officials and the sort modeled by Mundt's marveling at the Vistula's disregard for such geo-political artifice. I must distinguish here between my usage of the word "border" as opposed to my use of the word "borderland." By "border," I understand the artificial division drawn between two entities in order to distinguish those two entities from one another. Whether it does so successfully or not, the border serves as a moment of division, an instance of separation. Such division may take various forms, and this project by no means limits itself to the most common association with the term "border," that of a geopolitical border between nation-states. The border may be a river, as in Mundt's travel narrative, an idea, a religion, or a language. It may invite or repel approach. In the end, its purpose is to enforce definitions, for good or for ill, and to produce meaning from difference. By contrast, I understand the "borderland" as the liminal space that grows around that line of demarcation to defy strict definitions. This difference highlights perhaps the single greatest issue underlying the discipline of literary border studies: ambivalence and ambiguity. In the borderland, ambiguity and ambivalence do not obliterate meaning, nor do they overwrite identity, though the uncertainty of in-between may at times seem to frustrate identity construction. In the novels treated in this dissertation, we will find that liminality, that borderlands, whether they be of a cultural, social, topographical, or geopolitical nature, act as perhaps the most productive forums in which to host a literary grappling with one's sense of self.

Ambivalence and Ambiguity in the Modern Imaginary

In his work *Modernity and Ambivalence*, the Polish-Jewish sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Baumann (1925-) describes modernity as the creation of a binary opposition between order and chaos.⁶ "Order is what is not chaos," Baumann writes, and "chaos is what is not

⁶ Bauman, Zygmunt. *Modernity and Ambivalence*. Cambridge: Polity, 2007. Electronic.

orderly. Order and chaos are modern twins. They had been conceived amidst the disruption and collapse of the divinely ordained world, which knew of neither necessity nor accident; one that just was – without ever thinking how to make itself to be. That unthinking and careless world which preceded the bifurcation into order and chaos we find difficult to describe in its own terms” (4-5). Consequently, he asserts, this paradigm shift, this opening moment of modernity, led to increasing aggression towards ambiguity and ambivalence. On the one hand, Bauman writes, ambivalence represents a natural byproduct of language itself, rather than a defect arising from imperfections of language or human use of it. Thus, for Baumann, “ambivalence is not the product of the pathology of language or speech. It is, rather, a normal aspect of linguistic practice” (1). Rather, Baumann posits, ambivalence “arises from one of the main functions of language: that of naming and classifying. Its volume grows depending on the effectivity with which that function is performed. Ambivalence is therefore the alter ego of language, and its permanent companion – indeed, its normal condition (1). It is a strengthened impulse to organize and classify which characterizes the modern, he argues. Such attempts at regulation have failed to assuage intellectual and social discomfort and, Baumann states, represent intrinsically counterproductive actions. Each assault on ambivalence only breeds further ambiguity. Against the backdrop of the horrors of the twentieth century, Baumann views the modern antagonism towards ambivalence as destructive in nature.⁷ I would counter this argument by focusing on a set of nineteenth-century novels which offers us an alternative philosophy of ambivalence. I differ as well from Baumann in the terminology that I use in my engagement with uncertainty and opacity in cultural production. Baumann often lacks precision in his use of the terms ambivalence and ambiguity. He does not appear to make any explicit distinction between the terms “ambivalence” and “ambiguity” in the introduction to *Modernity*

⁷ Baumann’s family had to flee Poland after the Nazi invasion during World War II, however returned to Poland after the war. Baumann was once again forced to leave Poland, this time for good, in the wake of the anti-Semitic campaigns in the Eastern bloc in 1968.

and Ambivalence. Though the two terms overlap in meaning somewhat, I will briefly sketch out definitions of the two terms as I intend to use them in the following chapters. In this dissertation, I employ the term “ambiguity” to denote situations characterized by pervasive uncertainty and lack of clarity. I take my definition of ambivalence from the opening sentence of Baumann’s introduction, understanding the term to mean “the possibility of assigning an object or an event to more than one category” (1).⁸ Ambivalence, as I use the term, refers to a multiplicity of meaning and belonging rather than the nebulosity denoted by the term “ambiguous.” It is critical in this study to draw a distinction between these terms as ambiguity and ambivalence each represent different attributes of the borderland which render that liminal space an area of tremendous literary risk and reward. Ambiguity in the borderland creates a landscape of fictional flexibility where encounters with the Other can mold identity with breathtaking speed, and of unknown perils and dangers one cannot immediately identify. Ambivalence in this same space frustrates modern humanity’s urge to classify by blurring or ignoring categorical divisions and in effect creating a sense of permanent transition between multiple ways of belonging.

My dissertation exposes literary engagement with the ambiguous and the ambivalent not as intrinsically belligerent, but instead as grounded in the recognition of the productive space engendered by the ambivalent. Discomfort delivers far more powerful narratives and compelling plots. Modern literature has evinced considerable unease towards one particularly ambiguous creation of modernity— the borderland. In their introduction to *Gendering Border Studies*, Henrice Altink and Chris Weedon note the dynamic role of this liminal space “in the production of meanings and values” as well as in the “composition of the human subject, and the workings of power” (5).⁹ I build on this introduction by Altink and Weedon, moving beyond their focus on

⁸ Baumann defines “ambivalence,” but not ambiguity, and indeed, seems to use the terms somewhat interchangeably.

⁹ Aaron, Jane, Henrice Altink, and Chris Weedon. *Gendering Border Studies*. Cardiff: U of Wales, 2010. Print.

the behavior of gender in the borderland and looking at literary engagements with indeterminacy and opacity itself, rather than only on the effects of a lack of clarity on human gender and sexuality. The desire for non-porous borders represents a peculiarly modern phenomenon and a formative concept in the creation of nation-states in the nineteenth century. Authors such as Sir Walter Scott, Jane Austen, Charles Sealsfield, and Victor Hugo treated this new social concern with correspondingly diligent attention to both internal and external boundaries. In his *Atlas of the European Novel: 1800-1900*, Franco Moretti discusses policing of Britishness through the use of French or French-speaking villains and of French-educated women as the “wrong” romantic love interest of young British male protagonists. For main characters in *Bildungsromane* such as Dickens’ *David Copperfield*, Moretti writes, “Withstanding Parisian seduction becomes thus one of the decisive passage rites of a young Englishman” (30). Dora Spenlow dies to make way for David’s true intended, Agnes Wickfield. I would also point to *David Copperfield*’s border policing in terms of its geographic shuffling of its characters. Characters who commit infractions against bourgeois social norms, such as Little Em’ly Peggotty, or who fail to thrive in Britain, such as Wilkins Micawber, find themselves removed by novel’s end to Australia, quite literally, to the other side of the world.

In this project, I focus on the novel, as this genre possesses certain formal qualities that makes the genre useful for a study of ambivalence and ambiguity. It is in the nineteenth century that the novel comes into its own as a cultural formation within which the relationship between the individual and society can be negotiated, regulated, and discussed. In her introduction to the collected essays in *The German Bestseller in the Late Nineteenth Century*, Charlotte Woodford outlines the slew of legal and technological innovations in the nineteenth century that made a mass market for German novels possible (2-4).¹⁰ Growing literacy and a rapid expansion of the

¹⁰ Woodford, Charlotte. “Introduction: German Fiction and the Marketplace in the Nineteenth Century.” Charlotte Woodford and Benedict Schofield, eds. *The German Bestseller in the Late Nineteenth Century*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2012. Print.

publishing industry extended the reach of novels long and short throughout German-speaking lands. Ironically, then, even the novels in this study which evince a strong undercurrent of skepticism and anxiety towards modernity were beneficiaries of the frightening social upheaval they sought to come to terms with or whose alienating and destructive effects they sought to alleviate. The novel is simultaneously symptom of and response to cultural shifts in nineteenth-century German lands and indeed, Europe more broadly. Woodford identifies several structural aspects of the novel which rendered the genre so appealing to the nineteenth-century reading public. The novel, she writes, provides the reader with an advantageous viewpoint vis-à-vis the characters and goings-on in the world the work creates. At the same time, the novel invites its readers to identify with the inhabitants of this observed world and to indirectly participate in that imagined creation even as they stand apart from it.

The reader is flattered by a sense of privileged insight and the feeling of transcending intellectually the petty bourgeois milieu in which the novels are located...Reading...provides a curious mixture of anonymity and belonging, at the same time. Novels provide a reader with a sense of shared experience by identification with a protagonist, even if that protagonist feels alienated from society. A curiosity of fiction is that it often depicts a sense of loneliness in a highly accessible way: a reader can share in the protagonist's isolation, and thereby feel some consolation in having his or her own similar feelings affirmed (9).

To this I would add that there is a certain satisfaction as a reader to observing, from the privileged position that Woodford points to, the interactions of a group of characters deliberately assembled by the author to execute a series of planned events. The novel's capacity for world-making in a sustained manner represents a key aspect of its appeal to its readers.

These same generic aspects which endeared the novelistic form to a wide readership also touch on its usefulness to the scholar of ambivalence and ambiguity in literature. The novel represents a kind of synthesis of thought. There is an inherent logic to thinking within the novel, to the regulated unfolding of a certain period of time. Notions of totality and the novel's ability to completely depict its subject represent an important undercurrent in critical theory on the novel. Novels are coordinated, *organized* by nature, "a complete and ordered whole" as literary

critic R.S. Crane (1886-1967) notes (132).¹¹ The novel exists as a coordination of characters whose motivations we as readers are given the opportunity to spectate. This juxtaposition of coordination and indeterminacy fosters a dynamic tension that propels the plot forward. To apply György Lukács' historical theory, I view the novel as "a period of transition, a contradictory unity of crisis" (386).¹² I extend this notion and argue that the borderland's ambiguity and ambivalence represents both an environmental obstacle at odds with the genre and the impetus which maintains the novel's momentum. Novels run on the contradiction of organized ambivalence. The tension surrounding ambiguity which Baumann views as destructive becomes productive. Finally, critical engagement with the novel presents the literary scholar with the opportunity for second-order observations. In the novels examined in the chapters to come, we have the opportunity as readers and critics to observe German and Polish authors as those writers in turn observe the borderland. We also observe the characters as they engage with ambiguity and ambivalence in their environments within the plot. Additionally, we observe the author's engagement with that same uncertainty in his or her creation of the novel's plot and harnessing of power of description, especially of landscapes, as a way of making non-plot points. As literary scholars, after all, we are concerned with the process of imagining the world as it appears in the text rather than with actual conditions on the ground of the German-Polish borderland.

¹¹ Crane, R.S. "from: 'The Concept of Plot and the Plot of *Tom Jones*.'" *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory, 1900-2000*. Ed. Dorothy J. Hale. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2006. Print.

¹² I use the first name listed in the anthology/source consulted for the sake of clarity. If Lukács first name is printed as "Georg," that is what I use in the body of the text, and the same goes for "György." There is however, I think we can agree, only one Lukács. The full citation reads thus: "Every great historical period is a period of transition, a contradictory unity of crisis and renewal of destruction and rebirth, a new social order and a new type of man always come into being in the course of a unified though contradictory process" (386). Lukács, György. "from *Studies in European Realism*." *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory, 1900-2000*. Ed. Dorothy J. Hale. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2006. Print.

The Case for Literary Border Studies

Borders and borderlands are crucial concepts and forums for the production of meaning, difference and identity, and feature prominently in authors' attempts to engage with important social and cultural issues of their day. Thus, the discipline of border studies provides scholars of literature with an illuminating critical lens through which to engage with literary texts. Indeed, border studies acts as a poignant critique of academic visions of nationalism. In his seminal treatise on nationalism and the novel, Benedict Anderson defines the nation as "an imagined political community— and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (6).¹³ National identity operates on the basis of exclusivity, on the fact that the nation is delineated by boundaries. Anderson describes the nation-state as an entity which understands itself as both new and possessed of an ancient past, all the while looking toward the distant future. The pre-nationalist era was characterized by the existence of dynastic states organized "around a high centre," in Anderson's words, and defined by unclear borders. In this understanding, the closer one was to the center, the greater the state's authority was (19). For modern nations however, "state sovereignty is fully, flatly, and evenly operative over each square centimetre of a legally demarcated territory" (19). Two forms of modern media, Anderson argues, play an especially vital role in shaping such a mentality: the newspaper and the novel. Much of the power of print-capitalism, Anderson argues, derives from a transformation of the human understanding of time itself. To the medieval mind, the concept of simultaneity was understood as "a simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present" and history and cosmology were interwoven (24). Furthermore, Anderson writes, "the mediaeval Christian mind had no conception of history as an endless chain of cause and effect or of radical separations between past and present" (23). The modern mind, by contrast, understands time as homogenous and empty and views simultaneity as a horizontal rather than vertical construct, defined "by temporal coincidence,

¹³ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. New York: Verso, 2006. Print.

and measured by clock and calendar” (24). The citizen of the nation, Anderson argues, as he sits down to read his morning paper, imagines millions of his fellow citizens proceeding through the same morning ritual, consuming the same news (35).¹⁴ It is this notion of “meanwhile” that renders the construct of the nation even plausible. In the novel, too, one human being, one prison, one university can serve as a representative example for thousands upon thousands of other citizens and institutions of the same nation (29-30).¹⁵ The power of the novel to create and maintain such imagined communities is the impetus behind much of the cultural work performed by the texts treated in this dissertation.

In a nationalist framework, then, national identity is often the meaning that is derived from and validated by the imagination of geo-political borders. The continued ambiguity and ambivalence of modern borderlands however, challenge this theoretical narrative. The field of border studies asserts that the borderland constitutes a creative space for literary imaginings of identity in a way that the nation does not. Nationhood is encoded as static, and the nation declares itself eternal. Maintaining a border promotes a collective identity that declares that neighbors do not belong. The borderland thus turns the self/neighbor binary into a productive category for identity formation. In the novel, we often find, a sojourn in the borderland can solidify an identity, transform that identity through conversion, or even create an entirely new identity.

Furthermore, borders and borderlands, as places of ambiguity and ambivalence, also constitute places of interrogation. Altink and Wheedon note the “ability of real and metaphorical borderlands to contest dominant gender ideologies” (2) and the role that recent cultural theory

¹⁴ Or, to update this example for the contemporary reader: as I sit here writing this introduction, shoppers crowd New Hampshire’s malls eager to avoid sales tax on last-minute Christmas gifts, hapless motorists sit in traffic on I-93, and we are all fueled by the Dunkin’ Donuts coffee we stocked up on last weekend.

¹⁵ Anderson takes as his example the 1816 novel of Mexican author José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi entitled *El Periquillo Sarniento* [The Itching Parrot]. “The horizon is clearly bounded,” Anderson writes, “it is that of colonial Mexico. Nothing assures us of this sociological solidity more than the succession of plurals. For they conjure up a social space full of *comparable* prisons, none in itself of any unique importance, but all representative (in their simultaneous, separate existence of the oppressiveness of *this* colony” (30).

has played in “questioning binary oppositions and the borders that they seek to hold in place” (6). The fact that “borders are not fixed and static but continuously contested, negotiated and reinterpreted” means that even as “they carry meaning and shape identities,” seeking to create definitions, “they are inherently contradictory, problematical and multifaceted” (Altink and Wheedon 13). Building on Altink and Wheedon, I maintain that the fact that borders and borderlands are places of ambiguity and ambivalence means that their existence provides a space in which to contest or frustrate not only prevailing gender norms, but *any* set of power dynamics. Indeed, in a number of scenes from novels in this study, ambiguity and ambivalence in the borderland are often frightening precisely *because* such uncertainty can work to the advantage of the marginalized, of the Other. For while it is true that oftentimes “borders help to create and sustain asymmetrical and hierarchical relationships,” as Altink and Wheedon write, oppression is not the only product of laying down borders (13). Ambiguity and ambivalence provide the opportunity for the less mighty to defy or even overturn existing social structures or mechanisms of power.

German-Polish Borderlands as Case Study

It is thus clear that border studies and literary criticism constitute mutually enriching disciplines that benefit from a simultaneous application to their objects of study. At this disciplinary intersection, the Polish-German borderland represents an enriching case study for literary investigations of physical and cultural boundaries. This is true both from the perspective of literary history as well as the influence of that particular borderland on German identity. I have gestured above to the power of literature to imagine borders and borderlands. In the case of the German-Polish borderland, works of literature played an especially important role. In this respect, literary scholars offer unique insights into the German-Polish borderland and to cultural conceptions of these constantly shifting borders. Both Polish and German authors have repeatedly narrated this periphery for their respective social contexts. Indeed, it is in part due to literature that we can discuss the notion of “Poland” in the nineteenth and early twentieth

century at all. In a time when Poland had disappeared from the map of Europe, Polish authors undertook a vital project of cultural self-preservation by continuing to write in Polish about the idea of “Poland”. Even German literature at times quite accidentally acknowledges that the cultural entity of Poland lives on as it imagines German-Polish borderlands in search of what it means to be German. Many nationally-minded German authors, however, strove for a cultural unity to promote a unified German state. Here, literary national unity preceded by several decades the formation of a nation-state in 1871. Both literary traditions tackle similar dilemmas of state formation through different cultural approaches to imagining borders.

Consequently, I treat both German and Polish novels in my own case study on literary borderlands. I have chosen four works in part because of their popularity and the renown of their authors. The novels treated here were selected with a view to both similarities of content and form as well as with a view to chronological and structural diversity. Canonical or not, each of these novels were widely read, well-circulated, and thus of great cultural relevance in their day. Novels which sold well must have fulfilled the literary and cultural expectations of the readership of the time.¹⁶ The popular fiction of Gustav Freytag’s *Soll und Haben* (1855) and Clara Viebig’s *Das schlafende Heer* (1904) cannot claim the same level of sophistication as Theodor Fontane’s canonical *Vor dem Sturm*, yet all are just as deserving of literary critical attention. Freytag’s first novel went through multiple printings between its first Easter and Christmas and went on to become the best-selling German novel of the nineteenth century. Viebig’s works were treasured with nostalgic fondness by readers who had grown up with these

¹⁶ Not only of the German-language reading public, I might add. All of the four novels treated here have been translated into English. *Soll und Haben* was especially popular as *Debit and Credit* among American readers and was also translated into Czech, Danish, Dutch, French, Hungarian, Italian, Romanian, and Swedish. *Das schlafende Heer* was translated into English, Dutch, Italian, and almost immediately after its German debut, into Swedish. *Vor dem Sturm* does not appear to have been widely translated, especially when compared to Fontane’s *Effi Briest* (1894) or *Irrungen Wirungen* (1888). My own search uncovered only recent translations into English and French (1985 and 1992 respectively), and these volumes were likely intended for academic researchers not fluent in German. Interestingly, none of the three German novels in this project were ever translated into Polish, perhaps out of an assumed lack of interest on the part of Polish readers, or perhaps as a result of a long history of German as an academic language in Poland.

novels, and the author's landmark birthdays were celebrated with feature articles in prominent newspapers.¹⁷ Such popular acceptance is what matters in establishing a collective literary imagining of the borderland. These works were seminal in their representation of the German-Polish dynamic. Finally, my choices are motivated by these novels' approaches to space and place. *Das schlafende Heer* and Bolesław Prus' *Placówka* inscribe German-Polish tensions into the landscape of fictional villages in order to reflect on the self, not the Other. These works' treatment of German-Polish relations engages with geography and space in a way that interrogates the borderland. We can contrast these more nuanced depictions of liminal spaces with the vague sentimentality of the *Polenlieder* of the likes of Ernst Ortlepp and Niklaus Lenau or Karl May's *Wanda*, where German-Polish interactions are exotic window-dressing to the main adventure of dramatic rescues and daring hot-air balloon pursuits.

Furthermore, these four novels do not only depict more broadly held views on the German/Polish borderland. They also represent innovative engagement with that borderland. Moreover, each of the above authors demonstrated continuous interest in the German-Polish borderland and in relations between the two ethnicities throughout their prolific careers. Polish characters play roles of great symbolic import in the works of Theodor Fontane, for example. Poles occupy key positions in such masterpieces of prose as *Schach von Wuthenow* (1882), *Unterm Birnbaum* (1885), *Cécile* (1887), and *Effi Briest* (1894), and Fontane's fiction contains a nearly constant undercurrent of the ancient Slavic heritage of the Mark Brandenburg.¹⁸ The preoccupation with German-Polish relations in *Vor dem Sturm* thus stands as an early iteration of what would become a key artistic motif in Fontane's literary opus. Gustav Freytag, in his capacity as journalist, wrote numerous articles on his home

¹⁷ See for example, the articles collected in *Mein Leben* which includes both writings by Viebig on her own work as well as press coverage of her seventieth and nintieth birthdays. Viebig, Clara. *Mein Leben : Autobiographische Skizzen*. Ed. Christel Aretz. Hontheim: Mosel Eifel, 2002. Print.

¹⁸ I have in mind here the novel *Der Stechlin* (1898), for example.

province of Silesia and his concern for the growing Slavic influence on the city of Breslau, and was an editor of the periodical *Die Grenzboten*, literally “The Border Envoys,” or “The Border Messengers.”¹⁹ Clara Viebig spent a considerable amount of time at the estate of a relative near the city of Posen in what is now Western Poland. Viebig’s personal and artistic investment in what were then eastern German lands is evident from her second novel, *Es lebe die Kunst!* (1899), which features a young author from the province of Posen as its protagonist. Viebig’s numerous novels and novellas set in the Rhineland and in the Eiffel region, moreover, demonstrate her broader interest in liminal spaces more generally.²⁰ Like Freytag and Fontane, the Polish writer Bolesław Prus began his writing career as a journalist. Prus was known especially for his feuilletons, and a quick perusal of the index of any one volume of those writings reveals a sustained interest in German-Polish relations, especially German-Polish economic interactions and German settlements in Partitioned Poland. Both topics form the premise for Prus’ first novel, *Placówka* [The Outpost] (1886). Indeed, all of the authors examined in this dissertation early on in their use of the novellistic form wrote a novel which engages in some significant way with the German-Polish borderland.²¹

These works command our interest, however, not primarily because of their similarities, but rather because they represent different strands of the literary discourse on the German-Polish borderland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The first element of diversity in these works is that of chronology. Freytag’s *Soll und Haben* preceded German

¹⁹ Izabela Surynt quotes extensively from Freytag’s journalistic publications in her book *Das “ferne”, „unheimliche” Land: Gustav Freytags Polen*. See, for example, the article cited on Freytag’s claims regarding links between Slavicization and Breslau’s increasingly proletarian character: “Keine Stadt in Deutschland hat ein so zahlreiches und so demoralisirtes Proletariat, als Breslau, und ich muß hinzusetzen, in keiner Stadt ist es seit einem Jahr so furchtbar gewachsen, als hier. Das hat mehrere Gründe. Die slavische Vergangenheit Schlesiens hat seiner Hauptstadt als letztes Erbtheil eine schmutzige Armseligkeit und Mangel an Energie in den unteren Schichten der Vermögenslosen zurückgelassen” (Freytag in Surynt 2004, 23). Surynt, Izabela. *Das “ferne”, „unheimliche” Land: Gustav Freytags Polen*. Dresden: Thelem, 2004. Print.

²⁰ I have in mind here her first novel *Rheinlandstöchter*, the novella collection *Kinder der Eiffel* (1897), *Die Wacht am Rhein* (1902), and the short story collection *Heimat* (1914). Her works on the Eiffel are remarkably available even today.

²¹ *Soll und Haben*, *Vor dem Sturm*, and *Placówka* all bear the distinction of being first novels.

unification in (1871) by sixteen years, Fontane's *Vor dem Sturm* appeared just seven years after unification, and Viebig's *Das schlafende Heer* was published thirty-three years after the German Empire was founded, at a time when an entire generation of adults had grown up in a united Germany. These works thus span nearly half a century of incredible change in what it meant to be "German." These novels also offer a range of spaces steeped in a long history of German-Polish interactions. The geographical scope of this dissertation ranges from the Brandenburger Mark to Silesia and Posen, from Berlin to Breslau and Kraków and to the Russian Partition of Poland. In addition to geographic diversity, these novels also treat the borderland from the viewpoint of different strata of German society. The cast of characters in this project includes bourgeois merchants and working class laborers, peasants prosperous and destitute, wealthy and impoverished aristocrats, Jews and Poles of varying socio-economic status, Catholics and Protestants, Wends (Sorbs), and ethnic Germans hailing from a number of different home provinces. Finally, the four novels treated here vary in their consideration by scholars in German and Polish studies. Fontane's novels, long a part of the German canon, have received ample attention from literary scholars. While *Soll und Haben* hardly counts as a canonical work, its immense popularity has kept it in the academic spotlight. Viebig's works, on the other hand, have only just begun to attract sustained critical interest in the past two decades in the midst of increased scholarship on female authors of popular literature in particular. Similarly, scholars of Polish literature have begun to rededicate themselves to Prus studies after a hiatus following the Communist regime's appropriation of nineteenth-century century Polish Positivist literature as early vehicles of a socialist agenda.²² With all of their similarities and differences, each of these four authors somehow found themselves stuck in the middle between Germanness and Polishness, and made use of the productivity engendered by

²² Recent scholarship on Prus includes, for example, the volume of collected essays, *Realści, Realizm, Realność: W Stulecie śmierci Bolesława Prusa*. Eds. Ewa Paczoska, Bartłomiej Szleszyński, and Dawid Maria Osiński. Warsaw: Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2013. Print.

ambiguity and ambivalence in the German-Polish borderland.

This dissertation focuses on German-language authors from the lands that would become “Germany” to the exclusion of those from Austria-Hungary for a number of reasons. Firstly, the incorporation of the Polish case study is crucial to the execution of this project on identity in the borderland, and the German was formative for the Polish conception of the Other in a way that the Austrian was not. The inclusion of a Polish novel in this project on literary border studies creates a discursive counterpoint to the German literary discourse on ambiguity and ambivalence in the borderland. In so doing, I seek to avoid reducing one “side” of the literary borderland to narrator and the other side to a silent object of description. Secondly, I have excluded Austrian and Swiss authors out of a simple practical need to limit the scope of my project. Polish-Austrian literary relations in the borderlands of a vast, multi-ethnic empire merit a separate critical endeavor from Polish-German literary encounters in a newly-minted nation-state. Naturally, the nation-state is not the only factor at play in the formation of literary borderlands, but it is a powerful determinant in the background of the cultural context in which these novels were written. Differences in German and Austrian collective imaginings of Poles can be seen, for example, in the absence of an equivalent to the tendentious German *Ostmarkenroman* genre in the Austrian cultural context.

Critical engagement with the German-Polish borderland as shown in works such as those discussed above represents an essential task for German studies. This necessity extends even beyond the importance of such scholarship for the intersection of literary criticism and border studies. Encounters with the East have proven remarkably formative for conceptions of Germanness, as Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius demonstrates in *The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present*.²³ Liulevicius’s monograph represents a synthetic treatment of the German myth of the East as it evolved over the centuries. He sketches early interactions between Germanic

²³ Liulevicius, Vejas Gabriel. *The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

peoples and Eastern lands in the mass migrations of antiquity and the Middle Ages before continuing on to his focus on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. During the Enlightenment, Eastern Europe became a kind of theoretical counterpoint to Western Europe's quest for reason and rationality, Liulevicius writes.²⁴ Sympathy for and animosity towards Eastern Europe waned and waxed over the course of the nineteenth century depending on internal politics and cultural developments within German lands. The *Polenbegeisterung* of the 1830s was fueled by a liberal bourgeoisie who shared similar aspirations of political reform and thus empathized with Polish rebels during the November Uprising of 1830 (73).²⁵ In the wake of the failed uprisings across Europe in 1848, a general loss of idealism among those middle class liberals resulted in a corresponding loss of affection for Polish national ideals. In the meantime, historians such as Heinrich von Treitschke (1834-1896) were laying the groundwork for a growing nationalist sentiment in German lands. In Treitschke's 1862 essay "The German Land of the Order, Prussia," the legacy of the Teutonic Knights becomes nothing less than the building of a "New Germany" in the East (Liulevicius 90-92). Treitschke was but one of many to cast Eastern endeavors as part of the German nation's founding mythology, as a glorious past that contemporary efforts to establish a German state could build on.

In analyzing that foundational mythology, Liulevicius emphasizes the importance that a sense of being geographically and culturally "in-between" the West and the East assumed in German imaginings of what it means to be German. A recurring theme in Liulevicius's study is the inherent ambivalence of the East in the German cultural imaginary. The German myth of the

²⁴ "Important thinkers of the European Enlightenment had postulated Eastern Europe as the counterpoint to the progress of Western Europe towards reason and reform. In the German lands, because of their central location, this broader European 'philosophical geography' took on a specific regional character. German thinkers adopted a position that was opposed both to Eastern Europe and to the dominant cultural power of France, and asserted that the Germans had a national mission of their own, which was represented by the culture that was seen as defining German national identity at this stage" (69).

²⁵ "Ideology bound the participants in these efforts with the Poles, as many were middle-class liberals and academics, and felt that the political cause of their ideals in Germany corresponded to the Polish hopes. With the collapse of the revolt, efforts were redoubled to aid the thousands of Polish refugees who passed through Germany to exile mainly in France and Britain" (73).

East, Liulevicius argues, is founded on paradoxical “combinations of attraction and repulsion” (6). According to Liulevicius, this myth, like so many other frontier narratives, functions by “celebrating the unlimited possibilities and expansive spirit of eastern regions, while also identifying them with potential perils” (6). Furthermore, according to Liulevicius, an enduring dilemma for the German cultural discourse of the East was the fact that the East was both without and within German lands. Easterly borderlands within the borders of Prussia, and later Germany, represented a source of instability, of internalized promises and perils of the East (4).

Additionally, as the historian Gregor Thum elaborates in his introduction to the essay collection *Traumland Osten: Deutsche Bilder vom östlichen Europa im 20. Jahrhundert*, the East has fueled German cultural fantasies, reflections, and comparisons more than any other geographic space (7).²⁶ Eastern Europe and the manner in which that space figures in the German cultural imagination, Thum writes, represents the single most important source of raw material for crafting definitions of German identity (7). Indeed, Thum argues, “ohne den Bezug zum östlichen Europa sind die Deutschen, ist Deutschland im 20. Jahrhundert nicht zu denken,” for one of the most potent tenets of Germandom is a sense of intermediacy (7). Germans, Thum maintains, view themselves as being between East and West, as alternately a bulwark against rabid socialism and as transmitters of Eastern wonders to the West. The idea of the East, moreover, writes Thum in his essay “Mythische Landschaften. Das Bild vom ‘deutschen Osten’ und die Zäsuren des 20. Jahrhunderts,” served as a tonic for the German imaginary in coping with the stresses of modernity and recurrent disenchantment with the West. Indeed, “der ‘deutsche Osten’ bot sich seit dem ausgehenden 19. Jahrhundert als

²⁶ “Kein geographischer Raum hat die Deutschen im 20. Jahrhundert so sehr in seinen Bann gezogen wie der Osten Europas. Kein Raum hat ihre Phantasie mehr angeregt, vermochte sie gleichzeitig so sehr in Schrecken zu versetzen wie mit Hoffnung zu erfüllen. Auch hat sie kein Raum mehr herausgefordert zu Urteilen und Kulturvergleichen. Kein Raum schließlich schien den Deutschen als Bezugspunkt besser geeignet, um ihre eigene Kultur und um ihre Rolle in der Welt zu definieren” (7). Thum, Gregor. “Ex oriente lux – ex oriente furor. Einführung” *Traumland Osten: Deutsche Bilder vom östlichen Europa Im 20. Jahrhundert*. Ed. Gregor Thum. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006. 7-15. Print.

Projektionsfläche für antimoderne und antiwestliche Sehnsüchte an” (209).²⁷ The so-called “German East” offered German thinkers and writers a space onto which they might project their desires for a counterweight to modern and Western pressures. This kind of engagement with the East renders literature of the German-Polish borderland a representative example of German literary interaction with modern ambiguity and ambivalence. Poland and the East are strongly implicated in German understandings of and responses to modernity.

Though the borderland is essential for the maintenance of German identity as *German*, that same liminal space, however, poses a certain danger to Germanness. Borderlands represent an unstable environment, ruled by ambivalence and ambiguity, where the German can get lost, become diluted, and even cease to be German. The space in-between represents a forum for cultural conversion away from the German and into the Slavic, the Polish. The borderland is perceived simultaneously as both a stronghold of Germanness and as its most vulnerable outpost. In the novels discussed in this dissertation, German literature often finds itself caught in the web of tensions spun by a concurrent requirement of the borderland’s ambivalence and ambiguity in order to sustain itself, and a desire to eliminate the threat posed by such liminal spaces.

The Need for New Identities

These novels are brought to bear on these in-between places out of a need to create or maintain the German sense of self. The borderland may seem to bring on an identity crisis, but usually the crisis has already taken hold much closer to home. In these works, as is often the case in nineteenth-century fiction, there is an atmosphere of family crisis, of needing to replace or buttress paternalistic structures in the face of modernity’s corrosion of interpersonal relationships which satisfy basic human needs for intimacy. A common motif in these novels is

²⁷ Thum, Gregor. “Mythische Landschaften. Das Bild vom ‘deutschen Osten’ und die Zäsuren des 20. Jahrhunderts,” *Traumland Osten : Deutsche Bilder Vom Östlichen Europa Im 20. Jahrhundert*. Ed. Gregor Thum. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006. 181-212. Print.

the bringing together of people from disparate German regions to form a new, national family in the borderland. In times of social upheaval, the family romance is comforting and fosters a sense of belonging among readers. The borderland, a site of constant encounters with difference, is a place where families are formed and broken. I draw here on Susanne Zantop's arguments in *Colonial Fantasies*. Her central thesis concerns the "colonial romance." This construct begins as a fantasy of intermarriage and thus de facto legitimacy to territorial expansion in the New World. Over time, this trope morphs into a "positive master fantasy" with benevolent whites caring lovingly for their dark-skinned colonial children. Zantop's work is a master study on the power of literature to create "a collective individuality," a family of readers, and strongly informs my conceptualization of literary imaginings of new communities (4). I examine works which react to social malaise by building new familial constructs on sturdier foundations. Those constructs may or may not be based on blood, for the ambivalence and ambiguity of the borderland allows for a certain amount of wiggle room in social ties. In these novels, a character may find or lose his or her identity in concert with or in spite of their loss or acquisition of family.

Each of these novels comes at the crisis and dilemma of identity in a different way depending on that text's understanding of how a sense of belonging is best created, fostered, or altered. In Gustav Freytag's *Soll und Haben* (1855), for example, we observe the socialized nature of identity, and the proper sense of self is achieved by way of the protagonist's individual journey to an existing group: the German bourgeoisie. Theodor Fontane's *Vor dem Sturm* (1878) deals with the paradoxical nature of identity as well as identity as the collective effort of German society as a whole. By contrast, Clara Viebig's *Das schlafende Heer* (1904) obsesses over the vulnerability and contagion of identity at the individual level. Finally, in Bolesław Prus' *Placówka* (1886), a Polish village must renegotiate its collective identity and remold its social structures in order to survive in the modern world. In these works, a foray into the borderland is

a kind of laboratory of identity which offers an opportunity to reimagine the building blocks of community.

Critical Interlocutors

The construction of identity in such liminal communities in German-Polish borderlands has won increased attention of late in academic circles. The 150th anniversary of Gustav Freytag's *Soll und Haben*, for example, was celebrated with an anthology of essays edited by Florian Krobb.²⁸ Katja Mellmann, in her essay in a separate volume, "Detoured Reading': Understanding Literature through the Eyes of Its Contemporaries: A Case Study on Anti-Semitism in Gustav Freytag's *Soll und Haben*," compared *Soll und Haben*'s dramatic effect on the collective perception of Poles versus its much lesser impact on contemporary views on Jews.²⁹ The controversial nature of Freytag's novel has meant that it has not had to struggle for critical attention in post-WWII literary studies, and recent treatments of the work by Christine Achinger and Hans J. Hahn devote more detailed attention to the role played by German-Polish relations in the text.³⁰ Other critical endeavors, such as the volume of conference proceedings of the Theodor Fontane Society, *Fontane und Polen, Fontane in Polen* (2008), or Alexandra Dunkel's recent monograph *Figurationen des Polnischen im Werk Theodor Fontanes* (2015), have entailed the renewed analysis of canonical authors such as Theodor Fontane in terms of their literary relationships with Polishness.³¹ Indeed, historians and literary critics alike have

²⁸ Krobb, Florian, ed. *150 Jahre Soll und Haben: Studien zu Gustav Freytags kontroversen Roman*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005. 239-54. Print.

²⁹ Mellmann, Katja. "Detoured Reading': Understanding Literature through the Eyes of Its Contemporaries (A Case Study on Anti-Semitism in Gustav Freytag's *Soll und Haben*." *Distant Readings: Topologies of German Culture in the Long Nineteenth Century*. Ed. Matt Erlin and Lynne Tatlock. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2014. 301-31. Print.

³⁰ Achinger, Christine. *Gespaltene Moderne: Gustav Freytags Soll und Haben Nation, Geschlecht und Judenbild*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007. Print; Hans J. Hahn. "Die 'Polenwirtschaft' in Gustav Freytags Roman *Soll und Haben*." *150 Jahre Soll und Haben: Studien zu Gustav Freytags kontroversen Roman*. Ed. Florian Krobb. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005. 239-54. Print.

³¹ Aust, Hugo, and Hubertus Fischer, eds. *Fontane und Polen, Fontane in Polen: Referate Der Wissenschaftlichen Frühjahrstagung Der Theodor Fontane Gesellschaft E.V. Von 26. Bis 29. Mai 2005 in Karpacz (Krummhübel)*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2008. Print. I have unfortunately been unable to obtain a copy of Dr. Dunkel's monograph as of the drafting of this introduction. The publisher's website offers this summary: "This study addresses the textual modeling of the Polish language in the works of Theodor Fontane, examining diachronic shifts as well as

begun to examine the creation of the imaginary German East. Maria Wojtczak's *Literatur der Ostmark: Posener Heimatsliteratur (1890-1918)* (1998) and Kristin Kopp's *Germany's Wild East: Constructing Poland as Colonial Space* (2012) represent vital contributions to contemporary understandings of German-Polish literary relations, particularly as regards their construction within popular genres such as the "Ostmarkenroman."³² Especially formative for my arguments in this dissertation has been research published by two Polish literary scholars who have had particularly long careers as scholars in German-Polish literary relations. Hubert Orłowski's seminal treatise on Poles in German-language literature, *Polnische Wirtschaft*, represents one of the most commonly cited works on Polish characters in the German literary imaginary.³³ Izabela Surynt has also published widely on German-Polish literary relations in both German and Polish, particularly on Gustav Freytag's depiction of Poland in his literary and journalistic publications, and on the image of Poland in German journalism more generally.³⁴ In addition to the works by Gregor Thum and Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius cited above, the scholarship of Polish cultural historian Wojciech Wrzesiński (*Sąsiad, czy wróg?* [Neighbor, or Enemy?]) has also greatly informed my thinking regarding German and Polish cultural images of one

thematic and narrative constants. Against the backdrop of Poland's conflicted connection with Prussian history, the author shows that across genres, Poland was made into a major political-aesthetic phenomenon in Fontane's texts, a subject suspended between attraction and repulsion." "Figurationen Des Polnischen Im Werk Theodor Fontanes." *Figurationen Des Polnischen Im Werk Theodor Fontanes*. De Gruyter, 01 July 2015. Web. 02 June 2016.

³² Kopp, Kristin Leigh. *Germany's Wild East: Constructing Poland as Colonial Space*. Ann Arbor, MI: Univ. of Michigan, 2012. Print; Wojtczak, Maria. *Literatur der Ostmark: Posener Heimatsliteratur (1890-1918)*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 1998.

³³ Orłowski, Hubert. *Polnische Wirtschaft: zum deutschen Polendiskurs der Neuzeit*. Wiesbaden : Harrassowitz, 1996. Print; Orłowski, Hubert. "Stereotype der 'langen Dauer' und Prozesse der Nationsbildung." *Deutsche und Pole: Geschichte, Kultur, Politik*. Lawaty, Andreas and Hubert Orłowski, eds Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2003. 269-79. Print ; Orłowski, Hubert. *Z modernizacją w tle: Wokół rodowodu nowoczesnych niemieckich wyobrażeń o Polsce i o Polakach*. [With Modernization in the Background: Reflections on the Origin of Modern German Notions about Poland and Poles]. Mała Biblioteka 7. Poznań: PTPN, 2002. Print.

³⁴ Surynt, Izabela. *Das "ferne", "unheimliche" Land: Gustav Freytags Polen*. Dresden: Thelem, 2004. Print; Surynt, Izabela. *Postęp, kultura, i kolonializm: Polska a niemiecki projekt europejskiego Wschodu w dyskursach publicznych XIX wieku* [Progress, Culture, and Colonialism: Poland and the German Project of the European East in Public Discourses of the nineteenth Century]. Wrocław: Wrocławskie Wydawnictwo Oświatowe, 2006. Print.

another.³⁵ As it traces the evolution of Polish depictions of “the German” Wrzesiński’s hefty tome centers around the ambivalence inherent in the Polish understanding of this particular Other. “Germans’ positive traits,” he writes, “were connected with civilization and culture, however they were diluted by simultaneously observed vices and values of these same Prussians located above all in the framework of national politics, and seemingly at variance with the system of moral values of contemporary Germans” (37). Key to the various shapes Polish views of the Germans would take is this coexistence of admiration of German social cohesion and success in educational and economic undertakings, and of an (understandable) aversion to Prussian/German aggression in European politics and in interactions with Poles in particular. Prominent Polish cultural figures from Adam Mickiewicz to Bolesław Prus to Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz expended much ink in speculating as to the sources of German vice and virtue with a view to better understanding Poland’s national predicament and possible rejuvenation.

Chapter Breakdown

My dissertation consists of four chapters with each chapter devoted to a different novel. I have organized my chapters in the chronological order of the German novels in each pairing as a matter of logistical convenience, and I have paired the single Polish novel, *Placówka*, with its German thematic counterpart, *Das schlafende Heer*.

I begin with the bestselling German-language novel of the nineteenth century. Gustav Freytag’s *Soll und Haben* (1855) intervenes decisively in broader cultural issues of the day, depicting the rise of the bourgeoisie. Chapter 1, “‘In dem Grenzlande’: Poland as the key in policing and establishing the borders of German bourgeois identity in Gustav Freytag’s *Soll und Haben*” examines the engagement of Freytag’s debut novel with anxieties towards the

³⁵ Liulevicius, Vejas Gabriel. *The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009; Wrzesiński, Wojciech. *Sąsiad, czy wróg? : ze studiów nad kształtowaniem obrazu Niemca w Polsce w latach 1795-1939*. [Neighbor, or Enemy?: from Studies on the Shaping of the Image of the German in Poland in the years 1795-1939]. Wrocław : Wydawn. Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2007. Print ; Wrzesiński, Wojciech. *Wokół Stereotypów Niemców i Polaków*. Wrocław: Wydawn. Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1993. Print. Historia, v. 114.

rapid industrialization and social changes brought on by modernity in German lands. Poland and Polishness play a critical role, I contend, in the novel's establishment and maintenance of German bourgeois identity, as well as in the work's mechanisms for managing ambivalence and ambiguity. In so doing, Freytag makes Polishness a key part of what it means to be a member of the German bourgeoisie.

The prism of history, it seems, permits a more nuanced engagement with issues of cultural identity in the justification of German national existence. Chapter 2 is entitled "‘Wie es damals Mode war’: Inscribing history and cultural identity into the Oderbruch in Theodor Fontane's *Vor dem Sturm*." In my analysis, I demonstrate that Fontane sets up four spheres of German identity construction, each with a different level of comfort in dealing with the inherent ambiguity and ambivalence of the Mark Brandenburg. The result is a revelation of the paradoxical nature of identity itself.

I have organized chapters 3 and 4 into a separate section entitled "Eastward Bound: A Comparative Study of German and Polish Novels of German Settlement in the East." This section takes on the literary treatment of late nineteenth-century German settlement in the East. It should be said upfront that neither *Placówka* (1886) nor *Das schlafende Heer* (1904) constitutes an objective depiction of this migration. Indeed, the strength of literature lies in its presentation of the subjective. Nevertheless, both novels present German and Polish characters in even-handed fashion. Both *Placówka* and *Das schlafende Heer* field complex German and Polish characters side-by-side, each with his or her own set of virtues and vices, often with an intricate web of personal history which informs their actions in the main plot. This balance renders these works instructive nodes of the literary treatment of ambivalence and ambiguity in the German-Polish borderland.

In chapter 3, "No Man's Land: Negotiations of Germanness in the Province of Posen in Clara Viebig's *Das schlafende Heer*," I turn my attention to Viebig's innovative appropriation of the *Ostmarkenroman*, a popular genre concerned with Posen to imagine a Germany unified

on a cultural and human level. *Das schlafende Heer* symbolically unifies culturally disparate regions through emissary characters and the reimagining of physical spaces. In Chapter 4 “‘For You are a Roving Nation’: the Wandering German in Bolesław Prus’ *Placówka* [The Outpost]” I look at Prus’ creation of a novelistic parable to illustrate the importance of coming to terms with the various forms of ambiguity and ambivalence introduced into a small Polish village by the sudden onslaught of the modern world.

Through my analysis of the varied approaches that these novels take in their engagement with the German-Polish borderland, I demonstrate literature’s capacity to provide us with an alternative philosophy of ambivalence and ambiguity. In spite of, or perhaps as a result of, its relationship with that ambivalence and ambiguity, each of these works makes productive use of the tensions in liminal spaces.

CHAPTER 1: “IN DEM GRENZLANDE”: POLAND AS THE KEY IN POLICING AND ESTABLISHING THE BORDERS OF GERMAN BOURGEOIS IDENTITY IN GUSTAV FREYTAG’S *SOLL UND HABEN*

The world of Gustav Freytag's novel *Soll und Haben* (1855) centers on the nucleus of Traugott Schröter's *Kolonialwarengeschäft*.³⁶ In the novel's opening pages Anton Wohlfart journeys to the provincial capital to take up an apprenticeship in the firm. As the young protagonist is introduced to the inner workings of the business, it is his first entry into the firm's storeroom that makes one of the most indelible impressions on his mind:

Es war ein großes dämmriges Gewölbe im Parterre des Hauses, durch Fenster mit Eisenstäben notdürftig erhellt, in welchem die Warenproben und kleinen Vorräte für den täglichen Verkehr lagen...Fast alle Länder der Erde, alle Rassen des Menschengeschlechts hatten gearbeitet und eingesammelt, um Nützliches und Wertvolles vor den Augen unseres Helden zusammenzutürmen. Der schwimmende Palast der ostindischen Kompanie, die fliegende amerikanische Brigg, die altertümliche Arche der Niederländer hatten die Erde umkreist...alle hatte ihre Flügel gerührt und mit Sturm und Wellen gekämpft, um dies Gewölbe zu füllen. Diese Bastmatten hatte eine Hindufräulein geflochten, jene Kisten war von einem fleißigen Chinesen mit rot und schwarzen Hieroglyphen bemalt worden, dort das Rohrgeflecht hatte ein Neger aus Kongo im Dienst des virginischen Pflanzers über den Ballen geschnürt... Hundert verschiedene Pflanzen hatten ihr Holz, ihre Rinde, ihre Knospen, ihre Früchte, das Mark und den Saft ihrer Stämme an dieser Stelle vereinigt. Auch abenteuerliche Gestalten ragten wie Ungetüme aus dem Chaos hervor: dort hinter dem offenen Fass...ruht ein unförmiges Tier- es ist Talg aus Polen, der in die Haut einer ganzen Kuh eingelassen ist... (60)

Anton stands awed among the piles of exotic wares. He imagines himself on the shore of a tropical sea, “die er nur aus seinen Träumen kannte,” and in the following weeks delves into a variety of books describing the inhabitants of these distant lands (61). The rich detail of the physical description found in this excerpt is unusual for the narrative style of the novel. This attention to detail here illustrates the importance of these colonial imports not only as the lifeblood of Schröter's business affairs, but also for Anton's sense of place in the world, and for

³⁶ Gustav Freytag (b. 1816, Kreuzburg [today Kluczbork in Poland], d. 1895, Wiesbaden).

daily life in Germany.³⁷ Indeed, the narrator relates that “[e]in großer Teil der Kaufleute in der Provinz versorgte sich aus den Magazinen der Handlung mit Kolonialwaren und den tausend guten Erzeugnissen der Fremde, welche uns *ein tägliches Bedürfnis* geworden sind”(51, my emphasis). Schröter’s firm supplies a myriad of smaller merchants who distribute these little foreign luxuries that common folk can no longer do without. Moreover, Anton’s own journey to become the quintessential bourgeois man is set in motion by Schröter’s yearly gift of imported coffee and sugar to the Wohlfart family (8).³⁸ Schröter’s firm then, is really one in a series of knots binding ordinary Germans to one another by means of these foreign goods. Anton joins an enterprise which fulfills a daily need of the people in the province. As we will see in the arguments below, moreover, trade in luxury goods serves as a potent creator of networks and identity in the world of *Soll und Haben*. Finally, this quote also contains one of the first references in the novel to a crucial linchpin in the structure of this identity, to the key coordinate in this constellation: Poland. This monstrous object, a cow skin filled with Polish tallow, a sort of macabre reconstitution of the butchered creature, looms in the shadows of the storeroom, presaging in silence the potential threats and treasures of German interactions with Poland. As we will see, Poland unites and acts on the other points of reference for German identity, the other groups of “foreigners” in the novel: the aristocracy and the Jews.

The treatment of the stereotypical Jewish figures is the more obvious narrative crux of Anton’s social development in *Soll und Haben*. After all, our hero is pitted against a primary antagonist who is a manipulative, greedy, and ruthless Jewish peer. However, Poland plays a key, though more subtle role in the construction of German bourgeois identity. Indeed, Poland is referenced in the very first sentence of the novel when Anton’s hometown is described:

³⁷ Although “Germany” as such did not exist until 16 years after the publication of *Soll und Haben*, this is the term used by the novel throughout, and as such it is the term I will use in my analysis.

³⁸ “Das war ein unscheinbares, leichtes Band, welches den Haushalt des Kalkulators mit dem geschäftlichen Treiben der großen Welt verknüpfte; und doch wurde es für Anton ein Leitseil, wodurch sein ganzes Leben Richtung erhielt.” (8)

“Ostrau ist eine kleine Kreisstadt unweit der Oder, bis nach Polen hinein berühmt durch ihr Gymnasium und süße Pfefferkuchen, welche dort noch mit einer Fülle von unverfälschtem Honig gebacken werden” (5).³⁹ The notoriety of the protagonist’s hometown is conveyed to the reader in terms of its relation to Poland.⁴⁰ Several critics have interpreted the so-called “Polish episodes” of the novel as a forum for the contemplation of contemporary German problems such as emigration, colonization, and an increasingly volatile proletariat, while allowing for a flattering contrast between chaotic Poland and orderly German lands. I shall argue, however, that Poland brings more to the novel’s cultural project than a negative *Gegenbild*. Freytag’s Poland is in fact the cornerstone of German identity, and assumes a productive role in the construction of the German sense of self.

Mechanisms of control are important for the cultural work that *Soll und Haben* seeks to accomplish, and Poland lies at the center of *Soll und Haben*’s two main narrative strategies as a novel for dealing with ambivalence and ambiguity. Key to both strategies is the establishment and maintenance of borders and engagement with the borderland. The first of these is the family romance.⁴¹ The plot of *Soll und Haben* shunts characters back and forth until all characters find themselves in the appropriate geographical location. Some of these figures, specifically the German bourgeois and nobility, are fortunate enough to acquire new families in their newly found places of belonging. Other groups, such as Poles and Jews, are excluded from explicit involvement in the family romance paradigm. The second strategy which *Soll und Haben* uses to

³⁹ The narrator appears more keen on the sweet pepper cake than the good schools of Ostrau (and indeed, who can find fault with this preference), lovingly describing the filling of purest honey.

⁴⁰ The action of *Soll und Haben* first moves to Poland itself when Schröter and Anton travel there to secure goods whose safe transportation to Germany has been jeopardized by the outbreak of a revolt. Anton returns to Poland later to manage the Polish estate of the noble von Rothsattel family when they must leave their lands in Germany due to mounting debts. There, he sets about reviving the dilapidated holdings, and even finds himself in the midst of a second uprising.

⁴¹ I do not use the term “family romance” in a psychoanalytical sense. Rather, I draw on the ideas articulated in a lecture by Michael McKeon on the early English novel which McKeon views as tending to resolve in the creation of new family arrangements for the protagonist. McKeon, Michael. “The Origins of the English Novel in the Parody of Family Romance.” Critical Speakers Series. UNC-Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC. 6 Mar. 2013. Lecture. This lecture is also available online here: <http://englishcomplit.unc.edu/programs/critical-speakers-series>

engage with uncertainty is the conversion of identity ambiguities into physical realities. Elements of bourgeois identity become tangible in the form of the colonial goods trade in Breslau. Trade routes represent physical manifestations of the maintenance of the various axes of German bourgeois identity. Trade gives the bourgeoisie economic, cultural, and as we shall see, national purpose, even serving as a tool of cultural conversion. The novel almost seems to deliberately seek out ambivalence and ambiguity by engaging with border provinces and borderlands. Dwelling in such liminal spaces fuels the novel's need to anchor itself in such a tightly controlled space as the colonial wares storeroom. Trade also provides a means of coping with the ethnic and geographic ambivalence of the borderland and the ambiguity of what it means to be German. And yet for all the anxiety provoked by entering into the borderland, the risks posed by the foray into liminality are outweighed by the potential rewards. For what it means to be German emerges even more clearly when the novel puts German boots on the ground in Poland. Ultimately, it is Poland which acts in defense of German bourgeois gender identities, and removes potential threats to German bourgeois men and women to a safe distance from the center. Interactions with Polish space, especially as pertains to the distribution of commodities, lead to the creation of the bourgeois family. Poland enables the romantic resolution of *Soll und Haben*, underwriting new structures of belonging amidst the social changes of modernity.

The preoccupation of this bestselling novel with the construction of German bourgeois identity at the expense of Others has long been a fruitful topic of analysis for literary scholars. Critics of all stripes have debated whether *Soll und Haben* and its author should be regarded as essentially anti-Semitic; in reading the novel, the reason for this focus becomes abundantly clear. From the start, a contrastive narrative parallel is established between the life paths of two main characters – that of the upstanding German boy Anton, and the scheming Jewish boy Veitel Itzig. As Anton rises up the ladder of the reputable bourgeois firm, Itzig becomes involved in increasingly shadier and at times malicious business dealings. He is clearly meant from the

beginning to be the prime antagonist over whom Anton must triumph in the end. The other central Jewish characters are depicted only slightly better.⁴² The narrator's tone in describing them varies, but ultimately concludes in a virulent tirade. The current consensus among critics largely aims to recognize the complexity of Freytag's own political and social views and to avoid wholesale condemnations of author or text. For example, scholars seek to draw out the less obvious anti-Jewish tendencies. As may be seen in analyses such as Christine Achinger's or Klaus Christian Köhnke's, current research seeks to avoid reducing the novel to a simple "Yes" or "No."⁴³ In Freytag's novel, Jews are condemned for being intrinsically associated with a non-bourgeois method of doing business, an association which the novel presents as natural and unproblematic.⁴⁴ Just as there are two trajectories of character development, so are there two methods of distributing goods – the Jewish, for profit, and the German, which sees the distribution as an end in itself. As exemplified in the final arguments of Achinger's text, the various attempts to indict or clear Freytag seem to be a symptom of literary criticism's efforts to come to terms with the Holocaust (343-344). More work has also been done on *Soll und Haben*'s influence on ethnic perceptions in the novel's own time. In her recent study, Katja Mellmann examined the reception of *Soll und Haben* in order to empirically determine the

⁴² Hirsch Ehrenthal, Itzig's first employer, is nearly as dishonest a businessman as the younger man, and Itzig's landlord Löbel Pinkus is a smuggler. Madame Ehrenthal, appears as a shallow woman concerned only with material gain, her daughter Rosalie as a vain, flirtatious girl, and her brother Bernhard is an endearing, but out-of-touch with reality scholar.

⁴³ Köhnke, Klaus Christian. "Ein antisemitischer Autor wider Willen. Zu Gustav Freytags Roman *Soll und Haben*". *Conditio Judaica: Judentum, Antisemitismus und deutschsprachige Literatur vom 18. Jahrhundert bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg. Interdisziplinäres Symposium der Werner-Reimers-Stiftungs Bad Homburg*. Eds. Hans Otto Horsch, Horst Denkler. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1989. 130-47. Print.; Achinger, Christine. *Gespaltene Moderne: Gustav Freytags Soll und Haben Nation, Geschlecht und Judenbild*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007. Print.

⁴⁴ "Wie schon beim Adel und bei den Polinnen und Polen ist auch hier der Unwillen beziehungsweise die Unfähigkeit zur , deutschen Arbeit'entscheidend. Während allerdings Adel und Polen sich von deutschem Bürgertum in dieser Hinsicht vor allem durch die mangelnde Bereitschaft zur Arbeit überhaupt unterscheiden, mangelt es den jüdischen Figuren keineswegs an Fleiß und Disziplin, sondern spezifischer am Sinn für die Arbeit in der *deutschen* Weise, an Sinn für Arbeit als moralischer Imperativ Staat als Mittel zum Erwerb, als ordnungs- und gemeinschaftsstiftende Aktivität, nicht als Beförderung der eigenen wirtschaftlichen Interessen, als produktiv, nicht profitabel, als Selbstzweck, nicht als Mittel" (Achinger 167).

novel's socio-cultural impact on attitudes towards Jews among its readers. Mellmann found that while Freytag's novel was reflective of common anti-Semitic prejudices at the time, it did not especially intensify or enhance the dissemination of those views.⁴⁵ Indeed, many critics accused Freytag of only portraying Jews as stock characters, types, caricatures (307). The novel offered its readers a distorted view of Jews, many critics felt, since the "good Jew" counterbalance to Freytag's Jewish villains was largely absent. Where the novel did have significant cultural impact was in its negative depiction of Poles and Slavs (311). *Soll und Haben* did, Mellmann argues, negatively influence contemporary attitudes towards those peoples. Whereas contemporary reviews of the novel criticized Freytag's mostly negative depiction of Jewish characters for not fulfilling an author's duty to advance tolerance, those same reviewers wished for Freytag to be more polemical in his portrayal of the Poles. One critic, Mellmann recounts, "criticizes Freytag only for reducing the conflict to a merely materialistic one and failing to demonstrate the moral supremacy of the Germans" vis-à-vis their Polish adversaries (311).

In my analysis of the role which family plays in *Soll und Haben*, I also draw in part on Susanne Zantop's work in *Colonial Fantasies*.⁴⁶ In working with this novel, I maintain that we may certainly recognize at play in *Soll und Haben*, elements of what Zantop terms a kind of positive "master fantasy" (123). During the novel's first excursion to Poland, Schröter describes the Slavs as a people incapable of statesmanship, and the narrator reframes Polish history as the legacy of German merchants and craftsmen. Their arrival in the Polish village of Rosmin lays the foundation of true liberty and social progression for the Poles. Unlike in the New World colonial

⁴⁵ "I would say in sum that *Soll und Haben* is to be considered a stage rather than a step in the long history of German anti-Semitism—that is, it sure had in itself *reproduced* anti-Semitic stereotypes (which is awful enough) but it did not in any empirically documented way *specifically enhance or popularize* anti-Semitic tendencies among contemporaries. It rather *coexisted*, for several decades, with the many other manifestations of various forms of nineteenth-century anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism before, beside, and after its appearance" (314). Mellmann goes on to say that, "While the novel could indeed be used as a cheap source of affirmation for already fierce anti-Semites...in the literary world its anti-Semitic potential seems rather to have been held in check in the majority of cases" (314-315).

⁴⁶ Zantop, Susanne. *Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family, and Nation in Precolonial Germany, 1770-1870*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1997. Print.

plantation “families” that Zantop treats, however, the Poles of *Soll und Haben* are to be tied to the German collective through bourgeois trading networks. Furthermore, in contradistinction to the slaves and indigenous peoples in the novels that Zantop considers, Poles do not join that network as the metaphorical children of the German masters on the spot, as it were. I take from Zantop the view of the family as a rhetorical narrative device for communicating a certain understanding of the world, especially in the engagement with cultural Others. In literature, I contend, the family represents a powerful means for organizing space into new collective identities and configurations. The family crafts physically and symbolically proximate communities. As I will show in this chapter, the aristocratic family that is formed through the novel acts in support of the German bourgeois family romance. That new noble family does not function as the head of a German-Polish colonial family dynamic. This function results from a desire to exclude Poles from the German bourgeois family, and to keep Polishness out of Germanness even as the former is crucial to the latter. In *Soll und Haben*, Poles are integrated through the more impersonal and regulated cycle of the trade in colonial goods, rather than as the children of the German bourgeoisie.

In this chapter, I delineate the crucial and varied roles that Poland and Poles play in the maintenance of German bourgeois identity. Poland not only defines German bourgeois identity ethnically, but also geographically, historically, culturally, economically, and in terms of gender. Potential threats and competitors on these fronts are removed to or neutralized on Polish soil. Jews are contained and alienated by Poland and the loss of the “symmetry of defeat” in the text.⁴⁷ Ultimately, it will become clear that in using Poland as both a stage and a tool for the creation of German identity, Freytag places it at the heart of his novel, and by extension, at the heart of the German sense of self. Just as bourgeois families consume and integrate the

⁴⁷ Köhnke discusses the loss of the symmetry of defeat in relation to the single greatest revision to *Soll und Haben* before publication. Originally, the German nobility were to join the Jewish characters in ignominy and only the German middle class was to emerge triumphant. The later addition of the second Polish episode, with its redemption of the German aristocracy protects them from the doom they once shared with their Jewish counterparts.

Kolonialwaren into the fabric of themselves and their daily lives, so does *Soll und Haben* integrate Polishness into the definition of Germanness. Viewing identity as both a system of oppositions and a search for boundaries, I demonstrate the specificity of the Polish contribution to German bourgeois identity. I shall describe Poland's role in shaping Germanness in relation to three other threats to German culture: the Jewish characters, the nobility, and the idea of America. On the one hand, Poland assumes a productive role by establishing international and domestic boundaries for the German bourgeoisie, and on the other, the novel rejects all idealistic ties to Polish culture in order to affirm the identity of bourgeois men and women. In doing so, however, the novel affirms the centrality of Polishness in what it means to be German. The Polish borderland defines Germanness, and Anton, the boy from the city "unweit der Oder," journeys to the heart of the provincial capital to become the epitome of the rising bourgeoisie.

I investigate these questions in a four-part analysis. In the first section, I examine Poland's important role as counterweight in the dual periphery of *Soll und Haben*'s geographic imaginary. I begin by outlining the manner in which Poland serves to police the external borders of Germany and by extension Germanness by examining the specific locations in which the Polish episodes of *Soll und Haben* take place. I then demonstrate how Poland is crucial to the construction of German bourgeois identity as a dumping ground for those to be excluded from it. The second portion of this chapter examines Poland's role in protecting this identity from the cultural and demographic threats posed by America. In Part III, I analyze the importance of the Polish episodes in the creation of the bourgeois family. I examine the construction of gender identity in the novel and the way in which the events in Poland serve to shield German bourgeois masculinity and femininity from the attractiveness of the nobility. In this same vein, *Soll und Haben* works to protect German gender identity by dismantling the images of "der edle Pole" and "die schöne Polin" familiar to German readers of Freytag's day. Finally, I examine the novel's treatment of Polish history and cultural identity, focusing on the discrediting of the 1846 and 1848 revolts and the depiction of German cultural dominance in Poland as a national

mission. Polish history is depicted as a history of German bourgeois trade networks and the egalitarianism of these enterprising German merchants and craftsmen. Over the course of this analysis, it will become clear that Poland is instrumental in the construction and preservation of German bourgeois identity in the novel. Poland, although geographically on the periphery of Germany, is in fact a crucial thread interwoven throughout the text, and lies at the very heart of *Soll und Haben* in Germanness itself.

I. Securing the Borders of Germanness

One manner in which Poland acts as a creator of German identity in the novel is in defining the German cultural space by excluding external and internal foreigners. These exclusionary measures enable *Soll und Haben* to manage anxieties associated with the ambiguous nature of German identity and space in the time before “Germany” was a political reality. The specific Polish localities chosen to appear in the plot furnish this identity with geographical and cultural stability by attempting to depict the problematic and ambiguous borders of this Germany-to-be as fixed, or for that matter, as actually being in existence. These borders delineate the boundaries of Germanness, keeping at bay external foreigners – the Russian and Austrian empires. Furthermore, Poland serves as a containment area for internal foreigners – Jewish and aristocratic characters. By the novel’s end, the only central characters who remain standing as it were, in the capital, are members of the German bourgeoisie. Those outside of this identity purview are either destroyed or remain in Poland. Freytag’s choice of Breslau, a border city ethnically in nineteenth-century Germany is significant in this respect.⁴⁸ For there is no true Center in *Soll und Haben*. Instead, we see only a primary (Breslau) and secondary (Poland) periphery on the margins of an unimagined and absent Center-to-be. There is the “Grenzland,” the borderland, and “weiter drinnen,” further in. It is the periphery over

⁴⁸ Although Breslau is not specifically named as such in the novel, it is accepted unproblematically by leading critics as the setting for the events of *Soll und Haben*. Several clues in the novel support this conclusion. We are told that Anton is from Ostrau, “eine kleine Kreisstadt unweit der Oder”, and he goes to the “Hauptstadt” of his province to begin his apprenticeship.

which the novel obsesses, the periphery which must be stabilized and which in turn serves to embody and define German bourgeois identity.

Policing the External Boundaries of German Identity

Let us begin with the unspoken construction of external geopolitical borders in the novel. As with Breslau, Freytag veils the identities of the “real” Polish cities which he chooses to feature in *Soll und Haben*’s two Polish episodes. The sprawling city of Kraków is referred to in the text cryptically as “eine große polnische Stadt unweit der Grenze” (322) and the small town of Rosmin, where the second Polish episode takes place, is in fact, according to Marek Jaroszewski, modern-day Strzelno (85). I explain Freytag’s decision not to invoke these specific names and histories directly as resulting from his desire to convey a broader vision of bourgeois Germanness and to evoke cultural sentiment surrounding issues of identity. *Soll und Haben* is not meant to serve as a gritty “slice-of-life” tale of the German-Polish borderland. It is perhaps for this reason that most narrative detail in the novel is invested in describing the goods traded through Schröter’s enterprise. These exotic commodities represent in countable, concrete form, the essence of far-off places without the need to actually go to most of them. Nevertheless, a critical examination of the “real” places alluded to in *Soll und Haben* reveals a number of underlying insecurities in the German cultural psyche towards the establishment and policing of borders. These anxieties surrounding boundaries in turn represent a strong impetus which drives the plot of the novel forward and fuels its cultural mission.

These two Polish cities seem at first glance to be very different sorts of spaces.⁴⁹ However, a consideration of their respective histories in the late eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century reveals two important similarities which will inform our reading of the novel and help us to understand why Freytag chose these specific spaces. Both Kraków and Strzelno came to operate as border towns, and as is generally the case with border spaces, their status

⁴⁹ Jaroszewski, Marek. *Literatur und Geschichte Studien zu den deutsch-polnischen Wechselbeziehungen im. 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*. Warsaw: Krzysztof Biesaga, 1995. Print.

changed several times over the years. For while history books tend to speak of “the three Partitions” of 1772, 1793, and 1795, this term is rather too neat and obscures the complexity of nineteenth-century Polish history. In reality, there were more than three partitions, and the borders which crisscrossed over what had once been Polish sovereign territory would be redrawn, the land re-divided, several times. It is important for our investigation to note that “German” Poland in particular experienced significant alterations in its boundaries. The literary result of all of these shifts is that Rosmin (Strzelno), for all intents and purposes, was located on the border with Russia.⁵⁰ Kraków, “die insurgierte Hauptstadt,” was on the border with Austria at the time in which the plot of *Soll und Haben* takes place (340).⁵¹

This means then, that the two places in Poland which Freytag chooses to depict in his novel are located on the borders with two Others which have historically been significant in the constitution of German identity – the Russian and Austrian empires. While Anton's journey does not ever take him to either of these countries, his travels do lead him to the lands bordering them, that is to say, to the very edges of Germany. It is significant, moreover, that *Soll und Haben* entirely skips over the complicated history referred to just a moment ago. Rosmin's

⁵⁰ Strzelno was absorbed by Germany in the First Partition. In 1807, it found itself within the borders of the newly formed Duchy of Warsaw, which had been primarily carved out of the Prussian Partition. In 1815, when the Duchy ceased to exist by force of the Congress of Vienna, Strzelno was returned to Germany and found itself on the border with the Congress Kingdom. For the first fifteen years or so of its existence, the Congress Kingdom, or Kongresówka, as it is somewhat ironically known in Polish, prospered, and although it was the Tsar who wore the Polish crown, the citizens of the Kongresówka enjoyed considerably more freedom and autonomy than their countrymen in the Partitions. The situation worsened drastically with the accession of Nicholas I, and the November uprising of 1830 provided the Russian ruler with the excuse he needed to clamp down on the Congress Kingdom. While the Kingdom continued to exist in name for another 34 years, it was effectively under Russian occupation for the remainder of its existence.

⁵¹ Kraków and its environs, the site of Anton's first excursion to Poland (and likely his first excursion outside of Germany), did not lose their independence until the Third Partition in 1795, when the area was annexed by the Austrian Empire. With this Partition, Poland disappeared completely from the map of Europe. A mere fourteen years later however, Austria was forced to cede the city and surrounding territory by the Treaty of Schönbrunn. Kraków and West Galicia were attached to the theoretically autonomous Duchy of Warsaw as a reward for the Duchy's military support of Napoleonic France. Then, in 1815, at the Congress of Vienna, Kraków was given the status of Free City and was to be “under the protection” of the three partitioning powers of Russia, Germany, and Austria. As one might imagine, given the fact that Kraków was to be supervised by three autocracies, the term “Free City” was somewhat of a misnomer, and its citizens were soon to realize the limits of the autonomy promised them. Following the 1846 rising in the city, and the savage “Jacquerie” in the surrounding countryside, the Powers intervened, and Kraków became once more part of Austria.

location near the border with Russia, and Kraków's peculiar status of semi-autonomy receive no mention in the novel. Kraków is described as mentioned above, as a large city near the German border, or as “die insurgierte Hauptstadt” (340), or “die alte Hauptstadt” (348) and Rosmin too is only described in the most generic terms possible, even considering it as a tiny village. What is emphasized is that they are near *borders*. The novel's first reference to Kraków describes it in terms of a border, and the term “Grenze” appears with rapidly increasing frequency from the moment Anton and Schröter set out for the city: there is on the German side a “Grenzort” on the “Grenzfluß” (333), over which stands a “Grenzbrücke” (336), and a “Grenzdorf” on the Polish inhabited by “Grenzteufel” (343). In the second Polish episode, Anton describes Rosmin and the surrounding area as being located “in dem Grenzlande,” and passionately describes the profound effect this geographical location has on the inhabitants there (635).⁵² Germany's borders, which we know to have been in flux in the years leading up to the novel's printing, are thereby given the illusion of stability. Two ambiguous Polish spaces are thereby fixed in place so that the German borders, and by extension the borders of German identity, may be defined. The novel's obsession with borders, however, proves that there is a sense that those boundaries are inherently problematic, that the novel is insecure in the lines it attempts to draw.

Yet we must ask, why is it precisely this unstable border which *Soll und Haben* is so obsessed with pinning down? Geopolitical historical context once again provides us with a lens through which to read and better understand Freytag's novel. To nail down Germany's other

⁵² “Sie [die Ahnen] haben für sich gearbeitet, als sie uns schufen...aber wir haben jetzt Leben gewonnen, und ein neues deutsches Volk ist entstanden. Jetzt fordern wir von ihnen, daß sie unser junges Leben anerkennen. Es wird ihnen schwer werden, gerade ihnen, die gewöhnt sind, ihr zusammengebrachtes Land als eine Domäne ihres Schwertes zu betrachten. Wer mag sagen, wann der Kampf zwischen ihnen und uns beendet sein wird, lange vielleicht werden wir den häßlichen Erscheinungen fluchen, welche dieser Streit hervorruft. Wie er aber auch enden mag, davon bin ich überzeugt wie von dem Lichte dieses Tages: Der Staat, den sie geschaffen, wird nicht wieder in die Trümmer zerschlagen werden, aus denen er herausgewachsen. Wenn du gelebt hättest wie ich in den letzten Jahren, in verschiedener Tätigkeit, viel unter den kleinen Leuten, du würdest mir glauben. Noch sind wir als Volk arm, noch ist unsere Kraft schwach, aber wir arbeiten uns herauf, mit jedem Jahr wächst mit unserer Arbeit Intelligenz, Wohlstand, und das Gefühl, daß einer zum andern gehört. Und in diesem Augenblick fühlen wir in dem Grenzlande uns zueinander wie Brüder. Wenn die weiter drinnen ärgerlich miteinander straiten, wir sind einig, un unser Kampf ist rein” (635).

borders would preclude the opportunity for geographic expansion and for German unification, a project which *Soll und Haben* clearly seeks to promote. “Deutsch,” “Deutsche,” “Deutschland,” and various declinations of these words are sprinkled throughout the novel and are presented as unquestionable. Neither the noun “Preußen” nor the adjective “preußisch” appears anywhere in the novel, nor is Silesia mentioned by name, although it is in that region that much of the novel takes place. References to specific German regions are scarce in *Soll und Haben*, so much so, that even the careful eye of the *Literaturwissenschaftler* may easily overlook them.⁵³ We may observe here the construction of a particular sort of imaginary cartography, one which is clearly embedded in a nationalist political agenda.

This particular border must also be emphasized as a result of Poland's particular political situation at the time. The Polish people were spread across the borders between several different nations, defying the ethnic homogeneity within borders that is promoted by nationalism, and thereby calling those borders into question. The situation is all the more problematic given Freytag's view of Poland as a unified entity. *Soll und Haben*, as other works by Freytag, does not acknowledge the complicated political situation at the time, as we have seen above. Freytag does not seem to differentiate between the different areas of Poland.⁵⁴ The narrator refers to “Revolution in Polen” (322), not “Revolution im Freistaat Krakau” for example, and Löbel Pinkus, boarding-house owner by day, smuggler by night, “macht seine Geschäfte nach Polen zu” (214). No particular partition is mentioned, though one would expect that political borders would be of the utmost concern to one involved in illegal activities. The existence of the notion

⁵³ Fink is referred to as being from Hamburg (38), and at the very beginning of the novel, we witness a scene in which Anton converts pounds sterling into “rheinische Gulden” and “Hamburger Mark Banko” (10).

⁵⁴ Surynt notes, “Ist sich Freytag auch des unterschiedlichen staatsrechtlichen Status der einzelnen als ‘polnisch’ bezeichneten Bevölkerungsteile in Mitteleuropa und der sozialstrukturellen Differenziertheit der einzelnen Gruppen bewusst, so erscheint sein ‘Polenbild’ trotzdem als innerlich homogen, unabhängig davon, innerhalb welchen Staats- und Sozialgefüges die von ihm geschilderte Gruppe existiert” (Surynt 2004, 22).

of a “Poland” requires that the border discussed above be artificially instated in order to secure German identity. In effect, *Soll und Haben* imagines Poland onto its map.

Containing Internal Foreigners

Poland is also essential for the assurance of the “Germanness” of German identity by helping to establish another sort of border, this time within Germany. This border is drawn around the provincial capital city, which is portrayed in the novel as essentially German. To understand why it was so essential for Freytag to portray the capital in this manner, and to understand why he might have chosen to base his story in this particular city, it is useful to consider Freytag's views on Breslau, the capital of his home province of Silesia. In his journalistic writings, Freytag expresses his fear of the subversive influence of Slavic culture in Silesia, especially in Breslau.⁵⁵ “Die Spuren der slawischen...Vergangenheit,” Surynt writes, “in die das ‘eigene’ Breslau zurückfällt, rufen die offenkundige Angst des Bildungsbürgers Freytag vor der Proletarisierung (und damit auch ‘Slawisierung’) der Gesellschaft hervor” (23).⁵⁶ To Freytag's mind, residual Slavicness constitutes a threat to “his” German bourgeois Breslau through proletarianisation and renewed Slavicization. Freytag's concerns regarding the Breslau proletariat were not entirely unfounded – in the rebellions of 1848, the workers of Breslau were among the most determined groups to hold their barricades. In *Soll und Haben*, the line between Germandom and the Slavic lands is firmly preserved, and all traces of the Slavic past of Breslau are erased. Freytag's “Hauptstadt” remains distinctly German, indeed, far more German than the historical Breslau was, and is rid of those who do not fit in with the paradigm of bourgeois German identity which Freytag seeks to promote. The Slavic Poles do not venture into the capital (Breslau) in the first place and so the second part of this narrative project has two

⁵⁵ “Keine Stadt in Deutschland hat ein so zahlreiches und so demoralisirtes Proletariat, als Breslau, und ich muß hinzusetzen, in keiner Stadt ist es seit einem Jahr so furchtbar gewachsen, als hier. Das hat mehrere Gründe. Die slavische Vergangenheit Schlesiens hat seiner Hauptstadt als letztes Erbtheil eine schmutzige Armseligkeit und Mangel an Energie in den unteren Schichten der Vermögenslosen zurückgelassen” (Freytag in Surynt 2004, 23).

⁵⁶Surynt, Izabela. *Das “ferne”, “unheimliche” Land: Gustav Freytags Polen*. Dresden: Thelem, 2004. Print.

targets – the Jewish and aristocratic figures of *Soll und Haben*. When in Poland, these persons assume positive and productive or at least non-threatening roles. However, when in “the capital” (i.e. Breslau) and its environs, aristocratic and Jewish characters, in particular, are treated with extreme suspicion or in some cases, outright vilification. The “Polish option” provides a sort of external holding pen for those who do not fit the German bourgeois mold. In this manner, Poland and Polishness Germanizes the Fatherland.

That it is specifically the presence of the Jews in a German city which is problematic in the novel may be seen in the fact that the Jews which we encounter in *Poland* are not perceived as being threatening. The Jews who remain in the capital suffer crushing defeats or are at least left with dim prospects. The “Jewish threat” in the capital, which in the persons of figures such as Veitel Itzig and the various smuggling associates of the Jewish boarding-house owner Pinkus seems to originate in Poland, is neutralized in the final pages of the novel. This is accomplished through the defeat of the two most “dangerous” Jewish characters: Itzig dies a most unheroic death, drowning in the same waters where he killed his mentor Hippus. Ehrenthal is a shell of a man, “ein blödsinniger Greis” driven to madness by his son Bernhard’s death (830). His dream of buying his son Bernhard an estate (specifically the Rothsattel holdings near the capital) so that the latter might lead the life of leisure his scholarly inclinations and delicate constitution lend him to, comes to nothing, as he recounts later to his wife (830).⁵⁷ As an added bonus for the reader, Pinkus’s smuggling operation is shut down by the city authorities. He receives a long prison term and is forced to sell his boarding-house, which is taken over by “ein ehrlicher Färber” (836). The building which once housed Pinkus’ den of iniquity and the shady business dealings of Breslau will now host an honest dyer, a craftsman who works with his hands and deals in tangible commodities. The vestiges of the lives led there are swept away, the narrator notes, as “von der Galerie, an welcher einst die hagere Gestalt des jungen Veitel gelehnt hatte,

⁵⁷ “Ich habe ihm wollen kaufen ein Pfed, daß er kann darauf reiten; ich habe ihm kaufen wollen ein Gut, damit er soll leben als ein anständiger Mensch, was er immer ist gewesen” (830).

hing jetzt blau und schwarz gefärbtes Garn hinunter bis in die trübe Flut.” The dyer’s yarn hangs over Itzig’s watery grave, a sort of victory banner for the German bourgeois population (836). Even the kindly Bernhard, whom Anton considers to be his friend, perishes of a fever brought on by swimming in chilly water on the Rothsattel estate.⁵⁸ Life is perilous for the Jew in the primary periphery.

By contrast, the Jewish innkeeper on the Polish estate is an honest businessman and compares favorably with the slovenly Pole Bratzky, an untrustworthy character with “einem aufgedunsenen Branntweingesicht” (504). The innkeeper is described as “ein ältlicher Mann mit verständigem Gesicht,” and he can speak both German and Polish. Upon the arrival of Anton and Karl in Poland, the innkeeper is “der einzige Mensch, der ihnen Auskunft geben konnte und Rat schaffen in der unbehaglichen Lage” (505). The innkeeper represents their sole source of intelligence in the area and is a crucial ally. The elderly Jew is concerned for their well-being, warning them that even on their first night, unsavory characters are grumbling about the new management (512-513).⁵⁹ Anton is irritated by and distrustful of the innkeeper’s hesitance to speak frankly on the conspiratorial activities of the local Polish nobles early in his stay in Poland. Anton brushes off the Jewish man’s warning against provoking the Polish nobility (535-536).⁶⁰ However, when the brewing conflict explodes into open fighting, Wohlfart offers the man and his family protection in the castle. The innkeeper declines, worrying that he will lose everything (696). The innkeeper, as may be seen in the quote above, prefers a path of

⁵⁸ Bernhard is a bookish fellow who occupies himself with rather esoteric subject matters such as ancient Arabic and Persian poetry (237-240). He even seems to possess rudimentary knowledge of the languages of American Indian tribes (246). He is an endearing chap, but unable to engage in practical matters of business.

⁵⁹ “Ich bitte den gnädigen Herrn, vorsichtig zu sein in der Nacht, die Bauern sitzen in der Schenke und räsonieren über Ihre Ankunft; es sind schlechte Leute darunter, ich traue nicht, daß nicht einer zur Nacht einen Schwefelfaden in das Stroh steckt und Ihnen den Hof abbrennt.” (512-513).

⁶⁰ “Herr Wohlfart, wenn ich mir erlauben darf, Ihnen zu sagen meine Meinung, wozu wollen auch Sie haben einen Verdacht auf jemanden? Sie werden genug zu tun haben hier im Gut und werden brauchen die Edelleute mehr als einmal. Wozu wollen Sie sich keine machen ohne Nutzen? Existiert das Land, wo die Herren auf einen Haufen reiten und wieder auseinander und ihre Köpfe zusammenstecken und wieder auseinander. Wer sich nicht darum kümmert, der handelt am klügsten.” (535-536)

conciliation (quite understandable given his vulnerable position between two hostile groups of individuals), and he is willing to receive the approaching Polish horde as guests. However, his sympathies and those of his daughter seem to lie with the German population. For example, he refers to the German soldiers as “*unsere Soldaten*” (696, my emphasis). On his way to the safety of the castle, the estate’s German woodsman trusts the innkeeper’s niece Rebekka to not turn him in to the Polish rebels when he asks her for news of the brewing conflict. And indeed, she has already aided the German defenders by not refuting the rumors among the Polish rebels that the estate is in possession of artillery (709). Even though the innkeeper’s family serves the Polish rebels food and drink when they stop on their way to storm the Rothsattel castle, the Polish Jews offer far greater (and unsolicited) aid to the German defenders. As a result, the novel kindly keeps them from drowning and refrains from condemning them to madness or incarceration.

We can observe here a striking contrast in the narrative treatment of the Jews in the capital and in Poland. The former are viewed as a threat, and as such must be defeated for the success of the German bourgeois cultural project. While the Jews in Poland are occasionally mistrusted, German characters do also place confidence in them from time to time, and in Poland the relations between the two groups are on the whole much more amicable – even the opinionated narrator has no disparaging remarks to make. In Poland, the interests of the Jewish characters are portrayed as being more in line with the German populace than with those of the Polish peasants and aristocracy, and German and Jewish characters even think of one another's safety. The innkeeper and Rebekka are not viewed as problematic figures in the text because they are not in Germany proper. They live in the secondary periphery of German identity, just where the novel would have them be. Because they remain in the furthestmost borderland of

Germanness, these Jewish figures are not threatening. As such, they do not suffer the dismal fates of their brethren in the provincial capital.⁶¹

The Final Break with the Aristocracy

In *Soll und Haben*, there is also a move to raise the somewhat ambiguous status of an emergent bourgeoisie by moving the German aristocracy to the secondary periphery. Of the principal figures in the novel, only the German *bourgeois* characters are allowed to remain in Germany. Midway through the novel, the aristocratic Rothsattels are struck by a financial disaster of Ehrenthal and Itzig's making and find themselves in danger of losing their ancestral holdings. A tearful Lenore turns to Anton in desperation, hoping he will be able to bring their affairs in order. He in turn seeks the help of his *Prinzipal*, expecting that Schröter will readily give his aid to the troubled nobles. However, in one of the most frequently cited passages of *Soll und Haben*, Schröter refuses any aid to family he sees as "ungesund" and undeserving of rescue (486). "Glauben Sie mir," he says to Anton,

einen großen Teil dieser Herren, welche an ihren alten Familien Erinnerungen leiden, ist nicht zu helfen...Wer von Haus aus den Anspruch an das Leben macht, zu genießen und seiner Vorfahren wegen eine bevorzugte Stellung einzunehmen, der wird sehr häufig nicht die volle Kraft behalten, sich eine solche Stellung zu verdienen. Sehr viele unserer alten eingesessenen Familien sind dem Untergange verfallen, und es wird kein Unglück für den Staat sein, wenn die untergehen. Ihre Familienerinnerungen machen sie hochmütig und Berechtigung, beschränken ihren Gesichtskreis, verwehren ihr Urteil...Wo die Kraft aufhört in der Familie oder im einzelnen, der soll auch das Vermögen aufhören, das Geld soll frei dahinrollen in andere Hände, und die Pflugschar soll übergehen in eine andere Hand, welche sie besser zu führen weiß...Und die Familie, welche im Genusse erschlaft, soll wieder heruntersinken auf den Grund des Volkslebens, um frisch aufsteigende Kraft Raum zu machen (485-486).

Schröter then goes on to urge caution and to discourage Anton from becoming emotionally involved in a hopeless situation (487). There is in fact little that can be done, and the Baron's family is forced to repair to an estate he was convinced to purchase in Poland near the village of Rosmin. The nobility, like the Jews, are thus removed to Poland, where they no longer pose a

⁶¹ This differing treatment of the two groups of Jews has gone uncommented in the critical literature, with the "Polish" Jews not even receiving mention.

threat to the “gesunden Entwicklung [des bürgerlichen] Staats” (486). In this manner, German lands are left to the Germans, and more specifically, to the bourgeoisie.

Anton, however, has not yet internalized the bourgeois maxims that Schröter expounds to him, and feels bound to help the Rothsattel family. Interclass unity in *Soll und Haben* endures just a bit longer with Anton remaining deeply sympathetic to the Rothsattels’ plight for a time, and he is determined to help his aristocratic “Mitbruder” (485). Anton’s quarrel with Schröter has the effect of ushering in the second Polish episode of the novel when Anton follows the Rothsattel family to their only remaining holdings, a run-down estate in Poland.⁶² During the extreme circumstances brought about by the uprising, ethnic Germans from various walks of life do present a united front as brothers-in-arms in Poland. German farmers, shopkeepers, and nobles band together to defend the Rothsattel estate, and the colonization of Poland becomes a national mission that unites all spheres of German society. Anton proudly declares to Fink that “in diesem Augenblick fühlen wir in dem Grenzlande uns zueinander wie Brüder. Wenn die weiter drinnen ärgerlich miteinander streiten, wir sind einig, und unser Kampf ist rein” (635). As the narrator foretells at the beginning of this Polish episode, “Erst im Auslande lernt man den Reiz des Heimatdialektes genießen, erst in der Fremde erkennt man, was das Vaterland ist” (515). Germanness becomes most universally German in Poland. Poland becomes the stage where individuals may define themselves as German regardless of class. In Poland, the younger generation of the nobility is given a chance to redeem and reinvent itself in the persons of Fink and Lenore, and to be of some use to the German heartland. They will remain in Poland to conquer in the name of the German people. The remainder of their days “wird ein unaufhörlicher siegreicher Kampf sein gegen die finstern Geister der Landschaft; und aus dem Slawenschloß wird eine Schar kraftvoller Knaben herausspringen, und ein neues deutsches Geschlecht, dauerhaft an Leib und Seele, wird sich über das Land verbreiten, ein Geschlecht von

⁶² Anton says in reply to Schröter’s Social Darwinism, “Und wenn das alles wahr ist...so darf e uns doch nicht abhalten, dem einzelnen als unserm Mitbruder zu helfen, wo unser Mitgefühl angeregt wird” (485).

Kolonisten und Eroberern”(845). The aristocratic figures in the text cannot be allowed to remain in the modern bourgeois society to which they have not adapted, but they can thrive in the backward lands of Poland.⁶³ The nobility are not destroyed but relegated to the secondary periphery of Germany – incorporated, but not integrated into Germanness. Poland, then, once again serves a productive function in the novel – it is a sort of “dumping ground” for groups which Freytag wishes to remove from the narrative landscape of the capital.

Paradoxically, though interclass cooperation works most effectively in Poland, the wild East also serves to reinforce class distinctions. For though German bourgeois identity, in all its honest productivity and moderation, begins to be defined in the capital, it is not claimed by Anton Wohlfart as his own until after his second sojourn abroad. Gradually, he comes to realize that he and the Rothsattel are fundamentally different sorts of people. The narrator foreshadows this development on Anton’s second day in Poland: “Anton sollte erproben, was er besaß, und was ihm noch fehlte” (515). Accustomed to the smooth efficiency and honest sincerity of Schröter’s *Kontor*, he is offended by the Baron’s supercilious behavior towards him, and by the frosty distance that the Baroness maintains in her relationship to him (545). Though Anton was previously in awe of the glittering opulence of the aristocracy, this material luxury gradually loses its charm for him. “Früher hatte Anton die Umgebung der Familie, die Einrichtung ihres Salons, die elegante Dekoration ihres Hauses gern bewundert,” the narrator tells us, “Aber jetzt, wo er die fremden Vögel täglich sah, kamen sie ihm langweilig vor, und an den Stuben war ihm bald nichts interessant, als daß er selbst die erste Einrichtung besorgt hatte”(545-546). The aristocratic environment, meant to dazzle and evoke wonder, is stripped of its façade when

⁶³ Traugott Schröter predicts early on that Fink is destined not for the bourgeoisie, but to lead others: “Sie waren nicht hier an Ihrem Platz,” he tells Fink as the young aristocrat resigns from his post “Das durfte mich nicht verhindert, zu beurteilen, daß Sie für eine andere, immerhin größere Tätigkeit vorzügliche Befähigung haben. Sie verstehen ausgezeichnet, zu disponieren und die Menschen unter Ihrer Herrschaft zu bringen, und besitzen eine ungewöhnliche Energie des Willens. Für solche Natur ist das Pol im Kontor nicht der rechte Ort” (310).

transplanted to the *Slawenschloss*. Familiarity breeds contempt and daily interactions breed boredom.

As Anton interacts with the Rothsattel family on a daily basis, he becomes more and more aware of their shortcomings as individuals. He is struck by their ignorance of basic *Gemeinwissen*, and begins to doubt their projected aura of superiority. He sees “daß sie eine völlig andere Bildung besaßen als er. Und bald nahm er sich die Freiheit, zu behaupten, daß ihre Bildung nicht die bessere war”(546). They have a poor knowledge of history, and lack any sense for geography, current events, or contemporary political structures. He comes to the realization that the Rothsattels are not his *Mitbrüder*, but that they are utterly different from himself: “Bald erkannte er, daß seine Hauptgenossen alles, was die Welt ihnen entgegentrug, von einem Standpunkte betrachteten, den er nicht hatte. Überall maßen sie, ohne es selbst zu wissen, nach den Interessen ihres Standes“(546-547). Anton and the Rothsattels look at everything from a completely different standpoint. The views of this aristocratic family are influenced purely by class interests, Anton thinks to himself.⁶⁴ The implication of these musings is that the mindset of the German bourgeoisie is the default setting, the more rational and objective *Weltanschauung*, while the mindset of the aristocracy is prejudiced, biased. In particular, Anton sees the Rothsattels as lacking any sense of national dignity or loyalty. He is shocked by the blindness their class identification results in when the Rothsattels insist on renewing their acquaintance with the Tarowski family. Anton suspects of plotting a rebellion against the German settlers. “Es schien ihm nicht männlich und nicht würdig, daß die deutsche Familie sich so hingebend unter Gegnern bewegte, welche wahrscheinlich in diesem Augenblick Feindliches gegen sie und ihr Volk im Sinne hatten”(556). Anton does not trust the Polish nobility for a moment, and finds the Rothsattels persistent lack of national awareness incomprehensible and unendingly frustrating.

⁶⁴ The reader has doubtless already realized that Anton Wohlfart is somewhat irony-deficient.

The take-away here is that only the bourgeoisie is nationally minded, and that the nobility cannot be trusted to be the primary representatives of German national interests.

The extent to which social standing dominates the Rothsattels' basis for judging individuals becomes amply clear when Anton's friend Fritz von Fink comes to Poland. The family quickly warms up to the energetic young nobleman: "Die Familie fühlte, daß er einer der Ihrigen war, es war eine stille Freimaurerei unter ihnen. Und auch Anton fragte sich, wie es möglich sei, daß Fink, der neue Gast, ganz als ein alter Freund des Hauses erscheine und er selbst als ein Fremder"(637-638). It is as if Fink and the Rothsattels belong to the same secret society, as if they are all automatically in league with one another. Rank, not character, forms the basis upon which the Rothsattel family forges close ties. Anton's own sacrifices and constant industriousness fails to earn him the respects that Fink instantly commands by virtue of name and birth. Anton comes to realize that his earlier fascination with the nobility was a blemish upon his better judgment.⁶⁵ The final straw comes when the Baron questions Anton's reputation and fires him.⁶⁶ Though Anton knows that the Baroness and Lenore will likely convince the Baron to keep him on, Anton resolves to quit his post, rejecting once and for all his "jugendliche Schwärmerei" (747). He realizes that the aristocratic Rothsattels will never accord him the acknowledgement he seeks, nor the respect he deserves. In Poland, Anton comes to identify with the bourgeoisie, the class he was always meant to champion, and his time there is crucial in his development as a character. Once the young Ostrauer understands himself as a member of the German bourgeoisie, Anton realizes that he must return to Germany, that the capital is where he belongs. In Poland, the last ties are severed between the nobility and the bourgeoisie and certain

⁶⁵"Und wieder kam etwas von dem Respekt in seine Seele, den er als Jüngling vor allem gehabt hatte, was elegant, vornehm und exklusiv erschien. Aber diese Empfindung war nur noch ein leichter Schatten, der über sein klares Urteil hinflieg."(638)

⁶⁶ "Er war entlassen, in der rohesten Weise entlassen, seine Redlichkeit war bezweifelt, dieser Bruch war unheilbar. Wohl mochte der Freiherr andern Sinnes werden, und Anton wußte, nach wenigen Stunden würden die Vorstellungen der Frauen den kranken Mann umstimmen; aber für ihn selbst gab es keine Rückkehr, er mußte fort" (746).

class differences are demonstrated to be irreconcilable. Not only does Poland remove the non-bourgeois figures from the capital, it ensures that Anton Wohlfart, the future of the German bourgeoisie, returns to Germany secure in his own self-confidence. A change of scene creates a forum for social self-discovery.

In summary, it is Poland which enables German identity to construct itself on the basis of external and internal foreigners. The “Polish Option” protects the integrity of the German primary borderland by establishing a secondary periphery in which those to be excluded from it may exist without threatening the cultural identity of the more central periphery. That Poland performs this function means however, that it is intrinsically a part of that primary periphery. For the primary periphery cannot be so without a more marginal periphery to contrast itself with – every “center,” or central periphery, needs a borderland to act as both a buffer zone and to establish the identity of the center as the center. Poland allows German bourgeois identity to simultaneously exclude and include the nobility and the Jews. German bourgeois identity “consumes” as it were, these two groups, but in a controlled fashion. Like the *Kolonialwaren* that Anton gazes at wonderingly, the movement of the aristocratic and Jewish characters in *Soll und Haben* is restricted to the *Grenzland* of Poland. The Austrian and Russian empires are moreover kept at bay without any German lands needing to serve in the role of outermost periphery. Instead, German lands wholly belong to the primary periphery of a center yet to be imagined. In this manner, Breslau, center of that primary periphery, is able to maintain the pretense of being utterly and completely German. Ironically, the novel’s push to smooth out ambivalences of class and ethnicity, to secure the position of the German bourgeoisie, is made possible through engagement with the ambivalence of the German-Polish borderland.

II. Eliminating the Threat of the Lure of America

The idea of Poland, moreover, acts as a bulwark against the temptation of immigration to America, a potent cultural upheaval which threatened to deplete Germany of its most enterprising individuals. At the time that the novel was published, there were serious concerns

in intellectual circles about the number of Germans immigrating to America in search of adventure and economic opportunity. We know from Freytag's wealth of journalistic writings that the author of *Soll und Haben* was no exception. In the novel, the untamed Polish landscape offers "das Versprechen männlicher Abenteuer" (Kopp, "Ich stehe" 237), and indeed the most exciting scenes in the novel take place in Poland. Both Kristin Kopp and Izabel Surynt point to Freytag's use of current discourses which portrayed Poland as a sort of "Wild East" to parallel the American Wild West. Freytag thereby offers a ready adventurous alternative to emigration to America (Surynt, "Das ferne" 269-272).⁶⁷ This proposal was echoed by others of Freytag's time such as the philosopher Friedrich List.⁶⁸ On a specifically literally level, *Soll und Haben* itself represents an alternative to the "Amerika-Romane" that were so popular at the time of its publication (Surynt, "Das ferne" 269).⁶⁹ The Poles are even described in terms reminiscent of Indians. The Pole who attacks the cousin of one of Anton's colleagues dances a "Kriegstanz" (Freytag, "Soll" 323), and the hordes of Polish *Sensemänner* march under the leadership of "Häuptlingen" (Freytag, "Soll" 322). Germans need not look further than their next door neighbors for untamed lands in need of cultivation and wild heathens in need of civilization.

⁶⁷ For example, "Dieser übertriebene Vergleich, der im für diese Gestalt charakteristischen ironischen Ton geäußert wird, ist über die Andeutungen der ‚indianischen‘ Kriegeslust hinaus, die offensichtlich auch einen braven deutschen Bürger überkommen könne, vornehmlich als ein Signal zu lesen, dass eben hier, im Genzland, Kriegsspiele und Abenteuer, eine ‚andere‘ Existenzform noch gelebt, eine Bewährung und Selbstbehauptung in extremen Situationen noch erfahren werden können. Dies hat wohl in Verbindung mit der Kolonisation und dem Kulturauftrag als ein alternatives Angebot für die Auswanderung nach Amerika zu gelten" (271).

⁶⁸ Henry Cord Meyer writes that "In 1842 List investigated the prospects of German emigration into southeastern Middle Europe. He estimated that German colonists could be sent there at one-fifth the cost of traveling to America. The Habsburgs state possessed three-fourths of the Danube; with its co-operation German settlers might continue to populate its lands, as they had begun to do in the days of Rory and Teresa, and to move beyond as well. A network of railroads and canals integrated with the Danubian waterway would be the framework for a German-Hungarian economic area extending southeastward from the North and Baltic Seas," and then goes on to cite List: "We have our backwoods as well as the Americans...the lands of the Lower Danube and the Black Sea, all of Turkey, the entire East beyond Hungary is our hinterlands." (13).

⁶⁹ "Auf der thematischen und strukturellen Ebene zeigt dieses Werk auffallende Übereinstimmungen mit den zu dieser Zeit gern gelesenen Amerika-Romanen und kann daher selbst als ein Beitrag zu der Diskussion über die deutsche Auswanderung nach Übersee gewertet werden" (269).

Consequently, Poland is not only an adjacent dumping ground for those rejected by Germanness in *Soll und Haben*. Some ethnic German characters voluntarily set out to make a new life for themselves in Poland. In *Soll und Haben*, aristocratic, working-class, and bourgeois characters directly reject American ways for German traditions. They choose to settle in Poland to continue the German cultural mission rather than seeking their fortune in America. America is referenced early and often in *Soll und Haben* – part of Veitel Itzig’s education involves reading about “die Eroberung Amerikas” (117), and Anton eagerly devours *The Last of the Mohicans* (142). At a company picnic, Anton and his friend Fink, the son of a wealthy Hamburg businessman and at this point in the novel a *Volontär* in Schröter’s firm, debate the merits of German sentimentality and *Gemütlichkeit* versus the practical mindset of the American, with Fink eventually conceding the debate to Anton (268-276). When his dishonest, but wealthy uncle dies, however, and leaves him valuable landholdings in the United States, Fink is asked by his father to travel across the ocean to oversee his new business affairs. Fink sees no option but to go, and asks Anton to set out for America with him. Anton turns down Fink’s offer on Schröter’s recommendation, saying sadly but firmly, “Zürne mir nicht, daß ich dir nicht folge; ich bin eine Waise und habe jetzt keine andere Heimat als dies Haus und dies Geschäft” (311). Anton cannot leave the only place where he feels he can belong. As an orphan, Anton feels that the only Heimat, the only home left to him are Schröter’s venerable *Patrizierhaus* and business. Anton acts also in deference to lessons learned as a child at his father’s knee. For even when Schröter points out the potential opportunities that Anton could be passing up, the young man sticks by his decision. “Mein guter Vater hat mir oft gesagt,” he replies, “Bleibe im Lande und nähre dich redlich. Ich will nach seinen Worten leben” (312). This is a novel which is very literally serious about *Vaterland* – it is Anton’s *father* who bade him remain in Germany. Fink departs, unable to understand why Anton will not come with him. The young aristocrat carries

with him as well the blessing of Sabine, Schröter's younger sister, and her wish that he might not forget whence he came.⁷⁰

Although Anton does not choose to go to the New World, he is willing to see matters through in Poland. The loyal Karl Sturm, the son of the strongest of Schröter's loaders, follows him. Fink seeks Anton out there following his disillusionment with his business ventures in America, and is impressed with what Anton and Karl have accomplished there. "Ihr habt euch respektabel benommen," he admits grudgingly, "Das hätte kein Amerikaner und kein anderer Landsmann durchgesetzt, in so verzweifelter Lage lobe ich mir den Deutschen"(640). An American would have been pragmatic, and abandoned the Polish wasteland as a lost cause not worth the effort. Only a German would take on such an impossible task for its own sake, Fink remarks. Indeed, Germans embrace such despairing circumstances, Fink observes, "Je dürrer die Zeit, desto grüner die Hoffnung"(635). For the sentimental German, hope springs all the greener in bleaker times. In spite of this ironic cynicism, Fink proves willing to risk his life in the German colonial cause, whereas he went to the extreme measure of sinking his own company to free himself from his American ties. And whereas emigration to America is discouraged in the novel, Anton enthusiastically champions the German colonization of the East.⁷¹ Fink and Karl even actively and diligently recruit settlers for the estate from Anton's home province, announcing proudly to the Baron: "Hier sind Ihre Pioniere, mein Chef"(664).⁷² Settlement in

⁷⁰ "Wenn Sie in dem deutschen Bürgerhaus, in dem Tun meines Bruders je etwas gefunden haben, was Ihnen ehrenwert erschien, o so denken Sie in der Fremde daran. In dem großartigen Leben, das Sie erwartet, unter den mächtigen Versuchungen, in dem wilden Kampf, den sie führen werden, entdecken Sie niemals gering von unserer Art zu sein" (316).

⁷¹ "Wer nicht gezogen wird, soll gerade jetzt nicht das Land verlassen... In einer wilden Stunde habe ich erkannt, wie sehr mein Herz an dem Lande hängt, dessen Bürger ich bin. Seit der Zeit weiß ich, weshalb ich in dieser Landschaft stehe. Um uns herum ist für den Augenblick aller gesetzlicher Ordnung aufgelöst, ich trage Waffen zur Verteidigung meines Lebens, und wie ich 100 anderen Netzen in einem fremden Stamm. Welches Geschäft auch nicht, den einzelnen, hierhergeführt hat, ich stehe hier als einer von den Eroberern, welche für freie Arbeit und menschliche Kultur einer schwächern Rasse die Herrschaft über diesen Boden abgenommen haben" (633-634)

⁷² "Wir haben in deiner Heimat getrommelt und gelockt wie Werbeoffiziere. Zur Arbeit allein wären sie schwerlich gekommen. Die grauen Jacken und jede Güte haben's ihnen angetan. Einige gedienten Männer sind darunter," Fink says to Anton (664).

Poland as an alternative to the Wild West of America is buttressed by co-opting the terms and titles associated with the rough-and-tumble American frontier. An Ostrauer in Rosmin is no less a pioneer than an adventurous greenhorn in a wagon train bound for Oregon.

Ultimately, Fink finds that he is content to remain permanently on the Rothsattels' Polish estate. In Poland, Fink once and for all acknowledges the merits of German culture and the German way of life, declaring his rejection of America. In choosing to remain in Poland over America, Fink confirms the enduring value of Germanness, even in the face of the rise of "ein mächtiger, freier Staat" in the New World (268). Poland therefore also acts as a sort of demographic safety valve that serves to preserve the essence of German culture – the German people. Internal insecurities of inferiority to America within Germanness are eliminated as German culture finds a cultural mission that only it can accomplish – the reinvention of Poland. Again, peripheral Poland establishes a border to maintain the integrity of the German primary periphery, in this case from the encroachment of America.

III. The Defense of Bourgeois Family Romance

It is in Poland, moreover, that the success of the bourgeois family romance is secured. The novel's first foray into Poland lays the groundwork for the new bourgeois family by forging new bonds between characters as they triage imperiled trade relationships. The second Polish episode of *Soll und Haben* reinforces the bourgeois family romance by orchestrating an aristocratic family romance and removing the temptations of beautiful aristocratic men and women to Poland. It is in Poland that bourgeois identity is most explicitly defined in terms of gender. Anton's fondness for Lenore von Rothsattel motivates him to leave Schröter's firm to manage her family's estate near Rosmin in Poland. However, Wohlfart's attraction to Lenore's dazzling beauty gradually fades over the course of the second Polish episode, and he begins to prefer the demure deportment of Sabine, Schröter's younger sister. In Poland, bourgeois femininity triumphs over aristocratic femininity, and aristocratic femininity is tamed and harnessed for cultural reproduction. More broadly, German womanhood triumphs over Polish

womanhood. In addition, while bourgeois masculinity does not directly defeat its aristocratic counterpart, Fink, the most dashing young nobleman in *Soll und Haben*, is left behind in Poland and married off. Freytag also seeks to invalidate the positive images of “die schöne Polin” and “der edle Pole” which had appeared in earlier German literature, thereby discrediting popular notions of Polish femininity and masculinity in favor of German gender identities. Even as Poles are sexualized, their physicality and sensuality is associated with filth and dirt, eliciting disgust in the German observer. Throughout the novel, romantic love and physical attraction play a very minor role, or are even overtly discouraged.

By way of introduction to the familial creation process set in motion in the first Polish episode, it is crucial that we note the tremendous influence which the distribution of physical commodities wields in forging bonds in the German middle class of *Soll und Haben*. Poland and the imperative of maintaining the flow of goods strengthen bourgeois familial relationships. Anton first travels to Poland with Schröter to rescue wagons stranded during the outbreak of a rebellion. This risky endeavor represents a fiscal medical necessity in light of the urgent terms in which the narrator describes the rebellion. “Das Schreckenswort ‘Revolution in Polen’” induces fiscal paralysis, the narrator tells us: “Das Land war wie ein gelähmter Körper, langsam rollte das Geld, dies Blut des Geschäftslebens, von einem Teile des großen Leibes zu dem andern” (322). The interplay between nation and trade is explained in corporeal terms. The flow of money is as essential to societal health as is proper circulation in the human body. Merchants such as those in Schröter’s firm bear responsibility for the steady distribution of wealth and goods to the many national limbs. The “Zuckungen” of Polish nationalism threatens the health of the German body and the German bourgeoisie’s cultural mission. In such dire circumstances, Schröter and Anton must intervene to restore the flow of goods and capital by rescuing the abandoned wagons. It later turns out that those wagons belong to Sabine Schröter, a secret partner in her brother’s colonial goods business. Sabine and Anton’s marriage therefore follows an earlier union through the flow of fiscal blood. Poland and the bourgeois commercial mission

bring Sabine and Anton together as lovers. Poland promotes Anton up from business trip companion and incorporates him more permanently into the familial unit of the firm as partner. The family that trades together stays together.

The grandiose delights of the German aristocracy constitute perilous distractions on the route to completion of the aforementioned German bourgeois family romance and cultural mission. Our bourgeois hero is confronted with the temptation of the beautiful young noblewoman at the very start of *Soll und Haben* and only a few chapters later, we learn that Sabine has fallen under the spell of the nobleman Fritz von Fink. That these passions are unacceptable is made clear by Traugott's Schröter's self-imposed role as bourgeois gender policeman. When he suspects Sabine's affections for Fink, he takes her aside to voice his disapproval. She tearfully reassures him that she knows any union to be impossible: "Ich bin ein Bürgerkind, und er wird nie ganz zu uns gehören. Ich bin so stolz wie du. Immer habe ich das Gefühl, daß zwischen ihm und mir eine Kluft liegt, so weit und tief, daß alle Liebe sie nicht auszufüllen vermöchte"(131). Sabine is proud of being a child of the bourgeoisie, she tells Traugott, and Fink will forever be an outsider in that society. All the love in the world means little in the face of such an unbridgeable gap. When Fink does propose to Sabine, she turns him down, but for good measure, the novel removes her temptation first to America, then to Poland. The *Bürgerkind* is punished for her folly by temporary heartbreak, when it seems that Anton is to leave her home forever to follow his love for Lenore: "An einer andern hing Antons sehndendes Herz," she realizes with regret, admitting that "sie selbst war ihm eine Fremde geblieben, die einen Entfernten geliebt und verschmäht hatte und jetzt im Witwenschleier auf das verglühende Gefühl ihrer Jugend zurücksah" (489). Sabine sees that she wasted her time longing for and despising the long-gone Fink, a love which, by her own admission can never be. In so doing, she remained a stranger to the man she now realizes would make her happy. Now, when the rightful object of her affections is to disappear into the vast Polish wilderness, our heroine realizes her mistakes and prepares to don a widow's weeds to mourn her youthful foolishness.

Anton, unlike Sabine, acts on his romantic feelings, a decision which ushers in a series of ominous closing scenes to the first half of the novel. When Anton's infatuation with Lenore leads him to resign from the *Kontor*, Schröter is angry, bitter, and disappointed that the young man would throw away his entire future for a woman. "Ein Paar Mädchenaugen ziehen ihn ab von uns," he remarks darkly to Sabine, "es erscheint ihm als ein würdiges Ziel seines Ehrgeizes, Geschäftsführer der Rothsattel zu werden"(488-489). Schröter feels that Anton is foolish to follow a pair of pretty eyes to Poland and to reduce his ambitions to the goal of estate agent for the Rothsattels. In this exchange, where Schröter expresses his disapproval of Anton's career change, Schröter makes specific reference to Lenore's physical beauty. To Schröter's mind, romantic attraction, especially of a physical nature, does not constitute a motivational factor worthy of a sensible businessman.

Schröter need not have worried, however, for the second Polish episode provides a forum where Anton can learn to identify as a bourgeois man. In Poland, Anton's gradual disillusionment with aristocratic femininity primes him for membership in the bourgeois family romance. Lenore's pretty eyes gradually lose their power over Anton. Indeed, his love for Sabine grows in abstentia as his infatuation with Lenore wanes. Even as Anton finds Lenore more attractive at the beginning of his employment in the Rothsattel family, he begins to become aware of some of her shortcomings:

Auch Lenore war nicht so, wie er sie geträumt hatte. Immer hatte er in ihr das vornehme Fräulein verehrt... Jetzt hörte sie ihm auf, eine vornehme Erscheinung zu sein. Er kannte die Muster ihrer Spitzenärmel persönlich und sah sehr gut einen kleinen Riß im Hauskleide, den die sorglose Lenore lange nicht beachtete. Er hatte die wenigen Bücher, die sie mitgebracht, gelesen und war in der Unterhaltung oft um die Grenzen ihres Wissens herumgegangen. Ihre Aussprüche imponierten ihm nicht mehr... Sie hatte nicht soviel gelernt als ein anderes Mädchen, das er kannte, und ihr Empfinden war durchaus nicht so gebildet (549-550).

Although he still is entranced by her beauty, he is beginning to see the flaws, literally the tiny tears in her façade. Even as Anton admires "den ganzen Zauber ihrer blühenden Jugend," he is surprised at how little Lenore knows of the world at large (550). Lenore's witty remarks, Anton

notes, are not as impressive as Sabine's studious intellect. He is able to quickly peruse the few books she does bring with her and to run circles around her in their conversations. At the ball on the Tarowski estate, Anton becomes even more deeply disenchanted with the sparkle of aristocratic femininity that sets aside national interests for the sake of a party. He appreciates more fully the calm sensibility of bourgeois women such as Sabine. After the festivities at the Tarowski estate, he is deeply discontented and very much the embodiment of disillusionment: "Schweigsam lenkte er den Schlitten, und immer wieder dachte er daran, daß *eine andere, die er kannte*, sich unter den Spinnweben im Hause der Feinde niemals in der Masurka geschwenkt hätte"(557, my emphasis). Sabine, he muses, would never have twirled around the cobwebbed ballroom of Polish nobles suspected of fomenting anti-German rebellions. Anton comes to view Lenore and her kind as frivolous and irrationally passionate, and even un-German until this passion is harnessed as vital fertility from which "eine Schar kraftvoller Knaben herausspringen [wird], und ein neues deutsches Geschlecht...sich über das Land verbreiten [wird]" (845). The threat which aristocratic womanhood represents to bourgeois masculinity as a means of seduction away from class interests, and to bourgeois femininity as competition, is brought under control during the Polish episodes. In Poland, German bourgeois gender identity finally becomes sure of itself. The two young aristocrats remain there, and Anton returns to the capital where he will eventually become engaged to Sabine – the correct pairing according to class is accomplished. Both male and female bourgeois figures are tempted by the nobility, and both successfully resist.

Though Poland is the scene where conflicts of interest between the bourgeoisie, Jews, and aristocracy are worked out to the benefit of the first of these, the novel does perform significant work towards rejecting Polishness as well. Part of that project involves "unmasking" certain Polish gender identities. In the case of Polish masculinity, the novel refers to the motif of "der edle Pole," a tragic, noble figure. This aspect of the novel does double duty in that it also serves to exclude French cultural influence from the German sphere. As Izabela Surynt points

out, Freytag seeks to discredit this, in his opinion, romanticized view of the Polish upper class. On the young, eager revolutionary who assists Anton and Schröter in the Polish rebels' capital, she writes, "Seine Unmündigkeit, französische Ver-Bildung, Triebhaftigkeit und inhumane Behandlung der Schwächeren gelten hier, ungeachtet gewisser sympathischen Züge, die ihm von Freytag verliehen werden, offensichtlich der Diskreditierung und Demontage des Bildes vom 'edlen Polen'"(273). The Polish nobleman may extend Anton and Schröter every courtesy while they are in his charge, but this gallantry is marred by the Pole's maltreatment of his subordinates and his own immaturity. The narrator's evaluation of the Polish youth is even more damning: "So war er mit seiner Umgebung kein unpassendes Bild der Aristokratie seines Stammes, er selbst ein vornehmes Kind mit den Leidenschaften und vielleicht mit den Sünden eines Mannes" (359). This elegant child with the passions and sins of a man who has idled his time away in learning French is a fitting representative of the Polish aristocracy as a whole, the narrator informs us. True, the young Polish man remains nameless and only spends a few pages with the reader. However, the narrator's statement endows this minor character with the significant task of undoing the German reader's positive associations with Polish masculinity. Later on in the novel, French continues to lend negative connotations to Polish masculinity. *Soll und Haben* associates Polish men's mastery of the French language with hostility towards Germans in Poland and with the only slightly lesser evil of Slavic economic incompetence. For example, the dubious activities of the noblemen in Rosmin are partially conducted in French (596), and Fink disparagingly refers to some of their attackers as "Messieurs" (733). Interesting for our analysis is the fact that knowledge of the French language, hitherto viewed generally as a sign of education and sophistication, is portrayed in the novel as an anachronism. For it is English, the language of business, that Anton chooses to learn, not French. During the first Polish episode the narrator draws attention very specifically to the fact that Anton and Schröter sometimes converse in English while in Poland, so as to keep their exchanges a secret. French,

by contrast, is used exclusively by the Polish characters.⁷³ Fluency in French is considered a sign of backwardness, whereas mastery of the English language is indicative of “Karrierebewußtsein” (A. Anderson, 215). Polish men, in other words, are little more than overgrown, educationally stunted children.

The associations which are attached to French and English as foreign languages parallel those which are attached to the nobility and the bourgeoisie as social groups (A. Anderson, 214). It is the practically-minded bourgeoisie which will enjoy success in the modern world, not an aristocracy which foolishly clings to outdated traditions. Schröter bluntly points this out to Anton when the latter feels sympathy for the Rothsattels. “Der Freiherr soll dahin gearbeitet haben,” he says admonishingly, “sein Eigentum aus der großen Flut der Kapitalien und Menschenkraft dadurch zu isolieren, daß er es auf ewige Zeit seiner Familie verschrieb. Auf ewige Zeit! Sie als Kaufmann wissen, was von solchem Streben zu halten ist” (486). The aristocracy is out of touch with modern economic developments and the Baron fails to grasp that it is impossible to guarantee eternal wealth without hard work. The differing choices in foreign language on the part of the German bourgeoisie and the Polish nobility therefore reflect an essential difference in class mentality. Anton observes firsthand the impracticality of the aristocratic education; he is astounded that the Baroness chooses to read such a hack writer as the French author Chateaubriand (546). It is essential however, to remember, as mentioned previously, that in *Soll und Haben*, bourgeois values are enshrined as essentially *German* values. Therefore, when Schröter and Anton, as principal representatives of the German bourgeoisie in the novel reject French influence, they do so as representatives of German culture in general. And indeed, as “leichte französische Bonmots” flit across the ballroom on the

⁷³ As Antje S. Anderson points out, one of the attractions of the work of Charles Dickens for Freytag was the fact that, in his view, “die Dickensbegeisterung in Deutschland den schädlichen Einfluß französischer Literatur voll ‘socialistischer Ideen und frecher Hetärengeschichten verdrängt habe’” (209). Anderson, Antje S. “Ein Kaufmann ‘von sehr englischen Aussehen’: Die literarische und soziokulturelle Funktion Englands in *Soll und Haben*.” *150 Jahre Soll und Haben: Studien zu Gustav Freytags kontroversen Roman*. Ed. Florian Krobb. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005. 209-24. Print.

Tarowski estate, we witness the scene which marks the beginning of Anton's final awakening to the superficiality of the nobility and his own bourgeois and German gender identity (555).

Unlike the Rothsattels, Anton is not taken in by the Tarowskis' façade, and it is through his eyes that the fiction of the "edle Pole" is unmasked for the fiction Freytag held it to be, and that French cultural influence is ultimately rejected.

Soll und Haben also sets out to dismantle the positive character type of "die schöne Polin," the female equivalent to the literary motif of "der edle Pole." Polish women, as Hubert Orłowski points out, had been frequently portrayed in German literature as being well-dressed, dazzlingly beautiful, sometimes seductive, and not uncommonly as "staatskluge" individuals. These women, he writes, played an important role in the struggle for Polish independence in literary understanding, especially as the mother of revolutionaries (Orłowski, "Polnische Wirtschaft" 217).⁷⁴ This motif is touched on briefly in *Soll und Haben* with regards to the Polish women who attend the dance on the Tarowski estate. Lenore is especially attentive in preparing herself for the party, for as she tells Anton, "die Mädchen dort sind reizend, und die Polen sollen nicht sagen, dass wir uns schlecht neben ihnen präsentieren" (553). The vibrant German aristocrat takes greater care with her appearance so that she may measure up to Polish standards. The Polish women are also described as being passionate dancers (557). Even in this scene, however, these women do not attract the same fascination from the Germans that Orłowski refers to. Anton, as a matter of fact, spends the majority of the party glowering at these women from the sidelines of the dance floor. Perhaps a tad jealous that he cannot join in, Anton disapproves intensely of Lenore's enthusiastic mingling with Polish women and her mimicry of wild Polish dance. From his point of view, "die schöne Polin" does not constitute an ideal for a young German woman to aspire to. As Anton watches Lenore emulate her Polish peers, he comes to despise his physical attraction to her.

⁷⁴ Orłowski, Hubert. *Polnische Wirtschaft: zum deutschen Polendiskurs der Neuzeit*. Wiesbaden : Harrassowitz, 1996. Print.

The novel has an ambivalent relationship to Polish female sexuality, and German men sexualize Polish women even as the novel seeks to counter the sensuality of those women. It is in Freytag's portrayal of two Polish peasant women that we find the most explicit disqualification of "die schöne Polin" and the most striking exclusion of Poles from the family romance paradigm. Through those two Polish female characters, Freytag disassociates any connotations of sexual attractiveness from Polish women. Suska, the *Polin* whom we get to know best in the novel, is a girl rather than a mature woman. She is referred to as "die Kleine" and "das Polenkind" inherently diminutive and, in the case of the second term, genderless and sexless appellations (719-720). When the besieged Germans are running out of water, she is sent to fetch some. A gallant Polish soldier helps her to fill her buckets, and asks her to leave the backdoor open for him and his compatriots. Suska, of course politely declines, and says as much in her report to Anton. She takes offense when the estate's woodsman implies that she might be willing to let the one Pole in if he came alone in order to sleep with him that night (720). Unsurprisingly, she is the most positively portrayed Polish woman in the text. Not so positively depicted is the wife of the Polish farmhand on the estate. She is described as "eine unsaubere Dame ohne Schuhe und Strümpfe, deren Milchschrüsseln die reinigende Macht des Wasser wohl selten erfahren hatten," a most unattractive figure (516). The Polish woman's unkempt personal appearance is reflected in the filth of her home. In the description of the Polish farmwife, we see far rawer physicality in the narrator's adjectives and the aspects of her appearance that he focuses on. The narrative lens, which generally ignores the appearance of the bourgeois characters as irrelevant, lingers on the Polish woman's bare feet on the earthen floor of her home and, in a thinly veiled innuendo to her breasts, comments on the unwashed milk bowls scattered about.⁷⁵ The wife of the German farmer is, in contrast, the perfect picture of domesticity. She has "eine saubere Gestalt" (520) and is a welcoming hostess, who offers Anton

⁷⁵ For the uninitiated, however, it should be noted that "milk bowls" are an actual type of dish used to hold milk that has been left out for the cream to rise to the surface.

flowers (522). The dismantling of the motif of “die schöne Polin” serves therefore a constructive purpose in positively portraying German femininity. By complicating German perceptions of Polish gender, Freytag positively contrasts German family life to its Polish counterpart. It is almost as if *Soll und Haben* attempts to show the grimy cracks in the porcelain vase of Polish beauty.

However, Poland acts as more than a negative foil against which German familial dynamics can shine. Through the German aristocratic family romance in Poland, Freytag inadvertently names Poland mother and midwife to historical Germanness. Fink’s future, the narrator relates, “wird ein unaufhörlicher Kampf sein” (845). This never-ending struggle will not be Fink’s alone however, for “aus dem Slawenschloß wird eine Schar kraftvoller Knaben herausspringen, und ein neues deutsches Geschlecht, dauerhaft an Leib und Seele, wird sich über das Land verbreiten” (845). The so-called Slavic castle appears here as a metaphorical womb which will bring a band of strapping German lads into the world. This passage omits any mention of Lenore, the presumptive biological mother. Instead, the narrator substitutes the architectural monument to lost Polish historical glory into the maternal role. Polish femininity symbolically gives birth to a new generation of Germans. This vibrant German race is possible only in the context of the Polish borderland.

Poland also regulates the portrayal of Jewish family dynamics, especially as regards Jewish femininity. The Jewish Ehrental family in Breslau represents a far greater threat in the world of *Soll und Haben* than the more traditional literary combo of the innkeeper and Rebekka in the second Polish episode. As discussed above, the Jews of Breslau all meet with unfortunate ends. Rosalie Ehrental, the most prominent Jewish female character, is vehemently attacked in the final pages. Throughout the novel, Rosalie is depicted as a shallow and self-centered young woman. The moment, however, that her fiancé, and the novel’s antagonist, Veitel Itzig, meets his maker, the narrative voice turns suddenly vicious:

Lege deinen Brautschmuck ab, schöne Rosalie, wirf das goldene Armband mit Türkisen in die finstere Ecke des Hauses, wo der Moder an den Wänden sitzt und nie ein Lichtstrahl auf Gold und Edelsteine blitzt. Die Steine sollen verbleichen und das Gold unscheinbar werden im Laufe der Jahre, die Kellerasseln sollen in den Gliedern des Armrings ihr Lager aufschlagen und durch das goldene Kettengelenk schlüpfen. Langbeinige Spinnen werden darüberkriechen und werden ihre Röhre daran spinnen, um einfältige Fliegen in der Finsternis zu überraschen. Wirf das Armband weit weg von dir, denn jeder Gran Gold daran ist durch eine Schurkerei bezahlt. Zieh dein hochzeitlich Gewand aus und hülle deinen schönen Leib in Trauerkleider... Und wenn die Zeit kommt, wo die Hoffnung der Mutter dich in der Residenz sah, in lustigen Flitterwochen, da wirst du in einer fremden Stadt sitzen, wohin du fliehst, um dem Spott der Boshaften zu entinnen...Dein Los ist, einem anheimzufallen, der dein Kapital heiratet und deine Glieder mit vergnügtem Lachen in Kauf nimmt, und du wirst ihn vom ersten Tage deiner Ehe an verachten und wirst ihn ertragen, wie man einen Schaden trägt, den der Arzt nicht wegschaffen kann. Neue Gewänder von glänzender Seide wirst du tragen, und ein anderer Goldschmuck wird an deinem Arm klirren, und der Inhalt deines Lebens wird sein, als geschmückte Puppe umherzuwandeln und deinen Mann höhnisch mit andern Männern zu vergleichen (831-832).

This tirade, the longest attack on any one character, comes seemingly out of nowhere. *Soll und Haben* rarely delves into such sustained vitriol, or really, into any strong emotions. This powerful passage builds in intensity with each semi-colon, relative clause, and series, leaving little space for the reader to pause to catch a breath. In effect, this passage exacts narrative revenge before the fact. Rosalie is condemned the moment that Itzig flees their wedding, transformed in a flash from a young woman bedecked with gold, jewels, and flowers, symbols of vitality, youth, and prosperity, into damaged goods associated with rot and decay. She should cast aside her wedding jewels, the narrator declares, tossing them into a dark corner of the house where the walls are covered in mildew. The narrator gleefully imagines the gold dulling with time and the brilliant colors of the gemstones fading in a corner where no light can reach them. The narrator relishes the idea of woodlice crawling through the links in Rosalie's golden bangles and spiders will lie in wait for "simple-minded" flies on the webs they will spin on her tarnished jewelry.⁷⁶ This passage dehumanizes Rosalie in cosigning her to the realms of creeping household pests, of quotidian monstrosities. She will be driven from Breslau by scorn for her

⁷⁶ One wonders if Freytag had ever encountered any "clever" houseflies.

family and their association with Itzig, exiled in effect. She will not find true love and happiness, the narrator declares, for Rosalie will be afflicted with a husband likened to a blemish (Schaden) that a doctor cannot remove. Her husband will marry her for her money with her beautiful body thrown into the bargain. Furthermore, even when she attains material prosperity again, she will be nothing more than a doll, a plaything, an ornamental object in the eyes of her husband. She is associated with creatures and objects beneath the notice of most, with things tossed aside or crushed under foot. The cultural project of the novel cannot leave a beautiful propertied Jewish woman with favorable prospects in the capital. Her future must be preemptively destroyed and she can be given no happy ending.

We observe a striking difference in the narrative treatment of the Jews in the capital and in Poland. The former are threatening and must be defeated for the success of the German bourgeois cultural project. In contrast to Rosalie, Rebekka is left in peace to be her feisty self without comment from the narrator or that fountain of bourgeois maxims, Traugott Schröter. She holds her own in the face of the woodsman's lewd suggestions, as he implies she might be attracted to her uncle's Polish guests, "denn mit Floretten gewinnt man die Weiber" (708). When he pinches her cheeks and calls her a "hübsches Schicksel," she playfully replies that he is "ein häßlicher Schekez" and states firmly "Ich will nichts mit Euch zu tun haben" (708). The innkeeper and Rebekka are not problematic in the text because they are in the secondary borderland of Germanness. As such, they do not suffer the dismal fates of their brethren in the capital. This pairing of uncle and niece is reminiscent of Jewish father-daughter pairings in earlier German literature. The innkeeper's wife, Rebekka's aunt, though alive, makes no actual appearance in the text and is only referred to in passing. This arrangement constitutes the acceptable Jewish family dynamic in the constellation of German identity that the novel promotes.

In concluding this section, we can see that *Soll und Haben* is a novel which is deeply invested in policing the boundaries of German bourgeois gender. This cultural work depends in

great part on engagement with Poland and Poles. The distribution of colonial goods lies at the heart of the bourgeoisie's sense of self, and the imperative of maintaining that circulation inaugurates the novel's first Polish episode. Both of Anton's sojourns in Poland have the effect of drawing him into ever more intimate positions in the Schröters' business. Poland contains potential threats to the bourgeois family romance and gives birth to an aristocratic family romance which will support the distribution imperatives of the bourgeoisie. Moreover, Anton's encounters with Polish women and men debunk any positive German perceptions of Polish gender. In so doing, *Soll und Haben* emphasizes the inherent superiority of German bourgeois men and women. Finally, the second Polish episode provides us with the opportunity to observe what the novel views as acceptable Jewish family dynamics. Freytag's portrayal of the innkeeper and Rebekka contrasts sharply with the narrator's vitriolic denouncement of Rosalie. We can therefore see that what *Soll und Haben* specifically objects to is the presence of Jewish families within the boundaries of Germanness. Poland emerges in each of these instances as instrument and platform for the shaping and maintenance of German bourgeois gender identities.

IV. Denying the Legitimacy of the Polish Cause

The dismantling of positive gender images of Polish characters in German literature is accompanied by a broader denunciation of Polish aspirations to statehood and indeed Polish culture as a whole. Polish patriotic aims are discredited and shown to be window dressing for less noble goals. The revolutionary skirmishes depicted in the novel are portrayed as part of an eternal struggle between Germanic and Slavic peoples, a battle which history has destined the Germans to win. Just as the bourgeois are destined by historical mechanisms to rise above an antiquated nobility, so do the laws of history, on a broader level, foretell the success of the German cultural crusade in Poland. The invalidation of Polish identity proves to be a crucial aspect of the project to construct a viable German bourgeois identity.

In *Soll und Haben*, it is the Slavs, and specifically the Poles, who are presented as the eternal enemy of the German people. "Wir und die Slawen," Anton says sagely to Fink, "es ist ein

alter Kampf. Und mit Stolz empfinden wir: Auf unserer Seite ist die Bildung, die Arbeitslust, der Kredit," i.e., the Holy Trinity of the bourgeoisie, Amen (634). In light of this point of view, it is unsurprising that a denial of Polish nationhood should represent a crucial aspect of the novel's work. It is significant to note that only Polish culture is so explicitly rejected in the novel. While the Jewish characters do not end well, and are associated with the worst forms of speculation and trade, they are never explicitly condemned for being ethnically or religiously Jewish. Jews do appear in the novel as an ethnic and religious group, with brief references to synagogue services and abstinence from pork. In fact, though references to religion are few in the novel, it is most frequently and most negatively associated with Polish culture as a superstitious influence that impedes economic and social progress. This phenomenon moreover helps to explain Mehlmann's conclusions concerning the novel's greater influence on readers' views of Polishness compared to its impact on that same readership's perception of Jewishness. Contrasting portrayals of Jewish and Catholic religiosity demonstrate the importance that Freytag attributed, consciously or unconsciously, to Polish culture for the creation of German identity. Small wonder that this should play out in contemporary reviews of the novel.

Freytag rewrites Polish history into a tale of wild lands not civilized until the arrival of the Germans. Moreover, he distorts the history of the 1846 uprising in the Republic of Kraków and portrays the rebellion in a harshly negative light, rejecting the Polish aspirations to nationhood. This seems to reflect Freytag's subscription to a certain kind of pragmatic liberalism that triumphed in the wake of the failures of revolutionary dreams in 1848. Freytag's liberalism, as Achinger points out, seems to define the bourgeoisie in terms of its economic role rather than in terms of any political aspirations (11).⁷⁷ This understanding led many to accept authoritarian Prussia as a perhaps unfortunate, but necessary agent in the securing of domestic progress and

⁷⁷ "1855 erschienen, ist *Soll und Haben* der in seiner Zeit herausragende Versuch einer literarischen Neudefinition nationaler und bürgerlicher Identität nach dem Scheitern der emanzipatorischen Hoffnungen des Bürgertums 1848/49."

social harmony in the form of the *kleindeutsche Lösung* – as Achinger neatly sums up this viewpoint: “Zwar ist diese Position nicht mit der zu verwechseln, daß Macht Recht *schaffe*...Recht ohne Macht ist sinnlose Träumerei” (87). And indeed, as Achinger writes, “die Zentralität der Idee der Nation, die Rolle Preußens als Wahrer nationaler Interessen...sind...im Roman unübersehbar” (16). This pragmatism colors the novel’s depiction of Polish revolutionaries as foolish idealists at best, and as a bloodthirsty, self-serving mob at the worst.

Up until now, we have been examining the manner in which Freytag’s choice to include the Polish space in the novel constructively contributes to the solidification of various aspects of a German bourgeois identity. We will now consider the significance of the selective and distorted manner in which Freytag portrays Polish history and Polishness as a whole in order to specifically discredit the Polish claim to nationhood. We will see that this fictionalization of Polish history represents an important part of the cultural work which the novel seeks to perform. Polishness is ultimately condemned where it fails to conform to bourgeois norms, and especially where it threatens the lifeblood of the bourgeoisie – the transfer of goods.

In this section we come full circle in our discussion of the trade in physical goods in *Soll und Haben* as the driving force in the historical narrative that the novel puts forth to explain German-Polish relations. It is trade that has bound Germans and Slavs together in the first place, we learn, and Polish nationalism threatens to break those bonds. Such a rupture would threaten the entire purpose of the German bourgeoisie. For the passage cited in the beginning of this chapter serves as a prelude to the importance that foreignness, even delight in the foreign, “diese Freude an der Fremde,” will play in the construction of German bourgeois identity (61).⁷⁸

⁷⁸ I provide this quote again here for the reader’s convenience: “Es war ein großes dämmriges Gewölbe im Parterre des Hauses, durch Fenster mit Eisenstäben notdürftig erhellt, in welchem die Warenproben und kleinen Vorräte für den täglichen Verkehr lagen...Fast alle Länder der Erde, alle Rassen des Menschengeschlechts hatten gearbeitet und eingesammelt, um Nützliches und Wertvolles vor den Augen unseres Helden zusammenzutürmen. Der schwimmende Palast der ostindischen Kompanie, die fliegende amerikanische Brigg, die altertümliche Arche der Niederländer hatten die Erde umkreist...alle hatte ihre Flügel gerührt und mit Sturm und Wellen gekämpft, um dies Gewölbe zu füllen. Diese Bastmatten hatte eine Hindufrau geflochten, jene Kisten war von einem fleißigen Chinesen mit rot und schwarzen Hieroglyphen bemalt worden, dort das Rohrgeflecht hatte ein Neger aus Kongo im Dienst des virginischen Pflanzers über den Ballen geschnürt... Hundert verschiedene Pflanzen hatten ihr Holz, ihre Rinde, ihre Knospen, ihre Früchte, das Mark und den Saft ihrer Stämme an dieser Stelle vereinigt. Auch abenteuerliche Gestalten ragten wie Ungetüme

The foreign, the strange, serves to establish a constellation of reference points for a certain sense of self. We see here the presence of foreign bodies, the imported goods, at the heart of the sanctified embodiment of German bourgeois identity, Schröter's firm. The storeroom then is a spatial reflection of the sort of identity the novel seeks to construct. Identity construction is a juggling act, a complicated series of checks and balances – foreign objects are allowed into a culturally charged space, but their movement is carefully regulated. Goods, unlike human beings, can be predictably manipulated and organized. Schröter's deeply bourgeois firm actively imports these colonial goods, and efficiently manages their distribution into and throughout the country. Schröter's agents facilitate the eventual consumption of those wares by the public, and provide an essential service. For, as noted above, the consumption of the *Kolonialwaren*, the foreign, has become a quotidian *necessity* in the world of the German bourgeoisie, an integral part of that class' identity.⁷⁹ What we have here, then, is a physical manifestation of the essence of the bourgeoisie. For the bourgeoisie is by nature an economically defined social group, one defined by its role in business, the distribution of consumer culture, and the consumption of luxury goods. The bourgeois sense of self is based on business, not solely ethnicity, and *Soll und Haben* is above all else a *Geschäftsroman*. Just as it is the bourgeois characters who control the flow of goods, so it is they who will define Germanness. In this novel, trade, as the basis for that German bourgeois identity project, becomes intimately tied up with Polish patriotism, history, and identity.

aus dem Chaos hervor: dort hinter dem offenen Fass...ruht ein unförmiges Tier- es ist Talg aus Polen, der in die Haut einer ganzen Kuh eingelassen ist" (60).

⁷⁹ The linking of places with consumable goods is introduced in the opening line of the novel when we are told that Anton's place of birth is known for a particular kind of *Pfefferkuchen* (5).

Revolution in Polen: Polishness as Threat to the Heart of the Bourgeoisie

The German bourgeoisie finds itself in a precarious position, however, for the maintenance of its identity depends on factors beyond its control, such as the political climate of the lands it trades with. Polish history is especially volatile in its impact on German trades. The first historical event in Poland to receive notice in *Soll und Haben* is referenced in the opening lines of Book III, where the 1846 uprising in the Republic of Kraków is described. The narrator's first thought is to comment on the disastrous effect this upheaval will have on German commerce:

Ein böses Jahr kam über das Land, ein plötzlicher Kriegslärm alarmierte die deutschen Grenzländer im Osten, darunter auch unsere Provinz. Die furchtbaren Folgen eines heftigen Landschreckens wurden schnell fühlbar. Der Verkehr stockte, die Werte der Güter und Waren fielen, jeder suchte das Seine zu retten und an sich zu ziehen, viele Kapitalien wurden gekündigt, große Summen, welche in kaufmännischen Unternehmungen angelegt waren, kamen in Gefahr. Niemand hatte Lust zu neuer Tätigkeit, Hunderte von Bändern wurden zerschnitten, welche die Menschen zu gegenseitigem Nutzen durch lange Zeit verbunden hatten. Jede einzelne Existenz wurde unsicherer, isolierter, ärmer. Überall sah man ernste Gesichter, gefurchte Stirnen. Das Land war wie ein gelähmter Körper, langsam rollte das Geld, dies Blut des Geschäftslebens, von einem Teile des großen Leibes zu dem andern...Die Zukunft erschien plötzlich verhängnisvoll, schwarz, verderblich wie der Himmel vor einem schweren Gewitter. Das Schreckenswort 'Revolution in Polen' brachte so große Wirkungen auch in Deutschland hervor (322).

As mentioned above, matters of trade are discussed in corporeal terms, as a matter of life and death. The tone of this paragraph would lead one to think that the rising was much more significant than it actually was. In reality, it was a rather abortive attempt which lasted only a few days, and was quickly quashed by the armed forces of the partitioning powers. The above quote gives the impression that it lasted much longer, particularly in its inflated portrayal of the commercial ramifications posed by the revolt. The strong and immediate emphasis on these particular consequences is hardly an accident – by compromising the flow of capital and goods, by ushering in a period of fiscal stagnation, the upheaval in Poland represents a direct attack on the very essence of bourgeois identity. *Soll und Haben* moreover misrepresents the human victims of the revolt. It was not predominantly the “unzählige fremde Geschäftsreisende und

friedliche Beamte” referred to in the novel who were dying, it was the Polish nobility (323). Incited to action by the Austrian authorities, who had caught wind of the conspiracies in Kraków, the peasants rose against the nobles and in a bloody massacre known as the “Jacquerie” which left hundreds of Polish aristocrats dead, they demonstrated their loyalty to the Empire.

In the novel, we quickly learn that this revolt strikes much closer to home than merely having a negative effect on German commerce as a whole: Schröter’s firm has two shipments of goods passing through enemy territory at the moment. Those commodities, and the firm’s prosperity, are thus imperiled by the conflict. Furthermore, Anton realizes with a shock, “was über dem allen stand, ein großer Teil der Geschäfte, welche das Haus machte, und ein großer Teil des Kredits, welchen dasselbe bewilligte, war in den empörten Landschaften gemacht und bewilligt worden; vieles, ja alles...ward durch diesen Krieg in Frage gestellt” (324). The scene in the warehouse earlier in the novel introduced us to the intricate ties that bind the *Kolonialwarengeschäft* with distant lands, Poland among them. Now, we learn that Poland occupies a much more significant position in that fiscal constellation than had been previously intimated. The firm’s business interests in Poland, it turns out, represent a vital portion of the company’s existence even beyond importing tallow. Large sums of money are tied up in its affairs there. The uprising in Poland puts everything in jeopardy. It is for this reason that Schröter decides that he must set out for the conflict area to recover his goods and restore the movement of commodities, insisting even in the face of the Prussian officer’s warnings of the grave danger that lies ahead (340). *This* excursion to Poland is not denounced by Schröter, but instead treated as a journey of the utmost importance for the securing of economic interests.

Discrediting Polish Nationalism

In *Soll und Haben*, Polish revolutionary upheaval is portrayed as completely pointless, even if it should manage to be successful. The Polish people are depicted as inherently incapable of statesmanship. As Schröter sets off for the border checkpoint accompanied by Anton, he grumbles about the financial losses he and other merchants incur due to the “unglücklichen

Versuche” of the Poles to establish an independent nation (332). In Schröter’s opinion, this is a futile attempt, as the Slavs in general lack that which is essential in the establishment of a stable nation-state: a bourgeoisie. “Es gibt keine Rasse, welche so wenig das Zeug hat,” Schröter declares, “vorwärtszukommen und sich durch ihre Kapitalien Menschlichkeit und Bildung zu erwerben, als die slawische.” “Als wenn Edelleute und leibeigene Bauern einen Staat bilden könnten!” he then scoffs to Anton, “Sie haben nicht mehr Berechtigung dazu als dieses Volk Sperlinge auf den Bäumen.” Nobles and serfs do not a nation make. Moreover, Schröter expounds, statehood is a privilege to be earned, not a right conferred to all peoples. The Poles have as much claim to an independent state as the sparrows chirping in the trees. For to lack a bourgeoisie is to be without “den Stand welcher Zivilisation und Fortschritt darstellt und welcher einen Haufen zerstreuter Ackerbauer zu einem Staate erhebt,” and indeed without culture itself (332). The bourgeoisie represents progress and it alone is able to raise a nation of peasants to a prosperous state. From this standpoint, the revolutionary aspirations of the Poles do indeed seem fruitless and doomed to failure, their outcome predetermined by an intrinsic shortcoming in Slavic culture.

After expounding upon the Poles’ unfitness for nationhood due to the lack of a middle-class, the novel proceeds to “unmask” the patriotic motivations cited by the Polish insurgents and to thereby prove the futility of revolution as a means of achieving their nationalistic goals. The revolt is discredited by Freytag’s decision to omit entirely from his depiction of the events any allusion to the patriotic motivations behind the rising. In fact, the history surrounding the partitioning of Poland is not referenced directly at all, and only alluded to in the second Polish episode. The revolt is dismissed as “eine der *krampfhaften Zuckungen*, welche die Slawenländer in dem letzten Jahrhundert so oft gehabt haben” (322, my emphasis). These periodic upheavals are likened to the involuntary twitch of a muscle cramp, a hiccup in the functions of a healthy body. The rebellion is portrayed not as a productive patriotic endeavor, but rather as an economic and material waste which unnecessarily interrupts the flow of trade. As is often the

case in *Soll und Haben*, it is Schröter who passes judgment on Poland here.⁸⁰ “Es wird dort drüben viel Pulver unnütz verschossen werden,” he grumbles to Anton, “alles Ausgaben, welche nichts einbringen, und Kosten, welche Land und Menschen ruinieren” (331-332). Revolution, he comments later, “verwüstet immer und schafft selten Neues” (349). The rebellion is dismissed as a waste of time, money, and commodities.

The patriotic motivations which in fact lay behind the rising are also removed through the discrediting of the patriots themselves. Schröter is quite easily able to bribe the leader of a small band of Polish rebels to allow him to retrieve his firm’s shipments by promising him money for beer: “Bei dem Wort ‘Biergeld’ senkten sich die Gewehre hochachtungsvoll von selbst” almost as if a result of an automatic instinct (337). Money and alcohol, that is to say, personal gain, are shown here to be more important for the Poles than realizing any patriotic project. This issue is raised once again in the case of the greedy innkeeper in Kraków. Anton and Schröter are told by the Polish officer who accompanies them in the city that “der Wirt hat einige von den Fuhrleuten überredet, da jetzt Revolution sei, hätten ihre Verpflichtungen aufgehört,” (357). The revolution is depicted here as an excuse to make an illegal profit. The fighters themselves are also discredited in a variety of disparaging phrases as not being serious soldiers. The typical Polish freedom-fighters are portrayed as “Sensenmänner” (330), who “play soldier” (347). In a particularly ridiculous scene, Herr Braun relates the tale of a Polish peasant who attacked his cousin. The peasant contents himself with skewering the cousin’s hat, and Braun’s relative makes a dash for the border “während der Krakuse, die gemordete Mütze auf seiner Sense schwenkend, mit Triumphgeschrei abgezogen sei” (323-324). In this manner, the national aspirations of the Poles are branded as invalid. The rebels are childish bandits waving captured hats on sickles in comical displays of triumph.

⁸⁰ Achinger aptly notes Schröter’s position “als eine derjenigen Figuren, die über weite Strecken das Wert- und Normsystem des Romans explizit formuliert” (141). Ping likewise notes this character’s position in the novel (91).

The German Legacy in Poland- Rewriting Polish History

The novel further discredits the Polish aspirations to statehood by rewriting Polish history, and in particular the history of German-Polish interaction. Unsurprisingly, the history laid out here is a history of trade and of the rising German bourgeoisie in Poland. We are introduced to the history of the little village Rosmin (Strzelno) through the lens of its weekly market:

Es war Wochenmarkt in der kleinen Kreisstadt Rosmin. Seit uralter Zeit war der Markttag für die Landleute der Umgebung ein Fest von besonderer Bedeutung. Fünf Tage der Woche mußte der Bauer seinen Kohl bauen oder dem gestrengen Herrn fronen, am Sonntage war sein Herz geteilt zwischen der Jungfrau Maria, seiner Familie und der Schenke, der Markttag trieb ihn über die Grenze seiner Feldmark hinein in die große Welt. Dann fühlte er sich auch gegenüber den Fremden als ein schlauer Mann, welcher schafft und gebraucht, er sah Bekannte wieder, die er sonst niemals getroffen, er erblickte neue Dinge aus der Fremde, er hörte von andern Städten und Ländern und genoß, was andere für ihn erfunden hatten, in vollen Zügen. Und am Abend dieses Tages flogen die Neuigkeiten aus der weiten Welt bis in das entfernte Walddorf, in jede Hütte, in jede einzelne Menschenseele des Kreises. So war es schon damals gewesen, als noch die Slawen allein auf dem Boden saßen, der Bauer leibeigen unter schmutzigem Strohdach, der Edelmann hoffärtig in seinem hölzernen Palast. Damals war ein offenes Feld gewesen, was jetzt Rosmin heißt (592-593).

Market day allows peasants to go beyond their own fields and to rekindle friendships. The Polish serf gains confidence and self-respect from his market day bargains, for this is the only day he owes neither to his master nor to the Church. On market Saturday, the peasant comes into contact with pieces of the foreign, with goods that connect him and his family to an entire world beyond the one he knows. From the beginning, market day occupies a central position in the narration of the Polish village's history, and the one source of freedom, the one point where the movement of goods, people, and information can be facilitated. It has been the beating heart of Rosmin, we learn, even back when Rosmin was just a barren field.

The weekly market proves to be the seed from which the town of Rosmin will grow. Attracted by this center of trade, Germans begin to arrive, and first among these pioneers are the merchants, bringing with them all sorts of new delights from their *Heimat* and beyond

(593).⁸¹ With time, these tradesmen establish themselves more permanently, and other craftsmen come to join them. Eventually, the town of Rosmin comes into existence, its date of birth significantly marked by the closing of the *Marktring* with homes for the merchants and a few taverns thrown in (593).⁸² The German settlers model their city statutes on German laws and the architecture of their town fortifications on the walls which surround the cities and towns of their *Heimat*. The marketplace is depicted as heart of the town geographically, as its historical beginning and *raison d'être*, and market day the time when all business is conducted, and the time when friendships between those living distant from one another can be renewed and cemented. Trade brings Germans to Poland and the maintenance of trade networks entices them to stay permanently. In short, the history of Rosmin is the history of the *Wochenmarkt*, and of German-Polish interactions.

The German craftsmen bring a certain social egalitarianism with them that astounds the indigenous Poles and draws them closer into German trade and cultural networks. The Slavs in the area observe these newcomers with curiosity, astonished that, “jeder Landmann, der durch ihre Tor fuhr, ihnen ein Kupferstück bezahlen mußte als Brückengeld, ja, der Edelmann, der allmächtige, mußte auch bezahlen,” and recognizing the chance for freedom and economic opportunity, the narrator tells us, “Manchen Slawen aus dem Kreise warf sein Schicksal zu den Bürgern in die Stadt, er wurde heimisch unter ihnen, ein Handwerker, Kaufmann, Bürger wie

⁸¹ “Damals war der deutsche Kaufmann zum Markte über die Grenze gekommen mit seinen Wagen und Dienern, er hatte unter dem Schutz des Kruzifixes oder eines slawischen Säbels seine Truhen geöffnet und die Werke des heimischen Fleißes, Tuche, buntfarbige Kleider, Zwickelstrümpfe, Halsbänder von Glas und teuren Korallen, Heiligenbilder und Kirchengesäß, aber auch, was den Gaumen erfreut, süße Backwaren, fremden Wein und wohlriechende Zitronen, feilgeboten und hatte dagegen eingetauscht, was die Landschaft ihm entgegenbrachte: Wolfsfelle, Hamsterpelze, Honig, Getreide, Vieh und anderes” (593).

⁸² “Nicht lange, so schlug neben dem Kaufmann auch der Handwerker eine Werkstatt auf, der deutsche Schuster kam und der Knopfmacher, der Blechschmied und der Gürtler, die Zelte und Hütten verwandelten sich allmählich in feste Häuser, die im Viereck um den großen Marktplatz aufstiegen, auf dem viele hundert beladene Polenwagen Raum haben mußten. Fest schlossen sich die fremden Ansiedler zusammen, sie kauften den Grund, sie kauften ein Stadtrecht von dem slawischen Grundherrn, sie gaben sich ein Statut nach dem Muster deutscher Städte. Die neuen Bürger bauten ihr Rathaus in die Mitte des großen Vierecks und daran ein Dutzend Häuser für Kaufleute und Schenken, und der Marktring war geschlossen. Um die Hofräume, die Hintergebäude und Gassen wurde die Stadtmauer gezogen und über die beiden gewölbten Tore nach dem Brauch der Heimat wohl auch die Wachttürme gesetzt, unten hauste der Zöllner, oben der Wächter” (593-594).

sie" (594). Thus, the Slavs are ultimately won over through business and trade, even if, as Anton and Fink discuss, it was the nobility who ultimately conquered the land, thereby making that territory politically German (634). Most significant in this quote, however, is that certain Poles are incorporated into the fabric of daily German life, consumed as it were. As in the case of the *Kolonialwaren* however, the Poles are incorporated within a designated space (Rosmin, or rather, Strzelno), and on German terms (as law-abiding members of the bourgeoisie). The arrival of the Germans has introduced not only legal equality in the form of tolls that apply to all, however. The marketplace has become the basis for a new, freer, post-feudal society which ultimately has liberated the Polish peasant. For, all these years later, as Anton makes his way to the marketplace, "Noch immer ist der Markttag von Rosmin der große Tag für die Umgegend...aber nicht mehr peitscht der Leibeigene die abgetriebenen Gäule seines Gebietes, ein frei gewordenen Slawenkind lenkt die staatlichen Pferde, deren Vater sogar ein Hengst des Königs ist. Und wenn der Federwagen eines Edelmanns vorbeifährt, dann treibt auch der Bursch seine Pferde zu schnellerem Lauf, und wenn er artig ist, drückt er nur ein wenig an seinem Hut" (594). The bourgeoisie, through trade, has begun to break the stranglehold of the Polish nobility. Young peasant lads have internalized German egalitarianism and are now even bold enough to race past a nobleman on the road and only briefly touch his cap in greeting. Such open defiance became possible with the arrival of the Germans. The Polish peasant child might once only have held the reins of a pair of tired old nags. Now he steers a pair of beautiful horses sired by the King's own stallion. In time, Rosmin and other German towns like it become "die Knoten eines festen Netzes, welches der Deutsche über den Slawen gelegt hat, kunstvolle Knoten, in denen zahllosen Fäden zusammenlaufen, durch welche die kleinen Arbeiter des Feldes verbunden werden mit andern Menschen, mit Bildung, mit Freiheit und einem zivilisierten Staat" (594). Just as in the opening pages of the novel, we see here the depiction of members of the German bourgeoisie as a series of links between human beings. Here, that

concept is expanded to a colonial setting to create a German national mission, a sort of *mission civilatrice allemande*.

Rosmin's market square is for the town what Schröter's warehouse is to his *Kolonialwarengeschäft* – the heart of everything built by the bourgeoisie, the mechanism by which goods can be circulated. In *Soll und Haben*, marketplaces and storerooms constitute nodes in a vital network of exchanges that holds society and the bourgeoisie together. As the bustling scene of Rosmin's market day is described, we see listings of goods reminiscent of that in Schröter's warehouse at the beginning of the novel, though the points of origin of the goods, being either of German or Polish manufacture, are not emphasized as was the case with the *Kolonialwaren* (595). It is at the market as well that the first stirrings of trouble are noticed in the weeks leading up to the siege on the Rothsattel. The townsmen sense the coming turmoil and worry. As with the first revolt portrayed in the book, a conflict represents the potential destruction of the trade network so carefully nourished by the German bourgeoisie: "aller Besitz, alle Bildung schien in Gefahr" (598). Once again, Polish revolutionary ideals threaten the essence of the German bourgeoisie – the flow of goods. As further proof of this, it is in the marketplace too that the initial fighting breaks out in that the German colonists make their first stand. Trade is the background and battleground in the world of *Soll und Haben*.

It is clear that the *Soll und Haben* goes to a great deal of trouble to invalidate Polishness, Polish national goals, and to rewrite Polish history in bourgeois terms. It is precisely according to those terms that the bourgeoisie expects the Polish characters in the novel to act. When they do not, they are condemned for it as individuals and as a nation. Though some Poles are willing to integrate into the German bourgeoisie, many Polish figures threaten to disrupt the lifeline of that social group, the distribution of goods, through plunder, theft, and the disruption of business connections through revolution. As a means of legitimizing German hegemony in the region, the Poles are discredited in their national aspirations by being portrayed as having a fatal social evolutionary flaw- the lack of a true bourgeoisie. The Poles are depicted as being

incapable of creating a nation, and, given the good that the German settlers have brought to the region, the novel asks, why should they wish to try?

Conclusion

Gustav Freytag's *Soll und Haben* is a novel which moves towards clarity in its understanding of what it means to be German and bourgeois. In this movement, the German-Polish borderland evokes both the unease which often accompanies ambiguity and ambivalence and a strong sense of German unity. It is a place of both uncertainty and clarity. The Polish episodes in *Soll und Haben* thus occupy a critical position in the establishment and preservation of the inherent structure of German bourgeois identity. Poland and the events that take place there situate the bourgeoisie physically and figuratively at the center of German identity. Indeed, Germanness copes with its own lack of center through the incorporation of Poland as secondary periphery. Poland firstly functions as a tool for establishing stable geopolitical borders for German identity, as the two portions of the novel that are set there take the reader precisely to the very edge of Germanness – the borders with the Russian and Austrian Empires. Poland moreover provides the German bourgeoisie with a place to which its opponents can be ousted. Once in Poland, Jewish figures, though still viewed as inherently different and not accepted as German, are treated by ethnic Germans as being significantly more trustworthy than Jews in the capital. A similar shift may be observed in the treatment of the German aristocracy. While in Germany, the nobility represents a threat to the natural evolution of the bourgeois state. When they are forced to move to Poland, they become part of the German mission to civilize Poland, and the narrator foresees an adventurous and fulfilling future for them. Rifts in the fabric of German society are temporarily healed in the face of the threat of the Polish rebels, and various factions join ranks to win the common battle. However, while both the bourgeoisie and aristocracy may be ethnically German, it is in Poland that the protagonist Anton Wohlfart comes to realize that certain breaches cannot be healed, and that there are inherent differences between himself and the Rothsattels. In Poland, the bourgeois hero comes to understand the

meaning of the word “bourgeois,” and returns to his true Heimat. In this manner, the center of German identity can be left to the bourgeoisie while the concept of an overarching definition of “German” is still maintained.

Poland also protects Germany from the threat of America and its promise of fame, fortune, and adventure. Several characters in *Soll und Haben* find their life's fulfillment in Poland, which proves to be an acceptable alternative to America in terms of providing second chances and excitement. Poland also settles another concern of the German bourgeoisie – inferiority complexes regarding bourgeois gender identities. Aristocratic femininity is unmasked as an illusion and a poor substitute for bourgeois womanhood during the second Polish episode. While Fink, the representative of aristocratic masculinity distinguishes himself in combat, he is maneuvered into remaining in Poland by the plot. Thus the German bourgeoisie is saved from its own fascination with the upper classes.

Yet although Poland facilitates the construction of so many facets of German bourgeois identity, it itself poses a threat to that sense of self. In fomenting revolution against the German authorities, Polish revolutionaries threaten the network by which the bourgeoisie manages the transit of goods. The novel copes with this dilemma by invalidating Polish nationalism and rewriting Polish history into a chapter of the tale of the German bourgeoisie, defining the development of Poland in terms of trading in *Kolonialwaren*, and justifying the German presence there as necessary and even beneficial for the Polish people. The keystone of German bourgeois identity is denounced as intrinsically inimical to Germanness and the bourgeoisie, and is therefore hidden in its role in forming German bourgeois identity.

Seemingly on the periphery, Poland is present in *Soll und Haben* from the very first line, and plays a critical role, one that is absolutely essential for the success of the novel's cultural work. Through Poland, seemingly irreconcilable concepts can occupy the same space, and logical obstacles insurmountable at first glance, are overcome. Early on in the novel, the bourgeoisie's need to incorporate foreign objects into itself, but in a controlled manner, becomes readily

apparent through the manipulation of *Kolonialwaren*. German bourgeois identity as presented in the novel is in the end dependent on Poland and Polishness, on something which is neither German nor bourgeois. Through its manipulation and use of the Polish space, *Soll und Haben*, that most quintessentially German bourgeois novel, places Poland and the ambivalence and ambiguity of the borderland at the center of the literary structure that seeks to define the German bourgeoisie. Identity, as always, is based on the foreign, on an object or person outside and yet within the self.

CHAPTER 2: “WIE ES DAMALS MODE WAR”: INSCRIBING HISTORY AND CULTURAL IDENTITY INTO THE ODERBRUCH IN THEODOR FONTANE’S *VOR DEM STURM*

On December 27, 1878, a rather frustrated Julius Rodenberg, editor of the influential literary journal *Deutsche Rundschau*, confided in his diary regarding an unpleasant scholarly task that lay before him:

An Fontane’s >Vor dem Sturm< würde ich mich nun schon bald acht Wochen; es ist gar nicht zu sagen, was das für ein albernes Buch, ein Roman in vier Bänden, mit gewiß nicht weniger als 100 Personen, u. dabei nicht so viel Handlung, um auch nur einen halben Band daraus zu machen. Und das muß man lesen u. darüber auch noch schreiben! Es ist so unglaublich dumm u. albern, daß es mir aus diesem Grund eine Art von negativem Vergnügen macht; ich frage mich immer: was wird nun kommen? Werden sie wieder über Land fahren (mit den Ponies)? Werden sie sich wieder zu Tisch setzen? Werden sie wieder schlafen gehn? Das ist die beständige Runde, die statt durch 4 Bände durch vierzig fortgehen könnte. Wer aber hält’s aus, mitzugehn? Wenn nur Fontane nicht ein so feiner, liebenswürdiger u. gescheidter Mann wäre. Und so etwas zu schreiben! (in *Nürnberger* 913-914).⁸³

Rodenberg seems to have managed, however, to power through the aforementioned “ludicrous” and “stupid” novel. He was even able to bring himself to pen a rather diplomatic review of Theodor Fontane’s first novel in the February 1879 issue of *Deutsche Rundschau*.

“Gesamteindruck des Buches...ist ein wohltuender,” Rodenberg writes, continuing on to concede that “Es ist so viel Kenntnis der Zeit und des Ortes, bei so viel diskreter Behandlung des rein historisch Gegebenen darin, so viel Poesie...bei so viel tiefem Ernst, daß wir nicht anstehen, >Vor dem Sturm< als ein gutes, erfreuliches Buch zu bezeichnen, mit großen Mängeln in der Komposition, aber auch mit großen Schönheiten und in seinem innersten Kerne gesund” (in *Nürnberger* 912-913). Overall impression: *Vor dem Sturm* (1878) is a pleasant and enjoyable book with significant compositional defects which nonetheless exhibits extraordinary knowledge

⁸³ *Nürnberger*, Helmuth, ed. “Nachwort.” Afterword. *Vor Dem Sturm: Roman Aus Dem Winter 1812 Auf 13*. 4th ed. Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2011. 909-22. Print.

of a particular time and place and is generally a lovely, wholesome book. Rodenberg was not the only critic to make such observations or criticisms regarding the relative lack of excitement in the plot of Fontane's literary debut, and Fontane himself accepted this criticism with grace and aplomb.⁸⁴

What these estimations of *Vor dem Sturm* neglect, however, is that this lack of "action" represents the true structural genius of Fontane's historical novel. The fact that we, as readers, never glimpse the main historical events rumbling across Europe in the winter of 1812-13 makes *Vor dem Sturm* a story about perspective and interpretation. For a plot set against the backdrop of the Napoleonic Wars, very little happens militarily in the March Brandenburg (hereafter referred to by its German designation, "Mark"). The one military operation, the raid on Frankfurt an der Oder, that is undertaken by patriotic Prussians, fails spectacularly to aid in the liberation of the region from the French occupation. As Brent O. Peterson notes in *History, Fiction, and Germany: Writing the Nineteenth-Century Nation*, such an outcome was typical in German historical novels set during the Wars of Liberation. "We expect tales of swashbuckling adventure," Peterson writes, "but in novel after novel the plot stops dead or leaps from early 1813 to mid-1815, when the male protagonists return home to marry" (248).⁸⁵ Indeed, the short-lived popular uprising in *Vor dem Sturm* has far more impact on the nuptial arrangements of the novel's central figures than on the outcome of the *Befreiungskriege*. This pattern, Peterson argues, "meets our expectations for narrative (and romantic) closure, and in so doing, it proves once again that marriage is more important than war in Germany's national narrative" (248). In *Vor dem Sturm*, the main characters (at least the German ones), show the most agency in molding identity through a range of group discussions on current events, archaeology, and

⁸⁴ Nürnberger mentions, for example, letters from Rodenberg and the writer Paul Heyse to Fontane (914).

⁸⁵ Peterson, Brent Orlyn. *History, Fiction, and Germany: Writing the Nineteenth-century Nation*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2005. Print.

regional history, geography and demography. In this historical novel, identity-building largely takes place in everyday parlor conversations and wintry excursions through the countryside.

However, the comparative lack of “action” in the traditional sense in *Vor dem Sturm* belies the fact that Prussian society here is playing for very high stakes indeed. Current literary criticism emphasizes Fontane’s tendency to focus on times of social upheaval. In his introduction to the essay collection entitled *Fontane und die Fremde: Fontane und Europa*, for example, Konrad Ehlich views Fontane as a sort of social seismograph, measuring the tremors of something apparently firm – the ground beneath society’s feet.⁸⁶ Referring specifically to *Vor dem Sturm*, Henry Garland points to a trait common to the genre of historical fiction more generally, namely, that it does not dwell on the dramatic or the sensational, but rather on the responses of *individuals* to momentous historical events.⁸⁷ Andrew Hamilton claims that Fontane deliberately chooses to set his works in times which are in flux, “molten periods,” as it were.⁸⁸ Fontane’s novels, Hamilton maintains, depict the creation and dissolution of social structures. Fontane, Hamilton stresses, seeks to do far more in his novels than to paint a faithful likeness of society. Rather, Fontane’s novels animate the *process* through which society comes to be by showing those social structures before they existed. In Fontane’s world, Hamilton continues, society is a construct: always changing, contingent, never stable. This can be seen in Fontane’s contemporary novels of course, Hamilton points out, but it most clearly comes to the fore in the author’s historical novels, such as *Unwiederbringlich* (1892) and *Vor dem Sturm*.

⁸⁶ “Ich möchte den Autor als jemanden sehen, der in seiner Autorschaft eine Art Seismograph war. Ich möchte der zitternden Bewegung der seismographischen Nadel in ihrer epizentrischen Indikatorik folgen, ihren Ausschlägen, die als Schreibspuren in Fontanes Œuvre hinterlassen sind. Der *Boden* ist das Feste. Seine Festigkeit, seine Beständigkeit, seine Verlässlichkeit sind die elementaren Voraussetzungen für die Ausbildung von Handlungsfähigkeit und so dafür, daß es Handlungsmöglichkeiten gibt” (9). Ehlich, Konrad, ed. *Fontane Und Die Fremde, Fontane Und Europa*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2002. Print.

⁸⁷ “He desired to portray a society in breadth not as dry history but with a sentient touch, with an ear for the words of the heart and a sensitive appreciation of the flavor of life as it was lived” (Garland 26). Garland, Henry B. *The Berlin Novels of Theodor Fontane*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1980. Print.

⁸⁸ Hamilton, Andrew. “Theodor Fontane’s Social Fictions.” German Studies Association Thirty-Eighth Annual Conference. Westin Kansas City at Crown Center, Kansas City, MO. 10 Sept. 2014. Lecture.

On the one hand, Fontane makes use of the genre of the historical novel in order to complicate the understanding of the present as contingent. On the other hand, *Vor dem Sturm* also represents recognition in literary form of the unsettling fragmentation introduced by modernity into society, culture, and even history itself. In the views of Michael Gratzke, Fontane's fiction stands as both reaction to and solution for rapid social change.⁸⁹ Fontane's heroes, Gratzke asserts, are meant to perpetuate the "Strom der Tradition" and to serve as a healing balm to the wounds inflicted by the fragmentation caused by modernity (Fontane in Gratzke 90). In her treatment of the nineteenth-century European historical novel in *Die Ganzheit der Geschichte*, Barbara Potthast claims that *Vor dem Sturm* reacts to anxieties triggered by rapid social changes in modern Germany and concludes that the novel focuses on the threat posed by a disruption of the harmonious coexistence of peasantry and *Junkertum* (300).⁹⁰ Fontane's novel, Potthast argues, is a reflection of "die politische Resignation seines Autors," and a departure from previous models of historical fiction. *Vor dem Sturm*, she maintains, achieves an integration of history, politics, and individuals without resorting to heavy-handed narrative schematics.⁹¹ Nevertheless, this novel reflects a deep-seated anxiety, a sense that the course of human lives and the world they play out in have been irreversibly severed from each other. "Fontanes Roman," Potthast writes, "impliziert das Bewußtsein von der Zerstörung eines ganzheitlichen Welt- und Lebenszusammenhanges, um den Verlust des körperlich-naturhaften Einklangs von Zeit, Gesellschaft und Ereignis" (341). The project to create a "Ganzheit der Geschichte," as Potthast terms it, is at an end. In *Vor dem Sturm*, Michael

⁸⁹ Gratzke, Michael. *Blut Und Feuer: Heldentum Bei Lessing, Kleist, Fontane, Jünger Und Heiner Müller*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2011. Print.

⁹⁰ Potthast, Barbara. *Die Ganzheit der Geschichte: Historische Romane im 19. Jahrhundert*. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2007. Print.

⁹¹ "Es ist der realistische Zeitroman, der die komplexe, sozialpsychologische Interdependenz von Individuum und Gesellschaft in sein Zentrum stellt, freilich ohne dabei noch einen sinnvollen, zielgerichteten, universalen Geschichtsprozeß, in den die erzählte Handlung eingelassen ist, behaupten zu können. Fontane nimmt mit >Vor dem Sturm< Abschied vom Konzept des historischen Romans, der eine Integration von Geschichte, Politik und Individuum nur auf Kosten eines strengen erzählerischen Schematismus erlaubt" (341).

James White concurs, history is a multifaceted construct. “History is not a simple, singular idea in *Vor dem Sturm*,” he writes, “Rather, diverse historical views and narratives coexist” (49). In allowing such polyphony, White continues, this novel effectively “questions the capacity of a single historical narrative to account for society’s experience of the past” (49).⁹² Thus, *Vor dem Sturm* seeks to depict a time of past social change while simultaneously constituting a reaction to contemporary upheaval and unease towards the meaning of history in the present.

Thus, Fontane studies currently recognizes the formal complexity of *Vor dem Sturm*, its depiction of alternative opinions and interpretations of every subject, as well as a nuanced portrayal of German national identity construction. Furthermore, as stated above, the fact that *Vor dem Sturm* centers on characters not immediately involved in the “main events” of this historical period makes the novel one about perspective. What scholarship has hitherto neglected, however, is a meta-level of perspectives above those of different characters or even social classes in which conflicting and cooperating discourses of Germandom coexist. I contend Fontane deliberately sets up simultaneous processes of identity construction in various spheres of the world of *Vor dem Sturm*. These mechanics of identity creation work at times in parallel, at times in quiet contradiction to one another. In staging these spheres in conversation with one another, I argue, Fontane exposes identity as an inherently paradoxical construct. Moreover, these four spheres vary in their approach to and comfort with ambivalence and ambiguity in the Mark. These four spheres are the archaeological, the political, the familial, and that of human and topographical geography at the regional level. This chapter intervenes in Fontane scholarship through an elaboration on the intricacy of *Vor dem Sturm*’s competing venues of identity development as an intense engagement with ambiguity and ambivalence.

I begin with the archaeological sphere of identity negotiation, centering this section on the “Odinswagen” debate at Pastor Seidentopf’s abode. Though left unresolved, this lively

⁹² “in *Vor dem Sturm* Fontane constantly undermines simple or limited perspectives in favour of a less well-defined but therefore truer image of the times” (White 49)

discussion is the one time when *Vor dem Sturm* seems to force a choice between Germanness and a cultural Other (here Slavicness). I contextualize this discussion in relation to the intersection of race and archeology as a discipline in the late 19th century, as well as to the intratextual role played by monuments and artifacts in *Vor dem Sturm* in forging historical and emotional bonds of belonging. I then continue on to a tandem discussion of the political and the familial. In Fontane's fiction, as is typical of the nineteenth-century novel, marriage in particular often serves as a metaphor for broader political and cultural events. Family here seems to act as an allegory for one model of German identity. For, as the Vitzewitz family sheds its foreign connections, so too does the Prussian state divest itself of foreign fealties. Though the political and the familial spheres appear to move in parallel to one another, however, the political sphere is propelled forward by concrete choices made by Prussian individuals, whereas familial arrangements are largely influenced by the actions of Polish characters. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a discussion of identity construction in the sphere of regional geography. This sphere stands in contradiction to the other three. In *Vor dem Sturm*, we see a kind of off-centered imagined geography that is at peace with its own ethnically composite nature and admits its own constructedness. Human and topographical geography in the Mark in general and the so-called "Oderbruch" in particular stand as counterpoints to the either/or of the archeological sphere, and to the Germanization of the familial and political spheres. The mosaic of the Oderbruch is emphasized all along, even as the Vitzewitz family divests itself of foreign alliances. The Mark's Wendish and Pfälzer residents are accepted as sediments deposited organically by history. Indeed, much of the actual soil of the Mark was placed there deliberately by human beings in the 18th-century draining of the Oder swamps, thereby paving the way for the influx of settlers. However, while the Mark's demography and topography may not, at the time of the novel's events, be undergoing drastic changes, we as readers witness characters' recognition of the need to revisit their own *imagined* geographies. This redrawing of mental boundaries serves to tie in the ambivalence of the Mark's geography to the events of the

political, and by extension, the familial sphere, and their tendencies to move away from ambivalence and ambiguity. Fontane's *Vor dem Sturm* thus juxtaposes the composite process of the demographic and topographical formation of the Oderbruch and the Mark with the abjuring of foreign alliances in the familial and political arenas and the drawing of clear distinctions between Germanic and Slavic in archeological discussions. The interplay of these different aspects of the Mark's past and present, ultimately, I contend, lays bare the functional paradox of national identity. *Vor dem Sturm* thus illustrates the central premise of this dissertation; namely, the capability of literature to expose its own uncertainties and opacity in order to embrace the productive discomfort that ambiguity and ambivalence engender in the perpetual in-between that is the borderland.

The Archaeological

Physical landmarks and ancient artifacts play a crucial role in *Vor dem Sturm* in terms of characters' interpretation of the landscape around them and the historical forces that came to shape the place they live in. Alexander Hamilton views the myriad outings, sorties, and excursions that the characters undertake in this novel as a method of identity maintenance. These seemingly light-hearted social affairs in fact reflect a deep sense of rootedness in the land among the gentry of the Mark, Hamilton argues, and the regular interactions of the nobility with storied churches and relics of days gone by serve to keep alive the connection to the land. True, the display and collection of artifacts in some cases is used to demonstrate wealth and worldliness, as in the case of the Count Drosselstein's reception room at his estate of Hohen-Ziesar.⁹³ When the characters move to the inner gallery of Hohen-Ziesar, the objects displayed are family portraits, proof of historical continuity, evidence that one's family has been there for

⁹³ "Das Empfangszimmer war ein großer quadratischer, fast durch die ganze Tiefe des Hauses gehender Saal, hinter dem nur noch ein schmaler Korridor lief. Der Korridor sah auf den Innenhof, wie der Empfangssaal auf Garten und Park. In diesem Saale ließ sich auf den ersten Blick erkennen, daß der Besitzer von Hohen-Ziesar reich und vielgereist und von gutem Geschmack in den bildenden Künsten sein müsse" (574).

centuries.⁹⁴ For although Count Drosselstein himself hails from East Prussia, his family has deep roots in the Mark, and his home reflects that bond. We must also affix an additional interpretative overlay here, namely, that of the fledgling academic discipline of archaeology at the time of *Vor dem Sturm*'s initial publication. As I will elaborate below, archaeological digs and theory greatly influenced notions of racial purity and relations with Others in the German-speaking world of the 1870s and 1880s. Against this particular backdrop, the novel's attempts to force a delineation of the Germanic and Slavic assumes greater significance and raises ominous questions about the sort of identity promulgated in *Vor dem Sturm*. I focus my analysis here on what I will call "the wagon debate" between Justizrat Turgany and Pastor Seidentopf in the chapter entitled "Der Wagen Odins." Though the discussion is amicable, and instigated by Turgany merely for the opportunity to argue with his former classmate, this moment is really the only time when *Vor dem Sturm* seeks to push for an outright choice between Germanness and Otherness. The issue at hand is the small bronze wagon found between Reppen and Drossen and presented to Seidentopf as a Christmas present of Germanic or Wendish provenance?⁹⁵ This friendly banter over a tiny artifact contributes as well to the novel's imagined geography and the connotation of the Oder river as a border river (Grenzfluss). Finally, however, I will point out the ways in which the narrator and other characters undercut the more serious points of contention with humor and by raising doubts about the intellectual framework surrounding the very notion of archeological interpretation of the physical past.

Before diving into an analysis of the wagon debate in *Vor dem Sturm*, it behooves us to contextualize our discussion in the development of archaeology as an academic discipline in German-speaking Europe in the nineteenth century. In giving archaeological matters such prominence in his novel, Fontane is touching on a discipline which, though in its infancy at the

⁹⁴ "Diese 'Galerie', nach Norden hin gelegen, zog sich durch den ganzen linken Flügel des Schlosses. Sie bestand aus drei Sälen, von denen der vorderste die Familienbilder enthielt, einige davon mit großer historischer Staffage" (578).

⁹⁵ Today Rzepin and Ośno Lubuskie in Poland, respectively.

time of *Vor dem Sturm*'s plot in 1812-13, would come to play a significant role in how Germans would come to see themselves as Germans and how those Germans were educated and interacted with the world around them. Archaeology occupied an increasingly privileged position in the German-speaking public sphere as the nineteenth century progressed and was intimately tied up in significant social changes in education, science, technology, historical research, foreign affairs, and understandings of human psychology. As scholars such as Eric Downing and Suzanne Marchand have emphasized, this discipline emerged at a time when institutional academe was beginning to coalesce in Western Europe in general, and German lands in particular.⁹⁶ Archaeology represented one of the primary means through which nineteenth-century Germans interacted with their past and interpreted that history for the purposes of the present. In *Vor dem Sturm*, therefore, archaeological discussions function as an important bridge to Fontane's present, and communal understandings of the past that were developing at the time of the novel's publication.

Archaeology in nineteenth-century German-speaking Europe took upon itself the roles of metaphor, method, and meaning in the construction of national and personal identity. This emerging discipline came to be both a means to an end and an end in itself. On a practical level, archaeology and its allied fields were intellectual endeavors which had enlisted large swaths of the educated public in German-speaking lands. The plot of *Vor dem Sturm* takes place just a few short years after the introduction of Alexander von Humboldt's school reforms of 1809-1810.⁹⁷ As a result of these radical changes meant to avert a repetition of the disaster of 1806, classical texts, especially the writings of ancient Greece, became the common educational denominator

⁹⁶ Downing, Eric. *After Images: Photography, Archaeology, and Psychoanalysis and the Tradition of Bildung*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2006. Print; Marchand, Suzanne L. *Down from Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750-1970*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1996. Print.

⁹⁷ Downing writes, "dominance of the classical ideal in Bildung was grounded on the conviction that Greece in particular, and Greco-Roman culture in general, represented the origin or foundation of European ideals of both the subject and community" (90).

amongst the rising middle class in the lands which were to become a united Germany.⁹⁸ Antiquity, and the archaeology that engaged with its physical remnants, were thus poised to be a powerful bonding agent of German national identity. Moreover, with its close ties to school curricular materials, archaeology was a powerful force for the institutional maintenance of individual identity. Furthermore, archaeology came to be an important item on the foreign policy docket of first Prussia, and then united Germany. “German archaeology abroad,” Downing writes, “was always a state-funded and directed undertaking. The classical world it sought out, and sought to take away from the local peoples and for itself, was inextricably implicated in the formation and legitimation of the German state” (10). Indeed, by the time of *Vor dem Sturm*’s publication in 1878, the Prussian “Institut für archäologische Korrespondenz” (IfAK), forerunner of the Deutsches-Archäologisches Institut (DAI), had been operating for nearly 50 years, having been founded in 1829. Thus, archaeological expeditions in Greece and Italy became political, and later, nationalist projects, a social effort to claim a special link between contemporary Germans and the human patrimony of ancient Greece.

The rise of archaeology as a discipline also had more abstract ramifications on German national and individual identities. The discipline of archaeology provided rich ground for the revision of contemporary understandings of human psychology, Downing writes in *After Images*, and indeed, “its metaphorical field proved a privileged site ... for a reconception of the human subject as himself an archaeological site and project, with archaeology figuring as a model both for memory/storage and for the practice of memory’s retrieval, reconstruction, and display” (102). Archaeology, Downing writes, along with photography and psychoanalysis, complicated contemporary understandings of subject identity and *Bildung*, or “conceptions of

⁹⁸As Downing elucidates, “the study of Greek and Latin culture functioned as the official, prescribed basis of bourgeois socialization, the sine non qua for the emergent *Bildungsbürgertum*, and in Germany in particular, it functioned as the prescribed basis not only for individual and class culture but for national culture as well” (91).

the subject and his (sometimes her) disciplined formation” (103).⁹⁹ Archaeology in particular, Downing asserts, came to represent a “model of ever-advancing technological progress [which] greatly reinforced the base ideals and vision of development on which Bildung depended” (90). As Downing points out, however, archaeology acted not only as a metaphor for human psychology, but also as a lens through which to view the self and the Other. Cultural understandings of the human subject were both projected onto and internalized by way of archaeology.¹⁰⁰ Downing draws particular attention to the phenomenon of introjection, “the mechanism by which the more or less impersonal conditions of social self-image related to archaeology become projected inward as a matter of individual psychological identity – in other words, the means by which socially contingent nationalism becomes reconstituted as an essential, inner psychology” (155). Thus, in summary, German archaeology provided both framework and content for the construction of nineteenth-century German national identity.

This understanding of nineteenth-century German archaeology as an overdetermined field provides an illuminating subtext to the treatment of archaeology and ancient artifacts in Fontane’s first novel, and it is crucial that we bear it in mind as we analyze the wagon debate. In *Vor dem Sturm*, the narrator’s description of Seidentopf’s interest in the archaeology of the ancient Mark reveals that the preacher’s intellectual passion has had noticeable physical impact on Seidentopf’s domestic environment. This description appears two chapters prior to the wagon debate and constitutes the better part of that chapter, the function of which is to introduce us as readers to the preacher’s home, the rectorate. Seidentopf, consciously or not, has arranged his study in a physical reflection of his own heart and mind. He has, the narrator

⁹⁹ In regards to photography, Downing asserts that, “Unlike that of a painting, the truth value of a photograph seemed a fleeting one indeed, without much staying power, and it tended to produce a correspondingly ephemeral sense of history and more pointedly, self-image. The subject was no longer thought of as a single, sustained, or constantly true identity; it became a series of possibly disconnected and always changing images or truths” (7).

¹⁰⁰ “archaeology proved...an important site for the cultural projection of various schemas for conceptualizing man” (Downing 102).

informs us, erected a small dividing wall between two windows in the room to create “zwei große, fast kabinettartige Fensternischen,” one dedicated to his religious vocation, the other to his avocation as collector and amateur scholar of the ancient Mark. We see here a corporeal manifestation of Seidentopf’s inner self, a visible sorting of identity-laden objects within a single house in reflection of the subject’s own split sense of self. Not only does *Vor dem Sturm* pursue multiple avenues of approach to the creation of German identity, the novel also gestures to the capacity of the individual subject to contain multiple identities.

Seidentopf’s multiple identities bleed into one another to a certain extent, however, with a type of intellectual religiosity that manifests itself in the preacher’s archaeological endeavors. Seidentopf, we learn, approaches the history of the Mark with an uncompromising doctrinal stringency that contrasts with his more relaxed attitude to matters of catechism. The preacher, the narrator informs us, is a collector with a purpose. Seidentopf “sammelte nicht, um zu sammeln, sondern um einer Idee willen,” the narrator says, terming the preacher a “Tendenzsammler.” Seidentopf’s small collection of märkisch antiquities is meant to serve a purpose; it is meant as a body of evidence in support of his belief in the eternal Germanic nature of the March Brandenburg.

Innerhalb der Kirche...ein Halber, ein Lauwarmer, hatte er, sobald es sich um Urnen und Totentöpfe handelte, die Dogmenstrenge eines Großinquisitors. Er duldete keine Kompromisse, und als erstes und letztes Resultat aller seiner Forschungen stand für ihn unwandelbar fest, daß die Mark Brandenburg nicht nur von Uranfang ein deutsches Land gewesen, sondern auch durch alle Jahrhunderte hin *geblieben* sei. Die wendische Invasion habe nur den Charakter einer Sturzwelle gehabt, durch die oberflächlich das eine oder andere geändert, dieser oder jener Name slawisiert worden sei. Aber nichts weiter. In der Bevölkerung, wie durch die Sagen von Fricke und Wotan bewiesen werde, habe deutsche Sitte und Sage fortgelebt; am wenigsten seien die Wenden, wie so oft behauptet werde, in die Tiefen der Erde eingedrungen. Ihre sogenannten »Wendenkirchhöfe«, ihre Totentöpfe niedrigeren Grades wollte er ihnen zugestehen, alles andere aber, was sich mit instinktiver Vermeidung des Oberflächlichen eingebohrt und eingegraben habe, alles, was zugleich Kultur und Kultus ausdrücke, sei so gewiß germanisch, wie Teut selber ein Deutscher gewesen sei. Um diese Sätze drehte sich für ihn jede Debatte von Bedeutung. Er war sich bewußt, in seinem archäologischen Museum durchaus unanfechtbare Belege für sein System in Händen zu haben, unterschied aber doch zwischen einem kleinen und einem großen Beweis” (86)

These ancient artifacts represent for Seidentopf not mysterious objects of study, but proof of the Mark's eternal, continuous Germanness. Each coin and ring acts as a sort of physical thesis for Seidentopf's historical imaginings, the so-called "System" in the quote above. Indeed, his little museum has but two exhibits: "unwiderlegliche" and "ganz unwiderlegliche" (87). This scant display contains but ten or twelve objects that all bear the distinction of "irrefutable" or "absolutely irrefutable." Seidentopf has even labeled the second category "Ultima ratio Semnonum," the last proof of the Semnones tribe (87). This Latin phrase is no piece of intellectual pretention, however, but rather a gesture to the writings of Tacitus. Each artifact in Seidentopf's collection is labeled with a quote from the Roman historian's account of ancient Germanic peoples. By affixing these citations to these ancient objects, Seidentopf effectively reads Tacitus' narrative onto them. In so doing, the pastor makes visible the high cultural stakes that he is playing for, namely, a connection to the legacy of ancient Rome and the glorious victory of the Germanic tribes over her mighty legions at Teutoburg. We can see here that this makeshift curio cabinet is a carefully curated ornament in Seidentopf's home. Indeed, the narrator's comparison of Seidentopf's theological stances and historical theories shows that more is at stake here than a mere hobby. Seidentopf's historical system has attained a near religious significance for the preacher, and this belief system, the narrator tells us, represents the center around which any debate of any importance to the man must necessarily rotate.

For Seidentopf then, the debate, though amicable and part of a Christmas visit, is underwritten by an intense intellectual urgency. It is worth noting here that this discussion of a small bronze artifact is the one time in *Vor dem Sturm* that Germanness and Slavicness are discussed outright, for an extended period of time, and that they are directly contrasted with one another. In the archaeological sphere, the plot of *Vor dem Sturm* draws a clear distinction between things Germanic and things Slavic. Indeed, Turgany provokes Seidentopf into arguing with him by drawing a different sort of division – a geo-cultural boundary. "Er ist von *jenseit* [sic] der Oder; Wegearbeiter fanden ihn zwischen Reppen und Drossen; er steckte im Mergel;

Drossen ist *wendisch* und heißt: ‘Stadt am Wege’. Die Oder war immer *Grenzfluß*” (97).¹⁰¹

Putting aside Turgany’s shaky grasp of toponymy, this opening salvo marks the first time in *Vor dem Sturm* that a character refers to the Oder River as a border. Not a geo-political boundary at the time, the Oder assumes the symbolic role of eternal topographical division between the Slavic Wends and the ancient Germanic tribes. Based on this assumption, Turgany declares that the wagon must be of ancient Slavic provenance. Seidentopf brushes aside this argument, maintaining that “es gab eine Zeit, wo diesseits und jenseits des Flusses Deutsche wohnten,” and though Seidentopf returns in the next breath to using the term “Germanic,” his brief reference to “Germans” ties the friendly repartee to more contemporary concerns (97).

After each man situates the wagon in his own imagined historical geography, the debate takes a more serious turn with judge and pastor each claiming the superb craftsmanship of the object as ultimate proof. In short, the conversation becomes one about which culture produced the superior civilization: the ancient Wends or their Germanic counterparts. Better culture, better miniature wagons. Turgany dismisses the Germanic tribesmen as wild men who offered up brutal human sacrifices, in stark contrast to the civilized Wendish peoples with their well-spun cloth and beautiful temples. “Wer brachte die Kultur in diese Gegenden?” Turgany demands. Seidentopf testily retorts that it is Germanic influences which only in this millennium have encouraged Wendish cultural flourishing, stating that “dieses spätere, unter den Anregungen unserer germanischen Welt über sich selbst hinauswachsende Wendentum ist ein Wendentum dieses Jahrtausends, während dieser bronzene Wagen augenscheinlich bis in die ersten Säkula unserer Zeitrechnung zurückdatiert,” estimating the object to hail from the third century, or even earlier (98). Again, we see that this archaeological debate has far-reaching

¹⁰¹ Actually, the *German* name Drossen first appears in 1375, well after the town Osna had come under the rulership of the Margraves of Brandenburg. The name likely derives from the prepositional phrase “an der Ossen,” or “on the Osna.” The Slavic Osna seems to come from “osa,” today “osika,” or aspen tree; “Ošno Lubuskie.” *Oficjalny Serwis Urzędu Miasta Ošno* [Official Portal of the Government of the City of Ošno]. Miasto Ošno [city of Ošno], n.d. Web. 06 Jan. 2016.

implications for understandings of history and culture. The debate surrounding this one tiny artifact spawns a discussion regarding innate cultural superiority and the indebtedness of one civilization to another. There is little room for ambivalence or ambiguity in this conversation. The idea that the wagon could be both Germanic and Slavic never occurs to the men. For Seidentopf in particular, the possibility of an item fitting into multiple categories would not only be distressing intellectually, it might require a small home renovation. Ambiguity similarly finds no quarter in this discussion. Both men, especially Seidentopf, voice distinctly *unambiguous* interpretations of the wagon's provenance and purpose. For an archaeological acolyte of Germanicness, any doubt or wiggle room would throw his entire understanding of the world into question.

Yet, in spite of the serious implications of some of the points made by Seidentopf and Turgany, Fontane frames this discussion in a manner which serves to parody the two men's more popular than scholarly understanding of history. We can see this in the narration immediately preceding Seidentopf's receipt of the wagon as well as in concluding moments of the debate. While the pastor's housekeeper works in the kitchen, Turgany and Seidentopf settle in his study for their usual antecibal debate. For, the narrator informs us, "Die Stunde vor Tische – nach einem alten Herkommen...gehörte dem wissenschaftlichen Austausch, will sagen, der Kriegsführung" (95). This tongue-in-cheek reference to the two men's "scholarly exchange" as "warfare" serves to undercut the remarks to come in the mind of the reader before argumentation begins. The narrator's commentary sets up the debate to come as one in which the participants take the subject at hand to be more serious than need be. As the debate winds down, the regulatory baton is passed from narrator to character. This discussion about the essential Germanicness or Slavicness of the Mark culminates in speculation as to the original purpose of the little bronze wagon. Seidentopf deems it a holy relic, specifically, the wagon of the Norse god Odin, while Turgany maintains the artifact was a toy belonging to the son of a Slavic prince, perhaps of the Lutici or Obotrite tribal confederations (98-99). Both men then present

their cases to Renate and Marie for judgment. Renate then points out the ridiculousness of such a question: “Welche Blindheit, ihr Freunde, daß ihr den Wald vor Bäumen nicht seht! War je eine Frage leichter zu entscheiden? Wozu das Suchen in dunkler Ferne? Dieser Wagen, von allerdings symbolischer Bedeutung, ist nichts anderes als ein *Streitwagen*, das zwischen Drossen und Reppen aufgefundene Bild eurer eigenen urewigen Fehde” (101). The only true meaning of the artifact in the present day that can be determined with any certainty lies not in its ancient use, but in its role as inspiration for the two gentlemen’s long-running argument of “Lutizii contra Semnones” (88). Fontane, Brent Maner points out, pokes fun here at the sort of antiquarian debates held by amateur archaeologists such as Turgany and Seidentopf.¹⁰² Naturally, there is no way of determining whether Wendish or Germanic hands molded the wagon, particularly given the archaeological tools at one’s disposal in 1812. This gentle mocking also gestures to the aforementioned rift in archaeology between professional archaeologists excavating Greek antiquities and amateur archaeologists collecting bits of local Germanic history. For much of the nineteenth century, and long after classical archaeology had already been outfitted with a rigorous institutional apparatus, *Tendenzsammler* such as Seidentopf were in fact the primary scholars who were cataloguing the remnants of ancient Germanic peoples. Fontane here makes an important critique regarding historical debate; interpretation very often depends entirely on partisanship.¹⁰³ And indeed, in our discussion of the debate itself in the previous paragraph, we can see the wanton imposition of historical narrative and imagined geography with few conclusions drawn from the physical evidence of the wagon itself. To a certain extent, Fontane pulls the rug out from underneath the feet of the more tendentious bits of nationalism in the discussion between Turgany and Seidentopf. Thus, the debate held by these two characters never goes near the rabid nationalism of Gustav Kossinna, a scholar of

¹⁰² Maner, Brent. “Felix Dahn and the People’s Migrations.” German Studies Association Thirty-Eighth Annual Conference. Westin Kansas City at Crown Center, Kansas City, MO. 19 Sept. 2014. Lecture.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

German pre-history driven by intense resentment at the overt marginalization of *Althertumskunde* in favor of the more prestigious *Althertumswissenschaft*.

Ambivalence underscores the wagon debate from start to finish, not the least because of the ambivalent attitudes held by Seidentopf and Turgany themselves regarding their discussions of many years. For Seidentopf, there is the nagging fear of the pious lying always in wait in the back of his mind, that there is a chance, however infinitesimal, that his belief system may be flawed. Though Seidentopf may participate in his archaeological feud with Turgany with enthusiasm, he faces each new contest with an underlying dread of being proven wrong:

In dieser kurzen Spanne Zeit [the hour before sitting down to eat] wurden jene Schlachten geschlagen, denen der Justizrat mit heiterer Entschlossenheit, der Pastor, bei allem Verlangen danach, doch zugleich mit immer erneutem Bangen entgegensah. Denn so laut er auch die Unerschütterlichkeit seines Systems proklamieren mochte, gerade hinter seinen bestimmtesten Versicherungen barg sich der quälendste Zweifel. Alle Systeme sind gefallen, sagte er zu sich selbst, und vor jeder neuen Debatte beschlich ihn die Vorstellung: wenn nun jetzt dein Bau zusammenstürzte! (96)

Seidentopf's confident proclamations on the Mark's embedded Germanness belie the pastor's secret anxiety that this historical "system" may collapse in on itself at any moment. Any system can fall, he knows, and many systems have failed in the past. This recognition of fallibility and fragility serve to temper the claims made during the wagon debate. The narrator qualifies Turgany's position by downplaying the judge's emotional investment in the outcome of the discussion. Turgany enjoys the act of argumentation itself, we are told. "Er debattierte nur nach" the narrator explains, "dem Prinzip von Stahl und Stein; hart gegen hart das gab dann die Funken, die ihm wichtiger waren als die Sache selbst. Zudem wußte der panslawistische Justizrat, daß Streit und immer wieder in Frage gestellter Sieg längst ein Lebensbedürfnis Seidentopfs geworden waren, und gefiel sich deshalb in seiner Oppositionsrolle mehr noch aus Rücksicht gegen diesen als aus Rücksicht gegen sich selbst" (88). Turgany is less interested in the Mark's ancient Germanic or Slavic legacy than the "sparks" of controversy that a discussion thereof will elicit from his friend. This ambivalence on Turgany's part to the debate's outcome in turn softens the blow of his points to the mind of the reader.

In summary, the wagon debate and its narrative framework work in support of the paradoxical identity construction that Fontane's *Vor dem Sturm* depicts. The discussion between Seidentopf and Turgany, on the one hand, represents the only time in the novel when characters compare and contrast Germanness and Slaviness explicitly. The Oder River assumes symbolic import in the novel's imagined geography as a putative ancient boundary between Germandom and Slavdom. Certain moments in the conversation contain serious implications for cultural claims to the Mark, as well as assertions of cultural superiority and inferiority. At one point, the stakes are as high as the debate over which culture brought "civilization," to the Mark. On the other hand, remarks by the narrator and other non-combattants, as it were, undermine the seriousness of the discussion in the minds of the readers. Turgany, we learn, is primarily invested in the subject at hand by a love of polemics rather than an ardent Pan-Slavist agenda. Furthermore, however zealous Seidentopf may be in public, the archaeology enthusiast harbors nagging doubts regarding the validity of his own arguments and methods. Finally, the discussion is brought to a close by Renate von Vitzewitz. The young noblewoman ends the debate by pointing out the general silliness of the argument and deeming the true significance of the wagon as a symbol of the two men's long-running archaeological feud. And yet, as we shall see in the following section, we conclude the novel with an all-German family and no intercultural alliances.

Family Politics

In the works of Theodor Fontane, marriage, family dynamics, and romantic entanglements often act as metaphors for broader political changes and cultural shifts. For example, in Fontane's novel *Unwiederbringlich*, the breakdown of Helmuth and Christine Holk's marriage foreshadows Denmark's loss of the region of Schleswig-Holstein and the transfer of the province to an emerging Germany. Failed marriages or matches underwrite class tensions and shifts in *Frau Jenny Treibel* (1893) and *Effi Briest* (1896). Here, the German *altmärkisch* noble Vitzewitz family stands in for the nation as both entities divest themselves of

foreign alliances over the course of the novel. Prussia shakes off its previous allegiance to Napoleonic France as circumstances dissolve the dual betrothals between Lewin and Renate von Vitzewitz and the Polish siblings Tubal von Ladalinski and Kathinka von Ladalinska. In *Vor dem Sturm*, the Poles stand in for the French, who never appear as individual, well-developed characters. Outside of the Ladalinski family, there are no real Polish characters, and Poland is not represented at the national level. Just as political and familial alliances in *Vor dem Sturm* move in parallel, so do familial alliances and cultural affinities. In this section, I will focus on two main juxtapositions of events of familial, political, and cultural import. The first is the Ladalinski ball where the news of General Yorck's surrender to the Russian forces coincides with Lewin's realization that he will lose Kathinka. The second juxtaposition is Lewin's illness following Kathinka's elopement with the Polish count Jarosch Bninski and the death of Lewin and Renate's Francophilic aunt Amélie Pudagla. Finally, I reflect on the lack of agency displayed by the German characters in bringing about their new family arrangements in contrast to the conscious political choices made by the Prussian king in dissolving his military alliance with France.

After spending Christmas (i.e. the first half of the novel) in Hohen-Vietz and Guse, Lewin von Vitzewitz returns to his studies in Berlin, in time, it turns out, to attend a social gathering which will mark a turning point in national and familial politics. When Lewin arrives at the Ladalinski residence, Kathinka von Ladalinska has withdrawn temporarily in order to prepare for a performance of the mazurka, a Polish folk dance. Significantly, Kathinka changes dresses before this dance. The gown she wore to dance the waltz and the *anglaise* is unsuitable for the fast-paced movements of the mazurka. As Kathinka prepares for a dance where she will be the center of attention, several men discuss her beauty, elegance, and coquetry, commenting on her fairy-like grace. Hauptmann Bummcke remarks, "Es will nicht mehr gehen, Tubal, und doch tanzt es sich mit Ihrer Schwester wie mit einer Fee" (359). In the moments leading up to the mazurka, Kathinka is painted as a sort of exotic figure, and as Bummcke comments wistfully,

whenever he hears her “vollen Namen... Kathinka von Ladalinska, da ist es mir immer wie Janitscharenmusik, ja auf Ehre, es tingelt und klingelt wie das Glockenspiel vom Regiment Alt-Larisch” (359).¹⁰⁴ Kathinka’s full name rolls off the tongue like the European military marching music inspired by the repertoire of the elite Ottoman fighting unit, the janissaries. Kathinka von Ladaliska is a woman of beauty and passion, a living piece of the Orient come to swirl briefly in the ballrooms of the West.

The mazurka is more of a performance than a group activity at a social gathering, a “graziösen Schauspiel” as the narrator terms it, which the entire company crowds into the doorways to observe. The Polish folk dance was becoming fashionable in Berlin high society at the time, the narrator tells us. Even so, we learn, the mazurka is often a bit of a spectator sport, depending on the company. The mazurka is a “Tanz, der, damals in den Gesellschaften unserer Hauptstadt Mode werdend dennoch, wenn Polen oder Schlesier von jenseit [sic] der Oder zugegen waren, in begründeter Furcht vor ihrer Überlegenheit immer nur von diesen getanz zu werden pflegte” (361). German gentry, for fear of embarrassment, leave the mazurka to their Polish and Silesian counterparts, to their guests “from the other side of the Oder.”¹⁰⁵ They stand and watch these “Herren und Damen in einem Kostüm, das, ohne streng national zu sein, das polnische Element wenigstens in quadratischen Mützen und kurzen Pelzröcken andeutete” (361). The four pairs who dance the mazurka at the Ladalinski ball may not be in full Polish folk costume, but their square caps and short jackets point to the Polish provenance of this display. In the middle of this gathering in the Prussian capital, German gentry give way to make space for this instance of staged Polishness.

¹⁰⁴ Actually, in Polish, her name would have omitted the German “von” and likely have been something along the lines of “Kathinka Ladalińska.”

¹⁰⁵ As may be recalled in Chapter I of this dissertation, Anton Wohlfart, protagonist of *Soll und Haben*, also takes the time to glower at mazurka dancers in Poland (Freytag 557). He particularly disapproves of the wild German Leonore, who lacks the grace of the Polish women’s practiced mazurka movements.

This clearing of the floor for the mazurka sets up a scene in which Lewin finds himself literally sidelined and separated from his beloved Kathinka. In effect, the mazurka performance symbolically stages the widening gulf between Lewin and Kathinka. This moment, in addition to representing a highlight of the evening, also marks a shift in Ladalinski-Vitzewitz family relations. Watching Kathinka swirl across the dance floor with Count Bninski as her mazurka partner, Lewin realizes that his engagement to the young Polish noblewoman is doomed.

Lewin hatte sich mittlerweile bis in die vorderste Reihe der Zuschauer geschoben...Von den vier Paaren, die sich in zierlicher Bewegung drehten, sah er nur eins, und während er hingerissen war von der Schönheit der Erscheinung, beschlich ihn doch zugleich das schmerzlichste der Gefühle, das Gefühl des Zurückstehenmüssens und des Besiegtseins, nicht durch Laune oder Zufall, sondern durch die wirkliche Überlegenheit seines Nebenbuhlers. Er empfand es selbst. Alles, was er sah, war Kraft, Grazie, Leidenschaft; was bedeutete daneben sein gutes Herz? Ein Lächeln zuckte um seine Lippen, er kam sich matt, nüchtern, langweilig vor...Es schien ihm alles ein Zeichen (362).

Lewin experiences here the excruciating pain of exclusion, of being literally obliged to stand back. This is a low moment for Germandom, for, on the surface at least, Lewin's loss of Kathinka seems to be a "defeat." Lewin looks on with anguish at the perceived superiority of his rival for Kathinka's heart. Looking on at Bninski's strength and poise, and the passion that he can offer Kathinka, Lewin falls into despair. What does the love of a good heart matter in the face of such beauty and excitement? The performance of the mazurka, and the position this spectacle places Lewin into, the young German realizes, are a sign of his ill-fated affection for the Polish Kathinka. After all, he is but a dull, sober, lethargic foil to Bninski's glittering brilliance.

Lewin's resignation to romantic defeat serves as preface to news of a very different sort of upset, this time on the military front to the east. Even as Ladalinski stands by, congratulating his daughter and the other dancers on their brilliantly executed mazurka, he receives news of York's surrender to Russian forces by courier. By the end of the next contredanse, ironically, a dance performed in rings with countermovement, the entire company has learned that Prussian General Field Marshal Johann David Ludwig York von Wartenburg has ceased to cover the

retreat of the troops under French Marshal Etienne Jacques Joseph Alexandre Macdonald. York acts independently of the Prussian King here, proclaiming his own troops neutral in a meeting with Russian General Diebitsch (835). This example of a Prussian taking political action without previous instruction from his sovereign sets off a rant on the hypocrisy of German loyalty from Count Bninski. For the Polish patriot, York's surrender presages a coming dissolution of Prussia's alliance with Napoleonic France and another nail in the coffin of Polish dreams of independent statehood.

Thus, familial and political alliances evolve in tandem in this chapter. The narrator points to this parallel development directly, referring later on to these events as taking place "an jenem Ballabend, der nur zwei große Momente gehabt hatte: die Mazurka und die Nachricht von der Kapitulation" (446). Prussia's political affiliations take a sharp turn at the moment when the intended Ladalinski-Vitzevitz alliance double is revealed to be doomed to fail. The mazurka is a symbol of Kathinka and Bninski's romance, and the pair's performance of the Polish national dance at a previous ball alerted Tubal von Ladalinski of the intensity of his sister's affection for Bninski and leads him to alert Lewin of a romantic rival. Furthermore, Kathinka's indifferent reaction to hearing these events of political moment elicits such a strong reaction from Bninski as to inadvertently reveal the depth of their relationship to Papa Ladalinski. Rather than address Kathinka with the proper formality of "Mein gnädigstes Fräulein," Bninski addresses her by her given name, a slip that Ladalinski does not miss (362). At this one social event, proof of evolution in political circumstances and personal relationships is revealed to reader and character alike in careful synchrony.

In this novel, it is not only the divestment of alliances in the political and familial realms which evolve in tandem, but also cultural affinities and marital bonds. As the war continues to unfold, the Vitzewitz family not only divests itself of its connections to the Polish aristocracy, but of its Francophilic contingent. To amend an old adage for the world of *Vor dem Sturm*: unlucky in war, lucky in love. The tides of war may not flow Bninski's way, but he succeeds in winning

Kathinka von Ladalinska's heart and the two lovers elope to Poland as the front line draws near. Timing again, proves far from coincidental here. Tubal's note to Lewin informing the young German man that his intended has run off and effectively broken her engagement pushes Lewin to the edge of despair. Brokenhearted, Lewin runs from his lodgings in Old Berlin, eventually collapsing from exhaustion and exposure in the freezing wintry landscape of Brandenburg. He is found unconscious the same morning that news arrives at Hohen Vietz that Berndt von Vitzewitz's sister Amélie von Pudagla has died at her estate, Schloss Guse. With her demise, one of the primary architects of the Ladalinski-Vitzewitz alliance double falls away, just as the possibility of one of the intended two matches (Kathinka and Lewin) crumbles to nothing. Tante Amélie's death also removes the most Francophilic character in *Vor dem Sturm* from the scene. Her love for all things French and indeed preference of French literature over German is made clear at the New Year's soirée held in her salon earlier in the novel. The evening's musical and theatrical program is printed in French, for example. Indeed, cultural differences prove to be a point of contention between Amélie and her German nationalist brother Berndt and a point of Amélie's estimation of Kathinka as an accomplished young woman and suitable bride for her nephew. Indeed, Amélie's guest of honor at this New Year's gathering is the French actress and chanteuse Demoiselle Alceste and the Countess of Guse is especially eager to introduce the evening's performer to "ihren Liebling Kathinka" (285). Alceste likewise points to a cultural kinship between her nation and Kathinka's Polish homeland, gushing that "Vous êtes polonaise. Ah, j'aime beaucoup les Polonais. Ils sont tout-à-fait les Français du Nord" (285). Alceste quickly steers the discussion towards the political arena, a subject of no interest to Kathinka, and "Frenchwoman of the North" though she may be, she feels little inclination to converse further with Alceste. On the one hand, French characters (of which there are very few in *Vor dem Sturm*) and Polish characters share far fewer personal connections than do Germans and Poles in the novel. However, France and Poland *are* joined to one another by cultural links and fortunes of war, as Alceste's greeting and later dissertation on politics indicate. In fact, Kathinka

is, after Tante Amélie of course, perhaps the character who most liberally peppers her speech with French expressions in *Vor dem Sturm*. Kathinka even performs a small role alongside Alceste that evening as an understudy for the sick Renate. It is significant therefore, that Amélie should pass away just as her social protégée and intended niece-in-law runs away to Poland (and later settles in Paris, we should note). Moreover, Lewin's recovery from his exposure-induced fever begins as Amélie's funeral is held in Guse.¹⁰⁶

In addition, Amélie's death serves to symbolically unite the Eastern and Western Oderbruch under more Germanophilic aristocrats and to reaffirm the importance of continuity in the relationship between the nobility and the land they hold. If Schloss Guse were a text, Amélie's death can be said to effectively change the estate in both form and content. The holding does not come under the stewardship of Amélie von Pudagla, née Vitzewitz by the traditional route of inheritance. Rather, her husband, the late Count von Pudagla, purchased the estate from its previous owners. Indeed, Guse has had a complicated history, falling into the hands of many different noble families. As Garland notes, the complicated history of Schloss Guse's ever-changing ownership stands in stark contrast to the unbroken family history of Hohen-Vietz. Though the castle itself has evolved or suffered partial destruction over the years, it has never left the von Vitzewitz family's possession. Garland notes the symbolic contrast between the two estates, maintaining that, "the manor house and the church of Hohen-Vietz reflect the historical continuity of the March. The description of Guse, however...illustrates the discontinuity, arising from the imposition of a foreign culture" (12-13). Upon Countess Amélie's passing, this erstwhile "Kaufgut" becomes a more traditional "Erbgut" when Amélie's testament bequeaths Guse to Renate. This act of inheritance moreover, effectively unites the Eastern Oderbruch with the Western under common ownership of the more German nationalist branch of clan Vitzewitz,

¹⁰⁶ Garland incorrectly states that Lewin's recovery coincides with the death of his aunt (13). She dies as Lewin himself lies on the road from Berlin to Bohlsdorf.

and eventually under the stewardship of the male line.¹⁰⁷ For, in the wake of her fiancé's death, Renate cedes the estate to her brother Lewin, who moves into Guse with his German bride Marie Kniehase. The home of the French-educated Countess becomes the first dwelling of the young all-German family which supersedes the German-Polish aristocratic nuptials that she had planned. For Lewin, of course, assumes lordship of Hohen-Vietz upon the death of his own father. Guse's long journey from ancient Wendish times through the stewardship of many noble families has brought it at long last into the fold of the German Mark and into the patrilineal possession of a distinguished *altmärkisch* family.

Another ultimate result of these narrative maneuverings is that the Poles are not incorporated on equal familial terms in *Vor dem Sturm*. The Prussian court may politically adopt Privy Councillor Ladalinski, but he will not be allowed by the novel to intertwine his own family tree with that of an altmärkische noble family. Kathinka's elopement and Tubal's death effectively deprive Ladalinski of an heir and spell the end of the Ladalinski bloodline. As a courtly orphan adopted by Prussia, Ladalinski faces the consequences of any adoption, as Nacim Ghanbari writes in her monograph, *Das Haus: eine deutsche Literaturgeschichte: 1850-1926*. "Nach dem Verlust seiner Nachkommen verharret Ladalinski im Status eines adoptierten Günstlings des preußischen Staates," Ghanbari writes, and "Auf unheimliche Weise verläuft sein Leben nach den Regeln der Adoption, die ihm verbieten...das verlassene (eigene) Haus fortzusetzen" (101). Moreover, I would add, the loss of the next generation of House Ladalinski and the Privy Councillor's political adoption effectively eliminates Poland's personal presence in the lives of the Vitzewitz family.

¹⁰⁷ The narrator takes great pains to emphasize the shift of narrative lense from Hohen-Vietz in the Eastern reaches of the Oderbruch to Schloss Guse's location in the Western half of the region, suggesting that this change of scenery is of especial symbolic import: "Der Lauf unserer Erzählung führt uns während der nächsten Kapitel von Hohen-Vietz und dem östlichen Teile des Oderbruchs an den *westlichen Höhenzug* desselben, zu dessen Füßen, heute wie damals, die historischen Dörfer dieser Gegenden gelegen sind, altadelige Güter, deren meist wendische Namen sich schon in unseren ältesten Urkunden finden" (131)

It behooves us, however, to note the lack of actual German agency in bringing about the familial end game of *Vor dem Sturm*. The all-German family seems to come into being almost organically. Any “project” to create German national identity through family ties is undertaken at the narrative level, rather than constituting a concerted effort by German characters in the novel to legislate a preference for intra-cultural bonds. Lewin does not consciously choose to marry a German girl instead of a Polish maiden. Circumstance chooses Lewin’s bride for him. Kathinka chooses to run away with Bninski. The news of Lewin’s capture exposes Marie’s affection for him when she faints from shock, an involuntary reaction. In the extreme circumstances of war, Berndt von Vitzewitz easily brushes aside any misgivings regarding the *mésalliance* in the midst of his anxiety over Lewin’s captivity and relief at his later rescue. That rescue claims Tubal’s life when the Polish man dashes into the crossfire to save the family dog Hektor, who has tagged along to liberate his beloved master. This tragedy leaves Renate without a fiancé, and results in her eventual spinsterhood. The transition of Schloss Guse from Francophilic *Kaufgut* to *Erbgut* and starter castle for a young German couple is effected by Amélie’s (presumably involuntary) death. Things seem to just conveniently “happen” to the Vitzewitzes. The all-German family that constitutes the novel’s romantic resolution results from the decisions of Polish characters and well-timed narrative circumstance. Any intentionality underlying the events leading to that resolution is to be laid at the feet of Theodor Fontane himself.

Imagined Geography

In the final section of this chapter we will look at a sphere of identity creation which exposes and embraces its own ambivalence and ambiguity, namely, the human and physical geography of the Mark. Descriptions by the narrator and characters of *Vor dem Sturm* of the region’s history render the Mark physical proof of present contingency. This novel tells the history of the land in its pages as it writes that history into every rock, stream, and village church. Märkisch history appears as a steady flow of gradual settlement by various groups and

of topographical remodeling in the draining of the Oderbruch. Physical and human geography in this land are the product of past change and the acceptance of ambivalence, and indeed, newcomers and outsiders rise easily to prominence in *Vor dem Sturm*. In setting his novel in a land already won for Germandom, Fontane effectively removes the element of conquest from the equation that Viebig and Freytag struggle to balance. The changes which take place within the timeframe of the main plot of the novel, however, occur in the realm of imagined geography. *Vor dem Sturm* depicts a time in which the region of the Mark is caught up in events of pan-European scope. Far more ambivalent is the way in which the Märker see themselves and imagine the position of their region with respect to the outside world. The fog of war demands that the men and women of the Oderbruch renegotiate their own inner cartography even though the novel depicts little physical border crossing and no real shift in “actual” geopolitical borders.

In *Vor dem Sturm*, it is only the sphere of regional geography which seems to accept liminality, ambiguity, and ambivalence. This novel is a work firmly anchored in the space and place of its setting and it is perhaps because of this grounding that German identity in *Vor dem Sturm* need not be tied to the conquest of lands or peoples in the way in which *Soll und Haben* and *Das schlafende Heer* are. At the level of region and village, *Vor dem Sturm* evinces no real insecurity regarding the Wendish population.¹⁰⁸ It must be acknowledged that this confidence may arise in part from the circumstance that the Wendish tribes never really united into a single political entity and wielded no significant political or military power after the Northern Crusades in the 12th century. The Wendish communities of the Mark therefore do not represent the same threat to Germandom and Prussia as do the Poles with their history of a unified state, or even empire. Beyond these qualifying factors, I maintain that the novel is at peace with the ambivalence embedded in the landscape around it and the tolerance for the diverse makeup of

¹⁰⁸ The term “Wend” is a broad one which encompasses a number of ancient Slavic tribes. In *Vor dem Sturm*, this designation likely refers to the Sorbs, as this tribe was the only one to retain any sort of distinct ethnic identity into the nineteenth century.

the Mark in the geographic sphere of identity construction stands in ironic tension with the all-German family produced by the novel's romantic resolution.

Vor dem Sturm expends considerable conversational and narrative effort in explaining how the geography of the Mark has come to be. As mentioned previously, the Mark is depicted as a place peopled by successive waves of migration by settlers from the Rhineland and Bohemia to lands already inhabited by the Slavic Wends. Through excursions to sites of local historical import, fireside conversations at Hohen-Vietz, and narrative descriptions of *märkisch* history, we as readers learn how each group of people came to reside in the Mark, how each family came to be, and how the main characters found their lives thrown together. *Vor dem Sturm* takes great pains in the relation of individual histories and the histories of inter-ethnic and interpersonal relationships. Continuous references to the original wendish names or heritage of various places in the Mark effectively refute Seidentopf's remark cited above, that "Die wendische Invasion habe nur den Charakter einer Sturzwelle gehabt." Each wave of immigrants is incorporated into the fabric of *märkisch* life, with outsiders able to rise to some prominence. The Pfälzer Kniehase, for example, is selected as Schulze by the home village of his Wendish wife. The village, in effect, adopts him. However, as we have seen above, adoption imposes certain limitations on its beneficiaries. While the Kniehase marriage, effectively a German-Slavic union, is allowed to take place, the Schulze and his wife are unable to have biological children of their own. Instead, they adopt the young Marie when her father dies at Hohen-Vietz, leaving her an orphan. As a result, the German-Wend marriage, a product of the ambivalence of *märkisch* history, proves a cradle for the German family that will supplant a projected German-Polish marriage. Thus, while the novel indeed delights in the composite nature of *märkisch* demography, ambivalence has its limits in *Vor dem Sturm*. For that which is permitted for the community may not be for the family.

However, though *Vor dem Sturm* actively incorporates the Mark's ancient Wendish heritage, significant emphasis is placed on *German* topographical remodeling efforts as

legitimizing German/Prussian claims to the Mark. Indeed, the draining of the Oderbruch greatly increased the amount of arable land and made it possible to attract such great numbers of settlers from across German-speaking lands. The symbolic importance of this undertaking for the plot of *Vor dem Sturm* is clear in the sheer frequency with which this event is referenced throughout the novel. This event finds what is perhaps its most poetic expression in the narrator's description of the region surrounding Schloss Guse:

Alle diese Güter begannen bald nach der Trockenlegung des Oderbruchs, also etwa dreißig Jahre vor Beginn unserer Erzählung, zu ihren sonstigen Vorzügen auch noch *den* landschaftlicher Schönheit zu gesellen. Wer hier um die Pfingstzeit seines Weges kam, wenn die Rapsfelder in Blüte standen und ihr Gold und ihren Duft über das Bruchland ausstreuten, der mußte sich, weit aus der Mark fort, in ferne, beglücktere Reichtumländer versetzt fühlen. Die Triebkraft des jungfräulichen Bodens berührte hier das Herz mit einer dankgestimmten Freude, wie sie die Patriarchen empfinden mochten, wenn sie, inmitten menschenleerer Gegenden, den gottgeschenkten Segen ihres Hauses und ihrer Herden zählten. Denn nur da, wo die Hand des Menschen in harter, nie rastender Arbeit der ärmlichen Scholle ein paar ärmliche Halme abgewinnt, kann die Vorstellung Platz greifen, daß *er* es sei, der diesen armen Segen geschaffen habe; wo aber die Erde hundertfältige Frucht treibt und aus jeden eingestreuten Korn einen Reichtum schafft, da fühlt sich das Menschenherz der Gnade Gottes unmittelbar gegenüber und begibt sich aller Selbstgenügsamkeit. Es war an diesem westlichen Höhenrande des Bruches, daß der Große König, über die goldenen Felder hinblickend, die Worte sprach: "Hier habe ich in Frieden eine Provinz gewonnen" (131-132).

It is in this manner that the "Great King," Frederick the Great, one of Prussia's most Francophile monarchs, earns his place in the novel as German ruler par excellence. His initiative quite literally brought beauty to the landscape of the Western Oderbruch, rendering this "virgin soil" fruitful and a land of plenty. The language in this description links the peoples of the Oderbruch to the biblical patriarchs in their gratitude for the nearly miraculous bounty of their new land. The King's reshaping of the topography of the Mark brings his people closer to God, for while a man who toils to coax a few sheafs of grain from poor soil might believe his own efforts deserve the credit for his harvest, a man whose every seed blossoms forth in brilliance can only turn to divine providence in gratitude for his great fortune. This passage embeds the Mark into history as the scene of one of the greatest and most enduring accomplishments of "old Fritz" and its golden waves of grain as the background for one of his most memorable pronouncements.

The history of the creation of the very land beneath the feet of the *märkisch* peasant moreover, provides the bedrock for the common man's unwavering loyalty to Frederick the Great's successors, regardless of which political allies those kings might choose. Schulze Kniehase stresses the depth of that fealty to Berndt von Vitzewitz when the latter argues that subjects must at times act in the interests of their land and earth. To Berndt's mind, if the King neglects his duty to that land, he effectively releases his subjects from their obligations to the Crown. Kniehase shakes his head, replying that for the peasants of the Oderbruch:

Der König ist ihnen alles. Der König hat ihnen das Bruch eingedeicht, der König hat ihnen die Kirchen gebaut, der König hat ihnen die Gräben gezogen. So wissen sie es von Vater und Großvater her, und so wissen sie es von sich selber. Wenn ich mit Kallies und Kümmeritz und den anderen Ganzbauern drüben bei Scharwenka sitze, so ist 'der Alte Fritz' das dritte Wort. Er ist ihr Herrgott, und sie sprechen von ihm, als wenn er noch lebte. Nur eins ist dem Bauer noch mehr ans Herz gewachsen: sein Haus und Hof (216-217).

"Old Fritz," Kniehase emphasizes, is alive and well in the village pubs of the Oderbruch, and the great king commands nearly godlike veneration from the peasants of Hohen-Vietz and beyond. The draining of the Oderbruch bound Wends, settlers from Pfalz and Bohemia to the Mark and to the Prussian Crown. The land and the loyalty it engenders run so deep in the identities of these peasants, Kniehase explains to Berndt, that they are unlikely to rise up without the King's blessing, even to dispel marauding French soldiers.

Discussion of the Mark's geographical and topographical history represents a crucial part of the broader process of identity construction taking place in *Vor dem Sturm*. Ambivalence of regional geography does not simply constitute quaint background for larger historical-geopolitical events. The emphasis on the Mark's history and the draining of the Oderbruch serve to emphasize the idea that the Mark is the product of historical change. The war which rages across Europe, largely behind the scenes in *Vor dem Sturm*, effects a re-centering of the imagined geography in the minds of the characters. This mental cartography leads to the repositioning of the Mark's geographic relationships to other points in a European context which now finds itself in flux. As I discuss the novel's engagement with changing imagined

geographies, I wish to emphasize that this engagement forms part of the same project of identity as the history of the Oderbruch's topography. Both efforts seek to read history's fingerprints in the world and the region, rather than to shake its hand.

As mentioned above, we “witness” very few actual border crossings in *Vor dem Sturm*, though the movements of distant armies across various boundaries is a frequent topic of conversation in Berlin, Hohen-Vietz, and Schloss Guse. Rivers in particular are commonly viewed as borders and reference points. The Oder and the Vistula are mentioned most frequently with the Bug and the Niemen assuming brief but critical roles in the Russian advance and French retreat. Rivers, it seems, are a constant in a world of shifting geographic relations. The relative significance of different rivers does change, however. The characters' imagined geography is in flux in *Vor dem Sturm* as a result of the ambiguous situation that the war has created in the geopolitical arena. While the Rhein and Mosel rivers are referenced only briefly in the context of the wine produced along their banks, the Oder emerges as a privileged border in the world of *Vor dem Sturm*. Understanding of borders changes in a time and place where borders are being transgressed and national allegiances are in flux. The Oder becomes an important boundary in part, because the French and Russian forces must cross it in their movement westward. War redraws borders and changes human interpretations of the existence and significance of borders. Rivers such as the Don and the Dnjepr come to stand in for whole nations (here: Russia). This holds true for Poland in particular which did not exist politically at the time of *Vor dem Sturm*, and is predominantly referenced by way of the culturally symbolic Vistula River, a body of water contained entirely within historically Polish territory. The Vistula and the Polish lands it represented held particular significance for Fontane's particular view of Prussia and its continued viability as a state. Fontane took great pains in an article he wrote while in England to refute one parliamentarian's comparison of Prussia's struggle in the Wars of Liberation to the Polish January Uprising of 1863: “Die Erhebung Preußens von 1813, die Erhebung eines Volkes, das noch lebte, das noch da war, die Erhebung eines ganzen Volkes vom

König bis zum Bettler, vom Greis bis zum Knaben, — sie hat nichts gemein mit diesem unseligen polnischen Aufstand” (in Flemming 219). The Vistula River takes on great symbolic import in the arguments that Fontane makes in his article which equates the reconstitution of Poland, the land on the banks of the Vistula, with the destruction of Prussia. “Polen wiederherstellen,” Fontane maintains, “heißt einfach das Königreich Preußen von der Landkarte streichen. Ohne Westpreußen, ohne Danzig, ohne die Weichsel, sind wir kein Preußen mehr” (in Flemming 219-220).¹⁰⁹ Without the Vistula, Fontane claims, there can be no kingdom of Prussia. The context of that article lends added importance to references to the river in *Vor dem Sturm*. For even though the novel’s narrative lens never takes the reader to Poland, the imagined geography drafted in the minds of German characters depends heavily on the idea of Poland in the German identity under construction in *Vor dem Sturm*.

The result is that the Mark becomes the center of an imagined geography that stretches from Greenland to Imperial Russia and includes reference points such as Paris, Rome, London, and Barcelona. The time of *Vor dem Sturm* is one in which the region is caught up in events of European scope. Indeed, to return to our first example in the previous section, the Ladalinski ball, there is a sense throughout *Vor dem Sturm* of things coming together in this time and place, of worlds colliding, of the Mark as pivotal historical and cultural crossroads. In speaking of two wounded officers who dabble in poetry and other literary pursuits, Lewin’s friend Jürgaß remarks,

Weiteres morgen, wenn ich die Ehre haben werde, Ihnen die beiden Herren vorzustellen. Heute nur noch das. Es waren ihrerzeit Poeten, wie wir deren wohl oder übel jetzt so viele unter unseren jungen Leutnants haben; aber die Kampagnen, die spanische und die russische — denn in der Tat, beide Herren treffen hier von Nord und Süd her in unserer guten Stadt Berlin zusammen — haben ihnen nach der Seite der Dichtung hin nichts abgeworfen. Smolensk und Borodino lagen nicht günstig für die Lyrik. Was sie mitgebracht haben, sind Wunden und Tagebuchblätter (360-361).

¹⁰⁹ Fontane continues on to state that “Es ist Torheit, von einem blühenden und lebensberechtigten Staate zu fordern, daß er sich selbst opfere, sich selbst zerstückele, um ein an seiner Schuld und seinen Gebrechen längst zugrunde gegangenes Gemeinwesen, wie das polnische, wieder aufrichten zu helfen” (in Flemming 220)

The words and stories of the war converge on Berlin, tying the Prussian capital to the distant battlefields of Borodino and Smolensk in Imperial Russia to the east and to the Andalusian port of Cadix and to the battlefield near the village of Plaa in Catalonia. In effect, discussions among characters on geography and topographical history position region, town, and village within the same geopolitical context that Vitzewitz family politics move in parallel to.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Vor dem Sturm* demonstrates the inherent paradox of identity through engagement with ambivalence and ambiguity in four different spheres of identity creation in the borderland of the Mark Brandenburg. Discussions of identity in the archaeological sphere resist ambivalence and ambiguity in interpreting the physical remnants of ancient *märkisch* cultures. Even before characters begin to debate the origins of the wagon artifact, we observe the amateur archaeologist Seidentopf's desire to maintain strict categorical divisions within his own home. Archaeological identity building pits Germanicness and Slavicness as irreconcilable categories in *Vor dem Sturm*, as Turgany and Seidentopf position the wagon in their own imagined geographic and cultural histories. In a similar vein, the political and familial spheres of German identity in this novel also tend towards a reduction of ambivalence in the Mark. The house of Vitzewitz avoids the cultural ambivalence of an *alliance double* with the Polish Ladalinskis. Instead, *Vor dem Sturm* finds its romantic resolution in the all-German family which results from the marriage of Lewin and Marie. As circumstance severs personal ties between the Vitzewitz family, Poland, and Francophilic tendencies in German society, the Prussian state sheds its own foreign alliances in a series of parallel developments. In the beginning of the novel, the Prussian state finds itself in the ambivalent position of being allied to its enemy, Napoleonic France. Over the course of the novel, Prussia moves steadily towards an openly anti-French stance in European politics. Identity construction is approached very differently in the sphere of regional geography where the ambivalence of history is embraced as Wendish, Pfälzer, and *altmärkisch* legacies are written into the landscape and architecture of the Mark. We

observe as well the characters as they grapple with the sudden ambiguity of their own mental cartography introduced by years of conflict. As the tides of war have turned back and forth, traditional borders have been thrown into the air and characters have found themselves forced to re-imagine European geographic relationships, as well as the position of the Mark within those networks. Ambivalence and ambiguity and engagement with those uncertainties provide the fuel which propels development in plot and identity in *Vor dem Sturm*. Across the four spheres discussed above, whether ambiguity and ambivalence are confronted or incorporated, uncertainty and lack of clarity promotes the construction of a new German identity in a borderland society rapidly re-defining center and margin.

As a novel, *Vor dem Sturm* harnesses the ambiguity and ambivalence of the Mark as borderland and organizes this uncertainty within an imagined world, which, as it strives toward literary totality, exposes the inner workings of social identity construction. We observe characters negotiate Germanness as individuals and as a collective. This negotiation takes place over the course of parlor conversations, group outings, and the arrangement of domestic spaces. Within the framework of a genre built on the organization of ambivalence and ambiguity and on regulated transition, *Vor dem Sturm* stages the contingency of Germanness in the present against a past setting of tremendous social upheaval. Through the creation of this fictional arena, Fontane coordinates a series of events, landscapes, and interior spaces which allow us, twice removed, to observe descriptive and dialogic imaginings of German cultural identity in the borderland.

CHAPTER 3: 'NO MAN'S LAND: THE NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF THE GERMAN-POLISH BORDERLAND IN CLARA VIEBIG'S NOVEL, *DAS SCHLAFENDE HEER* [THE SLEEPING ARMY]

In the final chapters of Clara Viebig's 1899 novel *Es lebe die Kunst*, the emotionally exhausted protagonist, author Elisabeth Reinharz, and her husband undertake a pilgrimage to Elisabeth's native village in the countryside of Posen. Upon disembarking from their train, they journey by wagon from the station through a peaceful, campestrial landscape:

Stille. Da blaut der Wald ernst und dunkel, weit in der Runde schließt er dieses Stück Erde ein; da grünen die Raine, von Mohn und Winden und Glockenblumen und Kamillen bunt gesprengt; da wehen weiße Fäden über dichte Stoppeln; da sucht das Rebhuhn mit seinen jungen Schatten im blühenden Kleefeld, und da duckt sich der Hase zwischen fetten Kohlköpfen und lässt sich's wohl sein. (269)

After several claustrophobic chapters in which the narrative gaze seldom departs from the stifling confines of a cramped Berlin apartment, we are allowed a breath of depictive fresh air. These tranquil vistas represent the most detailed descriptive passage of the novel. The rare immediacy of present tense transports us through a landscape where the smallest beetle warrants notice, where colors become verbs.

While the *idea* of Posen underlies the entirety of the central action in Berlin, the province is little more than a background of sylvan respite from the cold stone and societal artifice of Berlin. A promising young writer, Elisabeth Reinharz moves from a Posen estate to Berlin following the death of her uncle and guardian. She relocates to the city in the hopes of making a name for herself. Following the early success of her *Einfache Geschichten*, a collection of tales inspired by her home province, Elizabeth runs afoul of the profit-obsessed sphere of the Berlin publishing houses. Agents, dramaturges, even fellow authors strip her works of all Posener *Lokalkolorit*, arguing that Viennese or at least Silesian themes and dialects will be more intelligible and of more interest to the audience. Desperate for success, Elisabeth

falls into despair and recovers only when her husband takes her back to her home. Amid the familiar sights and sounds, and the pure air of the Posener forests, she rediscovers the inspirations which pushed her to take up her pen in the first place. In this novel, Posen is a holistic antidote to the urban sprawl of Berlin, and Elizabeth's village is beyond the reach of even the railroad and is of little interest to travelers and pleasure seekers (291).¹¹⁰ Indeed, the superficiality and hypocrisy of the Berlin literary salon scene is unable to appreciate the simple, yet complex aesthetics intrinsic in the Posener landscape, deeming it unworthy of literary attention. In the capital, art serves little purpose beyond societal packaging, and the frivolous toast, “Es lebe die Kunst!” Few who raise their glasses thusly truly seek to dedicate their lives to art.

Ironically, given that the premise of the work is the career of an artist meant to be a breath of fresh air in the Berlin literary scene, *Es lebe die Kunst* is a highly derivative novel, a work utterly devoid of any sort of formal innovation or experimentation. In contrast to Viebig's *Das schlafende Heer* (1904), the work which will be the focus of this chapter, the plot of *Es lebe die Kunst* unwinds in predictably linear fashion. This earlier work of Viebig's opens *in media res* at a *soirée* in one of Berlin's most fashionable literary salons. A few pages of light, empty *bons mots* amongst the German capital's *soi-disant* cultured elite introduce Elisabeth, our protagonist. The narrative gaze rarely departs from her in the coming chapters, and indeed, an earlier title for the novel was *Elisabeth Reinharz' Ehe: Es lebe die Kunst!*. *Es lebe die Kunst* is, above all else, a *Großstadtroman*, and as such revolves around the literary cityscape of Berlin and Elisabeth's own effort to find a place there for herself, her art, and her marriage. True, we the readers do journey to the pastoral idyll of the Posener countryside, but the central figure of this excursion is Elisabeth herself. Posen is not especially *Posenerisch*. The region constitutes a generic antidote to urban artifice. Only narrator commentary and the occasional Slavic-inflected

¹¹⁰ “Das Gedränge war nicht sehr groß, Vergnügungsreisende fahren nicht viele in jene Gegend. Da ist das Land zu flach, die Verhältnisse sind zu einfach und die Kieferwälder zu eintönig.“ (291), *ELDK*

Kosenname or smattering of dialect betray the setting as Posen. Stir gently and season with local color to taste—precisely the advice given to the protagonist by the literary establishment.

Elisabeth encounters much resistance to linguistic Posnerisch local color when her prose fiction is adapted for the Berlin stage. Oberregisseur Wadler deems the Posener dialect to be “bäuerliches Kauderwelsch” and insists on a translation into Viennese, as “das spricht jeder nur halbwegs gebildete Schauspieler,” shrugging off Elisabeth’s dismay at the proposed butchering of her play with the words “Lokalkolorit hin, Lokalkolorit her!...Lokalkolorit, was heißt Lokalkolorit?” (218-219).¹¹¹ Ironical, then, that the *Heimat* of a protagonist who utters the words “Ohne das Lokalkolorit? Das ist unmöglich!” should be so generically portrayed (219). Indeed, the flora and fauna described in the above passage are not even unique enough to distinguish the landscape from any number of vistas in New England or Eastern Canada.¹¹²

The Grand Duchy of Posen enjoys special consideration in Viebig’s opera omnia, and *Es lebe die Kunst* is not the only novel of hers which brings the reader to the Eastern Marches. Viebig had a keen sense of place and of purpose as a writer, viewing herself as a “soziale Dichterin” (*Mein Leben* 26). Her earlier work set in the Western German region Eifel had brought the relatively unknown region national attention, and eventually even launched a fundraiser to build a hospital in an afflicted rural area.¹¹³ In 1902 Viebig composed *Die Wacht am Rhein*, a novel which follows the birth pains of the German nation within the microcosm of Düsseldorf, a city where Viebig lived until her father’s death in 1883. After Viebig and her

¹¹¹ “Also, meine gnädige Frau...eins muß ich Ihnen aber gleich von vornherein sagen: Sie müssen den Dialekt ändern. Ich bitte Sie, das Stück spielt auf dem Lande, in Posen, Pommern oder so wo – wer soll das bäuerliche Kauderwelsch reden? Schlesisch geht noch allenfalls, aber auch schwer. Wir müssen die Dialektstellen ins Wienerische übertragen, das spricht jeder nur halbwegs gebildete Schauspieler“ (218-219). However, any scholar or traveller who has had the opportunity to attempt to decipher Silesian might feel compelled to contest Wadler’s assertion of the dialect’s comparative simplicity to Posenerisch.

¹¹² Die Luft ist still, heiß und doch nicht drückend. Ein starker Duft steigt vom Kraut auf, und weiterhin, wo die Heide zu Ende geht, schimmert es goldgelb; das sind Lupinen, sie duften berauschend, süßer wie Jasmin. Der sommerlich leise Windhauch nimmt den Geruch auf und trägt ihn wohl eine Stunde weit in die Runde, dort zum Dorf, dort zum See, dort zu den Kiefern, die der Riesenwald als Boten in’s Feld schickt.

¹¹³ For example, *Das Weiberdorf* (1899).

mother moved to Berlin, they spent their summers with relatives in Posen. The Eastern province became a third Heimat to Viebig, and she saw *Das schlafende Heer* as an Eastern “Gegenstück” to *Die Wacht am Rhein*, a tribute to her adopted Heimat.¹¹⁴

In *Das schlafende Heer*, Viebig employs a completely different tack in her portrayal of the region of Posen and in her literary technique. Here, Posen unfolds as an ambiguous and ambivalent canvas, at times a landscape of great promise and opportunity, at other moments a gaping maw waiting to devour the unsuspecting German settler. This landscape is peopled by diverse ethnicities, faiths, and political convictions, all with varying visions for Posen. Content-wise, *Das schlafende Heer* stands at the intersection of *Heimatkunst* and Naturalism with its focus on regional particularities, human sexuality (male *and* female), and piercing social analysis, particularly the lot of unmarried mothers.¹¹⁵ No longer an interchangeable holiday destination, Posen emerges as a region peopled by honest-to-goodness three-dimensional characters, rife with social dilemmas and cultural tensions. Here, Berlin is in the abstract, Posen the quotidian concrete, a balanced contribution by a seasoned author to an increasingly feverish obsession with the East and with the effort to bring German culture and civilization to Polish lands in German literature.

Thanks to the work of scholars such as Caroline Bland and Kristin Kopp, Viebig’s literary oeuvre has enjoyed a revival of critical interest. Viebig studies has emerged out of a movement in German studies to rescue once prominent female authors from oblivion. Scholarship on Viebig now encompasses a broad range of critical discourses. This spectrum includes gender studies, post-colonial studies, as well as the relationship between popular literature and the canon.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Viebig was born in Trier, and considered the Mosel, Rheinland, and Eifel as her first Heimat, Düsseldorf the second, Posen the third, and Berlin her fourth.

¹¹⁵ One René Maus went so far as to say “Clara Viebig wurde eine der bedeutendsten Schriftstellerinnen des deutschen Naturalismus, vor allem in der Darstellung der ihr vertrauten Landschaften der Eifel und darüber hinaus des Rheinlandes, aber auch Berlin und der Provinz Posen” (*Mein Leben* 212). Viebig, Clara. *Mein Leben : Autobiographische Skizzen*. Ed. Christel Aretz. Hontheim: Mosel Eifel, 2002. Print.

¹¹⁶ Caroline Bland comments on this phenomenon: “Since the early 1990s, there has been something of a resurgence of interest in her work, driven partly by the desire to recover forgotten women writers and partly by the continuing

Bland, for example, describes Viebig as an intermediary figure between readers of popular literature and the highbrow literature of her day (*Using the Genres* 86).¹¹⁷ Aesthetically, Bland views Viebig's work as straddling the literary modes of *Heimatkunst* and naturalism, citing the formative influence of French naturalist Émile Zola on Viebig's writing. Indeed, Bland attributes Viebig's extraordinary popularity to her ability to fold "these contemporary discourses into fashionable literary genres," characterizing Viebig as an author in tune with the tastes of her time and a writer flexible in setting, genre, and topic (*Using the Genres* 87-88).¹¹⁸ While Bland primarily discusses Viebig's commercial success and literary depiction of motherhood, Kopp focuses on Viebig's treatment of the Polish Question in her 1904 bestselling novel *Das schlafende Heer*, examining the anxieties of the German colonial project in the face of Polish cultural adjacency. *Das schlafende Heer*, Kopp argues, seeks to negotiate the unreliability of physical pigmentation in differentiating Poles from Germans by emphasizing the significance of the domestic degeneracy of the *Polnische Wirtschaft* as a visible marker of the Polish cultural Other. This term *Polnische Wirtschaft*, coined by eighteenth-century travel writer Georg Forster and introduced into common parlance by Gustav Freytag's 1855 bestselling novel *Soll und Haben*, was used "to indicate gross agricultural mismanagement, neglected villages, and pestilent dwellings," Kopp summarizes, "all rendered inherent by-products of the filth, backwardness, laziness, and brutality adhering to the Poles" ("Constructing Racial Difference"

fascination with her Eifel-based stories, an aspect that is actively promoted by the *Clara-Viebig-Gesellschaft* (Clara Viebig Society) based in Bad Bertrich" (*Using the Genres*, 86). Bland, Caroline. "Clara Viebig: Using the Genres of *Heimatkunst* and *Großstadtroman* to create bestselling novels." Woodford, Charlotte, and Benedict Schofield, eds. *The German Bestseller in the Late Nineteenth Century*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2012. Print. (77-93).

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* "Viebig's literary reputation has languished in the gray area between *Unterhaltungsliteratur* and writing with more serious literary ambitions, an ambivalent status that has been further complicated for the intervening generations of literary historians by her gender" (*Using the Genres*, 86).

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* "In summary, one can conclude that Viebig was a bestselling or bestreading author because she was adept at understanding and exploiting the appetites of the literary market. In the older tradition of the social novel, she chose themes that would strike a chord with many of her contemporaries, such as the changing experiences of a predominantly rural society that was becoming rapidly urbanized...emboldened by the high currency of naturalism among her peers, she tackled subjects such as promiscuity, adultery, petty crime, and alcoholism that other female novelists were less willing to address in such a direct fashion" (*Using the Genres*, 87-88).

89).¹¹⁹ Amidst fears of cultural contagion, *Das schlafende Heer*, Kopp maintains, seeks to render cultural and racial differences more visible and thus able to be confronted. However, I maintain that in order to truly appreciate the complexity of the cultural work that *Das schlafende Heer* performs, one must examine the novel's generic innovations. In *Das schlafende Heer*, Viebig produces more than another *Ostmarkenroman*; she transforms the generic strictures which make up this mode of literature. In this chapter, I push the envelope of Viebig studies by demonstrating the ground-breaking work of *Das schlafende Heer* in the novel's cooption of the popular *Ostmarkenroman* genre in its engagement with the cultural, gender, and topographical ambivalence and ambiguity of the German-Polish borderland. In *Das schlafende Heer*, genre and content interact to call for revised German cultural approaches to the Eastern Marches.

The *Ostmarkenroman* was a popular topical literary genre concerned with German-Polish relations in the Eastern province of Posen at the turn of the century. The genre emerged around 1890, gaining in popularity and becoming increasingly anti-Polish as Germanization efforts intensified after 1900. Once Posen became a province in a newly independent Poland in 1918, the *Ostmarkenroman* died a natural death. The *Ostmarkenroman* is a genre of modest size, encompassing around 80 novels. This number can be stretched to about 300 texts in total if all forms of *Ostmarkenliteratur* (drama, etc.) are taken into consideration (70).¹²⁰ In *Germany's Wild East*, Kopp divides the body of *Ostmarkenromane* according to two main approaches to German-Polish cohabitation: assimilationist and exclusionist. Assimilationist *Ostmarkenroman* authors believed that Poles could be converted to German culture. Exclusionists, however,

¹¹⁹ Kopp, Kristin. "Constructing Racial Difference in Colonial Poland." *Germany's Colonial Pasts*. Eric Ames, Marcia Klotz, and Lora Wildenthal, Eds. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2005. 76-96. Print.

¹²⁰ "The Eastern Marches literature is a genre circumscribed by content, and not by literary form, and thus includes short stories, dramas, and verse in addition to the novel that was its mainstay. Approximately 80 novels set in the province of Posen have been identified, and, when the entirety of the Eastern Marches is considered (including East and West Prussia and all literary forms), the number of texts exceeds 300" (Kopp, *Germany's Wild East*, 70). Kopp, Kristin Leigh. *Germany's Wild East: Constructing Poland as Colonial Space*. Ann Arbor, MI: Univ. of Michigan, 2012. Print; Maria Wojtczak places the number of novels at 60 (22). Wojtczak, Maria. *Literatur der Ostmark: Posener Heimatsliteratur (1890-1918)*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 1998.

viewed race as an immutable fact of biology which mandated the enforcement of strict segregation between Germans and Poles so as to prevent racial contamination (*Germany's Wild East* 74).¹²¹ In both schools of thought, glaring cultural stereotypes constitute a staple of the *Ostmarkenroman's* structural repertoire, such as it is.¹²² For, as Kopp notes, most examples of the genre, with the exception of *Das schlafende Heer*, “are of strikingly poor quality” (“Constructing Racial Difference in Poland” 80). The actual plots of *Ostmarkenromane*, as Maria Wojtczak lays out in her survey of the genre, generally take place in the countryside around the city of Posen (Poznań) and many center around a disastrous German-Polish marriage (101).¹²³ At the heart of this genre obsessed with the possibility of the cultural conversion of Germans lies anxiety towards Polish encroachment on the German domestic space. Ultimately, the *Ostmarkenroman* belongs to a discourse on the nature of belonging and the fragility of identity.

However, there is more at stake in *Das schlafende Heer* than ethnic conflict between Germans and Poles in search of identity. *Das schlafende Heer* contributes to a literary discourse on effective narration beyond the contemporary social discussion of German-Polish relations. I draw out a complexity in Viebig's novel that other critics have left untreated. The novel's constant shifts in perspective, between Germans and Poles and between internal and external narration, expose the central conflict of *Das schlafende Heer* as friction between competing

¹²¹ “The assimilationist literature portrays the Poles as developmentally inferior to the Germans but identifies this inferiority as situational, a result of their political and cultural history, and thus subject to change. Exclusionist texts, in contrast, present essentialist arguments, insisting that Polish developmental inferiority is inherent to the Poles' nature or racial makeup. The assimilation of the Poles into the German collective is thereby placed out of question, and the claim is instead made that the rightful relationship between German and Pole is that of colonizer and colonized” (*Germany's Wild East*, 74).

¹²² In *Literatur der Ostmark: Posener Heimatliteratur (1890-1918)*, Maria Wojtczak writes, “Die Dynamik der sich verbreitenden stereotypen und vorurteilvollen literarischen Bilder ist von einer unermesslichen Größe” (49).

¹²³ Of the 60 novels Wojtczak recognizes as *Ostmarkenromane*, she counts ten as dealing with mixed-ethnicity couples (101).

methods of narrating the ambiguity and ambivalence of Posen, rather than simply a contest between Germans and Poles.

I maintain that *Das schlafende Heer* represents an appropriation of the *Ostmarkenroman* genre which challenges German master-narratives of the East. The novel accomplishes this task by staging the process of choosing a guiding narrative for the ambiguity and ambivalence of Posen. This process of interpreting the people and landscapes of Posen is very much tied up with the power dynamics at play amongst the three ethnic groups represented in the novel: the Germans, the Poles, and the Jews. Access to power in turn affects each community's approach to ambiguity and ambivalence. Each of these three groups finds itself in crisis as its members attempt to navigate the social upheavals of modernity in the novel and each community perceives ambiguity and ambivalence as playing very different roles in their narration of Posen. The primary German characters by and large view ambiguity and ambivalence as existential threats to Germandom. Uncertainty in the form of ambiguous physical and personal boundaries between Germans, Poles, and Jews make German men in particular deeply uncomfortable. Polish culture, in the face of the increasingly strident Germanization of Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* and the reality of German political dominance, feels itself to be under siege, locked in a battle for survival. Consequently, several Polish nationalists in the novel recognize and exploit the subversive potential of ambiguity and ambivalence for the less powerful. The Jewish community of *Das schlafende Heer* by contrast, finds that modernity has inverted the Jewish relationship to liminality. The condition of being in the middle once offered the Jews of Posen economic security and a clear role in the province. Over the course of the novel, however, Jewish characters find that the middle ground once so beneficial to their ancestors is ever more dangerous. As that in-between space dwindles away, the Jews of *Das schlafende Heer* find that they are no longer intermediaries between their German and Polish neighbors and the outside world. They become a people unluckily caught between competing nationalisms and with a rapidly disappearing place in Posen society. *Das schlafende Heer* thus

cultivates an ambivalent relationship to the borderland it depicts. For in spite of the risks of interacting with the ambiguity and ambivalence inherent in a borderland such as Posen, German encounters with liminality reap the great reward of a new guiding narrative. In the end, the novel's engagement with the ambiguity and ambivalence paves the way for a new start for Germanism in Posen.

That new start is embodied in a new approach to narrating the ambiguity and ambivalence of Posen. By "narrative" in *Das schlafende Heer*, I understand a collection of ideas governing characters' perception of their environment, history, and vision for Posen's future. These ideas include methods for interpreting and interacting with the Posener landscape, approach to ambivalence and ambiguity, as well as the manipulation of family dynamics and human sexuality. In short, the process of choosing a guiding narrative entails the interpretation of Posen's current circumstances, the manipulation of those prevailing conditions, and the attempt to choose the direction that Posen's future will take.

The following chapter analyzes *Das schlafende Heer's* confrontation with power dynamics of legibility and control as the novel grapples with nation-building based on domestic arrangements in the German-Polish borderland. Antagonistic approaches to Posen prove fatal for German men. Baron Hanns-Martin von Doleschal and settler Valentin Bräuer die in their attempts to impose their narratives on the province. Viebig warns against ignoring ambivalence and ambiguity, proposing a more nuanced Germanization based on cultural and topographical literacy nurtured by German motherhood. This novel depicts the *process* of choosing a guiding narrative; it is not a soliloquy thereof. Indeed, as the newly crowned heroine strides off through bounteous farmland in the novel's closing lines, we witness only the beginning of the victorious narrative method.

Through close readings of German narrative offensives and Polish counter-narratives, I demonstrate *Das schlafende Heer's* critique of aggressive German narration as ineffective and the novel's proposal of a gentler appropriation of Posener space. In Section I, "Keeping it in the

Family,” I examine characters’ revisions of Posen’s cultural narrative by influencing familial structures, those basic units of human identity. Consequently, Germans and Poles couch their cultural missions in highly gendered language. In Section II, “Home Sweet Home?” I analyze German defense of the domestic space as crucible of cultural identity and Polish frustration of German domesticity through linguistic obfuscation and household negligence. Finally, I discuss topographical narration in *Das schlafende Heer*, in which landscape acts as cultural domestic space where German men consistently misinterpret a gendered Polish landscape.

Simultaneously, I contrast this ultimately fatal relationship with the symbiosis of German motherhood and the fields of Posen. *Das schlafende Heer* envisions the triumph of German identity not through direct confrontation with Polishness, but by constructing its own imagining of Posen. Ultimately, this novel uses the borderland to interrogate German cultural narration and to suggest an alternative approach to ambivalence and ambiguity.

Keeping it in the Family: German and Polish Nationalist Manipulation of Gender and Family Structures

In *Das schlafende Heer*, contention over gender relations and domestic arrangements reflects cultural and political power struggles in Posen. As such, the theme of familial obligations forms an integral part of the rhetoric of German and Polish nationalists as they put forth their narrative visions for the land around them. For Baron von Doleschal, reforming the Polish family informs Germanization strategies and reaffirms German domestic superiority. However, von Doleschal’s flawed strategies and faulty understanding of German domesticity soon become apparent. In depicting Polish sexuality, *Das schlafende Heer* provides both affirmation of German prejudices, and examples of Poles policing sexual restraint amongst themselves. In their interactions with Posener officialdom, Polish nationalists meet Germanization efforts with cultural defensive tactics framed as parental duties. Poles go on the offensive as well, manipulating domestic arrangements for ideological and material ends. In *Das schlafende Heer*,

a novel anchored in one particular physical space, changes in domestic arrangements provide the plot with drive and impetus.

German nationalists such as von Doleschal see Germanization as a narrative of socioeconomic liberation of the peasant and dissemination of German domestic mores. Von Doleschal flirts with two approaches to gender narratives within his nationalist agenda which Susanne Zantop identifies in her work on German colonialist literature—the narrative of intermarriage and that of the “positive master fantasy” (153). Von Doleschal briefly contemplates German-Polish intermarriage as a boon to Germanization in Posen. Looking out over the land, von Doleschal dreams of the day when German children will be born to German parents in the fields below. Von Doleschal imagines with satisfaction, “die polnische Dirne, die der deutsche Bursche befreite” (315-316). German lads will “liberate” Polish strumpets, and German expansionism will usher in class and gender egalitarianism in Polish lands. However, it is the “positive master fantasy” which dominates von Doleschal’s thinking. In this new colonial model, Zantop writes, “[t]he natural fathers...must be replaced,” Zantop writes, “not by an interracial ‘marriage’, nor by a Robinsonian ‘brotherhood,’ but by the colonial ‘family’ of the plantation household in which benign white planter-fathers watch over their loyal slave-children” (148). Von Doleschal illustrates his commitment to the family romance of the benevolent German master and his Polish laborers in two speeches—one public, one private—on Sedan Day. The celebrations which von Doleschal organizes on this holiday provide a glimpse into his personal processes of narration, and their impractical nature. Von Doleschal composes his triumphantly German nationalist speech (which he delivers to an assembly of his Polish farm laborers), in seemingly complete disregard for local narratives. He appears oblivious to alternative views in the Polish psyche of the Battle of Sedan (September 1-2, 1870), a victory over the French that solidified the German nation. Speaking to his wife Helene afterwards, von Doleschal spins a sequel narrative concerning Polish gender relations which illustrates the intersection of family structures and provincial politics. He regrets not including his vision for

restoring tranquility to Polish family dynamics, von Doleschal tells Helene. He should have told his audience that “ein tugendsames Weib... ist viel edler denn köstliche Perlen!...Und dann hätte ich auch von ihren Frauen gesprochen, daß sie in die Ehren halten sollen — ‘hebt nicht die Hand gegen sie, sie sind die Mütter eurer Kinder!’ Und den Weibern hätte ich auch ins Gewissen geredet, daß sie nicht herumschlampfen sollen, wie sie es so gerne tun!” (93). In both soliloquies, von Doleschal sets out a paternalistic approach for reforming Polish sexual habits and domestic strife, and illustrates that family arrangements and nationalist politics are inextricably intertwined.

The formal complexity of *Das schlafende Heer*, however, encompasses events which offer contradictory evidence concerning the allegedly more harmonious German domicile. German male characters actively silence the women in their communities. On Sedan Day, von Doleschal declares, “[d]ie patriarchalischen Zeiten sind vorbei,” yet, the text shows us that German family life maintains a number of injustices little different from those von Doleschal identifies in Polish homes (86). Though von Doleschal doubtless uses the term “patriarchal” in his Sedan Day speech to designate the tyranny of the Polish nobility over their peasants rather than gender inequality, that event’s juxtaposition with von Doleschal’s dismissal of his own wife’s insights is fairly ironic. Helene conveys her concern to her husband concerning the inflammatory nature of his public speech, for she recognizes the problems with von Doleschal’s attempt to impose his narrative on Posen by sheer force of will. Helene points out that her husband’s words may have been received rather differently than he had intended, saying, “man dürfte nie vergessen, auch den Gefühlen anderer...” before he interrupts her (93). It seems her concern for the feelings of others are a bit of a buzzkill for her politically ambitious husband. Von Doleschal chides her for attempting to intervene in public affairs: “Verstimme mich nicht!...Es tut mir leid, daß dir nicht gefallen hat, was ich sagte, aber ich mußte so sprechen” (93). Even after coming across evidence to the contrary, von Doleschal does not revise his narrative of German domestic mores as an ideal for Poles to aspire to. The Baron himself

chastises settler Peter Bräuer for shouting at his wife Kettchen when she interrupts her husband. Bräuer is genuinely puzzled by von Doleschal's intervention, wondering how else he should act (157-158). These little moments of discord prevent *Das schlafende Heer* from becoming a pure mouthpiece for German settlement policies in the East. The genius of *Das schlafende Heer* is this constant questioning of the narratives expounded within its pages.

Das schlafende Heer portrays Polish gender and sexuality in an ambivalent manner, providing both ample proof of Polish licentiousness and examples of the policing of carnal excess within the Polish community itself. Von Doleschal's assessment of Polish gender mores is borne out to a certain extent by the "reality" of *Das schlafende Heer*. Put bluntly, Polish men and women have far more sex. Baron von Doleschal stumbles upon his Polish coachman rolling about in the hay with a maid (133-134), and at a raucous servants' party there later on, each man has two girls on his lap (143). Furthermore, this sexuality is not portrayed as being the result of religion. With one Protestant exception, German men of any denomination do not engage in recreational sex and German women do not even express sexual desire. However, German characters remain unaware of Polish gender policing. Indeed, three prominent members of the Polish community are involved in meting out punishment when the maid Stasia Frelikowska and Inspector Szulc sleep together out of wedlock. Lord Garczyński and Lady Garczyńska, local Polish gentry, summarily dismiss these two servants, and the Polish vicar Górka intervenes to prevent Garczyński from beating Stasia as punishment. Questioning contemporary double standards, Lady Garczyńska insists that Szulc be dismissed along with Stasia, much to her husband's disappointment: "war er nicht der viel Schuldigere? Er hatte das Mädchen verführt! Vergebens versuchte der Gatte ihr verständlich zu machen, daß man einem Manne mehr nachsehen könne, mehr nachsehen müsse als einer Frauensperson" (181). Where Garczyńska sees a seducer, her husband sees normal male sexual proclivities. Indeed, Garczyńska asserts that Szulc is the *guiltier* party. Viebig's indirect inclusion of Garczyńska's arguments through Garczyński's thoughts has the effect of highlighting Garczyńska's more progressive values

without expressly designating them as such. While none of these characters is especially sympathetic, their interactions represent a complex negotiation of the consequences for breaching societal gender codes.

Polish characters in *Das schlafende Heer* also seek to influence German domestic arrangements in furtherance of their own national ideology. The vicar, Górka, and provost Stachowiak manipulate commonplace rhetoric around family roles in order to encourage the Polonization of the Rheinland family Bräuer. The depiction in the novel of these maneuverings unmasks the ease with which such nominally common sense understandings of gender roles can be twisted any which way to serve the manipulator's goals. The two churchmen push Kettchen Bräuer, stepmother to Valentin and mother of the family's other children, towards active intervention or passive acceptance as suits Polish nationalist needs. Vicar and provost begin by seeking to render Kettchen more Polish in appearance. Shortly after the Bräuer family arrives in Posen, Stachowiak urges Kettchen to wear the bonnet worn by all married Polish peasant women (157-158). Later in the novel, Górka subtly paves the way for linguistic Polonization of Kettchen's family. Górka persuades her not to tell her husband of her concerns that her young daughter says her prayers in Polish (309).¹²⁴ Most significantly, Górka succeeds in pushing Kettchen to change her husband Peter's mind regarding the betrothal of Stasia Frelikowska and Valentin Bräuer. When Peter Bräuer disapproves of Valentin's wish to marry Stasia, Kettchen seeks Górka's advice in resolving the conflict. Hoping to further the Polish cause by way of intermarriage, Górka draws upon religious language and appeals to standard gender rhetoric to facilitate the match.¹²⁵ "Es ist weder christlich noch klug," he admonishes her, "zu widerstreben, nur weil der eine Teil polnisch ist und der andre deutsch. Das sagen Sie nur Ihrem Manne!"

¹²⁴ Fears concerning the possible Polonization of German children were widespread throughout different strata of German society, as I explore in the opening pages of Chapter IV (see for example, page 164).

¹²⁵ As Kristin Kopp points out, this policy is often pursued by the clergy of the Ostmarkenroman ("Constructing Racial Difference in Colonial Poland" 87).

(258). Opposing the marriage simply because it represents an intercultural match is not only unwise, it is downright unchristian, Górka asserts. Kettchen must persuade her husband of this truth. It is her right and duty to voice her opinion, particularly where children and matters of the heart are concerned. “Eine brave christliche Ehefrau hat auch das Recht, ein Wort mitzusprechen,” he reassures his timid parishioner, “besonders in Herzensangelegenheiten und Erziehungsfragen,” since, as everyone knows, women have better judgment in such matters (258). Górka in fact unequivocally encourages Frau Kettchen to quietly challenge her husband's rigid stance on the issue. When Kettchen again seeks the counsel of her priest as Valentin and Stasia's marriage begins to implode, unhappy but unsure of the cause, Górka encourages her to be content. He points out that she has a loving husband, good children, and an ideal daughter-in-law (309). What more, after all, could any good woman and wife desire? Both priest and provost push Kettchen to act only when it serves their purposes.

Polish characters in this novel also marshal their own gendered narratives out of fear of cultural conversion. *Das schlafende Heer* predominantly focuses on this anxiety within the German community, but the fear of cultural conversion and loss of native identity runs rampant in Polish social spheres as well. We the readers may only witness examples of German to Polish cultural conversion, but the Polish characters feel that Polish to German conversion is a very real possibility. The Polish fear of being written out of existence by Germanization policies comes to a dramatic head in a volatile public meeting on the enforcement of German as language of instruction in the Province of Posen's schools. In this tense atmosphere, the shepherd Kuba Dudek issues a dramatic appeal to local Polish historical narratives and Górka echoes his call to action. Both men couch their nationalist narratives in the sacred duty of Polish mothers. Dudek, mystical healer as well as shepherd, calls on Polish women to take drastic action to drive the Germans from their land. In this scene, Dudek, enraged at his countrymen's inaction, calls for an uprising against the German oppressor. He reminds them of the ferocity of the Polish mothers of the past, telling a tale of a brutal attack on a German militia unit:

Und die polnischen Mütter haben auch nicht geschlafen... Als die deutsche Landwehr bei Buk im Quartier lag, in jedem Haus ihrer zwei und drei, da hat die Mutter Gottes der Weiber Herzen gestärkt, daß die Tauben zu Adlern wurden...Und als sie schliefen in Stellen und Scheunen, auf Tennen und Heuböden, da sind Polens Mütter hingeschlichen mit ihren Messern und haben den Teufeln die Bärte abgeschnitten, die Nasen und Ohren, die Finger und Zehen, und haben das Blut hinströmen gemacht von Polens Feinden. (199-200)

Employing a blend of religious rhetoric and Polish nationalist symbolism, Dudek promotes a limited expansion of female agency for the sake of Poland. He narrates with relish this gruesome episode in local history, proudly recalling this emasculation and symbolic castration of these German men through the amputation of beard, nose, ears, fingers, and toes. Though Polish women by default should be associated with a symbol of peace and virtue, he declares, in extreme cases, the gentle dove may be transformed by the Mother of God herself into a fierce eagle of vengeance. Górka goes even further, emphasizing the Polish mother's duty to God. "Welche Mutter möchte ihr Kind verlieren," he asks, since "mit der fremden Sprache kommt der fremde Glaube" (205). A mother who allows her child to attend school in German becomes an idle bystander to that child's conversion to Protestantism. After all, it is she who must answer before God for the imperilment of her children's souls. Germans and Poles, we shall see, are each afraid of the seductive power of the other group's cultural narrative.

Yet the stakes motivating the manipulation of family dynamics are not always so high as salvation or damnation. Indeed, some interference with domestic arrangements is pragmatic rather than ideological in nature. The plot of *Das schlafende Heer* gains impetus through the intersections of contradictory narratives. For example, though Górka views a match between the Polish Stasia Frelikowska and the German Valentin Bräuer as a coup for Polish nationalism, Stasia pursues Valentin out of fiscal necessity. Unlike Kopp, I do not see Stasia as a deliberate agent of Polonization.¹²⁶ Making her way home after losing her position as maid to Lady

¹²⁶ "The marriage between a Polish woman and a German man is condemned as the result of insouciance on the part of the German and cunning ploy on the part of the Pole, which in combination mark a victory for the Polish nationalist cause" ("Constructing Racial Difference in Colonial Poland" 82).

Garczyńska, Stasia encounters Valentin, who is immediately smitten with her. She quickly realizes that the young German represents a solution to her current predicament:

Sie ließ sich ziehen. Und durch ihre Gedanken schoß es: zwei Pferde, das ging auch an! Hofbesitzers Sohn, der einzige noch dazu, das ging auch an! Und ein hübsches Haus, besser fast als die Propstei! Nach Posen in Stellung zu gehen, sich wieder quälen lassen von einer neuen Herrin, das war doch gar nicht angenehm (177).

She obviously sees different benefits of a match with Valentin than does her priest. Stasia notes the security that Valentin, only son and heir of a prosperous farmer, could provide. Moreover, marriage to Valentin would spare Stasia the unpleasantness of seeking employment. As shallow Stasia generally is, she approaches marriage pragmatically. Szulc may be better-looking than Valentin, but he will never offer marriage (241-243). Clearly, Stasia pursues Valentin out of materialistic calculation rather than nationalist zeal. These circumstances hardly render Stasia a sympathetic character — she is, after all, playing on Valentin's feelings for selfish reasons — but she does not marry him in order to turn him into a Pole. However, in the culturally charged atmosphere of Posen, Stasia's pragmatism initiates a series of domestic conflicts which will come to a head in one of *Das schlafende Heer*'s two tragic climaxes.

Germans and Poles in *Das schlafende Heer* thus commonly employ gendered rhetoric in pursuit of ideological and personal goals. Von Doleschal views the introduction of German family models in Posen to be a critical plank in the German nationalist platform, though the novel also reveals unpleasant sides to German households. This even-handedness reflects the ambivalent portrayal of gender dynamics throughout the novel, as we observed regarding Polish sexuality. Though sexual promiscuity is coded Polish in *Das schlafende Heer*, the novel also depicts Poles enforcing sexual restraint. Polish characters work to influence German family bonds, cognizant of the links between family and cultural affiliation. Clergymen such as vicar Górka and provost Stachowiak exploit their spiritual influence over Kettchen Bräuer to render her and her family more Polish in appearance, speech, and blood. Leaders in the Polish community call on sacred parental duties to organize resistance to Germanization policies in

schools. Finally, in the case of Stasia Frelikowska, the novel provides us with an example of gender dynamics motivated by financial practicalities rather than lofty ideals or fear of hellfire. However, the characters of *Das schlafende Heer* manipulate not only human relationships, but also view interior spaces as contested ground.

Home Sweet Home?: Polish Frustration of German Domesticity

Tension builds in several shared interior spaces in *Das schlafende Heer* as Germans and Poles seek to maintain emotionally charged rooms as crucibles of cultural identity. For the German Settlement Commission and the nationalist Baron von Doleschal, the imposition and preservation of separate home and social spaces for Germans and Poles constitute critical measures in narrating a German Posen. The Poles in turn frustrate these efforts by making use of a number of deliberate and unintentional methods, many involving the Polish language. Their “tactics,” as such, include unintended linguistic spatial appropriation, outright rejection of the German language, translation, and the exploitation of linguistic opacity. Polish women disrupt the maintenance of the German domestic and social sphere through the simple means of poor housekeeping, introducing the infamous *Polnische Wirtschaft*, and paradoxically, generosity and kindness. Ultimately, Germans are unable to maintain a German domestic space in Posen and cultural segregation proves impossible even in carefully built interiors. Walls cannot defend against liminality.

Poles thwart the establishment of an exclusively German social forum through linguistic spatial appropriation which results in the creation of a liminal cultural space. We see this phenomenon in the evolution of pub culture in Kolonie Augenweide, the German settlement featured in *Das schlafende Heer*. The German Settlement Commission builds a new pub, intended as a German-only establishment, so that the settlers need not frequent the same watering hole as the Polish peasantry. Newlyweds Valentin Bräuer and Stasia Frelikowska take over the management of this pub, a circumstance which quickly defeats the pub’s *raison d’être*. Stasia’s father so successfully drums up business for his daughter that any German settler who

wishes to enjoy a pint on a Sunday evening is forced to squeeze in between the predominantly Polish customers (295). Speaking Polish soon becomes a matter of convenience for the German clientele and they become accustomed to ordering “Piwo” rather than “Bier” (296). Distressed by this encroachment of Polishness and frustrated by his inability to understand the conversations in his establishment, Valentin asks Stasia to speak only German in the pub. Stasia flatly refuses to adopt this policy. A tavern is meant for everyone, Stasia quips to her husband, and any customer who would rather not hear Polish can go home and “deutsch genug reden mit ihren Hühnern und Gänsen.” Those who prefer to socialize with humans rather than poultry must adapt (295). The Settlement Commission’s efforts are easily defeated; language empowers Polish characters in a land where they are relatively politically disenfranchised. Poles flip the balance of linguistic power in the tavern with little effort – German-only spaces are fragile in this borderland environment, it seems. Given that German nationalists cannot even retain linguistic control of one pub, von Doleschal’s visions for Posen seem particularly out of touch with reality. His stubborn insistence earlier in the novel, “Hier ist deutsches Land, und hier wird deutsch gesprochen!” sounds absurd by plot’s end (164). Indeed, Germanness proves far less able than Polishness to effect cultural conversion. The Germanness of this land hangs ever in the balance, and the Polish language retains cultural and practical legitimacy. The German language has failed in its attempts to stake a claim here.

Language has power even greater than transient conversation over a pint of ale, for some linguistic changes are permanent and represent proof of cultural conversion. Von Doleschal evinces a visceral fear of translation, an action which allows the less powerful Poles to effect cultural conversion. When von Doleschal hears of Valentin's betrothal to Stasia, von Doleschal immediately accuses Valentin of breaking his *Fahneneid*, of betraying his German heritage, and exclaims with horror that within a matter of years he will have renounced his Fatherland, and exchanged his “ehrlichen deutschen Namen” for a Polish approximation of that surname—“‘Browar’, ‘Browarski’ oder Gott weiß was...!” (269). For von Doleschal, this name game

represents a most insidious means of Polonizing German men. Polish women address familiar German men with the Polish equivalent of their given name. Michalina, the Bräuer family's Polish maid, and Stasia, for example, both call Valentin by the Polish version of his first name, "Walenty," or the diminutive, "Walek." In *Das schlafende Heer*, a character's name declares their cultural allegiance. Simple orthographic changes publically signal a cultural conversion. When, for example, Kestner seeks to claim that Inspector Szulc (pronounced identically to the German 'Schulz') is German by virtue of the pronunciation of his last name, Doleschal points to the Polish spelling as damning proof of Szulc's true cultural allegiance, snapping, "polnisch geworden ist er" (368). Significantly, this type of cultural assimilation is a specifically Polish endeavor. German characters do not give Polish neighbors German names. For German nationalists, the completed cultural conversions that have resulted from shared spaces between Germans and Poles offer a terrifying counter-narrative to Germanization, and the potential for new conversions represents an existential threat.

Those shared spaces represent another point of contention as Germans find themselves unable to impose German domestic maxims on all Polish women or to enlist them in maintaining German spaces. Valentin Bräuer finds that not only his linguistic and social environment has undergone a Polish metamorphosis, but that his indoor environment resembles Polish interior spaces. Like many of the Polish women in *Ostmarkenromane* who marry German colonists, Stasia is wild, "ungezähmt", and resists the role of the obedient German housewife (Wojtczak 85). Once married to Valentin, she refuses to compromise on anything, and Valentin discovers that he cannot control his wife. Stasia rejects German models of domesticity, introducing to the German pub the filth of the *Polnische Wirtschaft*. The first squabble that she and Valentin have as a married couple results from Stasia's indifference to the niceties of cleanliness in the tavern. The scent of the soapy water literally offends her nose. With the delicate hands of a lady's maid, Stasia is unaccustomed to the grubbiness of household chores ("ihre Hände hatten stets weich und fein sein müssen, um der Herrin aufzuwarten"). She

allows dust to accumulate in the nooks and crannies of the *Krug*, and does not even wipe down the tables, feeling that the distasteful work is beneath her, and pointless besides (293). Valentin watches in dismay as Polish domestic degeneracy effects a cultural conversion of his interior environment.

Social and environmental Polonization, accepted by the average customer of the Augenweide pub, exerts unbearable stress upon Valentin Bräuer. Valentin is disoriented by his lack of control over his household and tavern, unable in particular to cope with linguistic opacity. Valentin becomes trapped within the narrative governing gender relations told to him from birth, increasingly frustrated that his own home life does not follow the appropriate plotline. Von Doleschal need not have worried about this Bräuer becoming a Browarski, for while the German homescape and pub culture yields to pressures of Polish cultural conversion, Valentin himself does not become Polonized. Rather, Valentin finds himself gradually marginalized. Stasia and the pub's Polish clientele first exclude Valentin linguistically from the conversations around him. The opacity of the Polish language even begins to exercise physical force, pushing Valentin to stand to the side, unable to join in the lively banter before him, while Stasia and Szulc flirt under his very nose. The discomfort of this auditory exclusion drives Valentin to seek out tasks outside of the pub, away from what should be the center of his daily interactions. Valentin's subsequent attempt to impose his notions of wifely obedience upon Stasia by force fails spectacularly— Stasia runs away after the first blows fall. A humiliated Valentin is then shunned by his own family as a weak-willed man who cannot govern his own household. Unable to bend, Valentin begins to break.

In keeping with the structural complexity of *Das schlafende Heer*, however, there is no singular narrative of Polonization. Some Polonization goes virtually unnoticed, offering a glimpse of a potential harmonious shared German-Polish domestic space. Michalina Dudek, granddaughter of Kuba Dudek, works for the Bräuer family as a maid and becomes a purveyor of an inadvertent form of Polonization. Michalina is kind and hard-working, a ray of "eitel [sic]

Sonnenschein” in the Bräuer household (251). Michalina takes the German obsession with tidiness in stride, maintaining German physical spaces even as she introduces Polish traditions into her employers’ home. Thus, while Kettchen Bräuer may grow concerned when she hears her daughters praying in Polish, she does not worry when Michalina teaches the children Polish nursery rhymes. The novel doubtless wishes for us, the readers, to be alarmed by the Bräuers’ willingness to relinquish their German Christmas tree in exchange for a traditional Polish Christmas Eve dinner that Michalina prepares for them (297). The Bräuer family, fond of Michalina, accept her gentle introduction of Polishness into the German homescape. Both Stasia and Michalina inhabit the German domestic space, but German characters interpret the actions of these two Polish women—one wife, the other, servant— very differently.

Attempts in *Das schlafende Heer* to preserve certain interior spaces as exclusively German fail spectacularly. Language is the medium of narration, its backbone, and German nationalists struggle to retain German-language spaces of narration. Declaring a pub “German” does not make it so. Instead, spaces intended to be bastions of Germanness undergo a gradual process of Polonization. Shared public and private spaces provoke a fear of translation in nationalists such as von Doleschal, especially of the names of German men. For all the talk of Germanization as a force for remaking Posen, there exists a deep-seated anxiety regarding the fragility of German masculinity and German spaces, social and domestic. The Polish language fills the “German” tavern, and the “Polnische Wirtschaft” overtakes the space as well, even extending to the German home. Valentin finds himself marginalized, a spectator of his own life, eventually cracking under the pressure. Valentin’s attempt to seize control of his domestic narrative backfires and earns him the derision of his family. Not all Polish influence has this divisive effect, though *Das schlafende Heer* still finds cause for concern. Michalina introduces the young Bräuer children to Polish songs and serves the family a traditional Polish holiday meal. In all of these cases, German attempts to overwrite existing Polish domestic narratives fail completely.

Neither Here nor There: The Narrowing Jewish Interstice of Posen

The Posener Jewish community finds itself in an increasingly awkward position amidst the politicking and domestic tensions between German and Pole. The Jewish characters are not hypersexualized like the Polish men and women around them, nor are they praised for tidy domesticity or nurturing maternity. In much of the literature of the German-Polish borderland, Jewish characters are depicted as culturally affiliated with either the German or Polish populace. In Freytag's *Soll und Haben* (1855), Jewish loyalty is contingent on geographic location, and as we shall see in Bolesław Prus' *Placówka* (1886), on the socio-economic position of the Jew in question. *Das schlafende Heer* places its Jewish characters in an impossible position between scornfully derisive German landowners uninterested in dealing with Jewish middlemen, and deeply mistrustful Polish peasants ready to blame Jewish tavern keepers and shop owners at the slightest perceived provocation. In my arguments below, I will show that Viebig's novel carves out no space for its Jewish characters in the various attempts to build a national domesticity. Being in the middle once gave the Jews of Posen a key place in society. In a changing Posen, however, ambiguity and ambivalence work against the Jewish population.

The exclusion of the Jewish populace begins before the plot's opening amidst the shifting economic structures introduced by industrialization. Jewish merchants once facilitated all commercial transactions, Löb Scheftel reminisces, and as a result of fulfilling this vital role, were treated with respect and courtesy:

Er seufzte und sah bekümmert in die wintergraue Weite. Gar keine Aussichten mehr! Vor zwanzig Jahren war's anders hier gewesen und vor fünfzig erst recht. Da waren die 'Faktors' gefahren von Gut zu Gut, und man hatte sie in die Stube geführt und hatte sie auch wieder hinausbegleitet und hatte ihnen die Hand gereicht. Kein Handelchen war gemacht worden ohne einen jüdischen Mann, kein großes und auch kein kleines. Jetzt besorgten sie's alles allein (117).

A few decades ago, he grumbles to himself, he would not have had to wait out in the bitter cold to purchase the handful of hares Frelikowski chose to spirit away from Garczyński's hunting party. Garczyński would have invited the Jewish trader inside, respectfully escorted him back

out again, shaken his hand in farewell. Now, Scheftel dare not even request the pleasure of an audience, for if he did, “wäre er rundweg abschlägig beschieden worden: der Herr von Chwaliborczyce machte keine Geschäfte mit Juden” (116). The Polish nobility refuses outright to deal with Jewish middlemen, and the German landed gentry is only slightly more receptive. Scheftel finds that his commercial overtures find purchase with Baron von Doleschal only out of superficial courtesy. Von Doleschal is reluctant to trade with Jews, and only briefly relents when he sees the merchant’s crestfallen expression (229). The Baron refuses to deal with Löb directly however, passing him off to the estate’s Inspektor, a Swiss man less than enamored of Scheftel (230). The Jewish population also begins to face the pressure of Polish economic competition. Scheftel’s son-in-law Leiser Hirsch loses business to an upstart Polish warehouse owner named Nepomuk Wisniewski.¹²⁷ The provost begins to drum up business for Wisniewski even before the warehouse opens its doors for the first time. Although Hirsch offers better quality goods at lower prices, the Poles prefer to take their money to their countryman under Stachowiak’s exhortations.¹²⁸ Scheftel’s own son Isidor chafes at the limited economic opportunities available in Miasteczko and Pociecha-Dorf, setting his sights on Posen, or even Berlin, vowing to send his own children to university to study law. By novel’s end, Isidor makes good on his musings and departs for greener pastures.

Though the situation of the Jewish characters in the events of *Das schlafende Heer* is rather bleak, the novel’s presentation of the Jewish community of Posen is in some ways progressive for its time. In the context of nineteenth-century European literature, it is highly significant that Viebig depicts here a Jewish collective. The Jewish people are not represented in

¹²⁷ The surname “Wisniewski” would be written as “Wiśniewski.” As the diacritic in question is omitted in Viebig’s text, I have also left it out.

¹²⁸ Scheftel resentfully notes that Wisniewski shares his name with St. John Nepomuk, “wie der Heilige, zu dem sie hier beteten, das war gar nicht zu verwinden” (117). Ironically, in light of the slander conducted against Leisel Hirsch, Nepomuk is a patron against calumny. In addition, Nepomuk is a saint of Czech origin. This is a telling mistake on Viebig’s part, indicating her difficulty in distinguishing between Slavic cultures at times.

Das schlafende Heer by shifty individual male characters alone, nor are Jewish characters restricted to the father- daughter dyad, or that of Shylock-belle juive. Rather, the Jews represent a true community, held together by family ties and concerned for the general well-being of those around them. Their speech is liberally sprinkled with Yiddishisms such as “Eiweih”, and Viebig takes care to reproduce Yiddish-inflected syntax in the German dialogue of her Jewish characters.¹²⁹ Scheftel introduces the reader to a brief communal history of this group as well in detailing the gradual economic exclusion of the Jewish shopkeepers and traders. This community has a past, *as a community*, not merely as the lifespan of a few token individuals. Moreover, through the anxieties of Scheftel, Isidor, and other Jewish characters, we witness concerns for the collective future of Jews in the Province of Posen.

Those concerns mount as the Jewish community’s ambiguous social position puts the lives of its members at risk. The Jewish collective in *Das schlafende Heer* increasingly finds itself caught in the crossfire of the cultural tensions between their German and Polish neighbors. Scheftel and his co-religionists depend on the German authorities’ protection, and even seem inclined to align their interests with Germans rather than with Polish aims. The German populace however, ignores or outright rejects Jewish political overtures. Jewish characters attempt to curry favor with German settlers and landowners and to simultaneously avoid provoking the volatile Polish nationalist camp. For example, Eljakim Hirsch, a Jewish tavernkeeper, boldly hangs a portrait of Kaiser Wilhelm II in his pub:

Ein Öldruck war’s, wundervoll bunt in Uniform, mit einem goldenen Stern auf der Brust. Eljakim Hirsch war sehr stolz darauf, stolz auf das schöne Gemälde, stolz auch auf seinen Mut. Im stillen hoffte er freilich, daß die von hierzulande es nicht erkennen würden. Dagegen würde der Herr Landrat, erfuhr er davon, ihm sicherlich hold sein, und die deutschen Ansiedler würden nun auch einkehren, da, wo ihres Kaisers Bild hing. (196)

He is proud of the colorful oil painting depicting the Kaiser in military dress, a visible symbol of German hegemony in the province. Economic and political pragmatism motivates Eljakim’s

¹²⁹ For example: “se werden mer entziehen de Konzession! Eiweih, eiweih!” (200)

choice of artwork. Political power lies predominantly in German hands, and in displaying a picture of the Kaiser, Eljakim hopes that local authorities will express their gratitude for his loyalty. He also reasons that the German settlers might feel more at home in a tavern in which their monarch's likeness hangs for all to see. The barkeeper congratulates himself on his courage in the face of his Polish customers, privately hoping that they will overlook the bright hues of such a hated visage. This hope is quickly dashed however in the incident touched on above in which Polish peasants gather to rebel against the use of the German language in the village school. As tensions rise that night in the pub, Eljakim becomes increasingly nervous that his Polish patrons will attract the notice of the German security services:

Mißtrauisch und ängstlich blickte Eljakim: wollte der Alte etwa machen Skandal? Wußte er denn nicht, daß der preußische Gendarm fleißig vigilierte? Wenn der nun Lärm hörte und schrieb auf in sein Buch?! "Eiweih, eiweih," jammerte Eljakim und wand sich wie in Schmerzen, "se werden mer schließen 's Lokal, se werden mer entziehen de Konzession! Eiweih, eiweih!" (200).

Eljakim's livelihood depends on his boisterous customers, but this clientele's patriotic zeal could easily put him in an awkward position before the German authorities. If Eljakim were to be observed while playing host to guests shouting "Gott erhalte Polen!," he would run the risk of losing his tavern license and be forced to close his place of business. In this instance, he cannot count on the protection of either his Polish clientele or the German (here, "Prussian") police. Ultimately, Eljakim can only stand by helplessly as Polish patrons, roused to action by Dudek's fiery speech, destroy the prized portrait of the Kaiser. These are dangerous times to live in the interstice.

Indeed, neither Polish peasants nor German aristocrats seem interested in Jewish political sympathies or support. During a discussion concerning purchasing of livestock, Löb Scheftel slyly mentions to Baron von Doleschal that, in the interest of a more amicable trade relationship, he would be willing to reveal the identity of the person who posted a threatening note on von Doleschal's barn the night after the Baron's disastrous Sedan Day celebrations. He also suggests that he could deliver the Jewish vote for the German baron:

Wann werden sein die Wahlen, wer' ich geben dem Herrn Baron meine Stimme, und alle von unsre Leut' werden geben dem Herrn Baron ihre Stimme. So 'n Mann...Gott der Gerechte, wie heißt, wie kann man antun dem Herrn Baron so 'ne...Frechheit, so'ne- so 'ne Chuzpe! Aber Gott der Gerechte wird sie strafen bis ins vierte und fünfte Glied! Was meinen wohl der Herr Baron, wer's geschrieben hat?...Unsereins kommt viel unters Publikum – en armer Jüd, vor dem geniert man sich nich. Meine Hochachtung dem Herrn Baron – Baron is er, aber er hat 'n Herz für den Fortschritt und für unsre Leut'. Soll ich dem gnädigen Herrn Baron ins Ohr flüstern, wer's Papierchen hat an die Scheune geklebt? (230)

In this scene, Scheftel attempts to frame the Jewish community's ambiguous status in Posen as potentially useful in gathering intelligence on anti-German activities. Jews can go where Germans cannot, and no one thinks to mince their words for the benefit of Jewish ears. But when Scheftel leans in to whisper the perpetrator's name into Doleschal's ear, the Junker's reaction is one of physical disgust:

Da fuhr dieser zurück, als habe ihn ein widriges Insekt gestreift...Schroff wendete er sich ab, mit einem flüchtigen Greifen an den Rand seines Hutes. Rasch entfernte er sich querfeldein (230- 231).

The Baron jerks back violently as if in response to “a repulsive insect” and immediately marches away through the fields. Scheftel snorts derisively that Doleschal is just as prejudiced as the rest of the Christian population, muttering to his son Isidor, “Er is 'n Rosche, so gut wie die Gojim alle” (231). The Baron is just another prejudiced Goy.

For Baron von Doleschal has no desire to ally himself with the Jewish community. This, he resolves, would be too high a price to pay for justice or electoral victory. He dwells on the encounter with Scheftel for much of his walk home:

Da hätte er's nun erfahren können, was ihn so quälte. Das sagte sich Doleschal in einem fort. Aber nein, so nicht, aus *dieser Quelle nicht!* Er rümpfte die Nase, ein Ekel zog seine Oberlippe in die Höhe. Und was hatte der Jude noch gesagt? – ‘Ich werde geben dem Herrn Baron meine Stimme’ – unverschämt! Vom Hofe jagen sollte man den Menschen für diese Frechheit! Auf's tiefste verstimmt, stapfte Doleschal durch den aufgeweichten Acker. Er fühlte sich beleidigt: also der Jude warf sich auf zu seinem Protektor? Nein, es war doch zu unsäglich naiv! Darüber konnte man wirklich nur lachen. (231)

That he passed up an opportunity to learn the name of the Sedan Day vandal eats at Doleschal certainly, though this frustration is quickly overcome by a prolonged somatic reaction to

Scheftel's physical proximity. Doleschal wrinkles his nose and his upper lip curls up in repugnance, seemingly of its own accord. Even the Jewish trader's promise to vote for the Baron offends his sensibilities, and such impertinence should not have to be tolerated, von Doleschal fumes. He dismisses Scheftel's appeal as "naïve" obsequy, finding the notion of himself as the Jewish community's protector to be nothing short of laughable. Moreover, we later learn, Jewishness is inextricably linked to Polishness in the Baron's mind. "Alles polnische Namen und jüdische," he despairs as he looks at the shop signs of Posen, "Polnisch-jüdisch – wer konnte das trennen? Ebenso unlöslich diese beiden Elemente miteinander verbunden, schier unzertrennlich verwachsen, wie die ganze Provinz mit dem Polentum" (353). He views the Jews not as a group emblematic of Posen's overall ambiguity and ambivalence, but as an outgrowth of Posen's essential Polishness. Indeed, their visible presence in Posen's cityscape symbolizes the failure of von Doleschal's brand of Germanization. For the Baron, the Jews of the province are merely one more element of uncomfortable ambiguity.

The ambiguity of the Jewish position in Posen becomes more than economically and politically insecure, however. Being in-between comes to be physically dangerous for the Jewish characters of *Das schlafend Heer*. For instance, just before Easter, a mob of angry peasants gathers at Von Doleschal's estate while the Baron is away in Berlin. His wife and children calm the peasants and successfully deescalate the situation. However, defusing the confrontation between the Polish peasants and German gentry turns out to be detrimental to the Jewish community. The crowd leaves Niemczyce/Deutschau and seeks a new outlet for their pent up rage:

Hin wie die wilde Jagd geht's über die Acker quer weg. Einer, der keinen Braten im Bauch hat, nicht mal ein Stück Kochfleisch, der kann schon rennen. Ja, die Kaldaunenschlucker, die Fleischfresser, die sich vollmästen an andrer Leute Fett, die können nicht nachsetzen. Ei, das wäre ein Spaß, denen die Fenster einzuschmeißen – warum hatten die denn satt?! (340)

As they dash across the fields, the peasants hit upon the idea of smashing in the windows of a group of exploitative "tripe-gobblers" as a source of amusement. They link hands, and shouting,

“Es lebe Polen!,” march off towards the unsuspecting Jewish quarter. As the narrator notes, they are playing a game with deadly serious intents: “Es war ein Spiel, wie ein Ringelreigen; aber Ernst war im Spiel,” a mortal game of ring-around-the-roses (341). The men sneer at the dark windows of the Jewish dwellings once they arrive at their destination:

He, die Faulenzer drin schliefen wohl schon? Warum sollten die auch wachen? Die hatten ja den Bauch voll, und die wähten sich ja so sicher, hatten sie doch Tellereisen gelegt. Aber warte, das sollte ihnen heimgezahlt werden! (342)

Only the full-bellied can afford the luxury of a lazily early bedtime, the peasants jeer. They snicker at the Jews’ false sense of security, muttering in self-satisfied tones that the slumberers will get what is coming to them. A glimmer of light from Scheftel’s home provides the spark needed to spur the group into action. The men paint for each other an image of an avaricious Jewish merchant gleefully counting his profits at a time when all good Christians are in bed. Having neatly sidestepped two rather large gaps in logic, the crusading band curses Löb to the deepest pit of hell:

Brannte das Licht nicht im Hause des Löb Scheftel? Ei, der Halunke, der Jude, der saß natürlich noch auf, während alle Christenmenschen schliefen, und zählte sein Geld. Daß er in die unterste Hölle fahre!
Alle Christenmenschen, die Übles getan haben, schickt Gott ins Fegefeuer zur Strafe, aber der Jude ist auch dafür zu schlecht, den muß man schon hier auf Erden strafen.
(342)

Even eternal fire and brimstone does not satisfy the group as being adequate punishment for Scheftel’s nocturnal labors, and the situation continues to escalate as the peasants bemoan the rising cost of meat, a grave issue indeed with the Easter holiday approaching and the end of their Lenten fast. Many of the men fume that they will not have enough money to set out a proper Easter feast, to which their comrades shake their heads indignantly, “kein Fleisch zu Ostern, nachdem man so lange gefastet hatte? Das ware! Nein, Fleisch mußte man haben!” (343). Their frustration at being unable to provide meat for their wives and children fixates ever more intensely on the Jewish tradesmen of the village. Several in the mob shout in zealous rage for Jewish blood in revenge for the suffering of Christ as Holy Week approaches, “Laßt uns dem

Juden tun, wie er Jesus Christus getan hat! Es ist schon lange her, aber die Gotteswunden bluten frisch, naht die heilige Karwache” (343). In a feverish haze, the crowd denounces the laws which allow Jewish merchants to sell meat, grumbling in a resurrection of medieval blood libel, “Wer konnte sagen, ob es auch wirklich Fleisch vom geschlachteten Tier war, was er verkaufte?” (343). Perhaps Scheftel is smoking the flesh of murdered Christian children behind his home? The crazed men catch wind of a sickening odor coming from behind Löb Scheftel’s house and exclaim loudly:

“Gott soll mich strafen, wenn das nicht Kinderfleisch ist, was da geräuchert wird!”

Ein Grausen rüttelte die Gemüter. Erregt stieß einer den andern an:

“Bruder, he, hast du nicht gehört, daß Juden Kinder schlachten?”

Gewiß, man hatte es gehört. Und wenn der Löb Scheftel nun vielleicht auch kein Kind geschlachtet hatte, viel zu teuer war er doch mit dem Fleisch. (344)

Even if the smell does not originate from child’s flesh in Scheftel’s smokehouse, the peasants grumble resentfully, the man’s meat is appallingly expensive. The narrator provides us with the far less sensational truth—Scheftel’s home stands just in front of the knacker’s yard where a worn-out nag was skinned and tanned earlier that day. Scheftel is indeed preoccupied with financial matters, the narrator continues, but has few profits to boast of. Indeed, he remains awake so late only because Isidor has left for Berlin and no longer assists him in keeping the books. Prices have risen, we are told, due to the greater sums demanded by larger landowners for their livestock, and the closure of the border with Russia and the obstacles to trade with America. Though we also witness a somewhat comical prayer from Scheftel wherein he appeals to God for success in business over health, the novel treats its Jewish character here relatively fairly. A crucial component of *Das schlafende Heer*’s formal apparatus, shifts in narrative perspective, comes into play here. The narrator describes in detail the mob psychology of the peasants and the blind fanatical envy of the Jewish community’s perceived material prosperity. The novel provides the reader with a forthright explanation of actual circumstances and passes on several opportunities to exploit anti-Semitic stereotypes in relating the night’s events. Unlike

in *Soll und Haben*, for example, *Das schlafende Heer* does not cast the Jewish characters in the role of ultimate villain driven by inborn avarice.

Whipped into a frenzy, however, the Poles seize upon the probable cause furnished by centuries of anti-Jewish mythology and go on the offensive, banging on Scheftel's door and the doors of other Jewish tradesmen in town. Terrified, Scheftel wonders where the gendarme and night watchman are (sleeping off an evening of drunken carousing and hiding from the drunken crowd, respectively), screaming silently, "Zu Hilfe, zu Hilfe! Wo blieben die, die den Bürger schützen sollten?!...weh, die kamen nicht!" (346). Scheftel escapes through a small window, shouting for his wife and daughter to run, the wild cries of "Hepp, hepp" echoing in his ears. As he hides, ironically enough, under the fresh horseskin in the knacker's yard, he knows, "'Hepp, hepp' – das würde er hören bis an das Ende seiner Tage" (347). The hateful cry of a mob out for blood is forever imprinted on Scheftel's mind. At this point, the Jewish community essentially disappears from the novel's narrative landscape into an ever-dwindling interstice. Unable to appeal to the German authorities for protection, resented by their Polish neighbors, and marginalized socially and economically by forces of modernity beyond their control, the Jewish characters find they can no longer prosper in the ambiguity and ambivalence of Posen. Consequently, they exercise little narrative agency in bringing about the novel's tragic dual climax.

In the Shadow of the Łysa Góra¹³⁰

German narrative hubris and cultural illiteracy surface most dramatically in interactions between German men and the Polish landscape. It is in those encounters that ambiguity and ambivalence prove fatal for two German men in particular. In the formal structure of *Das schlafende Heer*, physical space is organized around several overdetermined landmarks

¹³⁰ In Polish, "Łysa Góra" means "bald mountain." As mentioned above, in *Das schlafende Heer*, Polish diacritical marks are sometimes missing. The German translation "Kahlberg" appears once in the novel, but is never used by characters with any regularity.

saturated with Polish historical narratives. The topography of the province of Posen is carefully designed in support of the novel's plot, and at times, the landscape even gains a sort of malicious agency. For it is in the proximity of landmarks coded Polish that both German male heroes meet their unfortunate ends. In the case of Valentin Bräuer, the Polish landscape is the direct agent of his untimely demise. Von Doleschal, however, takes his own life when he comes to realize that his approach to redirecting the narration of Posen has come to naught. Von Doleschal's sudden understanding of the futility of his narrative approach to Posen is not accompanied by a corresponding insight into the precise flaws of that approach. Von Doleschal dies in despair over his own inadequacy, unable to see that he has been brought to this point by his own attempts to co-opt existing Polish landmarks. He has attempted to overwrite Polish narratives which have long inhabited the Posener landscape. His ignorance of the power of these pre-existing narratives, doom his endeavors to failure. Von Doleschal's desire to impose his own narration of the land around him ends, unsurprisingly, in disaster. While von Doleschal futilely politicks about Berlin, his son offers the reader an example of more constructive engagement with the Polish Other through direct dialog, rather than through topographical assault.

The Polish landscape of Posen seems at times to be imbued with an innate hostility towards the German men who seek to tame it. This topographical resistance to direct assault mirrors the intractability of many of the Polish women in *Das schlafende Heer*. Stasia Frelikowska flees her husband Valentin Bräuer when he strikes her during an argument, running away to her parents' home. Appropriately enough for the dwelling of the local forester, the Frelikowski family home lies in an isolated patch of woodland surrounded by the swamp known locally as the "Tupadlo."¹³¹ Driven mad by his wife's desertion and shamed and shunned by his parents, Valentin waits listless at the edge of the Tupadlo, desperately hoping that Stasia

¹³¹ In Polish, this name is an amalgamation of the sentence "tu padło," literally "it fell here." The novel offers no translation of the swamp's name, but the Polish language initiate will find irony in the fact that Valentin does indeed, fall there.

will emerge and give him the chance to reconcile with her. Few can navigate the quicksand-like mire of the swamp which renders Stasia physically unreachable to Valentin. Topographical ambiguity here provides refuge to the less powerful, leveling the playing field with those who seek to control them. In a despair-fueled hallucination, Valentin attempts to cross the Tupadlo and sinks to his death, “under the power of a landscape that he has failed to master” (Kopp “Constructing Racial Difference in Colonial Poland” 81). Furthermore, Valentin is killed by a landscape that he cannot understand, that he cannot *read* in pursuit of a woman who eludes his grasp and resists his attempt to master *her*. Stasia Frelikowska represents the meaning at the heart of a topographical narrative which Valentin Bräuer’s limited interpretative faculties will not allow him to access. The consequence of Valentin’s incautious narrative approach is consumption by Polishness, by the topographical text he seeks to decipher.

Von Doleschal likewise suffers from topographical delusions which prove to be his undoing. In contradistinction to Valentin Bräuer, however, von Doleschal is consumed by his own despair when he comes to recognize the narrative delusions he has been laboring under for so long, particularly as regards Posen’s rural and urban landscapes. These delusions have their roots in von Doleschal’s fallacious narrative of the fields of Posen as a virginal land eagerly awaiting her lover: “Über den Äckern schwebte Duft, der ganze Zauber des Frühlings. Jetzt empfand er ihn. Ach, dieses Land, ausgenutzt, ausgesogen, zertrampelt von vielen Füßen, war doch noch *jungfräulich*, doch noch fähig, zu empfangen und Frucht zu bringen dem Liebenden!” (374, my emphasis). The acres unfurling before von Doleschal’s eyes may have suffered great abuse and exploitation, but they retain their maidenhood and fertility. Posen only requires a gentle hand in order to conceive and bring forth new life to her bridegroom. Von Doleschal imagines his own version of the land’s character and history, blithely ignoring the stories already there. For the fields around von Doleschal are not virginal plains, but part of a landscape already pregnant with Polish history.

The true embodiment of resistance written into the land, from both the German and Polish viewpoint, is the mountain known as Lysa Góra, beneath which as legend has it, 300,000 Polish knights slumber, awaiting the day when they are destined to rise up and restore Polish nationhood. The legend in the novel effectively transplants an ancient Polish myth of a Polish knight slumbering beneath Mount Giewont in the Tatra Mountains in southern Poland. According to that legend, the sleeping knight will awaken in the hour of Poland's need.¹³² The legend of the Lysa Góra in the novel relocates the source of Poland's mystical salvation from the imposing peaks of the south to the plains of Posen. The Lysa Góra, the "Berg der Verheißung, darin die Hoffnung schlief" which embeds Polishness and Polish history, and the dream of a free and independent Poland, into the landscape, is ever present in the minds of both Germans and Poles, as it is visible from nearly everywhere in the immediate vicinity. The mountain functions in the novel as a threatening foil to a nurturing model of motherhood. The Lysa Góra, beneath which thousands of Polish knights await Poland's hour of redemption, is a sort of dark, menacing womb, waiting to give birth, to burst open and release its frightening power, *ein schlafendes Heer* at any moment. In the vessel of the Lysa Góra, we see femininity in its most raw and uncontrollable form, and the metaphor in the novel's title becomes clear. Posen is no demure damsel in distress, helpless without von Doleschal's loving protection. She is a mature woman promised to another. In *Das schlafende Heer*, Viebig crushes the settler fantasy of a blank topographical canvas, discrediting such notions as misguided and potentially fatal.

Baron von Doleschal seeks to realize his narrative conceptualization of Posen through the direct appropriation of Polish-imbued landmarks, a misguided approach that turns tragic. Von Doleschal's initial unwillingness to interpret the landscape around him ignores the complexity of this borderland and its history. For example, on Sedan Day, a red letter date for German nationalism, von Doleschal plants a German flag on the summit of the mountain that

¹³² "Giewont - Highlanders Sacred Mountain." *Zakopane Online* -. Wirtualny Turysta, n.d. Web. 12 July 2016. <http://www.zakopane-online.eu/71,giewont_-_highlanders%EF%BF%BD_sacred_mountain.htm>.

can be seen for miles around in a fit of “siegeessichen Freudigkeit” (166). Von Doleschal does not stop to consider how the celebration of a rising German national star might be received by a people raised with the legacy of shattered Polish hopes for national resurrection. Later that night, the flag is torn down, the pole smashed to pieces, and reclaiming the sight of this defeat becomes a point of despair for von Doleschal (166). For von Doleschal, the ultimate victory of *Deutschtum* will be on the day when he can “vom Lysa Góra auf deutsches Land blicken, auf lauter ganz deutsches Land” (348). Ultimately, this is the place where he chooses to commit suicide. The only points of orientation in the land around von Doleschal are culturally Polish, yet he never considers that this fact might bode ill for his mission of topographical cultural conversion. Indeed, in his obsession with playing capture-the-mountain, von Doleschal seems to miss the fact that the Lysa Góra stands in context with other markers of a very Polish landscape—the church and the Tupadlo swamp. The Polish village of Pociecha lies between the Lysa Góra and the church. The term “pociecha” means literally “joy, comfort” in Polish and represents a term of endearment used commonly with children. Topographically and culturally, the Polish peasants in the village are the children of legend and religion.

Von Doleschal’s obsession with conquering the Lysa Góra and with the Germanization this conquest symbolizes leads to his alienation from other German landowners in Posen. Just after von Doleschal greets the mountain as a “deutscher Berg,” the Lysa Góra becomes the scene of his beating at the hands of Kestner’s men (402). The German landowner Kestner, indifferent to any German national agenda, orders the assault to dissuade Baron von Doleschal from continuing to inflame tensions with the Poles by seeking election to the local seat in the Reichstag. This incident leaves the proud Baron feeling violated and raped on his own land, his honor lost (403). However, Kestner’s violent actions are driven by a not unreasonable fear of Polish insurrection which is widespread on German estates in the province. Von Doleschal’s aspirations to the Reichstag risk inflaming German-Polish tensions, Frau Kestner explains to Helene, and his campaign seems reckless and selfish to the other German gentry:

Man ist allgemein auf seiten meines Mannes, um so mehr, da man am – gelinde gesagt – unbesonnenen Vorgehen Ihres Herrn Gemahls viel zu tadeln findet. Sagen Sie mal...ist er denn ganz von Gott verlassen? Hat er den gar keine Liebe zur Provinz, gar kein Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl? Wie kann er sich nur zum Reichstag aufstellen lassen? Es ist doch ausgemachte Sache, daß Garczyński gewählt wird. Und mit Recht! Warum also solche Manipulationen?...in diesen Zeiten – und hier – man lacht ihn ja nur aus. Schlimmer: man ist empört!...Ihr Herr Gemahl hat sämtliche Besizer der Gegend, große wie kleine, vor den Kopf gestoßen (437-438).

Has the Baron lost all sense of solidarity with his peers? Small and large German landowners alike are content with the status quo and see no reason to rock the boat. They do not share Baron von Doleschal's discomfort with Posen's ambivalent status of being simultaneously German and not German. They fear instead for their safety and the continued viability of their estates should the Polish peasantry be roused to rebellion. Indeed, Baron von Doleschal's candidacy has already made life difficult for German landowners dependent on Polish peasant labor.

Daß ein deutscher Kandidat nicht durchkommt, weiß man doch längst, und daß solch ein deutsches Kandidieren die Polen nur reizt, weiß man auch...überall spukt es...die Leute sind empört, ganz fanatisch, in ihren alten Rechten gekränkt; sie sind obstinat, sie werfen die Arbeit hin. Nichts als Ärger hat man davon, nichts als Schaden...es mag ja sein...daß Ihr Herr Gemahl geglaubt hat, Gutes stiften zu können. Aber er hat nur gehetzt (437-438)

Everyone knows that a German candidate will never win the Reichstag seat, Frau Kestner explains with some exasperation, and this pointless campaign only serves to irritate the Polish populace. The Poles on many estates in the area have become intractable in their outrage at the Baron's perceived infringements on their traditional rights to be represented by a Pole in Berlin. Even if the Baron only hoped to do some good for the province, Frau Kestner concludes, all his endeavors have done is to stir up trouble on the home front. In the end, his campaign against ambivalence leads other Germans to unite against him.

When Baron von Doleschal is finally able to read his environment for the ambiguous and ambivalent place that it is, he is unable to cope with the realization that his nationalist agenda has effected little change in Posen. Though Baron von Doleschal concerns himself principally with narrating the rural landscape of Posen, it is through contact with the urban landscape of

the city of Posen that the Baron understands the futility of his endeavors. In the final quarter of the novel, von Doleschal travels to Berlin to rally support for his electoral bid to the Reichstag and to raise awareness of the state of things in Posen. After a heady few weeks in the capital during which Doleschal is pleasantly surprised at the genuine interest shown in his province, the Junker returns home by train. As he approaches his destination, he becomes increasingly melancholy and is overwhelmed when confronted with the actual cultural reality that he wishes to change:

Ihn ekelte. Tief verstimmt schritt er in die Stadt hinein.
Kein einziges deutsches Firmenschild...Es schien Doleschal auf einmal, als seien all seine Bestrebungen, lang Bestehendes auszumerzen, fruchtlos kindisches Bemühen (353).

The inscription of Yiddish and Polish into the cityscape of Posen mocks von Doleschal's previous overconfidence in his own success. These foreign signs represent to von Doleschal the cultural backwardness of Posen. He despairs of ever being able to transform the province into a bastion of Germanness when he cannot even find a sign for a German business in the capital, Posen. Confronted with physically present language—the inscriptions on ordinary business signs—von Doleschal can no longer ignore the imprints left on the land around him by Polishness and Jewishness. Posen may be physically connected to Berlin by that symbol of modern industry, the railroad, but von Doleschal's journey by train has the effect of cultural teleportation. A short trip outside of his narrative space is all it takes to reset von Doleschal's perspective on Posen, to prime him for a traumatizing cultural shock. Finally able to read Posen's "native narration," as it were, and hampered by the indifference of other German landowners to revising that narrative, von Doleschal falls into despair, losing all will to carry on.

Carry on is what von Doleschal's wife Helene and their sons will do, crafting a new narrative from the ground up. Helene and her sons are more conciliatory in their interactions with the Polish population. They are also more respectful of the region's complexity, its innate ambiguity and ambivalence. Helene avoids nationalist pontificating and sees no harm in indulging the farm laborers' requests for the occasional swig of liquor while they work. While the

Baron politicks in the drawing rooms of Berlin, an irate band of Polish peasants storms up to his estate, prepared to burn it to the ground. Helene's eldest son, named Hanns-Martin after his father, pacifies the angry peasants by offering to share his Easter eggs with the Polish children (336-338). The Poles hoist him on their shoulders in gratitude, a gesture pointing towards the eventual creation of a plantation family à la Zantop. Little Hanns-Martin succeeds through dialogue with the Polish Other, rather than roughshod narrative impositions. For her part, Helene maintains a gentler relationship with the landscape of Posen than her husband. With her golden hair, Helene seems a natural part of the waving fields of wheat. She is associated with grain, the staff of life, with nourishment, motherhood, the creation of life itself. The Bräuers are in awe of the Baronness, viewing her as a prodigious omen upon their arrival in Posen:

Gen Niemczyce zu schlug das Korn im heißen Wind Wellen. Wie flutendes Wasser schwappte und wogte der goldene Schwall, und die scheitelrechte Sonne goß noch einen goldenen Strom vom Himmel dazu nieder. Mitten in diesem Meer, im blendenden Mittagszauber der Ähren war plötzlich eine Gestalt aufgetaucht, hell der Hut und das Gewand, hell das Gesicht, und die Flechten wie reifer Weizen" (20).

Helene enters the novel's plot from behind a curtain of golden wheat stalks, and ushers in the novel's ending as the Bräuers leave the province by striding confidently towards the future through bountiful fields, surrounded by her five strapping boys:

In den Ähren rauschte es, rasch kamen die fünf gesprungen, blühend und frisch, und umringten ihre Mutter:

"Mutter, hier sind wir!"

Da lächelte die Witwe Hanns-Martin von Doleschals, und inmitten ihrer jungen Schar ging sie durch reifende Ähren der Ernte entgegen (450).

The future belongs to the mother in Viebig's works. Not only virgin territory holds potential for cultivation. Though the events of *Das schlafende Heer* unfold in linear fashion, the plot itself comes full circle before moving forward in a new direction, much like the cycle of life and death symbolized by the vast fields of grain in this final scene. In the wake of so many failed impositional linear narratives, Helene emerges as the novel's heroine, effortlessly scooping up

the reins of a receptive narrative landscape, rather than embarking on an aggressive crusade on foreign topography.

Conclusion

Clara Viebig's *Das schlafende Heer* interrogates German master narratives of the East through engagement and confrontation with ambivalence and ambiguity in the province of Posen. The novel accomplishes this task through an innovative appropriation of the *Ostmarkenroman* genre which portrays the diverse ethnic communities of Posen in a nuanced manner. We have seen how each of these communities, German, Polish, and Jewish, has a very different relationship to ambivalence and ambiguity based on their current position in Posen power dynamics. Most of the main German characters see the interstice as a threat to be attacked, subdued, and controlled. Ambivalence and ambiguity open the door to cultural conversion. However, many other Germans in Posen, who never appear in the novel's events, fear von Doleschal's confrontational approach will push the Poles toward open insurrection or at least create a recalcitrant workforce on their estates. These other landowners are content with the ambivalent status quo of a Posen that is both German and not German. Though the Polish characters in the novel also fear cultural conversion, ambiguity and ambivalence largely work in their favor. Indeed, the only cases of cultural conversion exhibited in the novel are of Germans transitioning to Poles. Life in the interstice becomes dangerous for the Jewish community, however. Their medial position in Posen had once benefitted them financially and afforded them an indisputable purpose in Posener society. Now, ambiguity and ambivalence threaten the survival of Posen's Jews as the Jews find themselves caught between German and Polish nationalism. Ultimately, the novel proposes an alternative narrative approach to winning the province for Germandom, one that works *with* Posen's current ambivalence and ambiguity rather than aggressively attempting to annihilate all uncertainty. *Das schlafende Heer* arrives at this proposal after a number of other narrative options. Germans and Poles alike attempt to direct the course of Posen's future by manipulating culturally coded gender norms and family

structures. Interior spaces fall into cultural contention as well. In homes and pubs, the Polish language represents a force for cultural conversion and exclusion, an example of the power of opacity to upend hierarchy. The Jewish community finds itself without narrative agency, excluded by faith from other attempts in the novel at nation-building based on domestic arrangements, and facing increasing social and economic marginalization. Finally, German male misinterpretation of the Posener landscape and an unwillingness to accept the province's ambivalence and ambiguity leads Baron Hanns-Martin von Doleschal and the settler Valentin Bräuer to their deaths. The novel's tragic climaxes clear the way for Helene von Doleschal and her towheaded sons to spearhead a new kind of Germanness rooted in the fertile Posener soil and productive placidity towards ambivalence and ambiguity.

The novel *Das schlafende Heer* organizes the ambiguity and ambivalence of the Posener borderland into a staging of partial parallel narrative approaches and shifts in character perspective. The world created in Viebig's novel represents a totality bounded by a very limited horizon—one small area of the province of Posen. This represents a very different sort of geographic imagination to that we saw in *Soll und Haben* in Chapter I. Gustav Freytag's novel expends considerable narrative effort into maintaining broader connections (largely through descriptions of trade) between peripheries and the world at large within its own geographic imaginary. We, the readers, witness more physical travel on the part of the characters in *Das schlafende Heer* within their small locality, though they do not journey as far as the cast of Theodor Fontane's *Vor dem Sturm* in Chapter II. Viebig's Posen is just barely tied to Berlin through occasional references to trips there, while Fontane's Mark is caught up in the pan-European drama of the Napoleonic Wars. In this particular novellistic framework, Viebig structures opacity and uncertainty into a discourse of what "Germanness" means in the province of Posen. *Das schlafende Heer* is set in a time and place of cultural, social, economic, and personal transition and unease.

The novel's cultural work consists in orchestrating the resolution of competing narratives of Germanness in Posen into one of German motherhood by plot's end. The individual reader is invited into a literary experiment on social interaction with liminality and all the promise and fear which such in-betweenness entails.

CHAPTER 4: “FOR YOU ARE A ROVING NATION”: THE WANDERING GERMAN IN BOLESŁAW PRUS’S *THE OUTPOST*

Preface

This chapter is intended as a case study and as an experiment in interpretation. The act of reading novels by German and Polish authors alongside each other highlights the existence of multiple discourses in the same theoretical borderland. By including this chapter on Bolesław Prus’ *Placówka* (1886), this dissertation avoids elevating one discourse to speaker and the other discourse to passive, silent receptacle. Both Germans and Poles have crafted their own dominant narratives of the Other in the borderland. These two sets of narratives share critiques and foci that I point to over the course of the analysis below. However, these common cultural nodes are often inserted into German and Polish discourses in different ways. Since Polish literature constitutes an independent discourse on the German-Polish borderland, Prus’s novel should not be construed as a direct response to Clara Viebig’s *Das schlafende Heer* (1904), though the two novels both explore the implications of German settlement in the East in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In addition, I do not view *Placówka* as “counter-narrative.” The appellation “counter” would suggest Prus were writing against a “dominant discourse” on the borderland in protest. Indeed, as I elaborate below, Prus portrays the German settlers in far too positive a light to warrant such antagonistic terminology. Instead, this chapter serves as a salient reminder that our perception of a “dominant” discourse results from our own point of view. Thus, while Prus does not constitute a direct response to the texts discussed in previous chapters, the act of considering ambivalence and ambiguity from a Polish literary point of view results in a change of which discourse is “dominant.” In this manner, my project departs from the current critical corpus on German-Polish literary relations. To be sure, I build on the excellent work done by scholars such as Kristin Kopp and Caroline Bland on German literary

portrayals of Poles and Poland more generally and on the *Ostmarkenroman* genre in particular. However, the inclusion of a Polish novel into my dissertation allows me to make wider claims regarding the role of ambivalence and ambiguity in the borderland in the nineteenth-century novel. In this way, my project balances the current scale of German studies' discourse on German-Polish literary relations. By including Polish literary discourse on Germany and Germans, this dissertation presents the borderland as a literary meeting place of cultural discourses.

Placówka is thematically and chronologically well-positioned to serve as a case study in this analysis of the German-Polish literary borderland. Firstly, Prus himself intended *Placówka* to be a kind of case study in literary social change and criticism. In writing this novel, Prus staged an internal critique of Polish society and the flaws in culture and community that, according to him, hindered Poland's economic and social development. *Placówka* constitutes a novellistic panorama of rural nineteenth-century Poland with a cast of characters drawn from across classes and ethnicities whose actions invite self-reflection on the part of the Polish reading public. Furthermore, *Placówka* was published in 1886 just after the height of Otto von Bismarck's ill-fated campaign against the Catholic Church in Germany, the *Kulturkampf* (1871-1878).¹³³ The waning of the *Kulturkampf* did not, however, indicate a lessening concern towards the perceived racial and ethnic threat posed by Poles within Prussian borders as Andrew Zimmerman writes in his monograph *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (82).¹³⁴ Indeed, in the two years prior to the novel's debut, some 32,000 Poles without Prussian citizenship were expelled from Prussia. Furthermore, although the *Kulturkampf* did not exclusively target Polish Catholics in German lands, Bismarck made clear in his memoirs that the Polish Question loomed large in that

¹³³ However, Pope Leo XIII did not declare the phenomenon to be over until 1887.

¹³⁴ Zimmerman, Andrew. *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2010. Print.

particular endeavor (Zimmermann 81-82). *Placówka* was published at a time when Germans were growing increasingly anxious over the dangers of Germans and Poles living, working, and learning in close proximity. The year 1886 saw the issuance of a memorandum by Christoph von Tiedemann, president of Bromberg in the province of Posen on the risk of Polonization of German children schooled alongside Polish peers (Zimmerman 87). It was in 1886, moreover, that the Ministry of Agriculture, with the approval of the Prussian House of Deputies, established a Settlement Commission (Zimmerman 88). The Commission's mandate was to purchase estates from Polish landowners that would in turn be parceled out into smallhold plots for German settler families. As a journalist and author in the Russian Partition, Prus might not have had concrete, everyday experience of the *Kulturkampf* or similar repressive measures implemented by German, or previously Prussian, authorities. However, he was certainly aware of events over the border. Indeed, in his feuilletons he wrote extensively about the perils of hawking off Polish ancestral lands to German settlers. This confluence of events makes Prus's nuanced portrayal of Germans in *Placówka*, a novel published and set in the Russian Partition, all the more significant. While Prus may be critical in his journalism of the discriminatory actions of certain German companies or individuals, as I discuss below, an undercurrent of admiration for the success of the German settler community is palpable throughout the novel.

Placówka simultaneously represents a long tradition in the Polish understanding of the Other and a pivot in the representation of the Self. The Polish discourse on the Other in the nineteenth century depicts the German in a relatively positive light. It is not until after the Second World War that "the German" takes on the mantle of the Great Oppressor. In nineteenth-century Polish literature, the German may be a foe, but he is a noble enemy. Furthermore, Germanness, in Polish discourse, often represented a look towards the West, toward technological and societal progress. Wojciech Wrzesiński discusses this juxtaposition of positive and negative images of the German in Polish collective memory, writing that he "realized, that the subject of this research would be not one, but rather numerous, oftentimes

divergent, contradictory stereotypes. Among these, the nationalist model dominated, presenting the German as a constant, simply biological enemy of the Poles: knowledgeable, strong, possessing power, military might, high culture, but having political aims, being more persistent, wealthier and of a higher civilization than the Poles, and moreover ruthless in the achievement of his own goals” (15).¹³⁵ Generally, Wrzesiński continues, there existed a dichotomy in Polish perceptions of the Germans, in which positive German traits were associated with a recognition of the sophistication of German culture and society, and negative German traits were associated with German actions in the political sphere (17). In the Classical and later Romantic poetry of Polish national bard Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855), for example, engagement with the German Other is a means towards achieving the political goal of independence in narrative poems such as *Grażyna* (1823) and *Konrad Wallenrod* (1828) in which the Teutonic Knights appear as an enemy against whom the protagonist must prove himself or herself. Against the background of Poland’s fifteenth century rise as a Baltic power, Polish/Lithuanian national belonging appears as something innate in the world of Mickiewicz. Though Mickiewicz may portray the Teutonic Knights as a fearsome enemy in battle and occupation, Konrad Wallenrod, a Lithuanian who has infiltrated the highest ranks of the Order, respects and acknowledges the merits of the Order’s code of chivalry with its guiding principles of bravery, loyalty, and honor. Recognition of these virtues makes undermining the Teutonic Knights from the inside a matter of great emotional pain for the eponymous character. As Alina Witkowska notes, the system of social ethics in *Konrad Wallenrod* is complicated and nuanced (263).¹³⁶ Wallenrod’s loyalty is tested, but love of his Lithuanian homeland eventually wins out and he leads the Knights to their ruin. While

¹³⁵ “Autor dostrzegwał, że przedmiotem badań będzie nie jeden, ale liczne, częstokroć odmienne, sprzeczne stereotypy. Dominował w nich wzorzec nacjonalistyczny, przedstawiający Niemca jako stałego, wręcz biologicznego wroga Polaków, świadomego, silnego, dysponującego siłą, potęgą militarną, wysoką kulturą, ale mającego cele polityczne, bardziej wytrwałego, bogatszego i o wyższej cywilizacji niż Polacy, a przy tym bezwzględnie w osiągnięciu własnych celów” (15). Wrzesiński, Wojciech. *Sąsiad, czy wróg? : ze studiów nad kształtowaniem obrazu Niemca w Polsce w latach 1795-1939*. Wrocław : Wydawn. Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2007. Print.

¹³⁶ Witkowska, Alina. “Adam Mickiewicz.” *Romantyzm*. Wyd. 1. Warszawa: Wydawn. Nauk. PWN, 1997. Print.

Wallenrod is symbolic of a call for great individual sacrifice to inspire revolutionary change for the good of the nation -- the cornerstone of Polish Romantic nationalism -- the Teutonic Order (i.e. Germans) is ultimately represented as a worthy, civilized opponent, from whom the Lithuanians can and should learn. Later in the nineteenth century, the German increasingly appeared as a forum for critical self-examination of Polish historical blunders and the role those mistakes played in Poland's ultimate disappearance from the map of Europe. For example, Józef Ignacy Kraszewski's historical novel *Hrabina Cosel* [The Countess of Cosel] (1873) depicted the excesses of the Dresden court of August II (1670-1733), Elector of Saxony, as an indirect indictment of the irresponsibility of the Polish nobility in electing such a foolish man to be King of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

This nuanced portrayal of the German Other persisted throughout the nineteenth century despite Polish aspirations toward national independence enacted in a series of disastrous uprisings, including the Poznań Uprising of 1848.¹³⁷ By the second half of the century, failed uprisings in the Prussian, Austrian, and Russian Partitions would dramatically shift Polish intellectual consensus regarding the means by which national destiny should be charted. The Romantic, revolutionary notions of achieving independence that had led to the uprisings would be replaced by a more conciliatory social program called "Positivism." With Romantic aspirations of national independence dashed after the failed 1863 Uprising against the Russian Tsarist Empire, Poles in the Russian partition developed an economic and social program of change called Positivism. Expressed primarily on the pages of the press and in literary form, Polish Positivists abandoned dreams of independence by revolution, and sought instead to strengthen Polish society through educational and economic initiatives.

¹³⁷ A number of uprisings were staged throughout the history of Polish Partition. The Kościuszko Uprising of 1794 led to the final partitioning of Poland and its disappearance from the map of Europe in 1795. Successive insurrections occurred as each new generation came of age, most notably in the November Uprising of 1830-1831, the Kraków Uprising of 1846, the Poznań Uprising of 1848, and the January Uprising of 1863 and 1864. Most uprisings broke out in the Russian partition, the most repressive of the three partitions.

With the advent of Positivism, the Poland we see depicted in literature is no longer the ideal abstraction of Romanticism, but rather a social mode of thought.¹³⁸ As I elaborate below, this is the vision of Poland that Prus puts forth in *Placówka*. In this novel, the phenomenon of German colonization in the East constitutes a vehicle through which one can explore other social and cultural problems. For Prus, and in Positivism more generally, economic practices are inextricably tied up with ethnicity. Germans in particular work together as a community for mutual prosperity. They are diligent, pragmatic, successful, and have adapted for survival to modernity and capitalism. This trend in the portrayal of the German continued through the years leading up to the First World War. For example, Władysław Reymont (1867-1925), in his gritty portrait of industrial Łódź, depicts a world in which ethnicity is inextricably tied to class. To be sure, there is some variety in the cast of German characters in *Ziemia obiecana*. Some Germans have ascended into the wealthy upper echelons of Łódź society, others are parvenus awkwardly adopting external trappings of their improved status. They are all, however, members of the middle class, and indeed represent the only true bourgeoisie in the novel. In a rapidly modernizing and industrializing Poland at the turn of the century, the German embodies an important component of capitalism that does not yet exist in Poland. *Placówka* was thus preceded and followed by a literary tradition of engagement with the Other that depicts the German as formidable opponent, object lesson, and agent of modernity. As we shall see below,

¹³⁸ Polish Positivism was an outgrowth of European Positivism, adjusted to the Polish cultural context and developed into a broad program of social reform that moved away from the philosophical focus of Auguste Comte to address concrete practical concerns of economic well-being and national independence. Positivism took root in Poland after the 1863 January Uprising (Janowski 147). In order to avoid the cultural annihilation of the Polish nation, younger generations must be pushed in “a real direction” rather than the “idealistic direction” that had spawned a series of failed rebellions which had only led to increased political and cultural repression by the Partitioning Powers (Janowski 147, translations not my own). This meant that Poles must learn from the success of other nations and embrace the benefits of industry and trade in the modern era (Janowski 147). The nobility must overcome their distaste for involvement in commerce and Polish positivists pushed for the development of technical education as a practical alternative or at least complement to traditional *gymnasia* (168).. The goal was to reform daily Polish life and attitudes towards civil society, leading to pervasive change “which should be shaped not by sacrifice but duty,” as demanded by Romanticism, but by everyday commitment to improvement. Also important for the Polish positivist program was Herbert Spencer’s understanding of society as organism and his elaboration of a “variant of organicist theory that is liberal and individualist (Janowski 166). Other influential Polish positivists include literary critic Piotr Chmielowski, Włodzimierz Spasowicz, Alexander Świętochowski, and author Eliza Orzeszkowa.

each of these forms is deeply implicated in Polish literary approaches to ambivalence and ambiguity in the borderland.

The Outpost

On September 1, 1874, the Polish journalist and future novelist Bolesław Prus published what was to become one of hundreds of weekly and monthly feuilletons and newspaper columns.¹³⁹ In this particular text, he responds to the hysterical tone of an article in the Russian liberal monthly magazine *Vestnik Evropy* [The European Herald] on the Germanization of the “entire Western region of Vistula Country,” a.k.a. Poland.¹⁴⁰ The Russian article, entitled “Poland and the Poles in the Time of Stanisław Poniatowski” exclaims with dismay that the Poles in the German Partition “are steadily becoming Germanized to the degree that many Polish border cities have already become almost German!”¹⁴¹ The anonymous Russian author contrasts Slavo-Polish apathy and indifference to German entrepreneurship. The Germans outpace their Polish neighbors, the author continues, not only in financial endeavors, but in the arts as well, comparing German literature, “with all its richness of diversity and sophistication” to Slavo-Polish fiction, deemed “poor, obscurantist, drenched in exaltation, with pointless rapture, alongside a very small particle of serious content” (48).¹⁴² The Russian columnist

¹³⁹ “Bolesław Prus” was the pseudonym of Aleksander Głowacki (1847-1912). Scholars generally use this name when discussing his works as Głowacki published almost all his writings under that name.

¹⁴⁰ Prus’ Polish translation of the Russian term for this part of Poland reads “cała zachodnia część Nadwiślańskiego Kraju.” The Vistula River, in Polish “Wisła,” is commensurate in cultural significance with the Seine in the French tradition, the Rhine or Danube in German and Austrian literature, or the Moldau (Vltava) in Czech culture. Cities on the bank of the Vistula include Kraków and Warsaw; The Russian title of the monthly is written in Cyrillic as “Вестник Европы.” Prus transliterates the title as “Wiestnik Jewropy.” The title in the main text of my prose follows Library of Congress transliteration guidelines. My thanks to Elena Pedigo Clark for assistance in rendering the English translation of the journal title from the Russian.

¹⁴¹ “Polska i Polacy za Stanisława Poniatowskiego 1784-1792 r.” All translations from Polish to English are my own unless otherwise noted. In the case of this article, I am relying on Prus’ translation from Russian to Polish as cited in the feuilleton referenced above. The original Polish text of the above quote reads: “stopniowo zniemcza się do takiego stopnia, że wiele pogranicznych miast polskich stały się już prawie niemieckimi!”

¹⁴² “biedną, obskurancką, przesiąkniętą egzaltacją, jakimś bezprzedmiotowym zachwytem, obok bardzo małej części treści poważnej, zdrowych dążeń i myśli.” “z całym swym bogactwem różnorodności i rozwoju”

contrasts German literary multifaceted glory and refinement with Polish obscurantism and paucity of genuine material.

Prus responds critically to the Russian article, constructing a more rational cultural narrative of German settlement in Poland based on sociological observation. German emigration is a natural result of overpopulation, he writes, not a sweeping historical saga propelled by sinister German intentions to destroy Polishdom. Prus concedes that there are significant German cultural influences on Polish society. However, he qualifies, German literature has no more claim to supremacy in Poland than do the works of any other European literary tradition esteemed by Polish readership. Prus urges his fellow Poles to adopt a more nuanced interpretation of German-Polish contact. Indeed, he encourages his readers to aspire to German social achievements. Poles have enjoyed notable educational success in recent years, Prus continues, but still have much to learn. In this feuilleton, Prus proposes an alternative model for engagement with the German-Polish borderland. He embraces the potential productivity of German-Polish interactions, and points to the complex motivations, the historical and political ambivalence and ambiguity surrounding German settlements, as grounds for reassurance, not alarm. The correct response to uncertainty is not oversimplification or dramatization, but rather levelheaded understanding of facts and calm confrontation with liminality. The arguments laid out in this feuilleton are indicative of Prus' views on the German presence in Polish lands throughout his literary and journalistic career. This same interpretation of the ambivalence governing German-Polish relations drives the plot of Prus' first novel, *Placówka* [The Outpost], a socioeconomic parable which calls for Polish civic self-critique in historical narration.

This is not to say that Prus minces words with regards to German political, economic, or cultural rhetoric and practices. He reacts rather caustically in one column to what he perceives as an obnoxious insistence by German society on proclaiming to the world a monopoly on true civilization. His are not the words of the colonized fearing cultural annihilation, but rather of an extremely vexed underdog telling off bullies who "left and right assure the world, that only they

are the truly civilized people” (Vol. V, 314-315).¹⁴³ At issue are not German accomplishments, which Prus readily acknowledges throughout his writings. Indeed, Prus’s opus frames German-Polish conflict as a matter of economic competition, rather than as an epic clash of cultures.¹⁴⁴ Prus’s voice evinces a timbre typical of Polish Positivism with its turn from revolutionary Romanticism to economic health and infrastructure, the Postivist principle called “work at the foundations” [*praca u podstaw*]. The more rational and measured approach of writers such as Prus and later Władysław Reymont often clashed with a broader public sentiment enthralled with the dramatics of neo-romantic novels of the late nineteenth century such as those of Henryk Sienkiewicz. The tone of Prus’s feuilletons concerning German-Polish business relations, German eastward colonization, and German language use in Poland varies from flippantly ironic, to sharply critical, to mildly concerned. His criticism of Germans most frequently concerns the cultural nepotism of German firms in Poland, who prefer to import workers from their homeland, rather than employing local Poles as did French and English manufacturers. Those Poles who succeed in obtaining employment in German companies, or who must conduct business with those firms, find themselves facing linguistic discrimination. Numerous German companies insist on the use of the German language in all corporate correspondence within Polish branches. Ultimately, however, this imbalance of financial power results, according to Prus, predominantly from Polish social flaws and an unwillingness to adapt to the advent of capitalism. In short, Polish economic woes have not been brought on by an evil German conspiracy, but by Polish resistance to economic and social change.

Prus’ literary social intervention likewise strives to present a more complex understanding of the Polish past, present, and future. His novels carry on initiatives to reform

¹⁴³ “na prawo i na lewo zapewniam świat, że i tylko oni są ludem prawdziwie ucywilizowanym”

¹⁴⁴ Note that in Freytag, economic competition is portrayed as a German-Jewish phenomenon, not a German-Polish phenomenon. In Prus’ context, the issue of economic competition between ethnic groups becomes an important theme in what is his most celebrated novel, *Lalka* [The Doll] (1890). In this novel, the competition is primarily between Jewish merchants and ethnic Poles attempting to break into the commercial middle class.

Polish civil and industrial infrastructure which were launched through his journalistic engagement. This work gathers together many of the strands of its author's journalistic writing – the need for social organization at the community level, for collective acceptance of changing economic realities, and for civic responsibility– around one of Prus's most reiterated appeals in the press: the need to halt the widespread sale of Polish estates to German buyers. Moreover, both Prus' feuilletons and his novels offer a more nuanced interpretation of German-Polish relations.

Yet, Prus' first novel *Placówka* [The Outpost] (1886) represents more than a literary formulation of his social ideals as expressed in so many of his feuilletons. *Placówka's* true literary genius lies in its manipulation of social, geographical, and historical ambivalence and ambiguity to throw a cross-section of Polish society into structural limbo. The novel forces a confrontation with ambivalence and ambiguity and the acceptance thereof in order to lay the framework for a new kind of Polish cultural self-narration. Ultimately, *Placówka* serves as a social parable, and sets out to teach its Polish readership a clear moral lesson. This work offers an alternative social narrative, a new story which Poles can tell themselves as they move to reshape the notion of "Poland." Indeed, the power of literature lies in its ability to create new worlds and to invite the reader in to stay awhile. Just like Freytag, Reymont, Fontane, Krasszewski, and Viebig, Prus offers an understanding of people and events through a principle of inclusion. All of these authors penned novels which provide readers an opportunity to observe the flaws and merits of their own personal narratives, to imagine alternative plots, and to continue the storyline after the final page. Such literature is participatory by nature.

The works and life of Prus have enjoyed no shortage of scholarly attention. Immensely popular as a journalist and novelist in his day, Prus also currently occupies a prominent position in the Polish literary canon. Critical tradition has thoroughly treated Prus' literary social activism and positivist leanings within its historical and literary contexts, but has not attended

to *Placówka*'s literary ingenuity.¹⁴⁵ *Placówka*, I argue, illustrates powerfully the broader question of this dissertation, namely, the productive literary space which borderlands create through the opportunity to engage with ambivalence and ambiguity. Scholarly literature characterizes the novel as a naturalist parable, and points to the representative function of many characters.¹⁴⁶ Other critics highlight the novel's emphasis on a logical exposition of cause and effect, and an avoidance of formal amorphousness.¹⁴⁷ More recent criticism has turned to the symbolism surrounding the complex interactions between human beings and the natural world around them.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ This academic focus on social activism is a product of the communist era in Poland, when ideology permeated academia and scholars sought to situate Polish Positivism as a precursor to postwar socialism. Moreover, during this time emphasis was placed on the literature of Polish Positivism so as to detract from the cultural centrality of Polish Romantic literature that was nationalistically minded, overtly rebellious, and highly critical of Tsarist Russia.

¹⁴⁶ With regards to *Placówka* as parable, I refer here to the discussion of the novel in the authoritative reference series *The History of Polish Literature*. [*Historia Literatury Polskiej: Pozytywizm*]. In situating *Placówka* within the positivist tradition, Józef Bachórz interprets the novel as a parable which casts the peasant Józef Ślimak as a modern-day Job. Bachórz points to the parabolic traits of the novel's surprise happy ending. The sudden rescue of the protagonist in the eleventh hour appears frequently in parables, he argues (360); "Representativeness," or "reprezentatywność" in Polish, is the order of the day in the parable and in *Placówka*, Żabski and Lubczyńska-Jeziorna concur. Tadeusz Żabski asserts this to be evident in the linguistically generic dialects. Modes of speech serve as blanket markers of social groups (peasant, country squire, Jew, or German) (in Lubczyńska-Jeziorna 136). In summarizing Żabski, Lubczyńska-Jeziorna echoes his sentiments, emphasizing the Realist novel's function as a symbolic representation of society as a whole, rather than as a description of a specific place. Prus' choice not to indicate an exact time and place, and to limit regional particularities, both researchers agree, derives from the author's dedication to Realist aesthetics. Lubczyńska-Jeziorna, Elżbieta. *Gatunki Literackie w Twórczości Bolesława Prusa*. Wrocław: Agencja Wydawnicza a linea, 2007. Print.

¹⁴⁷ Elżbieta Lubczyńska-Jeziorna, in her 2007 book *Literary Genres in the Œuvre of Bolesław Prus* [*Gatunki literackie w twórczości Bolesława Prusa*], engages with the development of literary form in Prus' works and focuses on the coherency of *Placówka*'s plot. "Fabuła *Placówki* jest bardzo spójna. Jej istotę stanowi logika wywodu. Klasyczna powieść realistyczna unika amorficzności konstrukcji fabularnej; eksponuje natomiast związki przyczynowo-skutkowe, dąży do silnego sproblematyzowania prezentowanych zdarzeń" (116). She notes as well the novel's studious restraint in not cultivating the seeds of potential adventure storylines.

¹⁴⁸ For Dariusz Trześniowski, the imbuing of nature with voices, even emotions, marks *Placówka* as a work of Magical Realism. It is truly bizarre to even mention Bolesław Prus and Magical Realism in the same sentence, or really, within a ten mile radius of one another. Trześniowski compares *Placówka* to Henryk Sienkiewicz's *Krzyżacy* [Knights of the Cross], a Neo-romantic Teutonic Knight saga. He asserts that both works assumed pivotal roles in shaping Polish national consciousness on the basis of confrontation and anti-German sentiment. The arguments of this chapter, will, I hope, thoroughly contest and nuance Trześniowski's claims. Anna Barcz offers a more elegant interpretation through the lens of eco-criticism, discussing Ślimak's parallel passivity in the face of transformations in human society and in nature (152-153). Tensions between peasant and nature culminate in dramatic polyphony, Barcz writes, in which a neglected earth bemoans its exhausted soil, and even the larks admonish Ślimak's slothfulness. She writes: "Tak polifonicznie przedstawiany świat, wielogłos współtworzących go bytów, które buntują się, gdy naruszona zostaje granica wytrzymałości ziemi lub kiedy jej eksploatacja jest większa, niż może ona to udźwignąć, jest jednym z najbardziej frapujących miejsc *Placówki*" (154-155).

I propose a reinterpretation of *Placówka* through the lens of its internal formal and plot mechanisms. My analysis moves beyond squaring plot content with social activism. This novel merits critical notice not only as historical artifact and illustration, but for the literary infrastructure it employs in the execution of its social goals. On a structural level, the plot of *Placówka* operates on the basis of ambiguity. This work points out the communal mistakes of Polish society, drawing on generic traits of the parable. *Placówka* contains several structural markers which indicate its indebtedness to the parabolic tradition rather than an affiliation with, say, allegory. I draw here on Susan E. Colón's monograph on parables in nineteenth-century British realist novels, *Victorian Parables*, which begins by tracing intellectual and literary engagement with the parabolic genre from Augustine to Adolf Jülcher (*Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* v.1 [1888] and v.2 [1899]), C. H. Dodd, and Paul Ricoeur ("Biblical Hermeneutics" [1975]). Colón points out the inherent perlocutionary nature of parables in their original Scriptural context in the synoptic Gospels; that is to say, parables were meant to elicit a specific course of action in its readership, a goal certainly present in *Placówka*. Structurally, Colón posits in her treatment of parable studies, parables operate according to a fundamental paradox of the "extraordinary in the ordinary," on the basis of the juxtaposition of the familiar with the alien. Extrabiblical and Biblical parables moreover, all make use of an element of "reversal" meant to shake up conventional wisdom in its exposition of a new moral truth. In this way, parables occupy an ambivalent status as being simultaneously iconoclastic and iconic. The parable genre is thus an excellent vehicle for a lesson on modern ambiguity and ambivalence. The genre itself is located in the interstitial space of the concrete and the abstract, of that which we know and that which we do not. The parable's task is to bring those two spheres to bear on one another. As we will see below in the case of *Placówka*, parables pack a hefty moral punch through an ethical confrontation which makes use of the deceptively simple everyday. *Placówka* is rooted in a very specifically Polish historical moment, quite ordinary in its subject matter, though the novel naturally possesses literary implications beyond those of literary historical

artifact. The novel lacks the more complete symbolic re-casting of the allegory (though allegory and parable are naturally kindred genres). *Placówka*'s didactic message lies in the complexity of the "surface story," rather than an implied substrate which results from the bifurcation of narrative planes that an allegory would engender. Ultimately, both the parabolic novel and the Biblical parable are based on the premise that ordinary, everyday occurrences carry within them the subversive potential to unveil greater moral lessons where least expected, and to call for the reader's subsequent engagement. Prus presses these structural aspects of the parable into service to create a piece of positivist didactic literature, simultaneously specific and not in terms of place, time, characters, etc. As a social parable, a didactic text, *Placówka* requires this uncertainty, this abstractness in order to become widely applicable. As regards plot mechanics, it is the sale of the noble estate which sets the action of *Placówka* in motion. From there, the plot unfolds in a microcosm of rural Polish life, in a nondescript village home to personages caught up in events recognizable to Polish readers of Prus' day. The fundamental power of the parable is its use of familiar settings, persons, and activities in order to impart an abstract religious, or here, social, ethical lesson. *Placówka* functions as a sophisticated novelistic parable which operates on ambiguity dependent on the generically concrete to make a fervent call for Polish social responsibility.

In *Placówka*, Prus depicts a community in transition, a world cast suddenly into a liminal social space by the sale of the noble estate to German settlers. Uncertainty characterizes every facet of the villagers' lives. The arrival of modernity, symbolized by the coming railway system, sets in motion a complex dynamic between center and periphery, and in the resulting socio-geographic ambiguity, we witness a gradual de-centering and re-centering of village life. Prus' even-handed treatment of the German figures in this work evinces a far less tendentious approach to Polish history than say, in the popular historical fiction of author Henryk

Sienkiewicz.¹⁴⁹ *Placówka* thus puts forth a more nuanced understanding of the roots of the social dilemmas facing Polish society at the end of the nineteenth century. The village's anonymity introduces additional geographic and temporal ambiguity and contributes to the parabolic tendencies of *Placówka*. In creating a novel which operates on multiple sorts of ambiguity and ambivalence, Prus forces his characters into a confrontation with social transition and into engagement with those changes. Ultimately, *Placówka* declares the impossibility of ignoring ambiguity, the disastrous consequences of attempting to do so, and the social and cultural productivity which interaction with the ambivalent can bring about.

I begin by discussing the complex dynamics between center and periphery in *Placówka*. I focus here on the geographic indeterminacy in the novel. Both German and Polish cultural identity depend on the borderland and each culture understands itself as a mediating force between East and West. Germans and Poles perceive themselves to be occupying a medial, ambivalent geo-cultural position and feel that negotiation with each other constitutes a cultural necessity. In *Placówka*, we witness the creation of a socio-cultural borderland with the departure of the nobility and the arrival of the German settlers. The novel's protagonist, Józef Ślimak, and his fellow Polish peasants however, remain stationary. Consequently, Ślimak's plot of land, once on the margins of the village, suddenly occupies a simultaneously liminal and central position as local centers shift. Prus plays with the relationship between urban and rural, reversing the usual circumstances in which the former is center, and the latter periphery. Even the landscape finds itself cast into a state of transition as German settlers mold the land "in their own image." This campestrial renovation results from the presence of increased mobility— that of the wandering German settlers, a phenomenon made possible by the arrival of the railroad. Following the discussion on increased mobility, I turn in Section II to the social ambiguity in

¹⁴⁹ Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846-1916) is best known for his *Trylogia* [Trilogy] of historical novels: *Ogniem i mieczem* [By Fire and Sword], *Potop*, and *Pan Wołodyjowski* [Fire in the Steppe]. In his novel *Krzyżacy* [The Knights of the Cross], Sienkiewicz depicts the heroic Polish defeat of the Teutonic Knights at the Battle of Grunwald (in German known as the "Schlacht bei Tannenberg" or "Battle of Tannenberg.")

Placówka. Here too, the events of the novel lead to the establishment of new centers, and we witness a seismic re-ordering of social structures resulting from German-Polish borderland interactions. In the final section, I treat the historical and temporal ambivalence and ambiguity which Prus introduces in order to create a more nuanced notion of Polish history and of German-Polish interaction. The Jewish community supplies key agents of change in these geographical, social, and historical processes, and these individuals wield considerably more narrative agency than do their coreligionists in *Das schlafende Heer*. Ultimately, *Placówka* takes a stand against Polish peasant fatalism and trumpets the possibility of grass-roots intervention in a modernity coded as German and Jewish.

Section I: Neither Here nor There: Geographic Ambivalence, Shifting Centers and Peripheries

Prus lays the foundations for the intricate center-periphery dynamics in *Placówka* by weaving indeterminacy into every aspect of the novel's geographic structure. Broadly speaking, there are two categories of geographic ambiguity in *Placówka*. There is established ambiguity which predates the main narrative. This category includes multivalent geographic designations, anonymity of place, and the narrative privileging of marginal places. Traditional location determiners such as place names are omitted, obscured, or occupy unconventional positions in the novel's geography. *Placówka* manifests an apparent unity of place, and on a broad synoptic level, revolves around a clear geographic center – one tiny, nameless Polish village. This place is known to its inhabitants as “wieś” (“the village”) and lies somewhere along the Białka River between the rivers Bug and Vistula. This village is a place whose location is simultaneously specific and nonspecific.¹⁵⁰ The second category of ambiguity at work in *Placówka* is introduced by the departure of the local gentry and the subsequent disintegration of existing social structures. I will discuss social ambiguity in Section II of this chapter, but these social changes

¹⁵⁰ Such places are not unusual in European realism. One need only think of the number of English towns and villages known only by first letters or dashes located in “****shire.” Beyond the level of naming, villages in the fiction of Jeremiah Gotthelf, Gottfried Keller, Adalbert Stifter, and Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach are similarly specific and non-specific in nature.

set in motion forces of ambiguity which even nature cannot withstand. The villagers experience the introduction of this new uncertainty as a military invasion. These various strains of ambiguity are ultimately drawn together by the complexity of the eponymous geographic term “placówka.” Modernity collides violently with this ancient landscape unaccustomed to change, and forces a disorienting series of metamorphoses. In true parabolic form, Prus blends the familiar paradigm of Polish village life with the ambiguous to create a universally applicable microcosm of Polish rural society.

Thus, the plot of *Placówka* elevates one anonymous village to the position of center, interrogating the traditional narrative of urban-rural dynamics.¹⁵¹ The peasants and shopkeepers of the village do not articulate their sense of place in relation to Warsaw, or any other traditionally-defined cultural or literary center. In fact, the villagers do not identify themselves as inhabitants of a marginal space. Indeed, characters in *Placówka* seem to be barely aware of a world beyond their own. Warsaw represents a vague and distant concept in the villagers’ understanding of place. It is the place where the nobility journeys for winter entertainment. The village of Wólka constitutes a far more tangible reference point as the hometown of some of the German settlers who take up residence in the *wieś*.¹⁵² Beyond this small valley, the Polish peasants are cognizant of Germany’s existence, though they possess little real knowledge of events there. When the lord and lady of the manor journey abroad, they are quickly forgotten with absolutely no collective curiosity of whither they have gone in particular.¹⁵³ Those more distant centers do not inform the villagers’ sense of place in any significant fashion.

¹⁵¹ The re-centering of literature to include social classes, spaces, and themes not previously deemed worthy of artistic notice was a central tenet of the Naturalist movement in full swing by the time of *Placówka*’s publication in 1886.

¹⁵² Wólka is not a fictional place, but in fact a small village which still exists just outside the voivodeship capital of Lublin in southeastern Poland.

¹⁵³ “It was July. The landlord and his wife had long since travelled abroad; in the village they were forgotten and a new coat of wool had begun to grow on the sheared sheep” (49). “Był lipiec. Dziedzic z dziedziczką od dawna wyjechali za granicę; we wsi o nich zapomniano i nawet nowa wełna zaczęła porastać na ostrzyżonych owcach” (49).

However, more than any towns, cities, countries, or other testaments to human endeavors, rivers receive the greatest narrative privilege as borders and points of orientation. In fact, *Placówka* refers far more often to rivers by name than any cities or towns. Natural borders take precedence over geopolitical delineations. This holds true regarding points of geographical orientation (where am I?) and self-orientation and the borders of identity (where am I from?). The German schoolmaster and his daughter describe themselves as “colonists from far beyond the Vistula” (91).¹⁵⁴ When pressed, the young woman explains that this new land is their country as well, for she was “born this side of the Vistula” (92).¹⁵⁵ They had initially hoped to settle “beyond the Bug River” where land would be cheaper, the schoolmaster’s daughter continues, but others preferred to settle along the new railroad line under construction near Ślimak’s farmstead. Prus removes the little village from the broader political context, and makes use of the formidable symbolic currency of the Vistula and Bug rivers to sidestep the Tsarist censor.¹⁵⁶ The Vistula River runs through the heart of Poland, through culturally significant cities such as Kraków and Warsaw. The Bug, on the other hand, originates in what is today Ukraine and flows through today’s Belarus to join the Narew River and then the Vistula. Connected also to the mighty Dnieper in today’s Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, the Bug is a symbol of Eastern lands

¹⁵⁴ “My koloniści, aże zza Wisły” (91).

¹⁵⁵ “Tu nasz kraj – odparła podróżna. – Ja przecie tu urodzona, za Wisłą” (92)

¹⁵⁶ Following the January Uprising of 1863-1864, a number of retributive measures were enacted by Tsarist officials, including the confiscation of noble estates. Most significantly, however, what had been Congress Poland, a semi-autonomous political entity became a province of Imperial Russia known as “Vistula Land,” (Wróbel 19). This term was stripped of implications of Polish statehood. In the Russian Partition, all published text was funneled through the Tsarist Censor, an entity which would doubtless have looked unkindly on any reference to “Poland.” As Maria Prussak writes in *Świat pod kontrolą: Wybór materiałów z archiwum cenzury rosyjskiej w Warszawie*, following the January Uprising, Tsarist censors became quasi-co-authors of literary texts published and performed in the city: “W Królestwie Kongresowym po powstaniu styczniowym rosycy cenzorzy, proponując poprawki i uzupełnienia, bywali niemal współautorami książek tu drukowanych i sztuk granych w tutejszych teatrach” (5). For more on the Uprising’s aftermath, see Volume one of *Eastern Europe: an Introduction to the People, Lands, and Culture*, edited by Richard C. Frucht. Wróbel, Piotr. “Poland.” *Eastern Europe : an Introduction to the People, Lands, and Culture*. Ed. Robert C. Frucht. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005. Print.; for more on censorship in the Russian Partition of Poland and the Russian Empire, see Prussak, Maria. *Świat Pod Kontrolą : Wybór Materiałów z Archiwum Cenzury Rosyjskiej w Warszawie*. Warszawa: Wydawn. KRAĞ, 1994. Print. and also: Choldin, Marianna T. *A Fence Around the Empire : Russian Censorship of Western Ideas Under the Tsars*. N.C.: Duke University Press, 1985. Print.

which were once a part of the sprawling Polish empire before the partitions of the eighteenth century.¹⁵⁷ In this way, Prus speaks of Poland without directly speaking of Poland. Furthermore, in these formulations of geo-cultural belonging, rivers constitute a place where different cultures meet. Simultaneously, rivers represent a natural barrier, the crossing of which has often signaled victory. While the Białka River was not a geopolitical border at the time of *Placówka*'s publication, a sort of metaphorical battle for land rumbles along its waters. In an interesting twist, victory here favors the culture which is able to maintain proximity to the Białka, rather than the culture which successfully transverses the river. I will return below to the processes of collective recognition by which German settlers and Polish peasants come to understand this condition for check mate. For now, let us note the extent of this particular border's peculiarity. In playing with the symbolism of the river, Prus has created a truly unique sort of borderland. Paradoxically, Germans and Poles find themselves *on the same side* of the most traditional natural border available to the plot. The Białka is a rather vague and oddly positioned border. This river does not divide peoples, but rather invites approach. The rivers of *Placówka* serve a literary-political imperative, as well as a literary-structural imperative. Rivers outline (broadly) Poland, as well as individual identities. They serve as external and internal borders and interrogate contemporary geo-political borders. These fluvial borders and borderlands may not exactly be subversive, but they do enable the novel to organize geography on its own structural terms.

The village's internal centers and boundaries are similarly vague and uncertain as modernity effects a disorienting shift of the hamlet's social, economic, and geographic loci. One of the most significant re-centerings in *Placówka* appears in the graduation of Józef Ślimak's farm, the eponymous "outpost," from margin to center. The opening description of Ślimak's land

¹⁵⁷ The Bug is connected to the Dnieper via the Mukahvets River, a Bug tributary, the Pina River (a tributary of the Pripyat River) and the Dnieper-Bug Canal built in the late eighteenth century.

sets up these some ten -odd morgens to become the center of the plot, and later, of the village.¹⁵⁸ The narrator begins the novel with a sweeping panorama of the Białka River Valley and then zooms in on the three hills which belong to Ślimak, “at the northern extreme of the valley” (6).¹⁵⁹ Prus introduces the reader to the village proper, the more conventional center of this region, by way of its margin.

In *Placówka*, narrative, social, and geographical centers are often at odds with one another. Having established the centrality of Ślimak’s farmstead in the narrative, Prus then presents and interrogates the peripheral status of Ślimak’s farmstead in the villagers’ understanding of space and place. “The valley peasants,” relates the narrator “joked that Ślimak lived in exile like a deportee to Siberia” (6).¹⁶⁰ Ślimak’s plot does enjoy proximity to the village church, the valley farmers concede, but what good is that when you have no one to talk to?¹⁶¹ The narrator then takes a step back to offer a gentle correction to this disdainful gossip pointing out that this so-called void is anything but uninhabited, and then tells the story of the everyday lives of the very real individuals who dwell among the hills.¹⁶² “This farmstead,” the narrator continues, “a drop in the sea of human affairs, was a separate world which passed through various phases and possessed its own history” (7).¹⁶³ This little world, perhaps insignificant in the grand annals of humankind, emerged nonetheless out of a complex series of developments which together have crafted a unique historical narrative. From the start, *Placówka* reminds the

¹⁵⁸ The Polish word for “morgen” is *morga*. This historical unit of land measure in Central Europe varied in size from 1/2 - 2 1/2 acres.

¹⁵⁹ “W północnym krańcu doliny” (6).

¹⁶⁰ “Chłopi dolińscy żartowali ze Ślimaka, że mieszka na wygnaniu jak Sybirak” (6).

¹⁶¹ “Prawda, że do kościoła – mówili – bliżej mu niż nam; ale za to nie ma do kogo gęby otworzyć” (6).

¹⁶² “Pustka wszelako nie była tak bezludną” (6).

¹⁶³ “Zagroda ta, kropla w morzu ludzich interesów, była odrębnym światem, który przechodził różne fazy i posiadał własną historię” (7).

reader that the margin cannot be written out of history, that the borderland cannot be simplified to the status of the center's leftovers.

The sale of the noble estate to German-Jewish investors and the arrival of German settlers transform Ślimak's periphery into a new sort of borderland and propel the landscape itself into an ambiguous state of topographical transition. As the forest is destroyed to make way for the railroad, we witness a confrontation between modernity and the ancient Polish landscape. The collective historical narration of the village interprets this encounter as an assault, employing military vocabulary to relate the story of the dramatic changes to the physical world. Hordes of predominantly German loggers descend upon the forests surrounding the little *wieś* on the Białka, the narrator recounts, noting that "They walked and drove down the path near Ślimak's cottage, oftentimes outfitted like an army" (88).¹⁶⁴ Modernity's troops lay siege to natural bastions large and small. Even ancient stones thought by the villagers to be too large and immutable to deal with, presumed to be permanent landmarks, prove unable to withstand these sylvan marauders. The village shudders under this bombardment: "The cannonade lasted the entire day, its rumble rolling across the furthest reaches of the valley, proclaiming to one and all that not even rock could resist a German."¹⁶⁵ In light of German teamwork, the villagers begin to witness the consequences of disunity and inaction in the face of geo-social ambiguity created by the nobility's departure. At this point, though, the peasants continue to narrate these events as a coordinated German offensive, rather than the result of their own failure to jointly purchase the estate lands from their former landlord. Indeed, a delegation of peasants even approached the landlord with an initial offer of fifty rubles per morgen, emphasizing the land as an inheritance shared by the village and the landlord's ancestors alike. The landlord requests one hundred rubles per morgen, and the negotiations fizzle out into a bout of drinking and hugging before the

¹⁶⁴ "Szli i jechali drogą około chaty Ślimaka gromadami, niekiedy uszykowani jak wojsko" (88)

¹⁶⁵ "Cały dzień trwała kanonada, której huk rozchodził się po najdalszych krańcach doliny, głosząc wszystkim i każdemu z osobna, że nawet skała nie oprze się Niemcowi" (90)

deal is concluded (66-67). The peasants' delay in finalizing a counteroffer of sixty rubles per morgen provides an opening for the German settlers' business agent to swoop in and purchase the estate.

This topographical ambiguity proves all the more traumatic for the villagers as it entails the dissolution of physical local history. The villagers have inscribed history into every feature of the landscape around them. They watch in horror at the loggers' destruction of beloved and infamous landmarks alike.

The forest fell. Only heaven and earth remained, and on it a few clusters of junipers, a few copses of hazel trees, a few little young pine trees, countless stumps and whole mounds of fallen trees, from which the branches had been hastily cut off. The predatory axe showed no respect for anything in the nation of leaves (88).¹⁶⁶

The German wielders of carnivorous implements are anonymous, faceless instruments of modernity's brutal re-sculpting of the *wieś*. The narrator blurs these individuals into a resolute and unstoppable force. The human foresters fade into the background of the text, to the size of worms from the perspective of one tree. The blows of the axes rain down on the ancient forest propelled by energy from a disembodied source. As this particular sequence progresses, the trees nearly seem to fall by themselves. Indifferent saws and axes ravage the natural monuments, the *Erinnerungsorte* of local history. The villagers' trauma is expressed most dramatically through the thoughts of the trees. The mighty oak who sneers at the worm-like axmen at first pays no mind to the resounding staccato of the hatchet.

Nothing [was spared], not even the oak, along whose century-old bark slid ribbons of lightning bolts. Its eyes fixed on the heavens, the victor of storms hardly perceived the worms squirming at its feet, and the blows of the axe were of no greater importance to it than the knocking of woodpeckers'. It fell suddenly, convinced at the last moment that the world had been turned upside down and that it was not worth living in a world of such uncertainty (88-89).¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ "Las padł. Zostało tylko niebo i ziemia, a na niej trochę kęp jałowcu, trochę leszczyny, trochę młodych sosenek, niepolicone szeregi pieńków i całe stopy leżących drzew, z których pośpiesznie obcinano gałęzie. Nic z liściastego narodu nie uszanował topór drapieżny" (88).

¹⁶⁷ "Nic, nawet dębu, po którego stuletniej korze ześlizgiwały się wstęgi piorunów. Zapatrzone w niebo zwycięzca burz prawie nie dostrzegł kręcących się u stóp jego robaków, a ciosy siekier nie więcej go obchodziły od pukania dzięciołów. Padł nagle, przekonany w ostatniej chwili, że to świat się obalił i że na tak niepewnym świecie żyć nie warto" (88-89).

Nature here is personified and speaks for the peasants, who otherwise seem unable to express themselves in the face of this destruction. The villagers are the ones unsure if life is still worth living amidst the upheaval of modernity. We witness here the acuity of communal vertigo experienced in the *wieś*. For if even the existence of an oak which has stood for more than one hundred years and weathered the most violent tempests is no longer assured, how can mere humans manage to carry on? In the eyes of the peasants, these trees are primordial, representing something almost akin to eternity, and they are felled in an instant.

Natural history is not the only casualty of the anonymous predatory axes. The loggers march on markers of local human history with equal indifference. Villagers have long dreaded passing one particular oak tree, the narrator explains, as it was from those branches that one unfortunate Szymon Gołąb hung himself. Not even the oak's dying curse, as imagined by the peasants, "I shall crush you!" deters the foresters.¹⁶⁸ The villagers interpret the logging operations as a mechanical, unfeeling force oblivious to the emotional history surrounding certain landmarks. The felling of a pine tree, home to a pair of squirrels, horrifies onlookers as they watch the terrified animals perish.¹⁶⁹ The narrator laments the forest's demise, recounting that "mighty trees fell one after the other, the nocturnal fog cried over their graves and birds

¹⁶⁸ The full quote is as follows: "There was another oak, from whose withered branches the ill-fated Szymon Gołąb had once hung himself. From then on, people passed it in fear. And so, having spotted the crowd of sawyers with axes it murmured: 'Leave this place, for my very name means death. Just one man placed his hand on my boughs and he perished.' Yet when the sawyers, instead of heeding the tree's kind admonitions, began to chop away and thrust the sharp iron ever more deeply into its body, the tree flew into a terrible rage and roared: 'I will crush you!...' and then fell to the ground" (89). Original Polish: "Był inny dąb, na którego zeschłej gałęzi powiesił się kiedyś nieszczęsny Szymon Gołąb. Ludzie odtąd mijali go ze strachem. Toteż ujrzawszy gromadę traczów z siekierami zaszemrał: 'Uciekajcie stąd, bo imię moje znaczy śmierć. Jeden tylko człowiek dotknął ręką mych konarów i umarł.' Gdy zaś tracje, zamiast usłuchać jego życzliwych upomnień, poczęli go rąbać i coraz głębiej zapuszczając mu w ciało ostre żelaza, wpadł w straszny gniew, ryknął: 'Zdruczoczę was!...' i – obalił się na ziemię" (89).

¹⁶⁹ "The pine tree, in whose hollow a pair of squirrels had hidden, seeing the universal destruction, entertained the hope, that it would avoid misfortune out of regard to its tenants: 'Pity will move them, for what have poor little squirrels done to them?', the tree whispered and fell, crushing the terrified little animals under its own weight" (89). In the original Polish: "Sosna, w której dziupli kryła się para wiewórek, widząc powszechne zniszczenie cieszyła się nadzieją, że uniknie złego losu przez wzgląd na swoich lokatorów: 'Litość ich wzruszy, bo cóż są im winne biedne, małe wiewiórki?' – szeptała i – padła miażdżąc własnym ciężarem wystraszone zwierzątka" (89).

robbed of their ancestral seats chirped mournfully,” (89).¹⁷⁰ The collective consciousness of the village dramatizes these events into a local historical narrative of a sudden loss of communal orientation. The tight association of the Polish peasants with nature creates an even greater narrative distance between the peasantry and a German-coded modernity. The villagers interpret these radical changes as an erasure of local history by a faceless, anonymous source which simple Polish peasants have no hope of resisting. The villagers understand these new events as the result of unseen forces beyond the control of mere Polish mortals, rather than as concrete socio-economic phenomena in which it is possible to intervene and negotiate. Through the “thoughts” of the dying trees, we see a community lost, confused, and afraid. This is a village where each tree is familiar, where every pine shelters innocent creatures, and where every oak is a memorial and warning. Modernity’s drastic terrestrial renovation and abrupt introduction of near-complete topographical historical ambiguity, an unsettling event for any community, has here the force of a cataclysmic earthquake with no foreseeable aftermath.

That aftermath arrives in the form of additional geographic ambiguity— the railroad, a symbol of modern mobility and geographic transience. After all, railroads, as a form of mass transportation and rapid travel represent a means of re-centering on a broader scale. The railroad effects even greater systemic changes in orientation by not only re-centering, but by atomizing the center and creating multiple stops at subordinate centers along the pathways in its network. With the ability to constantly reaffirm cultural, political, and geographic relationships comes the opportunity to maintain more complex social networks over longer distances. As Todd Presner points out in *Mobile Modernity: Germans, Jews, Trains*, railroads are inherently bidirectional.¹⁷¹ In *Placówka*, trains just rumble past the village. We know

¹⁷⁰ “Tak ginęły mocne drzewa jedno po drugim; nad ich grobem płakała mgła nocna i kwiliły ptaki pozbawione ojczystych siedzib” (89).

¹⁷¹ Presner writes, “The railway system thus provides the organizing principles of this cultural geography: Stations are infinitely connectable; the tracks are, by definition, bidirectional; the system is nonlinear, acentric, and open-ended; connections are based on the contingency of contiguity; and movement is synchronous. With the rejection of developmental models of history, connections cannot be made by chronology; instead, derived from the cultural

neither where they are coming from, nor where they are going. For the inhabitants of the *wieś*, the arrival of these ribbons of steel provides no reassuring connections to the outside world. Ślimak observes the construction of the railroad bed warily, comparing it to the “outstretched tongue of a giant lizard that sits in the wood at the western border of the horizon and will come crawling here any day now, in order to devour his meager possessions. At other times it seemed to him that the embankment was a border, which separated his village from the rest of the world” (117-118).¹⁷² For Ślimak, the arrival of the railroad does not bring the outside world closer to home. The Polish peasant perceives the railroad as cutting off the little hamlet, as a mechanism of isolation. These villagers acquire no new center towards which they might orient themselves, nor do they see an opportunity to revise their own historical narrative. The railroad, as an engine of mobility, presents another scenario of disconcerting transition into ambiguity. This engine of mobility, the embodiment of modern technology, takes on near mythical proportions in *Placówka*, as it did throughout nineteenth-century European literature.¹⁷³ The farmhand Owczarz watches the construction with a dread similar to that of Ślimak, as this

geography of the railway system, they are made through new constellations of contiguity” (15). Presner, Todd Samuel. *Mobile Modernity: Germans, Jews, Trains*. New York, NY, USA: Columbia University Press, 2007. ProQuest ebrary.

¹⁷² “Gdy wszedł na swoje wzgórze przypatrywać się robotom, widok kolejowego nasypu za każdym razem budził w nim posępniejsze myśli. To zdawało mu się, że wal piaszczysty jest wysuniętym językiem olbrzymiego gadu, który siedzi w borze, na zachodniej granicy horyzontu, i przypelźnie tu łąda dzień, aby mu pożreć chudobę. To znowu, że nasyp jest granicą, która jego wieś oddzieli od reszty świata” (117-118).

¹⁷³The mythologization of the railroad was not an exclusively Polish literary reaction to modernity. Paul A. Youngman discusses this phenomenon in his monograph *Black Devil and Iron Angel: The Railway in Nineteenth-Century German Realism*. He suggests that even when German Realist authors seek to make use of the railroad as a grounding mechanism for their narratives, the result is not necessarily an increased quotient of the every day. The railway breeds its own poetics: “Realists often introduce scientific ideas and technological developments in order to bolster the claim that what they write is ‘real.’ Yet they cannot seem to divorce these developments from myth. They either couch the train and its associated technologies in mythological terms, or they show how it begins to create its own myths. Thus, as Adorno and Horkheimer posit, technology never really separates itself from myth, and it often develops a mythology of its own” (x). Youngman also points out that the treatment of the railway in German Realist fiction gets to the heart of a long-festering rift between science and the humanities, drawing on C.P. Snow’s essays “The Two Cultures” (1959) and “The Two Cultures: A Second Look” (1963) in which Snow calls for a ‘third’ culture to heal the divide between science and humanities. Youngman makes the argument that some German realist authors were so-called “third culturalists” *avant la lettre*, as it were (x). Youngman, Paul A. *Black Devil and Iron Angel: The Railway in Nineteenth-century German Realism*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 2005. Print.

endeavor “seemed to him a rebellion against the natural order of things” (118).¹⁷⁴ This abomination fills Ślimak with an ever increasing sense of foreboding, until it seems to him that the railroad bed has taken on the shape of an enormous finger pointing at a series of graves (118).¹⁷⁵ Owczarz and Ślimak perceive the railroad as something monstrous, ominous, and unnatural. These ribbons of steel do not act as an inclusionary or grounding mechanism. The railroad bed instead adds to the trauma of the village as a form of introduced ambiguity.¹⁷⁶

The railway, this strange transplant from another world, soon becomes an inescapable part of the landscape, much like the rivers. Unlike the rivers, however, the railway becomes a constant source of anxiety and physical discomfort. As the railroad approaches completion, its embankment loses its reptilian and cemetery qualities and morphs into one long sandy height “straight as an arrow” (118). This transformation offers no relief to Ślimak however. He finds it utterly impossible to ignore or adjust to the railroad’s existence: “At every time of day, the embankment reminded one of its presence; at noon, it threw off a glare which blinded the eyes, a night it shone like a line drawn in phosphorus on the wall” (118).¹⁷⁷ The rails intrude on Ślimak’s visual perception of the world, an oppressive sort of repeated aggravation. The railroad embankments result in another inescapable transformation of local terrain. The construction necessitates the narrowing of the Białka River, one of the village’s most prominent points of

¹⁷⁴“jemu wydawało się buntem przeciw porządkowi świata” (118).

¹⁷⁵ “Roboty prowadzono już w pięciu miejscach, po obu brzegach rzeki, sypiąc w jednej linii wzgórza mające kształt mogił. Ślimak dostrzegał to podobieństwo i marzył, że ukończony nasyp jest niby olbrzymim palcem, który ukazuje mu jeden za drugim – cztery groby...” (118).

¹⁷⁶ Prus was not alone in his vision of the harmful potential of the railway. Freud, as Youngman points out, writing much later in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), certainly did not feel that the railway promoted healthy social relations (8). Other intellectuals, such as Friedrich List in *Kräfte und Mächte* (1841), however, felt that the railway would promote national unification. The other authors treated by Youngman see the railway variously as something which can import and exacerbate social ills or broaden minds (8). In the German-speaking context alone, the railway was given a plethora of appellations and titles ranging from a possible “Kulturbeförderungsmittel” to “Triumphwagen des Gewerbefleißes,” “Leichenwagen des Absolutismus,” eiserne Engel” to the less complimentary designations of “schwarzer Teufel,” “Feuerdrachen,” or the evocative and oddly specific “Saat von Drachenzähnen” (9-10).

¹⁷⁷“Powoli jednak przerwy między wałami wypełniły się: groby znikły i zostało tylko jedno długie wzgórze piasku, wyciągnięte prosto jak strzała. W każdej porze dnia nasyp przypominał swoją obecność; w południe rzucał blask rażący oczy, w nocy świecił jak linia wykreślona fosforem na murze.” (118)

orientation. This remodeling drastically lowers the amount of rainfall needed for the river to overflow its banks. Ślimak underestimates the danger this topographic change represents to him and his family. He initially brushes off the increased risk of flooding. When he observes his German neighbors building protective barriers, he resolves to do something eventually, though he is in no particular hurry. This delay in accepting the results of ambiguity and failing to react proves tragic. During a torrential rainstorm, Ślimak's land floods and the peasant's youngest son drowns. For the Polish villagers then, the construction of the railroad represents as yet a fatal form of marginalization and a primary contributory factor behind the traumatic topological ambiguity forced upon the Białka Valley.

In addition to taking on life as otherworldly symbols and oversized salamanders, railroads are strangely monodirectional and exclusively foreign in this novel. They are built by Germans and transport Germans. A few Polish peasants benefit from extra work as draymen during the railroad's construction, but this boon is short-lived. Ultimately, the German settlers profit most from proximity to the new station, as German railroad administrators and travelers prefer to give their business to fellow Germans. The equation of Germanness with mobility, and Polishness with stasis emerges from the interplay of center and periphery in the novel. The Germans journey east to found new settlements and finance the building of railroads. Polish peasants, with the exception of the lord and lady of the manor, stay put. Furthermore, not only is the railroad coded foreign, seen as German, it is perceived by Ślimak, and presented by the narrator as another abstract force driven by the will of modernity. The railroad is specifically German and generically modern, as it were. However, the novel focuses on modernity as the true threat, and not on Germanness. Like the foresting operation, the railroad construction appears to have a life of its own, and is completely depersonalized. With some irony, the narrator describes the future of the railroad in broader historical terms:

The railway embankment continued to grow, and slowly moved from west to east. In a few years, hundreds of railcars will trundle along it every day at the speed of a bird's flight, transporting people and luxuries, enriching the wealthy, impoverishing the poor,

empowering the mighty, crushing the weak, pouring out fashions and multiplying misdemeanors, which put together is called civilization. But Ślimak knew nothing of civilization and maybe that is why one of its beautiful creations seemed to him to be something sinister. (117)¹⁷⁸

The railroad represents an eastward expansion of the West and the “civilization” it exports in the form of luxuries and fashions that the villagers have little use for. The narrator paints a grim portrait of the future in which the railroad will only serve to exacerbate existing social inequalities and cultivate a rash of petty crimes. We observe here a disjunction between the narrative voice and that of the characters as the narrator makes use of a vocabulary of broader perspective that the peasant characters are unable to call upon. As with the correction of the village’s presumption of insignificance where Ślimak’s farmstead is concerned, the narrator intervenes more directly to widen the novel’s narrative scope to include more distant points of cultural orientation. The narrator points out not only the hypocrisy of the term “civilization” as used in Western Europe, but also that Ślimak has no broader framework in which to understand this so-called civilization, these ailments, injustices and disparities of modernity. Finally, the railway is portrayed as a unilateral system of distribution. The railcars will race through the countryside, scattering baubles and troubles as they pass by the village.

In *Placówka*, mobility and the introduction of topographical ambiguity is coded German not only on the macroscopic level of the railroad, but also at the level of the individual. Whether by train, horse-drawn wagon, or dog-drawn cart, the Germans in this novel move. Poles, by contrast, remain stationary throughout the story. Though the word for “real estate” in both German (*Immobilien*) and Polish (*nieruchomości*) translates literally as “immovables,” this concept of land as non-transferrable in its connection to a particular group of people seems to

¹⁷⁸ “Nasyp kolejowy wciąż rosł i z wolna posuwał się od zachodu na wschód. Za kilka lat toczyć się będą po nim co dzień setki wagonów z szybkością lotu ptaka, rozwoząc ludzi i dostatki, bogacąc możnych, ubożąc biednych, umacniając silnych, druzgocąc słabych, rozlewając mody i mnożąc występki, co wszystko razem nazywa się cywilizacją. Ale Ślimak nie wiedział o cywilizacji i może dlatego jedno z jej pięknych dzieł wydawało mu się czymś złowrogim” (117).

apply more particularly to the Polish characters in the novel.¹⁷⁹ German mobility interrogates Polish sedentary tendencies and acts upon traditional village orientation. German movement begets Polish spatial ambiguity. The establishment of the new German settlement introduces a new landmark which further alters center-periphery relations in the village. The German settlers strategically found their new town close by the recently constructed train station, and as it so happens, near Ślimak's land. Ślimak's farmstead, already set up in the novel's opening pages as the plot's center, now finds himself positioned near the village's new locus. Ślimak's family name translates into English as "snail," and proves a fitting appellation. The obstinate peasant moves nowhere in a hurry and possesses nearly as little initiative as his gastropod namesake. Unlike that little animal, Ślimak the human cannot carry his shelter on his back, nor is he willing to make his home anywhere other than on the land that his father and grandfather cultivated. The characters most comfortable with spatial ambiguity establish new centers and peripheries in proximity to an individual least prepared for those sorts of spatial shifts.

In Józef Ślimak's world view, there are no alternative centers, and relocating to the East where land is cheaper never truly represents for him a viable option. The Polish peasant assigns geographic significance through an interpretive lens which is completely incompatible with a place plunged into multifaceted ambiguity. Ślimak feels a deep sense of belonging to one particular place, and cannot imagine himself in any other context. One cold winter morning, as he looks over the landscape, he reflects that he could not ever abandon his home. "This sky, snow and frost," he thinks to himself, "he would not give up for the most beautiful music and dancing" (81).¹⁸⁰ Ślimak is a man firmly convinced of his rightful place in the world. His own

¹⁷⁹ Additionally, in partitioned Poland, the retention of Polish land in Polish hands was of vital importance to long-sighted intellectuals such as Prus. For Prus, I would emphasize, statehood and land are inextricably intertwined, and any possibility of reviving a Polish state would hinge on control of Polish soil.

¹⁸⁰ "Patrzył na błękit niebieski, na śnieg zaróżowiony promieniami słońca, na obłoki jakby skąpane w purpurze, wdychał mroźne powietrze ranka i czuł, że tego nieba, śniegu i mrozu nie oddałby za najpiękniejszą muzykę i tańce. (81)

frost-bitten vista is worth more to him than all the dancing and frivolities of the gentry. Unsurprisingly, the Hamer family's desire to purchase that rightful place utterly baffles him. Ślimak demands to know by what right the German father and son presume to make an offer on his farmstead. While it may be in the nature of the German people to move from place to place, Ślimak explains, the Polish peasant has only one home. "For you, the Germans," he says, "moving away from a place is nothing, for you are a roving nation, here today, there tomorrow. But a peasant is settled like that stone by the road. I know each corner here by heart, I could find any place in the dark, I turned every lump in the soil over with my own two hands, and you say to me: 'Sell and go out into the world!'" (135).¹⁸¹ Ślimak does not see land as a commodity which can be easily transferred for money as part of an exchange economy. One plot is not as good as another. Despite the chaos of modern ambivalence, Ślimak retains a deeply intimate connection to this one particular spot, this center of his understanding of the world. Establishing a similarly close bond to any other piece of land seems impossible.

This land in fact stands at the center at the connection between the Polish villagers and their ancestral landscape. Ślimak's land, this margin-turned-center, does not merely remain Ślimak's personal center, nor the novel's newly inducted locus. As in *Das schlafende Heer*, there is an obsession with one particular hill. One especially persistent German, Hamer, challenges Ślimak's stubborn refusal to sell that certain hill. Hamer Sr. desires this hill so that he might build a windmill for Hamer Jr. and so that, in turn, the young man can earn a living and marry. The dowry of young Hamer's bride, the daughter of a prosperous German in the village of Wólka, could then be used to repay the loans issued by the associates of the Warsaw-based Jewish businessman Hirszburg.¹⁸² Only Ślimak's hill holds fast in the face of the traumatic

¹⁸¹ "Dla was, Niemcy, wyprowadzić się z miejsca to nic, bo wy błędny naród, dziś tu, jutro tam. Ale chłop jest przecie osiedzony jak ten kamień przy drodze. Ja tu każdy kąt wiem na pamięć, wszędy po ciemku bym trafił, każdemu grudej ziemi własną ręką obrócił, a wy mi gadacie: 'Sprzedaj i idź w świat!'" (135).

¹⁸² Hirszburg is never identified as being a "Polish" or "German" Jew. Hirszburg's comment about leaving his carriage in Warsaw seems to imply that he resides there. While he acts as business agent for the German settlers and the German railway builders, he is never referred to as a "German" as his clients are. All names are Polonized in the text

upheavals of modernity. His little outpost escapes German economic occupation by the windmill. Once the payment deadline passes without Ślimak agreeing to sell his hill, the German settlers are forced to abandon their town. The endurance of this one outpost of Polishness proves to be the undoing of the German settlement. Ślimak's stubbornness turns out to be the village's salvation, and the preservation of that one hill, that outpost, becomes the mechanism for unifying quarrelling factions of Polish village society.

As noted above, the villagers are slow to react to the new ambivalence brought on by the sale of the estate and the arrival of modernity. This community stubbornly clings to an outdated social narrative and continues to view Ślimak's holdings as marginal and of no particularly central importance. In fact, the village further isolates Ślimak out of resentment of his small economic success achieved by briefly trading with railroad prospectors. This delayed comprehension, this communal failure to understand the new central importance of Ślimak's farmstead is nearly disastrous to the town. None of the villagers reaches out to Ślimak, even when his wife takes ill and lies on her deathbed. Soon, Ślimak begins to see himself as isolated, cut off from any assistance. He becomes increasingly lethargic, falling into despair. In a moment of terror he wonders, "could he, alone in the middle of nowhere, manage to stand fast against so many Germans?"¹⁸³ It is the priest's intervention that brings to light the significance of Ślimak's obstinacy in the face of pressure to sell. Ślimak's tenacity prevents the Germans from gaining an economic foothold. In the final dialogue of the novel, the villagers come together to outline a more productive and insightful geo-cultural narrative. They agree to cooperate in their purchase of the German-owned lands, and arrange a mutually beneficial marriage and land exchange so

(for example, Fryc Hamer, rather than Fritz Hammer), so the fact that Hirszburg is "Hirszburg" rather than "Hirschgold" does not prove a Polish affiliation either.

¹⁸³ "Ciemność pozbawiła go energii, więc z trwogą myślał: czy on sam na odludziu potrafi się oprzeć tylu Niemcom?" (98).

that each peasant can manage a consolidated holding. They recognize, in the end, their own agency in rewriting their community's story.

Ślimak's revised communal narrative functions through the incorporation of a place paradoxically resistant to and saturated with ambiguity: Ślimak's eponymous outpost. The farmstead represents an ambiguous sort of outpost as is embodied in the richness of the Polish word *placówka*. The novel's title is simultaneously specific and not specific, not the least because of the Polish language's lack of definite and indefinite articles. "Placówka" could be translated into English as "outpost," "the outpost," or "an outpost." The nuances of this term become even more apparent after a glance through turn-of-the-century Polish dictionaries. "Placówka" appears predominantly in military vocabulary.¹⁸⁴ A *placówka* is far-flung, the furthest position occupied by a given military force, and thus, quite literally, located at the margin. It is the most imperiled position at which a soldier can find himself stationed. An outpost is a highly strategic position which cannot be abandoned without inflicting significant damage on the larger group that has established it. The *Słownik warszawski* defines the word "placówka" variously as outpost, picket, the physically foremost military position, sentinel, sentry post, avant garde, guard post, or the most distant point of reconnaissance. Interestingly, this word also denotes a place where a fox trap is laid, as well as "an important, influential position in society, which must be defended; post, checkpoint." Based on the points I have made thus far, I would make the case that all of these definitions are applicable to the novel to varying degrees. The military connotations of the word "placówka" are echoed in the martial vocabulary employed during the deforestation sequence and on other occasions, Ślimak expresses the sentiment of feeling besieged. Ślimak's persistence in remaining at his post has far-reaching social implications for the *wieś*. His plight moves the priest to intervene in defense of this strategic post on the border with modernity and to unite the various factions of the village.

¹⁸⁴ Also, as a side note, this word apparently denotes a particular cut of beef from around the shoulder.

Ślimak acts as an unwitting sentinel of this microcosm of Polish society, reconnoitering the operations of geographic ambivalence and topographical change. In the end, this paradoxically immovable yet ambivalent point, central yet liminal, serves as a springboard for a broader communal engagement with ambiguity.

In summary, geographic ambiguity in *Placówka* plays with our expectations of center-periphery dynamics. Prus introduces new rules, dynamics, and laws of orientation at every level of geographic determinacy. A farmstead on the outskirts of a tiny, nameless village, itself located on the margins of civilization, acquires the status of center. From the outset, *Placówka* establishes Ślimak's land as the plot's focal point, and then nuances this position further. Ślimak's farmstead, in addition to narrative center, becomes an outpost on the border with Germanness, modernity, and dramatic topographical renovations. Ślimak finds himself at the center of the village's attempt to come to grips with the trauma of sudden ambiguity that erases landmarks of local history and alters traditional campestrial signposts. Only in the final pages of the novel does the centrality of Ślimak's hill emerge and gain acceptance by village society. The acceptance of geographic ambiguity writes a new cultural narrative that will accommodate the social ambiguity that modernity has brought to the village.

Section II: Social Ambivalence

Modernity causes seismic shifts in social structures in the world of *Placówka*. Changing economic conditions engender a new sort of social ambiguity in which the village struggles to understand the rules by which their society is ordered. The departure of the nobility creates a socio-economic vacuum which throws the village into disorienting structural ambiguity. The landlord's decision to sell his estate effectively dissolves the long-established social and economic center of the *wieś*. That choice compounds the social restructuring already underway as a result of the abolition of serfdom in the Russian Empire in 1864. Thus, even before the Germans consider arriving on the scene, the village world of the Polish peasant has undergone significant changes. The financial situation of the nobility has changed, and consequently, so

does that of their peasantry. The remainder of the novel follows the ensuing negotiation of socio-economic and cultural ambiguity introduced by the arrival of capitalism. This negotiation unfolds alongside the shifts in geographic orientation discussed above. Just as geographic ambiguity necessitates a re-negotiation of communal topographical interpretation, so does social ambiguity require the drafting of a new communal narrative. Ślimak in particular clings stubbornly to traditional, and fast crumbling, social hierarchies. He refuses to accept the restructuring of the world. A lack of social trust between peasant and nobleman and a general lack of social responsibility across social classes leads village society to the brink of disaster. Once again, German society proves more adaptable to the vicissitudes of industrialization and serves as a positive contrast to the petty jealousy of the Polish peasants and shopkeepers. The German town demonstrates firm social cohesion and its inhabitants possess a profound sense of Christian communal responsibility, even towards resentful neighbors. Through the priest's intervention however, the villagers lay the groundwork for a new sort of society able to weather modern uncertainty.

Ślimak's world view leaves no room for ambiguity and undergoes only minute alterations over the course of *Placówka*. Traditional social hierarchies are firmly entrenched in the stubborn peasant's mind and constitute an absolute framework within which he understands social interactions. Not only does Ślimak see geographic belonging as non-interchangeable, he also views social standing as a static attribute of every human being. At the urging of his wife, Ślimakowa, Ślimak works towards increased material prosperity. However, he aspires to no greater mobility than the climb from moderately successful peasant to more successful peasant. Ślimak is a man firmly rooted, both geographically and socially. He "knows" his place in the social order and approaches social and familial interactions with fatalism and resignation. "The Lord God established a world order so that there would be no equality," Ślimak explains to his son Jędrek. "That's why the sky is higher, the earth lower – the pine tree tall, the hazelwood small, and the grass even smaller. That's also why among people one person is old, another

young; one is the father, another the son; one is a farmer, the other a laborer; one is a lord, the other a peasant” (37).¹⁸⁵ Hierarchy and difference define Ślimak’s world and his increasingly anachronistic sense of his “place” in it. Superiority and inferiority write the laws that govern the natural world and determine why one sort of tree towers over the other. Sylvan structures in turn provide a self-evident model for human beings to interpret social interactions. For Ślimak, no other explanation is needed to explain why the young must obey their elders, children their parents, why workers must comply with their employers’ requests, and why a nobleman should have authority over the peasants on his land. This, to Ślimak’s mind, is simply the way God intended things to be.

Furthermore, Ślimak explains to Jędrek, inequality ensures stability in the world and, first and foremost, protects the weak and the poor. Ślimak shudders at the thought of the chaos that must ensue should the less fortunate demand their due from their social superiors.

Look how it is even among clever dogs, when there are many of them wandering around the courtyard. They bring a bucket of food out from the kitchen, and right away the one who approaches it first is the strongest, and that one eats, and the others wait licking their chops, even though they see he is eating up the best parts. Only when that one has eaten till he’s fit to burst, do the others come over. Each one pokes his muzzle from his side and eats as much as comes his way, without fighting. But if the dogs are stupid, then all of them run right away to the bucket, fight among themselves and end up with more scratched muzzles than food. Because either they knock over the bucket and spill the food everywhere, or the strongest one always wins and chases all of them away. He himself doesn’t have much in such a situation, but the others have nothing at all.¹⁸⁶

Human society resembles the dog pack in this instance, Ślimak continues. Acceptance of the status quo fosters tranquility and stability, while demanding one’s fair and equitable share hurts everyone. It is in the interest of each member of society to recognize his or her position in the

¹⁸⁵ “Pan Bóg taki rząd postanowił na świecie, żeby nie było równości. Dlatego jest niebo wyżej, ziemia niżej – sosna wielka, a leszczyna mała, a trawa jeszcze mniejsza. Dlatego i między ludźmi jeden jest stary, drugi młody – jeden ojciec, drugi syn – jeden gospodarz, drugi parobek – jeden pan, drugi chłop” (37).

¹⁸⁶ “Ty se patrzaj, jak jest nawet między mądrymi psami, gdzie ich dużo chodzi po podwórku. Wyniosą z kuchni ceber pomyjów i zara do nich przyjdzie jeden najpierwszy, co jest najmocniejszy, i ten zje, a inne czekają oblizujący się, choć widzą, że on wyjada część najlepszą. Dopiero kiedy tamten podjadł sobie, aż napęczniał, idą drudzy. Każdy wsadza łeb ze swojej strony i zje, ile na niego przypadnie, nie swarząc się. Ale gdzie psy głupie, to zara wszystkie lecą do cebra, drą się między sobą i więcej mają podartych pysków niż jedzenia. Bo albo ceber wywróci i strawę rozleją, albo zawdy zdybie się jeden najmocniejszy, co ich odpędzi. On sam na takim gospodarstwie ma niedużo, a inni wcale nic.

world and to cling tightly to that assigned rung on the social ladder. Might makes right, that's just the way it is, and the classic parental shut-down: "I told you so." Inequality is a fact of life for Ślimak, not something to rail against. Indeed, hierarchy represents such an intrinsic element of every environment that Ślimak moves through, that the stubborn peasant cannot fathom challenging that system, nor imagine the collapse or metamorphosis of it.

Ślimak is physically unable to budge from old habits of serfdom, even when encouraged by social superiors to do so. When the landlord's progressive-minded brother-in-law insists that Ślimak need not bow to him, nor doff his cap in respect, Ślimak is "shocked and embarrassed" (41).¹⁸⁷ He does not recognize the gentleman's "democratic intentions," but perceives the request as an order (41). The brother-in-law proclaims enthusiastically and naively that it is "Time to do away with the vestiges of slavery, which bring you and us disgrace. Cover your head, Citizen, please" (41).¹⁸⁸ Ślimak attempts to comply, but finds that his hand will not move to obey. Traditional social hierarchies not only operate within Ślimak's intellectual understanding of the world; customs and rank are impressed into every fiber of his physical being. In this particular moment, Ślimak finds himself *physically unable to change*. Little wonder then, that Ślimak should be concerned for his son Jędreka's future when the boy begins to question societal norms. He shakes his head, muttering worriedly that Jędreka will not make a good peasant. The boy is "headstrong...won't defer to anyone, and it's only by the grace of God that he hasn't started stealing yet. Oh! Oh!... he'll never be a peasant" (39).¹⁸⁹ Indeed, when prior to the above encounter, Jędreka fails to exhibit the proper respect to the brother-in-law of the landlord, Ślimak gives his son such a violent beating that Ślimakowa must intervene to stay her husband's wrath. Unquestioning acceptance of the order of things constitutes the only viable framework

¹⁸⁷ "Zdumiony i zakłopotany" (41).

¹⁸⁸ "Czas zapomnieć o resztkach niewoli, które nam i wam ujmę przynoszą. Nakryj głowę, obywatelu, proszę cię..." (41).

¹⁸⁹ "Hardy, para, nikomu nie ustąpi, i łaska Boża, że jeszcze nie kradnie, Ho! Ho!... on już nie będzie chłopem" (39).

within which Ślimak can operate. Jędreka's defiance of his father's teachings represent an assault on Ślimak's world view. Such rebellion, Ślimak fears, imperils the boy's own ability to survive in the future.

Moreover, Ślimak copes with the social changes that he cannot ignore by reading those changes into the landscape around him. In the previous section of this chapter, we observed the peasantry's embedding of history and consciousness into the land around them. The ground beneath their feet is simultaneously collective memory, archive, and text to be studied and interpreted in pursuit of wisdom. The topographical upheaval is traumatic enough in its transformation of the village's physical environment. We might well imagine how this trauma would be compounded when we look at the role that geographical orientation plays in Ślimak's understanding of social hierarchy. Ślimak views social status as topographically determined. When Ślimak's oldest son Jędrzek asks why the peasant Grzyb has benefited more from the state-ordered land distributions of some estate holdings than Ślimak has, Ślimak points to the natural consequences of village geography. Grzyb's property lies far closer to the landlord's traditional holdings. Ślimak is truly content, or at least determined to be at peace, with his lot in life, seeing himself as even superior to the noble landlord in certain respects. He may be only a peasant, but runoff from his land falls onto the meadows of the noble estate. An elegant harmony shapes Ślimak's understanding of the world. Society and nature exist in a state of reciprocal influence and the laws of one reflect or stem from the other. Divine will guides this system along a path of self-balance. The least are made greatest (38).

The world of *Placówka* has been plunged into a situation in which societal positions are in flux, traditional hierarchies are dissolving and dispersing from rural areas, and ancient patterns of relating to others are unraveling. In light of the above analysis of Ślimak's worldview, we can well imagine just how traumatic this social ambivalence, would be for a tiny village community which held the same worldview. There is in fact, no room for ambiguity in this understanding of the world. There is no need to even consider the necessity for social

adjustment when the world functions in such a completely preordained and self-evident manner. Ślimak's frustration as he attempts to explain the way of the world to the rebellious Jędretek serves as a prelude to Ślimak's later inability to accept and adapt to the changes occurring in a community understood as unchangeable. For Ślimak and the other peasants, there is no obvious successor to the vanished social center of the estate. Passivity and a lack of social cooperation, we will see below, cause the villagers to miss a vital opportunity to actively shape the social structures of their newly ambiguous space. Only by chance does such an opportunity return at novel's end, a rare example of fruitful inaction.

For Ślimak is not alone in his inability to adjust to modern social ambiguity. For instance, the peasants who are contemplating making their landlord an offer on the remaining estate wait respectfully to approach the nobleman until after a lavish party has concluded. In fact, even the German colonists believe there is no use in attempting to speak with the landlord until he is no longer entertaining. The Germans, however, have hired a shrewd agent to negotiate on their behalf who does not share their compunctions about interrupting pleasure for business. The Jewish businessman Hirszburg pushes the nobleman to fit in a business deal between dancing a *polka* and swirling about in the energetic *mazurka*.¹⁹⁰ Unlike the peasants, Hirszburg does not follow the clever canine school of economics described by Ślimak earlier. Hirszburg leaps into action after speaking with the Jewish village innkeeper Josel.¹⁹¹ Presumably having received a tip of some sort or merely directions to the estate, Hirszburg races off to the manor house. He ignores the skepticism of his German colonist companions regarding the possibility of an audience with a Polish nobleman enjoying himself on the dance floor. He remains unperturbed even when this sentiment is echoed by a servant boy and then by the

¹⁹⁰ The *polka* and the *mazurka* are both lively Polish folk dances performed in pairs (with the *polka* likely originally of Bohemian origin). The *polka* is scored in duple meter and the *mazurka* in triple meter.

¹⁹¹ The text does not explicitly refer to its Jewish characters as "German-Jewish" or "Polish-Jewish." I make this distinction as it is the German-Jewish characters who facilitate the introduction of an ambivalent modernity into the village, rather than the Polish Jews who in the end field a character who brings about the novel's happy ending.

footman who brings Hirszgold inside to meet with the landlord (78-79). But Hirszgold pursues his business deal determinedly, bribing both servants and putting steady pressure on the landlord to secure the sale of the estate. Hirszgold seizes the opportunity to achieve his goal, and indeed actively creates an opportunity when none falls into his lap. This passage transmits a fair amount of implicit anti-Semitic stereotypes, referring to Hirszgold as “the Jew” as frequently as “the merchant,” and the narrator emphasizes more than once the richness of Hirszgold’s beaver fur trappings. I will return to Jewish narrative agency and the novel’s coding of modernity as Jewish in the final section of this chapter. Key to our present discussion however, is the text’s portrayal of the nobleman’s inability or disinclination to thoroughly consider the consequences of his financial decisions. The landlord proves unable to grasp the dangers of quick decisions in an increasingly ambiguous modernity.

Prus does not place the onus for adaptation to social ambiguous, or difficulty thereof, exclusively on the shoulders of a fatalistic Polish peasantry. Ultimately, Hirszgold takes advantage of the civic irresponsibility of the Polish landlord. The members of the nobility whom we encounter in *Placówka* hardly constitute forward-thinking individuals. The landlord and his wife abdicate their social responsibilities toward their former serfs. When the landlady’s civic-minded brother encourages the couple to engage more deliberately with the local peasantry, they both scoff at his romantic conceptions of the peasant’s potential. The landlord and his wife view the peasants on their land with biting condescension and have little desire to interact with them at all. Throughout his literary and journalistic writings, Prus repeated this scathing critique of the Polish elites as thoughtlessly neglecting social duties and selfishly disregarding the well-being of any group other than their own. In *Placówka*, the nobility care little for how their decisions will impact the collective well-being of the peasantry around them. In fact, the landowners have no understanding of the hardships of peasant life, nor any true interest in social development. The landlady flippantly tells Ślimak that if he had a daughter, she could teach her to crochet. She offers to teach Ślimak’s sons Jędrek and Stasiek to read. Ślimak

responds that the boys have no time to spare from their chores. The landlady points to what she views as Ślimak's short-sighted reply as proof that there is nothing to be done for the peasantry. Her husband then proclaims all peasants to be idiots, saying that "our peasant is made up of a stomach and some muscles, because he has left reason and willpower to his wife. Ślimak belongs to the cleverest peasants in the village, and yet just a moment ago, you heard proof of his idiocy" (44-45).¹⁹² The landlord then sets out to prove Ślimak's stupidity and offers to sell rather than lease a meadow to an increasingly embarrassed and uncomfortable Ślimak. The landlord scornfully derides Ślimak's confused refusal of this lucrative deal in a snide French remark to his brother-in-law. The landlord and his wife, and even the brother-in-law, fail to appreciate the reasons for Ślimak's hesitance to accept the landlord's offer. They also display a shockingly obtuse lack of understanding of Ślimak's perception of social interactions with the gentry. The former landowners take no steps to prepare the local peasantry for the new social and economic environment into which the village is about to be plunged.

The landlord and his wife have no sense of duty to the cultivation of a healthy village society beyond the date of their departure. They have no appreciation of the social or geographical ambiguity, the dizzying shifts of centers and margins that will ensue. Like the peasants, the nobility prove unwilling or unable to manage modern ambivalence. The landlord and his wife avoid a confrontation with ambiguity by leaving for Warsaw. The peasants sit tight, unaware of the necessity of active engagement with ambiguity. The landlord and his wife do not share with Ślimak the same sort of deep attachment to one ancestral place. The narrator points to this class disconnect when Ślimak wonders at the landlord's decision to leave, even though from a peasant's perspective, there are no dire financial straits that would force him to do so.¹⁹³

¹⁹² "Nasz chłop składa się z żołądka i mięśni, bo rozumu i woli zrzekł się na benefit swej żony. Ślimak należy do najsprytniejszych chłopów we wsi, a przecież w tej chwili słyszałeś dowód jego głupoty" (44-45).

¹⁹³ In all likelihood, the landlord and his wife had experienced the financial difficulties which plagued much of their social peers and had come to realize that they could not afford to maintain residences in both the countryside and the city. Many of the Polish nobility sold off their estates at this time due to financial difficulties. The novel does not mention this historical context explicitly, as it would have been a familiar circumstance for Prus' readership. As events

“So thought the peasant to himself, because he measured the landlord by his own standards, and did not understand at all what it means to have a young wife, who is bored in the countryside” (63).¹⁹⁴ The landlady thinks only of escaping this provincial backwater for the salons of Warsaw. She abjures any sort of physical proximity to the less fortunate around her, citing the local children’s destruction of her peach orchard and a dress forever tainted by the odors of a cottage where a sick child lay (43). The landlord and landlady see no possibility for improvement or change to the way things are in the village. A peasant man like Ślimak cannot even make the decision to purchase a few piddly morgens of pasture without consulting his wife, the landlord scoffs (44).¹⁹⁵ This incident offers a silent rebuke to the socially irresponsible nobility, a critique that appears again and again throughout Prus’ œuvre. Belief in social stagnation and inevitability, impervious to modern ambiguity, absolves the upper class from civic obligations.

However, the most astounding social negligence of the Polish gentry in the novel concerns their utter carelessness in conducting business. In the face of uncertainty, the landlord quickly folds. The landlord fails completely to comprehend the repercussions of his hastily drawn up bill of sale between two dance sets. Pressured by Hirszgold’s threat to offer a neighboring landowner the same deal, the landlord abandons weeks of sales negotiations with prosperous local peasants out of pure self-interest (67). The landlord has, simply put, no financial spine, and in Prus’ view, no sense of social responsibility. A few one-line rebuttals on Hirszgold’s part to the Polish nobleman’s half-hearted threats to sell the land to his peasants, or to colonize his land independently, and a note from the landlord’s financially strapped father-in-law convince the landlord to give in to the merchant’s demands. Based on Hirszgold’s remarks,

are largely depicted through the eyes of the Polish peasantry, moreover, we are not privy to the intricacies of the landlord’s financial situation.

¹⁹⁴ “Tak sobie myślał chłop, bo mierzył pana swoją miarą, a już wcale nie rozumiał tego, co znaczy młoda żona, która się nudzi się na wsi” (63).

¹⁹⁵ A truly shocking notion, one must admit.

it seems that the father-in-law's receipt of additional credit was based on the sale of the landlord's estate to Hirszgold, or that perhaps the conclusion of the sale would earn the father-in-law some sort of repayment respite (80). At the very least, the father-in-law's assurance that Hirszgold would offer the most lucrative price for the estate seems to be bought and paid for, rather than the product of sound financial acumen. The upper class of the Polish countryside also finds itself overwhelmed by the various forms of ambivalence which accompany industrialization.

More than simple stubbornness or financial negligence however, it is a profound lack of social trust between the classes in Polish society that impedes a true confrontation with the ambiguity of modernity. The absence of a sense of social responsibility on the part of the nobility accompanied by a deep-seated condescension towards the lower classes feeds the landlord's readiness to drop weeks of negotiation with the peasants to accept Hirszgold's purchase offer. Ślimak is so entrenched in traditional hierarchies that he cannot conceive of a gentleman reaching out in friendship to him. He views the brother-in-law's insistence that he not doff his hat in respect with mistrust and thinks that the landlord must have an ulterior motive in offering to sell rather than lease him the pastureland. Ślimak waits uncomfortably as the landlord, his wife, and brother-in-law chatter on in French, thinking to himself that they must be plotting to hoodwink him in some fashion (43, 48).¹⁹⁶ Ślimakowa applauds his prudence in declining the offer of sale and agrees that the landlord's willingness to sell must mean that another round of land redistribution is on the horizon. She concludes that in that case, Ślimak might be awarded those meadows for free (48). Throughout the exchange at the estate, the narrator hops between Ślimak and the nobility, pointing out the miscommunication between the peasantry and the upper classes. The narrator largely sticks to matter-of-fact explanations of Ślimak's misinterpretation of the nobility's intentions, taking a step back when the nobility talk

¹⁹⁶ In all fairness, this is the point at which the landlord and landlady are describing their disgust and their contempt for the peasantry and referring to Ślimak as a lump of meat and stomach.

amongst themselves to allow the landlord, his wife and his brother-in-law to demonstrate their own social ignorance in dialogue with one another. The humble, and largely silent Ślimak is the one whose thoughts must be spelled out for the reader. The narrator's discreet commentary and explanation of intentions frame the conversation in a way which illustrates a key crack in Poland's social foundation without needing to make a direct didactic statement. Rather, the novel leads the readers to make their own social observation that there exists no basis for social cooperation in Poland. The village consequently misses its first opportunity to seize upon the productivity that this social ambiguity presents to the community. Ambiguity does not inherently represent a curse. It also carries tremendous creative potential.

Rather than introducing a period of social construction to the little village, the departure of the nobility causes the local social center not only to become an uncertainly ambiguous concept but to abruptly implode. A collapse of moral values briefly sets in. Even at this juncture though, we the readers glimpse a flicker of real social potential. The physical shift of the village center that we witness creates an opportunity for the peasants and servants to join an emerging middle class. Amidst the disorderly looting and scavenging of the baubles and trinkets left behind in the manor house, we observe the potential for the villagers to become middle-class consumers of products not of their own making. On the eve of traumatic social and topographical ambiguity, the villagers make an astonishing transition from peering in at the festivities of the nobility through the slats of a wooden fence to traipsing through once forbidden halls and chambers. Social ambiguity has introduced another element of spatial ambiguity, redefining permitted and proscribed places and movements. Social non-cohesion however, Prus' fable points out, risks wasting the productive energy created by the reactive agents of ambiguity.

The creation of a state of spatial ambiguity in which social centers and margins are up for grabs allows the German settlers to enter the plot of *Placówka* and immediately create a new social borderland to accompany the shifts in geographical borderlands discussed in the previous section. German community life is healthy and organized and already well-adapted to the

realities of modern ambivalence. German settler society is *held together* by the concept of moveable centers. The durability of this social cohesion is conveyed to the reader not through clear didactic statements by the narrator, but rather through a depiction of the organized actions that the German community takes to ensure its own survival. For the German settlers are bound together even in a state of complete social and geographical ambiguity, even before the Hamers purchase the land from Hirszburg. Upon arriving on the banks of the Białka, the Germans are able to establish their own social and geographical center amidst shifting centers and borders in Polish village society. The Germans work away at this endeavor, the very picture of industriousness while the Polish peasants smoke cigarettes and casually observe the formation of this new locus. While Polish peasants bicker and the nobility dance on the social ashes of the estate, the German settlers work together to build on the basis of modern ambiguity. They seize the opening that the Polish village fails to discern.

Ślimak, through sheer geographical and social obstinacy, unwittingly returns that opportunity to the Polish village and provides an opening for the priest to intervene and establish a new Polish social center. This new center operates under significant gravitational pull from the traditional center of religion in Polish village life. However, this *clerus ex machina* denouement carves out a renewed social role for the priest, one which involves direct engagement with his flock.¹⁹⁷ When we are introduced to the priest, the narrator provides us with a sympathetic and largely positive description. He is well-educated, possesses the refined manners of a nobleman, and is respected by the peasantry, the nobility, the Jewish community, and the German colonists. He says mass beautifully and helps the poor, even christening children of the less fortunate free of charge. However, the narrator explains, the priest is unhappy that he has yet to win over the hearts of the peasantry; they do not invite him into their homes on special occasions, they have not yet truly welcomed him into the village community

¹⁹⁷ Or for those who prefer Ancient Latin to its Medieval cousin, *sacerdos ex machina*. My thanks to Ross Twele for this and all other Latin puns.

(177).¹⁹⁸ On the evening when the impoverished Jewish peddler Jojna Niedoperz arrives to intercede on Ślimak's behalf, the priest stands on the verge of a fall from grace. The narrator gives way to the clergyman's inner thoughts as he wrestles with the temptation posed by the lovely green eyes of a certain Lady Teofilowa who will be in attendance at a soiree for which the priest is about to leave. Jojna's description of Ślimak's plight annoys the priest at first. He cannot possibly be expected to be responsible for every unfortunate peasant who loses his wife and his home, he reasons. His eyes light on the Crucifix on his wall, and he shudders at his near neglect of his vocation as chaplain. He resolves to tend to his flock, chastising himself for his own dereliction of duty to the villagers and doubting his worthiness for salvation. As the priest strikes his chest on the way to Ślimak's holdings, the narrator chimes in, noting that a "merciful Father does not keep count of the number of soirees nor of the number of bottles drunk, but rather of these difficult struggles that the human heart wages with itself" (180).¹⁹⁹ The priest becomes the mediator between Ślimak and the peasants who shunned him and refused him help in his hour of need. In effect, the priest mediates between the peasants and financial capital structures. Ślimak, the priest explains, unwittingly played a key role in forcing the German town to leave. In the final pages of the novel, the priest steps into the margin turned center and arbitrates the conflict between the Polish villagers and modern ambivalence. The priest

¹⁹⁸ The full description reads thus: "Tutejszy proboszcz dopiero od kilku lat rządził parafią. Był to człowiek średniego wieku, bardzo piękny. Posiadał wyższe ukształcenie i maniery dobrze wychowanego szlachcica. Co rok sprowadzał więcej książek aniżeli wszyscy jego sąsiedzi i dużo czytał; nie przeszkadzało mu to hodować pszczoł, polować, bywać na sąsiedzkich zebraniach i pełnić duchownych obowiązków. Posiadał ogólną sympatię. Szlachta kochała go za rozum i hulackie skłonności. Żydzi za to, że nie pozwalał ich krzywdzić, koloniści, że – na probostwie ugasał pastorów, chłopci, że odnowił kościół, obmurował cmentarz, mówił ładne kazania, urządzał świetne nabożeństwa, a ubogich nie tylko darmo chrzczył i grzebał, lecz nawet wspomagał. Ale stosunki między prostym ludem a proboszczem nie były dosyć ściśle. Chłopi szanowali go, ale nie mieli śmiałości. Patrząc na niego wyobrażali sobie, że Bóg jest to wielki pan i szlachcic, łaskawy i miłosierny, który jednak z byle kim nie gada. Proboszcz czuł to i szczególnie było mu przykro, że jeszcze żaden chłop nie prosił go do siebie na wesele czy chrzciny, żaden o nic się nie radził. Chcąc przełamać ich nieśmiałość czasami wdawał się w rozmowy; ale wnet spostrzegał bojaźń na twarzy chłopca, a w sobie zakłopotanie i – urywał" (177).

¹⁹⁹ "Bił się w piersi i wąpił o swoim zbawieniu zapominając, że miłosierny Ojciec nie rachuje liczby rautów ani wypitych butelek, lecz te ciężkie walki, jakie stacza ze sobą ludzkie serce" (180).

completes the social narrative that enables the village to understand the productivity that the ambiguity of the borderland provides.

In conclusion, the moral of Prus' social parable is that a radical shift in communal dynamics is desperately necessary in Polish society. The Polish peasantry must shake off centuries of social thought regarding the static nature of inter- and intra-class relations. They must learn to take initiative and seize that which is important to them in the wake of modernity's arrival to the banks of the Białka. As the narrator points out, however, peasant lack of initiative is not the only issue at hand. When Ślimak puts off a meeting with the landlord, the narrator gestures at the excuses which peasants make for themselves, and the misinterpreting condescension of the middle and upperclasses: "something stopped him in his tracks. Something peasants call timidity, the gentry simplemindedness, and the learned a lack of will" (66).²⁰⁰ Each group's appellation for the paralysis gripping village society in late 19th-century Poland excuses that group from the responsibility *to do something*. Shyness, a natural part of the peasant character, cannot be helped. Stupidity? Well there's not much to be done for a bunch of addle minded folk who were better off as serfs. As for the absence of any sort of get-up-and-go among the Polish peasantry, well, what can possibly be achieved if these people have no desire to raise themselves up out of destitution? They must not want anything better for themselves. The narrator's sarcastic remark gestures for the reader to recognize a general lack of social cohesion and civic responsibility in an increasingly ambiguous social sphere. More bluntly put: Dear Poland, this mess is everybody's fault. Sincerely, Prus. *Placówka*, as a social parabolic novel, offers the reader a vision of the dangerous consequences of ignoring the realities of modern ambiguity. This ignorance can deprive Polish society of the constructive opportunities which ambiguity provides and prevent Poles from harnessing the productive nature of the borderland. The novel puts forth a vision of modernity as a set of inevitable ambiguities that

²⁰⁰ "coś go zatrzymywało na miejscu. Coś, co chłopie nazywają niesmiałością, szlachta próżniactwem, a uczeni – brakiem woli" (66).

may be difficult to accept, but that is perilous to ignore. Moreover, this disorienting social upheaval offers Polish society an opportunity to remake itself in a more mutually beneficial and prosperous image. Modernity has already shaken the kaleidoscope of Polish society—the role of Polish literature is to help the reader re-imagine the pieces into a meaningful picture.

Section III: It's All About Time: Temporal Ambivalence

The geographical and social ambiguity and ambivalence in *Placówka* feed into another form of ambiguity which shapes the novel's plot, namely, historical-temporal. This ambiguity takes several forms in the novel, both at the macro-level of the novel's intervention in 19th-century Polish society and at the micro-level of the plot and story. *Placówka* is both historical and ahistorical with no dates appearing in the novel. The historically-minded reader can hazard a ballpark guess as to when the plot takes place. For instance, the arrival of German settlers in the Russian partition of Poland indicates that the plot of the novel is unfolding at some point in the late nineteenth century. Moreover, the fact that the peasants have been emancipated points to a time after the liberation of the serfs in the Russian Empire in 1864. The only specific markers of time are the names of months, a system of time-keeping which follows the peasant seasonal calendar.²⁰¹ The ambiguous way in which time itself functions in *Placówka* contributes to the universal applicability of the broader historical arguments that this novel puts forth. In *Placówka*, Prus pens a more nuanced and ambivalent historical narrative of Polish-German interactions. Though the novel is rife with possibilities for being read as anti-German, we have already seen that *Placówka* defies any sort of simplistic rubric wherein German = bad, Polish = good. Poles do not appear as eternal victims, nor do Germans function as diabolical perpetrators. Prus presents a historical narrative driven by economic and social motivations and colors German actions in that light. *Placówka* seeks to counter historical fatalism among Polish peasants and to argue against the inevitability of German economic victory. This novel makes

²⁰¹ These same chronological markers appear in Władysław Reymont's *Chłopi* [The Peasants] (1904).

the case for Polish historical, social, and economic agency amidst the ambivalence and ambiguity of modernity. This declaration of agency attributes greater responsibility on the part of Polish civil society for the existence of Polish social and economic problems. Polish civic stagnation, Prus argues, has led to the advent of a modernity which is coded German and Jewish. Jewish historical and narrative agency in *Placówka* again demonstrates the same ambivalence as its German counterpart. Jewish characters both pave the way for the dramatic entrance of traumatic topographical and social ambiguity and facilitate the novel's uplifting conclusion. In this final section of my chapter, I elaborate on temporal ambiguity in Prus' complex social fable and simultaneously gesture at the interstices between the various forms of ambiguity in *Placówka*.

Temporality in *Placówka*, much as the novel's geography, is characterized by a mixture of specificity and indeterminacy which serves to bind together the various forms of ambiguity at play in the novel. It also assists the novel's efforts at playing with center-periphery dynamics. The novel creates a world easily recognizable as contemporary by the late nineteenth-century Polish reader, but provides no precise markers in terms of years or dates. Days of the week are referenced occasionally, but predominantly, temporal orientation appears in the form of the months of the year. Just as geographic and social ambivalence in *Placówka* are intimately intertwined, so too is temporal ambiguity caught up in the novel's formal reliance on ambiguity.

Temporal semi-indeterminacy in turn supports *Placówka*'s efforts to craft a new social narrative. *Placówka*'s plot lies in a temporal borderland between the end of one era of Polish social history and the very beginning of another. It is a novel which seeks to hold on to fundamentals of Polish peasant culture, symbolized by an attachment to the land rooted in a profound sense of space and place. Yet, *Placówka*, in depicting a temporally vague present, seeks as well to look forward into a not-so-distant possible future, to point the readership towards the first installment of the next chapter of Polish history. Prus's novel asks Polish

society to step out of pre-conceived narrations of the Polish past in order to create a new framework within which to interpret present difficulties.

Prus seeks to craft a more nuanced and subtle narrative of that history, which complicates later simplistic binaries in literary criticism of Germans as malicious perpetrators and of Poles as eternal victims. In Prus' opus, passivity constitutes another form of culpability. Inaction does not equate innocence. However, *Placówka* as a novel seeks not only to preach civic responsibility to chastise rural Polish society. Rather, it seeks to empower the Polish village with historical and social agency beyond a more established narrative of Polish uprisings. Nothing is inevitable. Also at odds with more dramatic novelizations of Poland such as the images in Henryk Sienkiewicz's *The Teutonic Knights* is the ambivalent portrayal of the Germans who appear in *Placówka*.²⁰² Though Hamers Sr. and Jr. find themselves at odds with Ślimak and attempt to coerce him into selling his land, they are among the first to respond when Ślimak's barn catches fire. In fact, the whole German community jumps out of bed on a cold winter's night to put out the blaze while the Polish villagers mutter that Ślimak's misfortune is divine punishment for grave sins. Fatalism and superstition run deep in the Catholic faith professed by the Poles, while Protestant German religious practice translates into social organization and helping thy neighbor.

Furthermore, *Placówka* asks Poles to step out of pre-conceived historical narratives as they interact with Germans. The German settlers in *Placówka* do not come as conquerors, but as individuals in search of a better life. As one family tells Ślimak and Ślimakowa, Germany is crowded, land and employment there are scarce, taxes high and military service hard. It is only natural that Germans should seek out a better place: "Everyone wants things to go well for himself in this world, and he also wants to live as he pleases, and not how others tell him to..."

²⁰² I have in mind here in particular Henryk Sienkiewicz's *The Teutonic Knights* [Krzyżacy] which details the valiant struggle of the Polish nobility against the Teutonic Knights.

Things are bad in our country, so we came here” (92).²⁰³ The Germans of the novel are simply ordinary human beings in pursuit of freedom and happiness. It just so happens that settling in Poland will help them find the security and liberty they seek. When Ślimakowa expresses concern over German motivations, one man expresses indignation. He and his fellow Germans have not come to seize Polish land, livestock, nor to steal or kill. “Ours is a peaceful people, they won’t get in anyone else’s way as long as no one gets in theirs” (92).²⁰⁴ Indeed, the German man continues, if the Polish village had purchased the land, the German settlers would never have come.

How come your lord sold [the land]?...If on these lands, instead of one lord, who didn’t do anything, who just spent money, there had been thirty or so peasants, our people wouldn’t have come here. Or why didn’t you buy the land yourselves as one big group? Your money is just as good as ours, your rights are the same as ours. But although you have been sitting on this land for ages upon ages, you didn’t put in the effort to buy these lands, to the point that it was necessary to bring in colonists from beyond the Vistula. And only when our people bought [the land] did it start to stick in your craw. The lord didn’t stick in your craw. (93).²⁰⁵

The elderly German’s soliloquy is primarily intended for the readership of *Placówka*. At any rate, the only lesson Ślimak and his wife seem to take away from this speech is the sentiment that their new neighbors are not so bad after all. On the one hand, it is significant that the Polish peasant couple agrees that “the Germans no longer seemed to be as terrible as they were before” (94).²⁰⁶ Germans and Poles meet here at the level of the individual, on a human level. To that extent, Ślimak and Ślimakowa do participate in the production of ambivalence in Polish-

²⁰³ “Každy chce, żeby mu dobrze było na świecie, i jeszcze chce tak żyć, jak jemu się podoba, a nie tak, jak inni mu każą... W naszym kraju jest źle, no więc przychodzimy tu...” (92).

²⁰⁴ “Nasi są ludzie spokojni, nikomu w drogę nie włożą, byle im nikt nie laził” (92).

²⁰⁵ “A po co ją wasz pan sprzedał?...Gdyby na tych gruntach zamiast jednego pana, który nic nie robił, tylko pieniądze wydawał, siedziało ze trzydziestu chłopów, nasi by tu nie przyszli. Albo – dlaczego wy sami nie kupiliście wsi całą gromadą? Taki wasz pieniądz jak i nasz, takie wasze prawa jak i nasze. Ale choć z dawien dawna siedzicie na miejscu, nie dbaliście o kupienie tych gruntów, aż trzeba było zza Wisły kolonistów sprowadzić. I dopiero jak nasi kupili, to was zaczyna kłuć w oczy. Pan was nie kłuł” (93).

²⁰⁶ “Niemcy nie wydawali się im już tak strasznymi jak dawniej” (94).

German historical narratives. The crucial lesson which they do *not* take away from this encounter, however, is the inherent malleability of history: nothing is inevitable. The German settlers are historically, physically, and mentally mobile. The Polish peasants, without the foresight of education, are none of these.

For Prus, the real bone of contention in the German-Polish borderland is that of economic competition. In his feuilletons, Prus writes that it is too late to be afraid of the Germans for they are already here. The proper response to German economic prominence is the bedrock of Polish positivist thinking, i.e. Polish economic development, not Romantic nationalist rhetoric. German-Polish communal tension emerges in *Placówka* when the Germans do not share the material wealth brought in by the railroad. However, the novel zooms in on one particular example of economic discrimination, on one conflict between *individuals*, between the two Hamers on the one side and Ślimak on the other. Only when the Hamers blacklist Ślimak from working as a drayman for the railroad does Ślimak first begin to feel anger and revulsion towards the Germans (113). The “German-Polish problem,” as it were, is presented in a much more ambivalent and complex fashion, not as the latest act in an age-old conflict destined to rage on for time immemorial.

The truest human mediators of ambiguity however are to be found among *Placówka*’s Jewish characters. Unlike the Jewish community in *Das schlafende Heer*, Jews in Prus’ novel possess tremendous narrative agency. The Jewish characters in *Placówka* take an active part in creating the optimum conditions for the introduction of ambiguity. They also intervene when all seems lost and create the opportunity for the Polish village to draft a new communal narrative of social and historical interactions. When Hirszburg pushes through the sale of the estate, he opens the floodgates for the rapid changes of modern ambiguity. Hirszburg facilitates the introduction of the topographical ambiguity by securing the land necessary for the construction of the railroad and for the German village. He, unlike the irresponsible nobleman or the passive peasantry, recognizes the incredible potential of the social ambiguities already beginning to set

in on the banks of the Białka. Arguably, Hirszgold's perceptiveness of ambiguity derives from his Jewishness; after all, the Jewish community in Poland lived in a perpetual state of marginality and in-betweeness, often serving as mediators in business affairs in Polish society. Through happenstance, Jojna Niedoperz stumbles upon the despairing Ślimak and subsequently informs the priest that one of his flock has gone astray. One wandering Jew prepares the way for modern ambiguity, another makes way for the Polish recovery. Thus, the novel suggests to its readers the possibility for positive Jewish-Gentile interactions at least on the level of the individual and within local communities. However, both Jews occupy a common liminal position as mediators between non-Jews. Hirszgold brokers the deal between the German settlers and the Polish landlord and Jojna brings the priest to Ślimak. One mediation proves to be more positive for the Gentiles involved, but in neither case do Jews and Germans nor Jews and Poles work together as true collaborators. It also bears mentioning that it is the more affluent and influential Jewish figure who sweeps in on a bitterly cold winter's evening to snap up the profits of modern ambivalence. Things are set right by the penniless and less powerful Jew practicing the old and traditionally Jewish profession of peddler. We can easily imagine that some contemporary Polish readers interpreted the events at the estate ball as a case of a cunning Jewish businessman taking advantage of a helpless Polish nobleman. However, the pressure that Hirszgold puts on the landlord is motivated purely by financial opportunism. Business is business, completely impersonal. These circumstances distinguish Hirszgold's behavior from the personal vendettas carried out by the Jewish businessmen in *Soll und Haben*, for example. Moreover, in contradistinction to Freytag's very opinionated narrator, Prus' narrator largely fades into the background in the negotiation scene and leaves the landlord to desperately flounder in the face of a calm and collected opponent. The narrator's most frequent comment regarding Hirszgold is that the Jewish merchant is thinking. Indeed, Hirszgold's ironic barb towards the landlord's excessive concern regarding his guests' amusement seems to chime with

the novel's own criticism of the landlord's ridiculous behavior.²⁰⁷ Unlike the landlord, Hirszburg has a name and thus a greater claim to individuality. The narrator even describes Hirszburg as handsome as he sweeps into the manor house to land his deal (77). The destitute itinerant Jew, rejected by his co-religionists in the village, is by contrast completely non-threatening. While at the same time acknowledging the unmistakable anti-Semitic elements of *Placówka*, we may observe that the novel's use of ambivalence comes full circle. The story of *Placówka* revolves around Ślimak, a man geographically and socially on the margins of Polish society, on the periphery of village life. The main action of the novel is set in motion by a modern travelling Jewish businessman. Balance is restored at the end by a Jewish peddler. Though there is an air of historical stability attached to his ancient profession, Josel the innkeeper must remain nearly perpetually in the geographic ambivalence of mobility in order to survive. Hirszburg's agent sets up shop in the manor house, the former social heart of the estate. Jojna ties Ślimak's central periphery to the traditional center of the priest and enables the introduction of a new post-estate Polish social center. Like Ślimak's outpost, the Jews of *Placówka* are both central and peripheral, utterly ambivalent.

Conclusion

In *Placówka*, Bolesław Prus forces his characters into a confrontation with every sort of uncertainty by weaving ambiguity into multiple aspects of the novel. Prus blends the familiar and the universal in the geographic setting of the novel. Topographical designations appear in both concrete place names and nameless places. The introduced geographic ambiguity with which Prus confronts his characters is all-consuming: sensory interference and the erasure of natural and local landmarks both serve to effect complete topographical disorientation in village life. Center-periphery dynamics shift and invert themselves in the presence of both geographical

²⁰⁷ A certain count at the party continually bursts in, interrupting the landlord's conversation with Hirszburg, upset that the landlord is neglecting his guests. The landlord is overly concerned at the count's discontent (79-80). Hirszburg asks "with a hint of slight irony" whether "the Count is angry?" (80). Original Polish: "spytał z odcieniem lekkiej ironii: — Cóż, pan hrabia nie gniewa się?" (80).

and social ambiguity. Borders question one another, unite, surround and divide all at once. The arrival of the ever mobile Germans creates an additional borderland within the village's physical and social margins. Prus' social parable seeks to complicate dominant Polish cultural narratives with the more ambivalent and productive realities of German-Polish interaction. However ill-managed, the departure of the nobility and the arrival of the German settlers forces the Polish village into a confrontation with modernity and into a period of introspection. For while *Placówka* praises Ślimak's steadfast refusal to abandon his post, the events of the novel and the narrator's comments make very clear that *Polish* society, not German settlers, bears primary responsibility for confronting the initial trauma set into motion by modern ambiguities. This novel proposes a two-pronged approach to modernity, capitalism, and the ambivalence which accompanies them. This approach mixes the practicalities of running a healthy economy at the local level with sentimental cultural value. German and Polish Jews act as brokers of modern ambivalence and ameliorators of it. The more mobile Jewish figures, as well as the German characters – the most spatially ambivalent characters – also possess the greatest narrative agency. Spatial and social ambiguity make things happen, and introduce temporal ambivalence, which in turn makes room for a new Polish cultural narrative. *Placówka* stands as testament that engagement with the ambivalence and ambiguity which is such an intrinsic part of the borderland, no matter on what terms, engenders tremendous literary productivity.

The above analysis of a Polish novel within a broader project on the borderland in the nineteenth-century German novel reflects the inherent ambiguity and ambivalence of that borderland. This space cannot be understood within the framework of one literary-cultural discourse. After all, borders have at least two sides, both in terms of geography and literary perspectives and borderlands stretch indeterminately across those boundaries. This final chapter of my dissertation moreover invites reflection on the role played by political and social power within a given literary discourse on that discourse's approach to ambivalence and ambiguity. While the German novels discussed in this project often warn against the dangers of

overly aggressive approaches to ambivalence and ambiguity, *Placówka* depicts the peril associated with passivity in the face of such forces. Penned in a home discourse of comparatively greater material power, the German novels reflect an altogether different imagining of their culture's relationship to ambivalence and ambiguity than does *Placówka*. Ultimately, the intent of this chapter is to balance Polishness as object of German novels on the borderland with Polishness as active, imagining subject of that same space. In adopting such an approach, I argue, German studies can arrive at a richer understanding of literary productivity amidst the ambivalence and ambiguity in physical, cultural, and metaphorical borderlands.

EPILOGUE

Maps as abstractions of physical and political landscapes have fascinated me since childhood. One of my favorite pastimes as a child was to pull out one of my three atlases and to trace the borders of the countries that most interested me. Chief among these, unsurprisingly, was Germany and its neighbors. The abstract reality of these nation-shapes represent for me one of my earliest memories and greatly impacted my understanding of my own place in the world. It is for this reason, that unlike many in my age cohort, I remember clearly the division of Germany into East and West and that for a time, the largest nation on Earth bore the name U.S.S.R. The end of the Cold War meant for my kindergarten-self a flourishing of new lines to trace and flags to pair with the names of newly independent countries on my now-antique Geo-Safari.

It was not until later that I understood the imaginative discourse that I had been unconsciously participating in with my pad of tracing paper and my bright colored pencils as I replicated arbitrary borders drawn through plains, woods, fields, and even city streets. The realization, as an undergraduate student at the University of Rochester, that those boundaries were artificial and therefore changeable, rather than the immutable lines I had once thought them to be, was a key moment in my intellectual development that spurred me on to pursue graduate school, and indeed, this particular dissertation project. My interest in Polish culture is the product of a flukish convergence of a dedicated high school Pre-Calculus teacher and a chance encounter with an energetic group of volunteers at a Study Abroad Expo in Spring 2005. I became intrigued by the overlaps between German and Polish literary spaces, in particular with those settings stuck in the middle, those places which did not fit on one side of the tracing paper.

This dissertation project represents my first sustained foray into my primary research interest in the relationship between literature, space, and place. I envision a number of future projects stemming out of this intellectual trajectory. Firstly, it is my hope to expand the interpretive approach of this project to ambivalence and ambiguity in the German-Polish borderland. Part of this expansion will entail the incorporation of additional works by authors already under consideration in this dissertation. Such works would include Clara Viebig's novel on the German-French borderland, *Die Wacht am Rhein* and Theodor Fontane's novel *Unwiederbringlich*, set in the German-Danish borderland, in addition to other literary engagements with the ambivalence and ambiguity of the German-Polish borderland which comprises the project's main focus. I also plan to pair the first two German novels of this study, Gustav Freytag's *Soll und Haben* and Theodor Fontane's *Vor dem Sturm*, with Polish novels which treat similar historical moments. Nobel Prize winning author Władysław Reymont's *Ziemia obiecana* [The Promised Land] (1899), for example, evinces anxieties towards modernity and industrialization reminiscent of those in Freytag's novel. I plan as well to read the historical fiction of prolific Polish author Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, specifically his *Trylogia Saska* [Saxon Trilogy] cycle alongside *Vor dem Sturm*. The addition of these two chapters will enrich my analyses of their German counterparts, deepen my own understanding of the nineteenth-century novel, and extend this dissertation's exercise in literary interpretation across national traditions in the borderland.

Moving beyond this project, I will embark on an examination of the formal intersections in the treatment of space by Austro-Hungarian regional literature and travel narratives. This next undertaking represents a shift in geographic focus from the German/Prussian-Polish borderland of my dissertation. I will treat authors such as Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, Karl Emil Franzos, Joseph Roth, and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. This research will take me to new literary borderlands such as Galicia, with its blend of Polish, Ukrainian, and Jewish ethnicities, and to Bukovina and other areas of present-day Poland, Ukraine, and Romania. My next major

research project arises out of my fascination with literature's role in interpreting familiar and foreign landscapes for its readers. Of particular importance in my analyses of these literary works will be the evolution of the foreign encounter in travel narratives and the depiction of the familiar to a "foreign" audience, as in the case of the Dorfgeschichte genre, where rural lives are narrativized for consumption by more urban bourgeois readers. Though the Austro-Hungarian travel narrative and the Austro-Hungarian Dorfgeschichte may treat very different geographic locales, both genres represent literary categories fundamentally defined by their relationship to place and their function as forms of narrative mediation between society and physical place.

Looking further ahead to other possible research projects, I envision expanding my current temporal focus on nineteenth-century German-language literature to include contemporary German historical fiction of settling the East. In researching popular narratives of settlement of more easterly German lands from our own times, such as Sabine Ebert's *Hebamme* series, I would be investigating the nature of more current historicizations of the German East. As elaborated upon throughout this dissertation, the imagined relationship with "the East," variously defined, has proved to be a vital connection for Germanness across the centuries. That font of creative inspiration has not yet run dry in the German literary imagination, demonstrating the staying power of geographic myths in cultural production.

Ultimately, it is a fascination with the power of literature to host the collective imaginings of spaces which has driven this scholarly endeavor. Spread across nearly fifty years of dramatic social and political changes, the novels interpreted above exhibit shared approaches in their use of the ambivalence and ambiguity inherent in geographic and cultural borderlands between Germanness and Polishness. The quest for identity, family, and a sense of belonging takes them all to a place which is simultaneously on the periphery and fundamentally in-between. Uncertainty and indeterminacy may be hard selling points, but these two elements send author after author out to the edge in search of fertile literary terrain on which to stage the construction of a new sense of self. Liminality is the ultimate frontier.

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